Reconnecting Urban Communities to the Environment in Baltimore City

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The Masonville Dredged Material Containment Facility (DMCF), located in Baltimore, Maryland, allows the Maryland Port Administration (MPA) to meet its dredged material placement needs while supporting the safe passage of ships within Baltimore Harbor channels. The DMCF’s construction required mitigation for 141 acres of disturbed habitats. MPA adopted a collaborative approach to planning the DMCF and mitigation projects by including citizens, environmental groups, regulatory and resource agencies, and elected officials. Ongoing mitigation projects include tidal wetland restoration and enhancement, non-tidal wetland construction, and reef and fish habitat creation. The goal of these projects is to restore natural ecological function in a former urban dumping ground adjacent to the DMCF, called Masonville Cove. In addition to the regulatory agency required mitigation projects, “community enhancement” projects were included in the project plans at the communities’ request.

One of the community enhancement projects is the Masonville Cove Environmental Education Center, which was requested by the community. The Center serves as a hub of environmental education through classroom learning, weekend community programs, community plantings, and community meetings. Ongoing mitigation projects and community planting events provide a hands-on connection to the environment. Ongoing remediation work has provided the opportunity for local at-risk youth to gain work experience in a positive environment.

Through these meaningful opportunities, the community is making connections to their environment in ways not previously possible in this urban setting. These connections, new or renewed, instill and strengthen community pride.

Masonville Cove Environmental Education Center – The Hub of Reconnection

Community members work on the Masonville Cove Small Watershed Action Plan, with assistance from Lt. Governor Brown. The SWAP identifies projects and efforts that would show the greatest impact on local water quality.

Weekend programming brings science Alive for students of any age.

Local students learn about terrapin adaptations through interactive costumes.

Community children make floating boats using natural materials.

Baltimore City elementary school students get hands-on experience planting wetland grasses during the Masonville Cove Environmental Education Festival.

Teachers seining during a 2013 externship, where they visited multiple Port-related facilities to see how the Port can be used as a learning tool.

Community members get dirty during a community field day led by the National Aquarium.

A local student successfully completed the “Osprey Odyssey” migration game. Later, he found out that the eggs his mate would lay would be thin and fragile due to the presence of DDT in the ecosystem.

High school interns participate in a variety of activities; here they are checking PO4 levels in the onsite lab.

Environmental programming allows local Boy Scout troops to work on badges.

This is the first close encounter with wildlife for some City students.

Workers from the Chesapeake Center for Youth Development pour reef balls for one of the site’s mitigation projects.

Baltimore Inner Harbor

Masonville

Living Classrooms connects underserved students and communities to the outdoors and the Chesapeake Bay through environmental education, field trips, internships, and weekend programs at Masonville.

National Aquarium provides opportunities for internships, community wetland plantings, cleanups, and volunteer monitoring at Masonville.

US Fish and Wildlife Service’s Urban Wildlife Refuge partnership designation educates urban communities about the country’s refuge system, provides internships, and brings expertise to the site regarding wildlife management and visitor services.

Brooklyn-Curtis Bay Coalition brought a community connection during the initial phases of site planning.

Chesapeake Center for Youth Development addresses the educational and developmental needs of local at-risk youth experiencing barriers to success due to educational deficits, troubled family relationships, juvenile delinquency, and limited employment opportunities. CCYD uses the stipend paid for labor as an incentive for at-risk youth to stay in school or to keep working on getting their GED if they have dropped out.

Impact, by the numbers:
• 13,000+ students
• 400+ teachers trained
• 5,500+ weekend program participants
• 17 internships funded
• 18 Master Naturalists trained
• 430+ wetland planting community participants
• 9 out of 27 CCYD participants were hired full-time