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NY/NJ Baykeeper's Oyster Reef Naturally Reproduces Baby Oysters in Raritan Bay

Oysters to strengthen shorelines - Discovery gives scientists hope for the return of the oyster

(Matawan, NJ) - NY/NJ Baykeeper's Restoration Program scientists discovered the natural growth of baby oysters, biologically known as spat, while monitoring the oyster restoration site at Naval Weapons Station Earle this week. Natural recruitment has been observed at the site for the first time which means that the adult oysters on the reef are spawning and the larvae is settling back on the reef. This is the first step in a self-sustaining reef.

The NY-NJ Harbor Estuary was once home to millions of acres of oyster beds. However, due to rampant development, overharvesting, and pollution, the metro-area oyster is now functionally extinct. NY/NJ Baykeeper has been working to restore the oyster population for the benefits they provide the surrounding communities, which include cleaner water, increased habitat, and shoreline stability.

"From a biological perspective, this initial discovery of spat is fantastic news, signifying the health of our oyster reef and Raritan Bay. With our continued urban shoreline habitat restoration efforts, we expect to see additional recruitment and reproduction," said Meredith Comi, Restoration Program Director, NY/NJ Baykeeper.

"By working in partnership with the community and non-governmental organizations like the NY/NJ Baykeeper, Naval Weapons Station Earle is working to protect the Navy's critical infrastructure, as well as our surrounding communities, against future storm surges," said Eric Helms, environmental director for Naval Weapons Station Earle.

"As a bi-state restoration leader, we are thankful for the Navy's unique assistance in providing a continued commitment to a safer and cleaner NY-NJ Harbor," said Comi.

“The success of the Baykeeper’s oyster reef in Lower New York Harbor is further assurance that the NWS Earle pier complex will continue in it’s ability to provide the ordinance our warfighters depend on in defense of our nation for years to come,” said Helms.

NY/NJ Baykeeper and partners installed a first of its kind urban living shoreline last year at Naval Weapons Station Earle in Monmouth County, NJ. The 0.9 acre living shoreline consists of an artificial reef using live oysters and concrete structures, known as oyster castles, which provide the necessary hard surface that oysters attach and grow on.

“After Hurricane Sandy, it became critical to address shoreline erosion and improve coastal resiliency. The project will provide important data to determine how a living shoreline can fortify the nearby shoreline, improve water quality, and create aquatic habitat in our urban watershed and, hopefully, replicate this technique elsewhere in the estuary,” said Debbie Mans, Executive Director and Baykeeper, NY/NJ Baykeeper.

NY/NJ Baykeeper’s living shoreline project is funded, in part, by the Marta Heflin Foundation, Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, Victoria Foundation, Johanette Wallerstein Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, and Proud Pour, Inc.

NY/NJ Baykeeper has recently been granted an award by the NJ Department of Environmental Protection to expand the living shoreline project. NY/NJ Baykeeper’s has received permits from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) and the US Army Corps of Engineers to conduct this research.

About NY/NJ Baykeeper

NY/NJ Baykeeper is the citizen advocate of the NY-NJ Harbor Estuary. Since 1989, we’ve worked to protect, preserve, and restore the environment of the most urban estuary on Earth – benefiting its natural and human communities. Through our Estuary-wide programs we seek to end pollution, improve public access, conserve and restore public lands, restore aquatic habitats, encourage appropriate and discourage inappropriate development, carry out public education, and work with federal and NY/NJ state regulators and citizen groups as partners in planning for a sustainable future for the NY-NJ Harbor Estuary watershed.

About Naval Weapons Station Earle

Located in Monmouth County, New Jersey, Naval Weapons Station Earle provides all ordnance for the Navy’s Atlantic Fleet Carrier and Expeditionary Strike Groups, while supporting strategic Department of Defense ordnance requirements. From the beaches of Normandy to the sands of the Fertile Crescent, NWS Earle continues to provide the hitting power the U.S. Navy & Marine Corps required to execute the mission of Power Projection around the globe.

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