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Sustainable Resources
November 10, 2023

Save the Oyster, Save the Bay.

What is an Oyster?

The oyster is much more than just a shellfish or a weird looking rock, in fact, oysters are much more important than you may think. On the outside, an oyster is a small shell that may seem less interesting than a piece of gum under a table, but on the inside, an oyster is a beautiful species that is significant enough to cause wars across states.

What does the Oyster even do?

The oyster has 9 main parts, each working hard to ensure that our bay is clean. While every bit of an oyster is useful in its own way, the most important part is their gills. Oysters bring water in through their gills and in the process, they filter out pollutants, algae, organic matter, and bacteria, creating a cleaner and healthier bay. Did you know that one single oyster can filter up to 50 gallons of water in just one day? That's a lot! Most people don't know this, but back when the settlers first came to America, there were so many oysters that the entire bay could be filtered within a couple days! Now, mainly due to over harvesting, pollution, diseases, and habitat loss, it can take roughly a year to filter the same amount of water. Even though we are losing our oysters, most people don't realize that without oysters, the bay would be nowhere near how it is today.

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A Chain Reaction.

If all of the oysters disappeared today, what do you think would happen to the bay? What do you think would happen to the animals? What about the people? Well here's what I think would happen. If the oysters weren't there to filter it out, a thick layer of algae would form on top of the surface of the bay. The algae would block the sun and oxygen from getting into the bay, and since plants need oxygen, the plants would die out. Without plants, many fish and small organisms would be without a food source. If all of the small fish were wiped out, the larger fish that look to the smaller fish for food would either have to swim out into the atlantic ocean or die in the bay. Without the fish in the bay, many fishermen would be without jobs and would have to find a different job, which could send their family into poverty, or even homelessness.

What can we do to Help?

While it may seem like there is nothing we can do to help the rapidly decreasing oyster population, many people have come up with solutions. One of the most important things we can do is to take care of the oysters we already have, as well as nurturing our future oysters. Another way we can help is by replacing the oyster shells we use. Oyster offspring, called spat, attach themselves to fully grown oysters to grow. When we don't put back the oyster shells we use, spat have nowhere to grow. After multiple generations of spat being lost in this way, oyster reef populations will start decreasing. One final way we can help save our oysters is by staying informed. If you're knowledgeable on all of the problems with our oysters, you can start to come up with solutions and ideas. You could also keep your friends and family informed, that way more people will be thinking about the oyster and being mindful as to how they go about pollution, eating seafood, and just their daily lives in general.

THMS
8th grade

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After reading this essay, I hope you feel more inclined to do something to help our oyster friends. Even if it's just keeping people informed, you are helping oysters to grow and to be able to keep our bay clean and reliable. In conclusion, oysters are a very useful organism that carries the entire Chesapeake Bay on its back. If everybody does their part to help save the oysters, oysters will reward us by allowing us to have a clean bay to swim, play, work, and eat out of. If we consider the oyster, the oyster will consider us.