

OYSTER RESTORATION PROJECTS BY GREENWICH SHELLFISH COMMISSION

In 1997, the oyster populations all over Connecticut, including Greenwich Cove, were decimated by 2 oyster diseases, not harmful to humans, MSX and Dermo. Since that time a great effort has been made by people involved in Aquaculture to find and reproduce disease resistant and fast growing oysters.

The Greenwich Shellfish Commission has initiated 3 projects to try to restore the abundant and delicious oysters of Greenwich Cove. In spring of 2001, we purchased 20,000 thumbnail-sized disease resistant oysters which we raised in plastic mesh cages hanging off a float. This involved weekly monitoring and cleaning of cages by Commission members. When they reached 1 ½ inches, they were released in the wild to grow larger.

In 2002, we made a deal with Ed Stilwagen of Atlantic Clam Farms to trade 1 million huge hardshell clams from Greenwich Cove for 2 million 1- 1 ½ inch oysters. On July 2, 2003, at 7:00 AM, the Commission met Stilwagen's boat, the New Harvester and with his help deposited the oysters in several places in Greenwich Cove. These oysters have thrived and have even produced a "set", which means that tiny oysters or "spat" have attached themselves to empty shells and will grow there. We hope that there will not be too much loss due to oyster drills, crabs and other predators.

This year, on September 24, the Greenwich Shellfish Commission purchased 100,000 small seed oysters from Frank Flowers and Sons in Oyster Bay, Long Island. These were brought by private boat to Greenwich Cove. Ed Stilwagen, his boat and 4 men plus a float and many oyster cages were there to assist the Commission at no charge to us. The oysters were caged and fastened beneath the float so they could grow to a size which would be safer from crabs and other predators. Soon the Commission will put them along the shore to grow until they are large enough to harvest by recreational shellfisherpeople. Meanwhile, the New Harvester has been putting down oyster shell or cultch near the Old Greenwich dock to provide a good habitat for the new oysters to grow and reproduce in. When oysters spawn, the spat or fertilized eggs must attach to a hard surface like an empty shell.

This winter, the area between the launching ramp and the stone groin running northwest from the Old Greenwich Yacht club has been designated for oyster restoration and is off limits for any shellfishing as we try to get a new oyster bed established.

These projects are part of a master plan to restore an adequate oyster population to the traditionally fecund Greenwich Cove so that residents will again be able to harvest and enjoy our fabulous oysters.

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