

## Oyster Reef FAQ's

Where is it? It's on the west side of Lt. Island on the intertidal flats.

How do I/can I get there to see it? It is basically accessible by boat only. At its beginnings, we do not encourage visitation. We'll do tours eventually.

What is an oyster reef? Oyster reef is a type of habitat made up of both living and dead oysters. It is a very three dimensional habitat with lots of hiding places for small fish and crabs.

How do you build it? What is it made of? The first step is to build a foundation for the oysters to grow on. We put down the foundation in mid June so that we can catch the planktonic, baby oysters as they settle to the bottom. This year we put down two shell piles, called culch. Next season we are going to try 3 other methods, oyster blocks, spat balls and shell mats. We have photos of each.

How big will it be? We are starting out with 2 one acre sites and experimenting with the different techniques

Will it grow over time? Yes, the reef will grow over time and cover the bottom if we are successful.

When will it be "ready"/finished/operational? Though it's never really "finished", we will consider the restoration successful when oysters cover the restoration area and we no longer need to add growing substrates.

How will you know? We know when we reach a certain density of oysters. We'll know when the oysters are harvested and enough younger oysters are left that they can sustain the reef and continue to grow.

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**What is it for?** Oyster reefs are important habitat for fish and a variety of invertebrates. Our oysters will also benefit commercial grants by adding a natural source of spat to the south end of the harbor. Oysters also lock up nitrogen and filter the water of the harbor, improving water quality. Oyster reefs may also help slow down erosion by helping to break down wave energy before it hits the shore. Maybe even eel grass, another rare marine community, will develop behind the reef.

**Why are we doing this?** We are doing this to restore a lost habitat to the sanctuary.

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Oyster questions:

Where does the spat come from? (What is spat?) Spat are baby oysters that settle out from their planktonic stage. Spat comes from all the oysters that spawn in Wellfleet Harbor in June

How long for an oyster to be mature? Oyster mature in 2 years, but the greatest spawning takes place in the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> year.

Will any have pearls (a kid question)? All clams have pearls so the oysters will too. They are very chalky looking and they are rarely found.

Can anyone pick/harvest the oysters? This part of the harbor is not open to family permit holders. It is open to anyone with a commercial license. How and when they will be harvested has not been determined and that will depend on whether we can successfully collect spat and that this is a good site for growing oysters.

Will Audubon harvest them? If not, why not. We will not be directly involved in the harvest of this site. The town Shellfish Department will manage that. We are interested only in the habitat restoration.

Will there be clams or mussels there? No

Is Wellfleet (town) involved in this – in what way? Yes, in lots of ways. The Shellfish Advisory Committee is represented on the steering committee and the advisory committee. A member of the Natural Resource Advisory Board and a member from the Conservation Commission are on the advisory committee. Numerous shellfishermen have attended the planning meeting.

Will this affect grants in the area? There are no grants in the area.