



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Fishermen to Build Oyster Reefs in Stump Sound

WILMINGTON –Several commercial fishermen go to work May 27 planting oyster shells to build habitat and supplement their income. The fishermen will distribute 18,000 bushels of oyster shells into Stump Sound from the Morris Landing Clean Water Preserve near Holly Ridge in Onslow County.

The fishermen will be paid \$2 a bushel as part of a federal economic recovery grant that the N.C. Coastal Federation received from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The \$5 million grant also included building two large oyster reefs in Pamlico Sound. That work was completed in May.

For the first three weeks of an oyster's life, it is a free-swimming animal that is carried about by currents. After that, the oyster sinks to the bottom and must attach itself to a clean, hard surface in order to survive. That is why oysters are found growing attached to one another in beds, on bridge pilings or other hard underwater surfaces.

During the summer, oyster shells and rock, called cultch, can be put into the water to provide additional habitat for larval oysters and clams. Not only are these planting sites beneficial to oysters, they provide essential habitat and protection for juvenile fish, crabs, small marine organisms and many important commercial and recreational species. Larger fish also tend to congregate around these sites, feeding on the smaller fish and marine life. Commercial and recreational fishing in North Carolina is a billion-dollar industry.

The N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries, a partner in this project, usually uses large barges to transport the shells and rocks to a designated site. By contracting with commercial fishermen, the material can be distributed to shallower water.

Through an application process, the division selected 72 fishermen to participate in the project. They will distribute 41,000 bushels of oyster shells between now and July 31 in different coastal waters of the state. The sites in Hyde, Carteret, Pender and New Hanover counties combine for a total of over 10 acres. The sites will be closed to harvest for four years in order for the oysters to grow and provide habitat, but hook-and-line fishing is allowed. Researchers from the University of North Carolina Wilmington will be monitoring two of the sites to evaluate oyster-reef development. Then the sites will be opened to oyster harvesting and future plantings, providing additional income for fishermen.

MEDIA NOTE: Staff from the federation, the division and UNCW will be available at Morris Landing from 11 a.m. until 2 p.m. on Thursday, May 27, to take media out on the water. News media who plan to attend should contact Ted Wilgis, a federation staff member, at tedw@nccoast.org or 910-509-2838 to ensure space on a boat.

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