



Delaware's Oyster Management Program



Counting and measuring oysters aboard the R/V First State.



Bushels of shell and oysters await sampling.



The oyster fleet in Little Creek (ca 1924).



Planting shell as part of Delaware's oyster restoration efforts.

For more information on Delaware's oyster program contact:

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The Division of Fish and Wildlife is responsible for managing the state-owned natural oyster beds to insure the long-term sustainable yield from, arguably, the most sensitive marine habitat in Delaware Bay. These natural oyster beds are located in an area of Delaware Bay extending north from Port Mahon to Woodland Beach. The 1,000+ acres of Delaware's oyster bottom serve as critical fisheries habitat, filter sediment from the water column and support a significant commercial oyster fishery. The reef building characteristics of oysters increases habitat complexity which supports a myriad of finfish and shellfish species that utilize and depend on this habitat for survival.

The Division must balance the needs of the commercial fishing industry with the need to maintain bay habitat quality. The Division monitors Delaware's oyster population through an annual dredge survey. The dredge survey provides critical information on the relative abundance of oysters on each individual bed. Data generated from this annual survey, which is conducted in October of each year, is used to set annual harvest quotas for the following year.

The Division is also working to enhance this valuable resource through an ongoing shell plant program. The planting of clean shell on an annual basis revitalizes the natural oyster beds, expands and improves habitat for dependant marine life and provides critical habitat for juvenile oyster (spat) recruitment, ultimately increasing oyster abundance.

The state's oyster beds have supported commercial harvesting operations for the last six consecutive years. It is hoped that the combination of habitat enhancement, through shell plantings, and regulated harvesting practices, based on sound biological data, will enable the Delaware Bay oyster resources to continue contributing to the well being of the Delaware Bay and the people that depend on this resource for part of their livelihood.

