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RECYCLE PARTNERS:



Local organizations join together to provide oyster shell recycling program for area restaurants

Charleston, SC --- The Nature Conservancy, Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Fisher Recycling and the College of Charleston Students In Free Enterprise (SIFE) organization have partnered together to offer Charleston-area restaurants the opportunity to be a part of a pilot oyster shell recycling project. This project kicks off on October 1, 2009 and is available to all Charleston-area restaurants that serve oysters. Recruitment efforts will focus primarily on restaurants that serve more than 100 bushels per month.

"Oyster reefs are one of the most severely impacted marine habitats on the planet with historic losses greater than coral reefs and mangroves," explains Joy Brown, the project's coordinator and marine restoration specialist with The Nature Conservancy. "They are an essential ecosystem to our marine environment. This project will allow us to reduce the amount of shell brought in from out of state that is used to replenish the oyster population in South Carolina."

In recent years it has become difficult to acquire oyster shell for oyster habitat restoration efforts because the sources of shell have become so dispersed throughout the state. Oyster shell is used in landscaping or goes to the landfills and approximately 40,000 bushels of shell could be purchased annually from outside South Carolina for restoration. Based on a recent survey of shellfish wholesalers conducted by Ben Stone, an intern with The Nature Conservancy and Department of Natural Resources, current calculations reveal that there are approximately 6,718,600 pounds (121,977 bushels) of Gulf oysters being sold in South Carolina each year and more than 50 percent are being sold to restaurants where the shells typically end up in the trash.

South Carolina was one of the first states in the nation to take part in oyster restoration programs and The South Carolina Department of Natural Resources has been working with area volunteers for the past eight years to recycle shell in a variety of ways; however, a coordinated effort to target restaurants has not been implemented until now. Personnel restrictions and routine pick-up demands from the downtown area have made it difficult to collect their oyster shells in the past.

Many efforts have been made by various organizations and individuals to eradicate the problems that have plagued SC oyster reefs but there have been many challenges and little resources to accomplish these goals. Volunteers have been collecting oyster shells from Hilton Head Island restaurants completely at their own expense since 2002 and volunteers have been collecting oyster shells from Murrells Inlet restaurants since 2004.

"What makes this project different," explains Nancy Hadley, a shellfish biologist with the Department of Natural Resources, "is that by partnering with The Nature Conservancy and Fisher Recycling we are able to expand our efforts and provide a program specifically tailored to the needs of restaurants."

The partnership between the organizations involved in this project promotes a more aggressive approach and with grant funding provided by U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, The Nature Conservancy has been able to coordinate efforts between all the partnering organizations.

"By bringing in Fisher Recycling and the SIFE students from College of Charleston, we are available to promote the program, handle the logistics of signing up restaurants and collect the shell in an organized and efficient manner," explains Brown.

Students In Free Enterprise (SIFE) joined the project in August, when they learned about the project through Chris Fisher. The student organization at the College encourages members to develop entrepreneurial skills and business ethics.

"When we learned about the oyster shell recycling project, we were immediately intrigued," says Nathan Aycock, a College of Charleston student and member of SIFE. "One of our core values in SIFE is environmental sustainability and this project has the potential to have a positive impact on this community. We will be closely involved with meeting with the restaurants, monitoring the results and will present the outcomes at a national competition later this year."

Currently, both Pearlz locations, Fleet Landing, Charleston Place, Hank's Seafood, Peninsula Grill and Liberty Taproom have signed on to participate in the recycling project. Restaurants interested in recycling, should contact Chris Fisher at (843) 881-3388 or e-mail chris@fisherrecycling.com.

For more information about the project, contact Joy Brown with The Nature Conservancy at (843) 937-8807 or e-mail joy_brown@tnc.org.

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