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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**NOAA AWARDS \$150,000 TO RESTORE THE OLYMPIA OYSTER  
IN PUGET SOUND**

The Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) announced a \$150,000 award to continue efforts to restore naturally spawning populations of Olympia oyster in the Puget Sound of Washington State. The project is one among many citizen driven efforts funded through the Community-based Restoration Program of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries). Work will be managed by Puget Sound Restoration Fund in cooperation with a broad coalition of tribal, government and industry, and community partners.

Olympia oyster reef was once a common and highly productive part of the nearshore habitat of Puget Sound. Historic populations have been dramatically reduced by industrial and domestic pollution. The oyster reef creates a diverse habitat that increases the productivity of the nearshore a critical habitat for many fish, including endangered Puget Sound Chinook Salmon.

"NOAA and the Bush Administration are working to improve the understanding of our environment and to strengthen local and regional initiatives like oyster population restoration," said retired Navy Vice Adm. Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Ph.D., under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. "This grant to the Puget Sound Restoration Fund will help advance knowledge critical to those efforts in Washington."

The Puget Sound Restoration Fund has inspired the involvement of over 100 organizations, including Washington tribes, local land owners, shellfish farmers, public agencies, university researchers and local advocacy organizations. Through a dynamic program of experimental seeding, monitoring and outreach, over 1.3 million oysters were planted at 41 experimental sites through 2002. An expanded effort is in the works for 2003 and beyond.

"NOAA Community-Based Restoration Program funding has added serious backbone to native oyster restoration efforts in Washington State, making it possible to expand the scope of our operation, broaden involvement and refine methodologies," states Betsy Peabody, Director of Puget Sound Restoration Fund.

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Through the Community-based Restoration Program, NOAA supports on-the-ground restoration efforts that empower communities while protecting and restoring our living marine resources. Since 1996 the CRP funds have supported over 600 projects in 25 states, from reef restoration to anadromous fish habitat enhancement. Federal money is made more effective through cooperation with local partners and focused on implementing locally relevant projects that restore and enhance our marine resources.

For more information about the Community-based Restoration Program, Please see our website at <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/restoration> or contact your local NOAA representative.

Each year, NOAA awards approximately \$900 million in grants to members of the academic, scientific and business communities to assist the agency in fulfilling its mission to study the Earth's natural systems in order to predict environmental change, manage ocean resources, protect life and property, and provide decision makers with reliable scientific information. NOAA goals and programs reflect a commitment to these basic responsibilities of science and service to the nation for the past 33 years.

NOAA fisheries is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources through scientific research, management, enforcement and the conservation of marine mammals and other protected marine species and their habitat. To learn more about NOAA fisheries, please visit <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>.

The Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. To learn more about NOAA, please visit <http://www.noaa.gov>.