



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Join the Work to Help Save Oysters**

OCEAN – ‘Tis the season to eat oysters and save them.

In these cold winter months, all along the N.C. coast, people enjoy oyster roasts and stews and even fancy oysters Rockefeller.

Most of us here at the N.C. Coastal Federation also like to eat oysters, but we also work hard at saving them. You can lend a hand by joining us on Friday and Saturday, Feb. 12 and 13, to bag oyster shells at the federation’s main office in Ocean. The bags of shells will be used later this year to build an oyster reef in the White Oak River.

While undoubtedly delicious, oysters are also very important to our coastal ecosystem. The health of our native oysters is a reflection of the health of that ecosystem. Oysters have tremendous value, often remembered by the three “Fs:” food, filter and fish habitat. They provide critical habitat for a diverse collection of aquatic animals, including many important commercial and recreational fish species. One healthy oyster reef can be home to more than 300 different organisms, such as adult and juvenile fish, shrimp, clams and blue crabs.

Oysters are filter feeders, meaning they filter out sediment, nutrients and plankton from the water in our estuaries, improving water quality. One adult oyster can filter between 25-50 gallons of water a day. The more oysters there are the cleaner the water, the more habitat for aquatic species and the more seafood for us.

The federation recognizes the importance of our native oysters, not only as good eating, but as a necessary ingredient for a healthier coast. Since 1998, the federation has been restoring and creating oyster habitat along the entire coast. We often need help, and our volunteers have been invaluable over the past 12 years in this work.

One way they help is by putting recycled oyster shells in mesh bag. When placed in the water, the shells in the bags attract baby oysters, called spat. Successive generations of oysters then settle on the shells of their descendants, and over time a reef forms. That reef will help cleanse the water and protect the shoreline from damaging waves. Some of the oysters in the reef will undoubtedly end up in a future stew.

You can help jump start the process by joining other volunteers, Croatan High School students and federation staff on Feb. 12 and 13 to bag oyster shells at the federation's main office on N.C. 24 between Morehead City and Swansboro. The filled bags will be used this summer in oyster restoration projects at Jones Island in the mouth of the White Oak. Grants from Restore America's Estuaries and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration are paying for the project.

Volunteers should wear closed-toed shoes and weather-appropriate clothes that could get dirty. Snacks and drinks will be provided. All ages are invited, though children under 13 need a parent or chaperone with them. If you're interested in helping or need more information, please contact Sarah Phillips at 252-393-8185 or at [sarahp@nccoast.org](mailto:sarahp@nccoast.org).