



The Shellfish Mariner



Loading Cultch.



Controlling the high pressure hose.

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What We Do And Why



Loading the barge with cultch material.

In Florida, shell or “cultch” planting, as well as, oyster relaying and transplanting are important resource management tools for maintaining and enhancing productive oyster habitat. The section has the responsibility of conducting shellfish enhancement activities. Using processed shell on existing oyster reefs and suitable bay bottom areas has been a positive management practice for many years. This practice provides resource managers within the Division of Aquaculture the opportunity to mitigate resource losses, to enhance productivity, and to contribute direct economic benefit to the oyster fishery. This program relies heavily on shell or cultch contributions from local shellfish processing plants. Shell planting on Florida’s public reefs to stimulate oyster production was reported as early as 1914, and the State has maintained an effective shell planting program since 1949. From its beginnings the Department has collected and planted more than 9.3 million bushels of shucked oyster shells. Over the last 5 years the section has maintained a



High pressure hose.

shell planting level of 250,000 bushels of shucked shell every year. This high level of cultching helps ensure the continued productivity of public oyster reefs in Florida. Reef construction and enhancement activities are located throughout Apalachicola Bay. The variety of locations and large amounts of cultch material provide an excellent base for the oyster larvae commonly called “Spat” to attach to.

Where processed shell is not available, cultching projects in recent years have been largely dependent on the Department’s stockpiled Calico Scallop shell, which has proven to be an excellent cultch material. This scallop shell cultch material is barged from the Apalachicola stockpile and distributed to other bay systems throughout Florida. The Division of Aquaculture’s vessel the “Shellfish Mariner” and shell barge along with her captain and crew have proven to be invaluable tools in oyster restoration projects throughout the State of Florida.

In Florida, significant acreage of productive oyster



Collecting Oysters for Relay from an Inter-tidal bar.

reefs are located in waters where harvesting for direct market sale is prohibited to avert public health problems associated with actual or potential pollution. Additionally, there are abundant stocks of juvenile oysters that grow on intertidal oyster bars. These intertidal oyster reefs continually come out of the water and the oysters don’t normally grow to legal size, because of over crowding and poor growing conditions. Resource development projects called “relaying or transplanting” take advantage of the oysters’s ability to cleanse itself of contaminants (depurate) and offer a practical means to use a previously debilitated resource. Oysters and clams relayed to unpolluted waters will depurate and become safe for human consumption. Oysters which are moved from the poor growing intertidal areas are



Transporting Oysters to Relay Area.

also able to recover and take advantage of less stressful growing conditions and grow to a legal and marketable quality size in a short time. When seed oysters are transplanted in the summer, harvesting may begin the following season and continue for several years as oysters grow to market size.

Relaying and transplanting activities are often conducted as cooperative management programs between the Department and local oystermen’s associations. Over the past twenty years, more than 4 million bushels of juvenile and adult oysters have been relayed and transplanted within six coastal counties. During much of this period, harvesting of oysters relocated during these projects was essential to sustain local fisheries. These projects provide substantial economic benefit to participants during the projects, as well as revenues when oysters were eventually harvested.



Depositing Oysters on Relay Area