











## **NEWS RELEASE**

For Immediate Release: October 28, 2010

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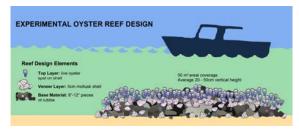


## A living oyster reef returns to the waters at the mouth of the Bronx River

NEW YORK (October 28, 2010) – Today, in the shallow waters off of Soundview Park, at the mouth of the Bronx River, a partnership of scientists, not-for-profit groups and government agencies placed 50,000 oysters on a base of rock and shell material to complete the final layer of one of the Partnership's experimental oyster reefs. The reef is one of a total of six reefs to be placed throughout New York Harbor and up the estuary as far as Hastings, New York. The reefs, which are approximately 15 feet by 30 feet, are part of an ambitious research project to determine if it is possible to restore oysters and oyster reefs to the NY Harbor Estuary. Project partners, include Hudson River Foundation, NY/NJ Baykeeper, NYC Department of Parks & Recreation's Natural Resources Group, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, NY/NJ Harbor Estuary Program, Urban Assembly New York Harbor School, Bronx River Alliance,

Rocking the Boat and WCS-NOAA Regional Partnership. This partnership has been working for the past year to develop a multi-phase plan to address the question of where and how sustainable oyster populations can be reintroduced in New York Harbor and the lower Hudson River.

By the early 20th century, overfishing, disease and pollution had all but eliminated these once-dominant features. While no known reefs and only a handful of individual oysters remain today, water quality has improved so dramatically in the past few decades that the restoration of oysters is no longer unthinkable. The possibility of their restoration has captured the interest of scientists, policy makers, and the general public, all recognizing the importance of



the oyster as a key biological component of the New York Harbor Estuary, as a symbol of environmental improvement, and as a means of further connecting people to and understanding and appreciation of the Hudson River estuary.

Oysters are "ecosystem engineers," shaping their environment into complex three-dimensional structures that support not only themselves but a host of other organisms. This unique characteristic led to the inclusion of oyster reef restoration as a key element of the Comprehensive Restoration Plan for the Hudson-Raritan Estuary (see <a href="www.thewatersweshare.org">www.thewatersweshare.org</a>) sponsored by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. With the help of oyster experts from around the country, the Hudson River

Foundation developed a research plan to determine whether it is possible to have healthy populations of oysters once again in the harbor, and whether the ambitious goals laid out in the Restoration Plan can be met. The research plan called for the creation of small experimental reefs at locations throughout the New York Harbor Estuary. The reef foundations consisting of a combination of rock and mollusk shell were constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The live oysters placed today were raised by the Urban Assembly New York Harbor School, on Governors Island and placed by the project partners including the NY/NJ Baykeeper, NYC Department of Parks & Recreation's Natural Resources Group, Urban Assembly New York Harbor School, Bronx River Alliance, Rocking the Boat, Wildlife Conservation Society and NOAA Restoration Center. The Soundview estuary has been a site of shellfish study since 2005, when NYC Parks' Natural Resources Group received a WCS/NOAA grant for site research. In 2006, NYC Parks built and installed the first pilot shellfish beds in the Soundview estuary and monitored them with the Bronx River Alliance, Rocking the Boat, CUNY graduate students.

During the next two years Hudson River Foundation sponsored scientists will use the newly-installed reefs as research platforms to characterize: 1) oyster reef development survival and growth of the oysters themselves and 2) reef performance - ecosystem services provided by the reefs. The project will provide critical new information from which larger scale restoration decisions can be made.

Oyster reefs provide three major ecosystem services: 1) habitat for other species, 2) augmented fish production, and 3) water quality improvements. To study these effects, the Hudson River Foundation has requested proposals from the scientific community to seek innovative, effective and efficient ways to assess the ecosystem services provided by and affected by the reefs. This research project is a collaborative effort of seventeen agencies and organizations. Key roles are being undertaken by





- The Hudson River Foundation for Science and Environmental Research, Inc. Coordinating the research project and providing funding for research.
- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Reef construction and vessel and team support.
- NY/NJ Harbor Estuary Program Funding for materials and monitoring equipment
- NY/NJ Baykeeper Field project management for monitoring and aquaculture
- Urban Assembly New York Harbor School Aquaculture support, divers in support of research scientists
- NYC Parks' Natural Resources Group and Rocking the Boat --Pioneered first oyster study at Soundview Park in 2006, provided construction and monitoring support for the newly installed reef

Numerous other groups are providing support to the project. These include: The Harbor Foundation, The Trust for Governors Island, New York City Department of Environmental Protection, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation - Hudson River Program, Bay Ridge Flats Oyster Project, NOAA Restoration Center, Rocking the Boat, and the Bronx River Alliance.

Primary funders for the project include The Hudson River Foundation, The U.S Army Corps of Engineers, The Port Authority of New York/New Jersey, New York City Department of Environmental Protection and the NY/NJ Harbor Estuary Program.

## **Statements from partners:**

"The development of a sound scientific research plan and the cooperative efforts of so many interested people and organizations in implementing that plan are a significant achievement for everyone who cares about this great estuary," said Clay Hiles, Executive Director of the Hudson River Foundation. "This collaboration will produce important information to guide policy makers in decisions affecting the conditions of the harbor and river far into the future."

"Using the information collected today and over the next two years will further our ability to potentially advance oyster restoration within the New York & New Jersey Harbor Estuary. If successful, we will have gained essential and practical experience to initiate full-scale restoration efforts," said Col. John R. Boulé II, the Army Corps' New York District commander. "This activity is part of the Comprehensive Restoration Plan, a broad vision for restoring a mosaic of habitats to the estuary."

"NY/NJ Baykeeper is thrilled to be a partner in this first step to bringing oysters back to the NY/NJ Harbor," said Debbie Mans, Executive Director, NY/NJ Baykeeper. "In addition to being a thriving port, our Harbor Estuary is a recovering ecosystem teeming with marine life. We look forward to many more restoration projects that improve water quality, provide habitat and increase recreational opportunities for the millions of people who live here."

"Since 2005, the Parks Department has studied the feasibility of shellfish restoration in the Soundview estuary and we are pleased to partner with this collection of government and non-profit scientists to enlarge our study," said Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe. "This research project anchors New York City's ongoing restoration efforts throughout the Bronx River Watershed, from upland, where we are controlling stormwater and planting trees, to the shoreline of Soundview Park, where we are restoring salt marsh, to the estuarine habitat."

"Rocking the Boat students have been working with the Natural Resources Group for past five years to experiment with the viability of oyster reefs at the mouth of the Bronx River," said Adam Green, Executive Director of Rocking the Boat. "It is incredibly exciting for all of us to see that our research has contributed to the large, citywide initiative being announced today. As the Bronx River is our classroom, we very much look forward to introducing our community to a river that is cleaner due to a growing oyster population."

"The Bronx River Alliance is pleased to be a partner in the restoration of oyster reefs in the waters off Soundview Park at the mouth of the Bronx River," said Linda Cox, Executive Director of the Bronx River Alliance. "This project is not only good for the river but is also successful in strengthening community partnerships."

"The Harbor School's participation in the Oyster Research Restoration Project is not only an integral part of our marine science curriculum, but also a crucial part of our school's mission" said Murray Fisher, Co-Founder, UA New York Harbor School. "Our school is committed to putting students to work restoring the degraded waterways that surround their city, and the oyster has proven to be not just the best animal to target for long-term restoration, but also the best animal for teaching about the human relationship with New York Harbor. We applaud the project partners for putting in the extra effort to ensure that young people would have so much responsibility for the project's implementation and, ultimately, success."

"Reducing pollution and improving water quality in the harbor is a priority for EPA," said EPA Regional Administrator Judith Enck. "Oyster beds provide critical habitat for fish and other wildlife, and are a hopeful reminder of what is possible when we invest in clean water."