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Maryland to Plant 41 Acres with Juvenile Oysters in Anne Arundel County with Mitigation Funds from 2022 Ever Forward Ship Grounding

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Photo courtesy National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will plant about 147 million oyster spat, or juvenile oysters, on 41 acres in Anne Arundel County waters with mitigation funds from the 2022 grounding of M/V Ever Forward on an upper Chesapeake Bay oyster bar.

On March 13, 2022, the 1,095-foot Ever Forward container ship ran aground inside Natural Oyster Bar 4-2. The bow of the ship, which draws 40 feet of water, became stuck at a depth of 18 feet. The Ever Forward was refloated on April 17, 2022, after a month of intensive dredging and multiple extraction attempts.

Last year, the state required the ship's owner, Evergreen Marine Corporation, to pay DNR \$676,200 to fund oyster bar seeding mitigate the event's impacts. DNR has now selected the first area that it will target with this funding.

"It was unfortunate that the Ever Forward ran aground in the area of a protected oyster bar, but we're glad to see that remediation from that grounding will go directly to helping oysters in the Bay," DNR Assistant Secretary for Aquatic Resources Kristen Fidler said. "This new planting of oyster spat will be beneficial to the oyster industry and ongoing restoration efforts in Maryland."

The grounding impacted about 14 acres of Chesapeake Bay bottom, including 11.5 acres within the boundary of a natural oyster bar, according to the Maryland Board of Public Works. A [U.S. Coast Guard report](#) later determined that negligence on the Ever Forward contributed to the grounding.

In January 2023, the Maryland Board of Public Works approved a [wetlands license](#) from the Maryland Department of the Environment that required Evergreen Marine Corporation to fund the seeding of oyster bars as mitigation for violating the legal boundaries of a designated natural oyster bar.

Per requirements placed on the shipping company, DNR will plant 60 million spat in designated sanctuary waters, where no oyster harvesting is allowed, and 87 million spat in oyster industry areas. Although the ship was lodged in a public fishery bar, Maryland included the seeding of both sanctuary and wild fishery locations to align with Maryland's commitment to the ecological and economic importance of the oyster population.

After a series of meetings with oyster stakeholders in Anne Arundel County, DNR selected Herring Bay Sanctuary as the location for the sanctuary spat. This site has abundant habitat to accommodate all 12 acres of the planned sanctuary mitigation and adequate water salinity for oyster survival and reproduction. A portion of this sanctuary is in an area labeled as "depleted" in the 2022 stock assessment. The planting will enhance that area.

"These mitigation spat add another dimension to the existing excitement for and dedication to sanctuary oysters among the river organizations and general public in Anne Arundel County," said Department of Natural Resources Shellfish Division Director Christopher Judy. "The 12 acres in the Herring Bay sanctuary will yield a sizable population of oysters and broodstock. DNR looks forward to working with the Advocates for Herring Bay, a strong partner in the area."

Locations for the 29 acres of public fishery oyster plantings will be determined in coordination with the Anne Arundel County Oyster Committee during DNR's annual planning meeting with commercial oyster operators in February.

In the next few months, DNR will plan details of hatchery production and planting for both the sanctuary and public fishery spat, which will be seeded in the Bay in summer 2024 and into 2025, if needed.

Source:

<https://news.maryland.gov/dnr/2024/01/12/maryland-to-plant-41-acres-with-juvenile-oysters-in-anne-arundel-county-with-mitigation-funds-from-2022-ever-forward-ship-grounding/>