

A NEIGHBORHOOD NON-PROFIT'S EFFORT TO IMPROVE HARBOR WATER QUALITY THROUGH THE INTRODUCTION OF OYSTERS VIA SURFACE DISBURSAL

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Keywords: Oysters, Water, Purification, Sewage, Volunteer, Harbor, Reintroduction, Monitoring, Cost-effective

It is widely recognized that mollusks have substantial water purification capabilities and that the oyster is particularly effective at removing silt, phytoplankton, nitrogen and bacteria from seawater. However, there are relatively few programs where oysters are being introduced solely for this purpose without a concomitant aquaculture program.

The Massachusetts Oyster Project for Clean Water (MOP) is a community started non-profit that was designed for just this purpose. Working in partnership with the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries, the Boston Conservation Commission, Island Creek Oyster Company and the community the organization has successfully obtained approval to create a substantial pilot program. Recognizing that each oyster can filter 30 gallons of water per day and that seed oysters can be acquired for \$0.08 each, this is a remarkably cost-effective tool for improving water quality.

This effort would return oysters to the waters of Boston Harbor after an absence of at least 50 years. In Colonial Times oyster reefs were substantial sometimes becoming an impediment to navigation with individual oysters reaching 12 inches in length. While specific causes of the oysters demise are not documented considerable habitat was lost to landfill with silt, pollution and food consumption also implicated as potential contributing factors.

150,000 seed oysters were sowed via surface disbursal in an area downstream from a Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) that releases minimally treated wastewater during times of heavy precipitation. The intent is to create a self-sustaining population that will reproduce in an environment that is free from the pressures of harvesting. The site was carefully selected to prevent the risk of pilferage and to allow for monitoring by volunteers scuba-diving from a nearby State Police facility. Additionally, the CSO is expected to remain indefinitely, so there is little likelihood that these oysters would see their environment improve to the level that they would allow for commercial harvest.

The MOP organization and effort is continuing to evolve, but is clearly benefiting from the attention of this pilot placement.

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*Proceedings of Coastal Zone 09
Boston, Massachusetts
July 19 to 23, 2009*

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