

## Independent Study

# NC Investment in Oyster Sanctuaries Yields Big Return


In 2015, the North Carolina General Assembly established the Senator Jean Preston Oyster Sanctuary Program to create a network of no-harvest oyster reefs, or sanctuaries, which serve as reef habitat and reseed the wild oyster population and support harvested oyster reefs in the Pamlico Sound. The NC Department of Environmental Quality’s Division of Marine Fisheries manages the sanctuary program in collaboration with the North Carolina Coastal Federation.

Recently, the Coastal Federation contracted with RTI International to do an independent assessment of the state’s investment in the sanctuary program and its impact on the NC coast.

### 2013–2023 NC Investment in Oyster Sanctuaries Provides Big Benefits

Between 2013 and 2023, North Carolina invested **\$20 million** in sanctuary construction and management. RTI’s study found that the state’s investment during this period:


Attracted an additional  
**\$7 million**  
 in federal and private funds.



Created  
**159 acres**  
 of oyster sanctuary.



Increased the stock and diversity of fish and shellfish for commercial and recreational fishing by improving water quality and submerged aquatic vegetation habitat.



Supported  
**143 jobs**  
 and generated  
**\$34 million**  
 in sales in local businesses and  
**\$8.7 million**  
 in employee wages and benefits as well as  
**\$1 million**  
 in state and local tax revenue.





Based on RTI’s benefit/cost analysis, between 2014 and 2024, past investments in oyster sanctuaries will provide North Carolina with more than **\$38 million** in economic and environmental benefits.

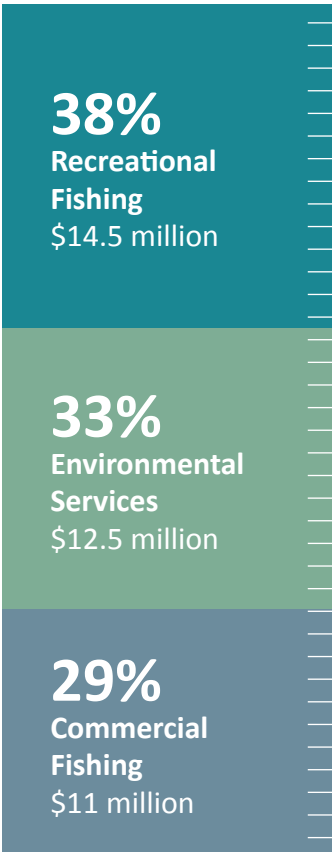
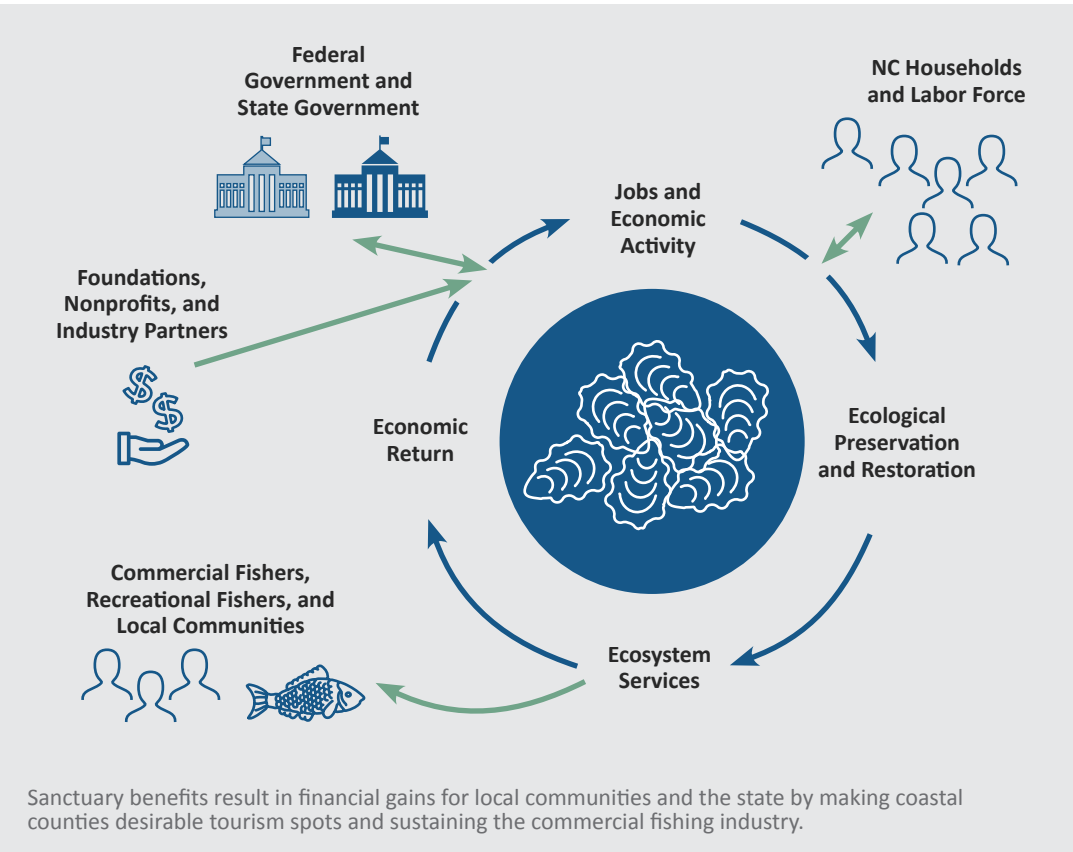
## 2023: A Big Boost to NC Oyster Sanctuaries

In 2023, the Coastal Federation received a \$14.9 million oyster sanctuary grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. This grant was matched by a \$1 million state appropriation. These funds are scheduled to create 120 acres of new sanctuary habitat in Pamlico Sound, bringing the total sanctuary habitat acreage in the Pamlico Sound to 509 acres.

The 2023 investment brings the total investment in the oyster sanctuary program since 2013 to nearly \$36.2 million. RTI study found that:

Every state dollar invested in the sanctuary program has been matched with **\$1.6** in federal and private funding.

Every dollar invested in the program - regardless of its source - created a return on investment of **\$1.71** in economic and environmental benefits.



To learn more about how the North Carolina Coastal Federation works to protect and restore North Carolina’s coastal resources, visit us at [www.nccoast.org](http://www.nccoast.org)

Visit the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality’s Division of Marine Fisheries for more information about the oyster sanctuary program. [www.deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/marine-fisheries/habitat-information/habitat-enhancement/oyster-sanctuaries](http://www.deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/marine-fisheries/habitat-information/habitat-enhancement/oyster-sanctuaries)