



John Kellett, inventor of the Inner Harbor Water Wheel, ties some of the floating wetlands to pylons around the World Trade Center Baltimore. (The Daily Record/Maximilian Franz)

Old bottles make a floating home for new plants

By: Lizzy McLellan Daily Record Business Writer ⌚ May 21, 2014

The team that wants to make Baltimore's Inner Harbor swimmable and fishable is building speed, its manager said Tuesday.

Adam Lindquist, manager of Healthy Harbor, an initiative of the Waterfront Partnership of Baltimore Inc., said the project is attracting attention and beginning to build momentum. The group completed its annual replacement of floating wetlands Wednesday, less than two weeks after unveiling a massive trash-removing water wheel in the harbor.

The goal is for the Inner Harbor to be healthy enough for swimming and fishing by 2020.

"We've seen some great reasons to be optimistic," said Lindquist.

Floating wetlands were first launched in the harbor in 2010, and the program expanded two years ago. Each year, the Waterfront Partnership and Biohabitats Inc. rotate out 10 of the 56 wetland units.

This year, the Baltimore Community ToolBank constructed the islands, with help from Maryland Department of Natural Resources volunteers. Volunteers from Morgan Stanley also came out to help deploy the wetlands.

"It gives us a home project. It was an easy fit," said Noah Smock, executive director of the ToolBank, which allowed the wetlands to be constructed in its building, and whose volunteers helped to collect 1,000 disposed bottles that were used to fill the grassy palettes and make them buoyant.

Smock said the ToolBank is also trying to raise funds so it can create 30 extra wetland units, to keep on the shelf for replacements as needed.

The wetlands, with native plants that treat the water below them, have hosted visitors such as herons, mussels, crabs, eels and even an otter.

"We've seen a lot of animal life," said Adam Ganser, a landscape architect for Biohabitats. "The Inner Harbor can actually support life."

Progress on litter reduction has been visible as well since the new water wheel was installed earlier this month, said Lindquist. The wheel has already removed 20 tons of trash from the water. That's five dumpsters' worth — four of which came from one day alone, following last week's rain storms.

"Last Friday you would have seen a lot more trash floating in the harbor" without the wheel, said Lindquist.

Healthy Harbor and Waterfront Partnership will see the official results of their efforts next week, when the harbor's health report card is released.

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