

Monday October 27, 2008

CAPE COD ONLINE | CLASSIFIEDS | CONTACT US | SUBSCRIBER TOOLS | MOBILE NEWS | E-MAIL NEWSLETTERS

WEATHER FOR CAPE COD:
 FOGGY 43°
 Forecasts/Radar



NEWS BUSINESS SPORTS OPINION ENTERTAINMENT LIFESTYLE MULTIMEDIA COMMUNITY NEWS REPORTS VISITOR GUIDE MARKETPLACE

Efforts under way to resurrect a Wellfleet staple

Photo 1 of 2 | Zoom Photo +



The Nature Conservancy, Massachusetts Audubon Society and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration joined forces to create two artificial reefs in Wellfleet Harbor in an effort to spur production of wild oysters.

Cape Cod Times/Paul Blackmore

By **Robin Lord**
 rlord@capecodonline.com
 October 27, 2008

WELLFLEET — The expanse of sand flats off Lieutenant Island is littered with clusters of purplish-colored oysters, the delectable shellfish that is so distinctively Wellfleet. But the population of oysters that has taken hold on rocks in the western side of the island is a mere shadow of what it once was.

A unique partnership between Audubon, The Nature Conservancy and the federal National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is working to revive the wild oyster beds in Wellfleet Harbor.

"Prior to 1972, they were taking 1,000 bushels of oysters out of here every year," said Robert Prescott, director of Massachusetts Audubon Society's Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary.

Today, most likely due to overfishing and disease, the wild population is holding on by a thread, he said.

In a project that started this summer with a \$78,000 Nature Conservancy grant, and in-kind private donations, members of the three organizations began the restoration effort.

It is the first attempt at establishing a wild population of the Eastern oyster in the state, according to Kate Killerman Morrison, marine program director in The Nature Conservancy's Boston office.

The project will serve primarily as a test site to discover where oysters grow best and under what circumstances. It may also give researchers information on disease and predators.

"The most important thing is the science behind this," Prescott said. "It's never been done before."

On a cloudless, wind-free afternoon Friday, at an unusually low tide in Cape Cod Bay, the two artificial reefs built in June were visible. The reefs, about 3 feet wide and 20 feet long and consisting of loose clamshells and shells in plastic mesh bags, are roughly 1,000 feet offshore.

Oysters that had attached to the shells over the summer as tiny seeds, or spat, are now about the size of a quarter. The reefs have also attracted a myriad of other sea life, which in turn provides food for other wildlife like diamondback terrapins, fish and shorebirds, Prescott said.

If winter ice in the bay is minimal and does not scrape the oysters from the reefs, and if shifting sands don't cover them, the shellfish will be well on their way to establishing, he said.

Next year, the project will expand and about 200 other oyster attachment devices will be spread across the two one-acre grants in the flats off the island. In addition to the reefs of sea clams, workers will put out oyster mats, which are oyster shells strung together on a biodegradable mesh mat. The spat prefers to attach to other oysters, Morrison said.

Yet another device they will use are "reef balls," which are concrete blocks to which the spat will also attach. And still another method are "oyster castles," which look like concrete Lego blocks that lock together to form an attractive structure for oysters.

"It's like laying a foundation of a house, said Bethany Walton, project co-director for Audubon.

The three partnering groups will not reap any economic benefit from the project, Prescott said. They are interested in it for scientific reasons. But they are working with the town of Wellfleet to come up with a way to allow local fishermen to harvest the shellfish.

Over the winter, about 10 or so project members will be monitoring the reefs and building the attachment structures.

A two-week period next June "will be madness," said Walton, since workers will have to put the attachment structures in place in time to catch the oyster spat.

If the Wellfleet experiment is successful in establishing wild oyster beds, the science may be used elsewhere in places like Barnstable Harbor and other protected environments, Prescott said.

Text Size: A | A | A

Print this Article | Email this Article

NEWS CALENDAR HOMES AUTOS JOBS CLASSIFIEDS

search CapeCodTimes.com

HOMES JOBS RENTALS

\$319,000
 Harwich, MA
 Bayside Realty
 Consultants
[More Details...](#)

\$5,950,000
 Harwich Port, MA
 McDevitt REALTORS
[More Details...](#)

\$795,000
 South Harwich, MA
 The Real Estate Co. at
 Sylvan
[More Details...](#)

[View all Featured Properties](#)
[\(What are these?\)](#)

capecodONLINE
 Powered by FindItOnline.com

Find it all here!

Select Category

Business Name:

Location:

Recently Reviewed by Your **VIEW** Neighbors

DJ's Family Sports Bar ★★★★★
 "Absolutely the best buffalo wings one can find around (and that bleu cheese dressing, yowza). The only point of contention I have with them is their..."
 more
 posted on 10/23/2008

Sandwich Taverna ★★★★★
 "Too loud, too crowded, slow service. Food was unremarkable, seemed microwaved. After food was delivered, never saw the waitstaff until we asked for..."
 more
 posted on 10/23/2008

MORE RESTAURANTS

Become a member of the Cape Cod Times and enjoy the convenience of home or office delivery



[Subscribe to the Cape Cod Times](#)

HOME

Reader Reaction

Before you sign up to post on our discussion forums, you **MUST read our terms of use rules**. These discussions and our forums are not moderated. We rely on users to police themselves, and you need not be registered to report abuse. In accordance with our [Terms of Service](#), we reserve the right to remove any post at any time for any reason, and will restrict access of registered users who repeatedly violate [our rules](#).

[Browse All Forums](#) | [View All Comments](#) | [Login](#) | [Register](#)

You are currently not logged in

[Browse All Forums](#) | [View All Comments](#) | [Login](#) | [Register](#)

Today's most viewed articles

- Falmouth officer finds truck before it's reported stolen - 10/27/2008
- Efforts under way to resurrect a Wellfleet staple - 10/27/2008
- Unmasking the next president - 10/27/2008
- Teenager in coma after being struck by train - 10/26/2008
- Dental schools draw a smile - 10/27/2008
- McCain: Most of Palin's clothes returned - 10/26/2008

[TERMS OF USE](#) | [COPYRIGHT](#) | [PRIVACY POLICY](#) | [SITE MAP](#) | [CONTACT US](#) | [ADVERTISE](#) | 

Copyright © 2008 Cape Cod Media Group, a division of Ottaway Newspapers, Inc. All Rights Reserved.