



Pensacola East Bay Oyster Habitat Restoration Project

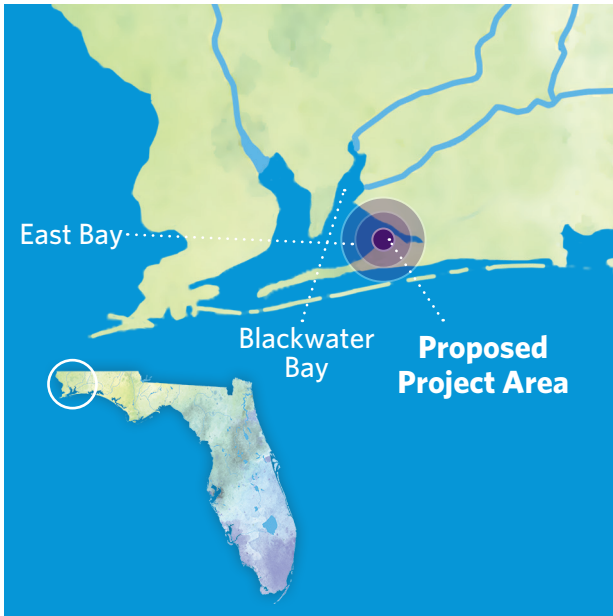


A bright future

The bays of Santa Rosa County once teemed with oysters. The stories told by local watermen reveal a history of plentiful oysters that supported a vibrant fishery and thriving wildlife. Decades of water quality degradation, among other challenges, led to a sharp decline in oysters and the important seagrasses that once flourished in East Bay and Blackwater Bay in Santa Rosa County. Communities throughout the watershed are making strides to improve the bays' water quality. This means once abundant oysters in these bays can make a comeback — with a little help. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is launching a large scale oyster restoration project guided by science that provides benefits to both people and nature in the bay system.

New oyster reefs

Oysters rely on just the right conditions to thrive. TNC and partners plan to construct reefs that have been designed to perfectly suit the local conditions and attract Eastern oysters along 6.5 miles of shoreline in the East and Blackwater bays. The reefs will consist of limestone rock and oyster shells — ideal materials on which oysters settle. The project—Pensacola East Bay Oyster Habitat Restoration—is funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's (NFWF) Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund.



Rendering of constructed oyster reefs at low tide © Jacobs

The spring of 2021 marks the beginning of the construction of 33 new oyster reefs to restore oyster habitat. Once built the reefs will offer a place for oysters to grow and contribute to the ecosystem by filtering water and providing an important food source and nursery habitat for commercially and recreationally significant finfish, crabs, shrimp and birds. These reefs will enhance partner efforts to rebuild reefs that can be harvested — both types of reefs are important pieces of a larger effort to restore the oyster fishery and rebuild the oyster population in the Pensacola Bay System.

TNC’s science and conservation expertise is complemented by the efforts of other coastal professionals who are engaged in the project. Coastal engineering firm Jacobs is managing the design, permitting and construction; coastal construction firm CrowderGulf is installing the reefs; and environmental consulting firm WSP is conducting the pre- and post-construction science-based monitoring for the project.

Expected Project Timeline

2016-2020: Reef design, permitting, construction bids and pre-construction monitoring

2021: Reef construction begins in Spring 2021

2021-2025: Post-construction monitoring for up to 5 years

Commitment and collaboration

Restoring oysters to the bay requires a long-term and collaborative effort with a team of partners and the community. The following organizations are members of the project’s Technical Working Group, formed to provide feedback and expertise on the project design and monitoring:

- Eglin Air Force Base
- Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Aquaculture Division
- Florida Department of Environmental Protection
- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- Northwest Florida Water Management District
- Santa Rosa County
- US Fish and Wildlife Service