

NEWS RELEASE

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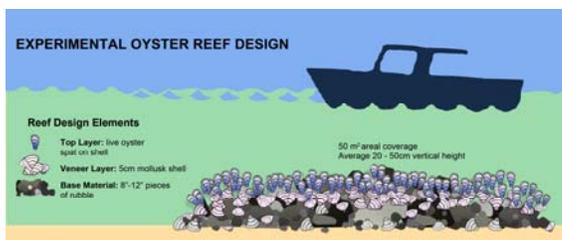
Comprehensive Oyster Restoration Research Project Gets Underway in NY Harbor

NEW YORK (October 6, 2010) – Today, in the shallow waters off the eastern shores of Governors Island, a special partnership of scientists, not-for-profit groups and government agencies began the first stage of an ambitious research effort to determine if oysters can once again flourish in the waters of NY Harbor. This partnership, led by the Hudson River Foundation, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New York/New Jersey Baykeeper, the New York/New Jersey Harbor Estuary Program and the Urban Assembly New York Harbor School, has been working for the past year to develop a multi-phase plan to address the question of where and how sustainable oyster populations can be reintroduced in New York Harbor and the lower Hudson River.

By the early 20th century, overfishing, disease and pollution had all but eliminated these once-dominant features. While no known reefs and only a handful of individual oysters remain today, water quality has improved so dramatically in the past few decades that the restoration of oysters is no longer unthinkable. The possibility of their restoration has captured the interest of scientists, policy makers, and the general public, all recognizing the importance of the oyster as a key biological component of the New York Harbor Estuary, as a symbol of environmental improvement, and as a means of further connecting people to and understanding and appreciation of the Hudson River estuary.



Oysters are “ecosystem engineers,” shaping their environment into complex three-dimensional structures that support not only themselves but a host of other organisms. This unique characteristic led to the inclusion of oyster reef restoration as a key element of the Comprehensive Restoration Plan for the Hudson-Raritan Estuary (see www.thewatersweshare.org) sponsored by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.



The experimental reef being constructed today off Governors Island is one of a total of six reefs to be placed throughout New York Harbor and up the estuary as far as Hastings, New York. The reefs, which are approximately 15 feet by 30 feet, are designed to mimic natural reefs as much as possible. With the

help of oyster experts from around the country, the Hudson River Foundation developed a research plan to determine whether it is possible to have healthy populations of oysters once again in the harbor, and whether the ambitious goals laid out in the Restoration Plan can be met. The experimental reef foundation consisting of a combination of rock and mollusk shell will be constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. During the next two years scientists will use the reefs as research platforms to characterize: 1) oyster reef development survival and growth of the oysters themselves and 2) reef performance - ecosystem services provided by the reefs. The project will provide critical new information from which larger scale restoration decisions can be made.

Oyster reefs provide three major ecosystem services: 1) habitat for other species, 2) augmented fish production, and 3) water quality improvements. To study these effects, the Hudson River Foundation has requested proposals from the scientific community to seek innovative, effective and efficient ways to assess the ecosystem services provided by and affected by the reefs. This research project is a collaborative effort of over fifteen agencies and organizations. Key roles are being undertaken by:



divers in support of research scientists

- The Hudson River Foundation for Science and Environmental Research, Inc. – Coordinating the research project and providing funding for research.
- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers – Reef construction and vessel and team support.
- NY/NJ Harbor Estuary Program – Funding for materials and monitoring equipment
- NY/NJ Baykeeper – Field project management for monitoring and aquaculture
- Urban Assembly New York Harbor School – Aquaculture support,

Numerous other groups are providing support to the project. These include: The Harbor Foundation, The Trust for Governors Island, New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, New York City Department of Environmental Protection, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation - Hudson River Program, Bay Ridge Flats Oyster Project, NOAA Restoration Center, Rocking the Boat, and the Bronx River Alliance

Primary funders for the project include The Hudson River Foundation, The U.S Army Corps of Engineers, The Port Authority of New York/New Jersey, New York City Department of Environmental Protection and the NY/NJ Harbor Estuary Program.

Statements from partners:

“The development of a sound scientific research plan and the cooperative efforts of so many interested people and organizations in implementing that plan are a significant achievement for everyone who cares about this great estuary,” said Clay Hiles, Executive Director of the Hudson River Foundation. “This collaboration will produce important information to guide policy makers in decisions affecting the conditions of the harbor and river far into the future.”

"This project is part of the Comprehensive Restoration Plan and broad vision for restoring a mosaic of habitats to the estuary which all the partners and organizations can participate and support," said Col. John R. Boulé II, the Army Corps' New York District commander. "Upon review of the data collected as part of this effort, we will be able to assess the feasibility of restoring oyster reefs at the targeted scales of 500 acres by 2015 and 5,000 acres by 2050. If deemed feasible, we will have gained essential and practical experience to initiate full-scale restoration efforts."

"NY/NJ Baykeeper is thrilled to be a partner in this first step to bringing oysters back to the NY/NJ Harbor," said Debbie Mans, Executive Director, NY/NJ Baykeeper. "In addition to being a thriving port, our Harbor Estuary is a recovering ecosystem teeming with marine life. We look forward to many more restoration projects that improve water quality, provide habitat and increase recreational opportunities for the millions of people who live here."

"Reducing pollution and improving water quality in the harbor is a priority for EPA," said EPA Regional Administrator Judith Enck. "Oyster beds provide critical habitat for fish and other wildlife, and are a hopeful reminder of what is possible when we invest in clean water."

"The Harbor School's participation in the Oyster Research Restoration Project is not only an integral part of our marine science curriculum, but also a crucial part of our school's mission" said Murray Fisher, Co-Founder, UA New York Harbor School. "Our school is committed to putting students to work restoring the degraded waterways that surround their city, and the oyster has proven to be not just the best animal to target for long-term restoration, but also the best animal for teaching about the human relationship with New York Harbor. We applaud the project partners for putting in the extra effort to ensure that young people would have so much responsibility for the project's implementation and, ultimately, success."

Mark Kurlansky, noted author of *The Big Oyster: History on the Half Shell* said "There are so many reasons why the replanting of oysters in New York Harbor is important that it is difficult to list them all. First it is a part of the history and patrimony of New York City in any time before the last bed was shut down in 1927, if someone said they were going to New York, the most likely response was "enjoy the oysters." They were sold on street corners in elegant restaurants, in the slums, and in all night outdoor markets. All five boroughs had beds. The harbor was full of oysters so in bringing oysters back we are restoring and celebrating New York history. Secondly, when the harbor became too polluted for oysters and for people, we lost our connection to the sea. New Yorkers too easily forget that they live on the sea and they live in a magnificent estuary that needs to be protected. Thirdly the oyster beds celebrate the accomplishments of the past thirty years in cleaning up New York harbor and remind us that this is something we must continue to fight for--that there can be no backsliding on environmental protection. And fourth, the oysters are good for the water filtering out natural impurities and keeping the water clean. But they can't clean up PCBs and heavy metals and until that is done we will not be able to eat these oysters and so they remind us of the work that is yet to be done."