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# Barnegat Bay oyster restoration project targeted to go large scale

(http://www.nj.com/)



Oysters being shucked. American Littoral Society holds their Lunch and Learn series at Langosta Lounge in Asbury Park. The purpose of the today's event is to help people learn about oyster restoration. Saturday, January 3, 2015 (Patti Sapone | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com)

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**ASBURY PARK (http://www.nj.com/monmouth county/)** —New Jersey is experimenting with a relatively new method of oyster propagation to jump-start an industry that came to a crashing halt generations ago because of extensive pollution and overharvesting.

The American Littoral Society is getting ready to start its second season of a new method of oyster seeding, called tankless spatting, in an attempt to restore oyster beds on a large scale with less effort and less money compared to current methods, officials said Saturday.

The first attempt at tankless spatting came last year when the littoral society, operating on a permit from the state Department of Environmental Protection, installed what looks like an underwater 10-foot circular curtain off Good Luck Point in Barnegat Bay at the mouth of the Toms River, said Alek Modjeski. Oyster seeds then are let loose in the water within the curtain to find and settle into the shells laid there years earlier.

"We're doing research in order to determine how we can scale up what works in the bay," said littoral society executive director Tim Dillingham.

Believed to be the first time it's been tried in New Jersey, tankless spatting was borrowed from the Chesapeake Bay and is designed to be cheaper and less labor intensive than planting seeds in shells in a tank and then transferring those shells to the bay, Modjeski said.

After three days of the tankless spatting process, the seeds began to take hold in the shells, he said. There's still more tweaking that has to be done this year, he said. Because of the heavy boat traffic near Good Luck Point, only six of the 21 bags of shells set out for the experiment were recovered, he said. The rest were probably dragged through the bay by boats whose operators didn't pay attention to the bright buoys marking the location of the curtain, he said.

"If we're successful at this site, we can do it almost anywhere," Modjeski said.

The littoral society starts laying new layers of shell at the reef in Barnegat Bay on Monday, he said.

Besides reviving a nearly dead industry, oyster bed restoration is seen as a natural way of cleaning waterways. A single oyster can filter 50 gallons of water a day.

In its heyday, the oyster industry in New York and New Jersey drew from 220,000 acres of oyster beds in the Hudson River Estuary and about 12,800 acres in the Barnegat Bay. Now there are only a couple of acres of experimental research projects conducted by the littoral society, the NY/NJ Baykeeper and Rutgers University, in addition to a few natural oyster beds on the Delaware Bay.

At the peak of commercial harvesting between 1870 and 1930, Barnegat Bay alone supplied 20 percent of all the oysters in New Jersey, Modjeski said.

The littoral society outlined its efforts on Saturday during a "Lunch and Learn" session at Langosta Lounge in Asbury Park where residents were briefed on the topic while they sampled oysters cultivated at an oyster farm in Tuckerton.

In 1927, the Raritan Bay was the last bay in the New York-New Jersey area closed to oyster harvesting, bringing an end to a culture and economy built on that industry.

Pollution — raw untreated sewage being dumped into the waterways — got so bad that by the 1960s, oysters couldn't even live in the area waters, said Sandra Meola, Baykeeper communications and outreach associate. After the 1972 federal Clean Water Act started to improve conditions, Baykeeper has been working since 1999 to try to restore oysters in the region.

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Baykeeper was dealt a serious blow in 2010 when New Jersey DEP officials, citing concern about illegal poaching bringing contaminated oysters to market for human consumption, banned restoration projects in contaminated areas of the Raritan Bay.

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That meant the Baykeeper's half-acre oyster reef in Keyport Harbor had to be abandoned, Meola said. Baykeeper criticized DEP as abandoning its duties to patrol the waters to prevent poaching. A year later, Baykeeper found a new home for a quarter-acre reef in the bay off Naval Weapons Station Earle where there would be little chance for the public to find the reef, she said.

Meola said Baykeeper and other environmental groups are now pushing for passage of a bill, sponsored by state Sen. Gerald Cardinale (R-Bergen), that would restore Keyport Harbor as an approved research location.

"There are very few natural resources today. The water is too polluted and overharvested," Meola said. "We're just hoping they lift that ban."

Mike Palmisano of Keyport said he attended discussion because he wanted to be in a better position to try to convince his legislators to pass laws to benefit the oyster industry.

"We want to understand the importance of the research so we can go back and speak intelligently to our legislators," said Palmisano, who is a member of Keyport's environmental commission.

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