

On May 24, the House of Representatives passed the Fiscal Year 2006 Energy and Water funding bill which included \$1 million for the Oyster Recovery Project, which is coordinating the revival of oysters in the bay.

Oysters improve water quality by filtering the Bay's water. The Chesapeake Bay, whose name means "great shellfish bay" was historically marked by high abundances of oysters that were able to filter the Bay water in a period of three days. Unfortunately, due to disease, pollution, low dissolved oxygen levels and over harvesting, oyster populations are only about two percent of their levels just a century ago. It now takes the current population one year to filter the water.

The Oyster Recovery Project is undertaken jointly by the Oyster Recovery Partnership (a non-profit that coordinates the efforts of the government agencies), the Army Corps of Engineers, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Maryland Department of Natural Resources and the University of Maryland's Center for Environmental Sciences.

The Project is working to create both managed harvest reserves and oyster sanctuaries which will provide in coming years a fresh supply of oysters for the watermen and the entire oyster industry infrastructure: shucking houses, businesses that serve harvesters and processors, and restaurants.

The oyster reef structures that will be created thanks to this effort will provide critical habitat and feeding grounds for other essential species, and will also serve as natural filters screening out algae, sediments, and pollutants.

However, I am extremely disappointed that the President effectively eliminated funding from his budget for the Oyster Recovery Project this year. I have been witness to the strength and quality of the Oyster Recovery Partnership and the significant progress they have made to restore the oyster population in the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. Last year I joined the Oyster Recovery Partnership to lay a new oyster sanctuary in the Patuxent River that is expected to raise close to 1 million new oysters and two years ago, we planted about 5 million spat (juvenile oysters) on another site close to Trent Hall Farm. Since 2000, the Oyster Recovery Partnership has planted over 400 million spat at 33 locations in the Bay.

In response to the oyster population decline in the Bay, Maryland and federal government stakeholders initiated and completed an action plan to restore the ecological and economic benefits of oysters in the Chesapeake Bay. The plan designated seven tributary rivers (Chester, Choptank, Magothy, Nanticoke, Patuxent, Severn and Potomac) as oyster recovery areas, where efforts would be undertaken to replenish the oyster populations of the Bay. The goal is to increase the oyster population 10-fold from the 1994 levels by the year 2010.

Charlie Frentz, a good friend, and Executive Director of the Oyster Recovery Partnership said, "Congress has supported this project for a number of years, and now that we're showing progress we should be encouraging the continuation of such an effective partnership. We've just turned a corner in oyster relief and are showing quantifiable progress, so we were hoping that the federal support which is so valuable to us would continue. We can continue to make a positive, discernable difference in oyster restoration in the Bay."

We should not be going down the road of eliminating programs that point to success and are addressing serious environmental challenges, which is why I fought to add funds to this bill for the Oyster Recovery Project. The President has presented budgets in the past that eliminated this program or provided an insufficient amount of federal funds and Congress has restored or increased the amount of funding every year. Since 1999, I have led the effort in the House of Representatives to secure nearly \$25 million in federal funding for the Oyster Recovery Project and I will continue to advocate on behalf of the Oyster Recovery Project and will work to increase funding for this important Partnership again this year.