



# North Carolina Oyster Shell Recycling

Now you have an opportunity to help rebuild North Carolina's oyster population by participating in this innovative effort to recycle oyster shells. Thanks to support from the North Carolina Legislature, the Office of the Governor, and funding agencies, the North Carolina Oyster Shell Recycling Partnership is expanding its efforts. Led by the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries (NCDMF) and supported by numerous conservation organizations, the Oyster Shell Recycling Partnership is encouraging restaurants, seafood dealers, community organizations and individuals to participate in this effort to collect oyster shells and use them to build oyster reefs in protected oyster sanctuaries.

Due to the life cycle of the oyster, recycled oyster shell is one of the best materials for building an oyster reef. Baby oysters begin life as free-floating organisms, but quickly settle to the bottom attaching themselves to hard surfaces. Placing recycled oyster shell in mounds in shellfish waters along the coast provides the baby oysters a place to attach themselves and grow. In addition to the baby oysters, numerous other marine organisms will colonize the mound of shells. This process is how a mound of recycled shells becomes a functioning oyster reef.

## Why protect and restore oysters?

Because of their tremendous value. The values of oysters are often referred to as the three "F's": **Filter**, **Food** and **Fish Habitat**.

- **Filter:** oysters are filter feeders and remove harmful pollutants, sediment, and plankton from the water, which can greatly improve water quality.
- **Food:** for the estuarine food chain and us; supporting a commercial and recreational fishery.
- **Fish Habitat:** oyster reefs provide habitat for many estuarine and marine species including crabs, shrimp and other commercial and recreational fish species.

From the Pamlico Sound to the Calabash River, North Carolina's coastal waters were once filled with healthy oyster reefs. However, due to oyster disease, declining water quality, harvest pressure and loss of habitat, oyster populations have plummeted an estimated 90%. To reverse this trend a comprehensive effort is being undertaken to protect and restore both water quality and oyster habitat along the coast.



## How you can help

Recycled oyster shell from oyster shucking operations is the primary source for current oyster reef restoration efforts. However, this oyster shell is under increasing demand and is becoming the limiting factor for oyster restoration projects.

This is where your participation in the Oyster Shell Recycling Partnership comes into play. The public can drop off shells in bins at designated drop-off locations. Trailers and containers are available free of charge to collect shell from larger oyster roasts associated with community, company, group, or organization sponsored events and festivals. In many areas, containers and scheduled pick-ups are available free of charge to restaurants and seafood dealers who wish to contribute their shell to this effort. Volunteers are also needed to help with all aspects of the Oyster Shell Recycling Partnership.

To find out more about the Oyster Shell Recycling Partnership, locate designated drop off sites near you, request materials, and sign up to volunteer please visit the NC Division of Marine Fisheries Website at [www.ncdmf.net](http://www.ncdmf.net) or contact Craig Hardy, North Carolina Oyster Shell Recycling Program, PO Box 769, Morehead City, NC 28557, 800-682-2632 or 252-726-7021, [craig.hardy@ncmail.net](mailto:craig.hardy@ncmail.net).

The Oyster Shell Recycling Program is partially supported through funding from the following sources:



## Oyster Shell Recycling – Trash to Treasure



**(1) Oyster Shell Drop-Off sites are located along the coast; (2) Trailers and barrels are available for organized oyster roasts; (3) NCDMF transports the shells when the collection sites are full and takes them to stockpile sites where they are aged so there is no threat of any contamination; (4) NCDMF transports the shells to the restoration sites on barges. Restoration sites are located in sanctuaries in the same vicinity of where the shells are collected; (5) Oyster reef creation site pre-restoration; (6) Oyster reef creation site post-restoration.**



This fact sheet was printed by the North Carolina Coastal Federation  
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