



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Fishermen Will Build Oyster Reefs in Middle Sound

WILMINGTON –Several local commercial fishermen will begin distributing 2,000 bushels of oyster shells in Middle Sound on Monday, July 19, 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 additional 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. The marl and shells also provide habitat and protection for juvenile fish, crabs, small marine organisms and many important commercial and recreational species. As the oyster reefs develop, larger fish also 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 usually uses large barges to transport the shells and rock to planting sites. 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. 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 University of North Carolina Wilmington is collaborating with the federation and the division to monitor several of the sites in Stump Sound and the White Oak River to evaluate the development of the reefs. Then the sites will be opened to harvest and future plantings, providing additional income for fishermen.

Wrightsville Beach is supporting the project by stockpiling the shells at its Public Works facility and by providing a loading area for the fishermen.

Editors' and reporters' note: Federation and division staff will be available at the Wrightsville Beach Public Works facility between 3 p.m. and 4 p.m. Tuesday, July 20, 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 Ted Wilgis at tedw@nccoast.org or 910-509-2838 to reserve space on a boat.

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