



News

Oxford Lab 'living shoreline' nearly complete

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By **CAROLYN SWIFT** Staff Writer

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OXFORD Construction is almost complete on a shoreline restoration project at the Cooperative Oxford Lab, a project the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration hopes will not only protect the shoreline from wave and storm erosion, but also will create new habitat for local Chesapeake Bay organisms.

Workers from Environmental Concern, a local wetland restoration nonprofit organization, are finalizing the construction of the 420-foot "living shoreline," stabilizing three offshore stone structures that will work to reduce wave energy, ultimately protecting the shoreline from erosion, said Kody Cario, wetland restoration manager for Environmental Concern.

Once the stone structures are secure, the project will be left untouched until March, when both high and low marsh grasses will be planted, Cario said. In addition to their function as a habitat for terrapins, blue crabs, juvenile fish and other Bay organisms, the grasses will help to regulate pollution, trapping and filtering excess nutrients that are harmful to the water.

Following the project's completion, NOAA restoration biologist Rich Takacs said he expects to see habitation very quickly, predicting terrapins to begin using the beach by June.

"When we've created this habitat in the past, use has been almost instantaneous," Takacs said, of previous living shoreline projects.

This is not the first time the shoreline at the Cooperative Lab has undergone a restoration. Ten years ago, NOAA funded a project at the lab that Takacs said was very effective at halting erosion, but did not provide a habitat for Bay organisms. By adding the habitation, the project takes full advantage of the shoreline's "green" capabilities.

"It's just another way to utilize a piece of property in an environmentally friendly way," Takacs said.

The previous restoration project has helped NOAA to save money on the current one, as workers have been able to use existing rock to build the offshore structures, Takacs said.

Part of the reason the lab was chosen as the site for the project is because the entire facility is going through a transformation in order to make the lab more environmentally friendly, even tapping into alternative energy sources such as geothermal, Takacs said. The lab is home to staff from across NOAA and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and houses a small U.S. Coast Guard station.

While funding for the design of the project came from NOAA, funding for construction, which was completed by Environmental Concern, was provided by the Environmental Protection Agency's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, via the Maryland Department of the Environment and Chesapeake Bay Trust, according to an e-mail from Kim Couranz, a contractor for the National Marine Fisheries Service, a division of NOAA.



PHOTO BY CAROLYN SWIFT Local wetland restoration organization Environmental Concern should soon finish construction on the Cooperative Oxford Lab's "living shoreline." The project will protect the shoreline from water and storm erosion and create a habitat for Chesapeake Bay organisms.

A similar NOAA project is scheduled for April or May of next year at Morris Park in Oxford.

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