VIRGINIA COAST RESERVE EELGRASS RESTORATION PROGRAM

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

A partnership between The Nature Conservancy, the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, and additional partners has developed new techniques to restore nearly 10,000 acres of thriving eelgrass in the Virginia Coast Reserve (VCR), sequestering carbon and supporting marine life. The development of a validated and verified blue carbon market protocol for eelgrass restoration will provide new opportunities for financing similar restoration projects nationwide.

OBJECTIVES

- Restore the Eastern Virginia Shore's eelgrass beds, which disappeared in the 1930s and only began to re-emerge in the 1990s.
- Develop new techniques for harvesting and distributing eelgrass seeds.
- Quantify the carbon sequestration potential of eelgrass and develop a verified carbon market protocol to support restoration work.

SUCCESSES TO DATE

Eelgrass has gone from being non-existent on Virginia's Eastern Shore to covering nearly 10,000 acres thanks to innovative harvesting and distribution techniques.

State legislation from 2020 allows carbon market participation by Virginia for seagrass restoration, with the revenue generated used for eelgrass research and monitoring.

The VCR is in line to be the first place on the planet with a validated and verified seagrass blue carbon market.

LOCATION

Virginia

PROGRAM PARTNERS

The Nature Conservancy, Virginia Institute of Marine Science, University of Virginia, Virginia Marine Resources Commission, Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program

PATHWAYS FOR SCALING

Innovative new techniques for restoring eelgrass lays the groundwork for wider-scale restoration.

The establishment of a carbon market protocol for eelgrass restoration in Virginia creates a mechanism to support eelgrass restoration projects nationwide.

For more information about this and other innovative and scalable projects implementing Natural Climate Solutions in the U.S., please visit www.usnature4climate.org/building-ambition/.