



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Aug. 2, 2010**

**Contact:** Erin Fleckenstein  
**Phone:** 252.473.1607  
**Email:** [erinf@nccoast.org](mailto:erinf@nccoast.org)

## **Hyde Fishermen to Build Oyster Reefs Near Ocracoke**

OCRACOKE – Several local commercial fishermen will begin distributing 3,000 bushels of oyster shells in Pamlico Sound behind Ocracoke starting on Tuesday, Aug. 3, to build habitat and supplement their income.

The N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries will pay the fishermen \$2 a bushel to distribute the shells as part of the N.C. Coastal Federation's \$5 million federal economic recovery grant. The grant also included building two large oyster reefs covering 48 acres in Pamlico Sound. That work was completed in May. The project has so far created about 135 jobs.

During the summer, oyster shells and rock, called cultch, can be put into the water, to provide habitat for oyster larvae. For the first two weeks of their lives, oysters are carried about by currents. Then, oysters sink to the bottom and attach to clean, hard surfaces in order to survive. That's why oysters are found growing attached to one another in reefs, on bridge pilings or other hard underwater surfaces.

The cultch isn't only beneficial to oysters. It also provides habitat and protection for juvenile fish, crabs, small marine organisms and many important commercial and recreational species. As the oyster reefs develop, larger fish tend to congregate around them, feeding on the smaller fish and marine life. The reefs are important nurseries and feeding grounds that help support North Carolina's billion dollar commercial and recreational fishing industries.

The fisheries division typically uses large barges to transport the cultch to planting sites. With this project, the fisherman, using smaller boats, can distribute the shells in water too shallow for the barges.

Through an application process, the division selected 72 fishermen statewide to participate in the cultch-planting project. They will distribute 41,000 bushels of oyster shells between May and August in different coastal waters of the state. The sites in Hyde, Carteret,

Onslow and New Hanover counties combine for more than 10 acres of created oyster habitat. To date 30,000 bushels of shell have been deployed. 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 will be allowed.

The division will monitor the oyster restoration sites in Pamlico Sound to evaluate the development of the reefs. Then the sites will be opened to harvest and future plantings, providing additional income for fishermen.

The N.C. Center for the Advancement of Teaching and the National Park Service are supporting the project by stockpiling the shells at their Ocracoke facilities, and James Barrie Gaskill, an Ocracoke commercial fisherman and federation board member, is providing a loading area for the fishermen.

**Editors' and reporters' note: Federation and division staff will be available at the N.C. Center for the Advancement of Teaching adjacent to the Ocracoke ferry terminal between 10 a.m. and 11:30 a.m. Wednesday, Aug. 4, for interviews and to take media out on the water to view the shell-planting activities. There will be an opportunity to talk with the fishermen and staff and follow the shell from shore to the reef site. Those planning to attend should contact federation staffer Erin Fleckenstein at [erinf@nccoast.org](mailto:erinf@nccoast.org) or 252-473-1607 to reserve space on a boat.**

**Ocracoke is only accessible by ferry. How to get there:**

**From the south or west:** The Cedar Island and Swan Quarter ferries depart at 7 a.m. and arrive on Ocracoke at 9:30 a.m. Reservations are required and fees charged for passenger cars. Walk-ons can travel free with no reservations. The ferry dock on Ocracoke is adjacent to the NCCAT facility. Return ferries to Swan Quarter depart at 12 p.m. and to Cedar Island at 12:30 p.m.

**From the north:** The free Hatteras to Ocracoke ferry departs Hatteras every 15-20 minutes and is about a 40 minute ride. No reservations are required. The Hatteras ferry dock on Ocracoke is a 12-mile drive to the NCCAT facility.

For more information about the N.C. ferry system please visit: <http://www.ncdot.org/ferry/>