



Oyster Domes Get Double Duty

By MICHAEL H. SAMUELS msamuels@tampatrib.com

Published: Dec 4, 2003



Photo by: JAY CONNER
Volunteers install "oyster balls" near a sand spit near the southern end of Bayshore Blvd. Volunteers were there to install "oyster balls" to help protect the small beach from erosion.

BAYSHORE BEAUTIFUL - Local environmentalists are planning to try an artificial, but natural, way to cut down on pollution entering Hillsborough Bay. As part of phase two of the popular oyster dome project, the city of Tampa, Tampa Bay Watch and the Coastal Conservation Alliance are planning by springtime to use the 100-pound concrete domes as ways to filter nutrients from stormwater runoff.

In previous phases and projects, the oyster domes had simply been used to shore up habitat and attract sea life. "We have not used oyster domes as a means of treating stormwater runoff before," said Peter Clark, executive director for Tampa Bay Watch. "This is the first of its kind. It's a very cool project." But not the first time oyster domes have been planted in the bay.

In March, more than 90 volunteers helped install 125 domes in the water off the seawall along Bayshore Boulevard. The progress has been noticeable, Clark said, with oysters covering the domes, seagrass growing around them and schools of fish using them as shelter. Now, instead of just helping create more habitat, Clark said the domes are going to help cut down on pollution entering the bay. The domes are to be installed in rings surrounding three stormwater drainage outflow pipes, Clark said. The hope is that the oysters that attach to the domes will filter nutrients from the water before it enters the bay, he said. "It creates a ring of reef domes around stormwater outfalls to improve stormwater runoff entering Tampa Bay," Clark said. "Stormwater runoff is the No. 1 source of pollution for Tampa Bay today."

Mike Flynn, a member of the Ballast Point Neighborhood Association and board member with the Coastal Conservation Alliance, said nutrients in stormwater runoff cause algae blooms and prevent seagrass from growing on the bay bottom. He said the area around the outflow culverts is a natural place to put more domes. ``The bay is overnutrified," Flynn said. ``We need to control it by controlling the stormwater."

Permits have not been approved yet, so there is no date set to install the domes. But neighborhood residents are eager to see the project continue. Sue Lyon, president of the Bayshore Beautiful Homeowner's Association, said the plan is for oyster domes to stretch all the way along Bayshore Boulevard south to the MacDill Air Force Base. ``There will be a follow-up on this," Lyon said. ``It's a real good project. It's one of those feel-good projects."

Reporter Michael H. Samuels can be reached at (813) 835-2109.