FWC Apalachicola Bay Oyster Restoration

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NFWF Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund – $20,057,000

- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
- Apalachicola Bay and Suwannee Sound
- Gather baseline ecological data
- Oyster reef restoration
- Develop oyster management plans
- Multiple partnerships
- Important to stress collaboration with management agencies, universities, and local, public stakeholders
Current Oyster Reef Conditions in Apalachicola Bay

- Recent mapping shows approximately 2,000 acres of potential oyster habitat
- Most of this area is degraded and does not support oyster spat settlement
- The east and central east sides of the Bay are the main areas supporting oysters and likely represents the core of the oyster population in the Bay
- Mapping shows areas where restoration would be most beneficial
- Additional $10 million allocated from Governor DeSantis’ Framework for Freedom Budget
  - Exclusively for Apalachicola Bay oyster reef restoration
Apalachicola Bay Oyster Restoration – Pilot Study

- NFWF has requested FWC conduct a restoration pilot study prior to extensive restoration
  - Past restoration operations in the Bay did not perform as well as expected
- Large number of unknowns still present
- Perform a large-scale pilot study
  - FSU will conduct complementary studies
- FWRI will conduct sampling and monitoring oversight
- Utilizing these studies, FWC will have more data to construct and perform larger restoration activity
Reef Characteristics
1. Hardbottom
2. Good waterflow
3. Nearby oysters
4. Not a navigational hazard
5. Navigable for contractor
Apalachicola Bay Oyster Restoration – Pilot Study

- Pilot study will test multiple reef heights: 1 ft (low) and 2 ft (high)
- Material will be *Kentucky Blue* limestone
  - Not using large rock, unable to be tonged
- Each restored reef will be 1 acre in size
- Site observer will be hired to oversee restoration efforts
- FWC will exhaust the $10 million state allocation → *need your input!*
- FSU ABSI’s complimentary study
  - Increases scientific scope of work done in Apalachicola Bay
  - Provides more data to assist in future, larger restoration activities
Adaptative Management and Restoration Plan

- Pilot Studies
- Large-scale Restoration

Pros and cons for future restoration activities

Informs FWC on management options for local fishery
Apalachee Bay Oyster Fishery Management

- FWC continues to gather public feedback to inform oyster fishery management
- Continue to monitor and analyze biological data
  - Most recent monitoring efforts have shown improvements where restoration has occurred.
- Decisions on future restoration and reopening of the Bay will be data informed as well as include public input.
- Actively researching additional funding opportunities
  - Example: NOAA Transformational Habitat Restoration and Coastal Resilience Grant
  - Recurring state funding
Conclusion

- $20 million for preliminary data gathering and analyses, restoration efforts, stakeholder-informed, regionally-specific oyster management plans
  - Additional $10 million allocated from the State for reef restoration
- Restoration pilot study underway
  - Material in the Bay early Spring 2024
  - Inform FWC for large-scale restoration
- Continually looking for additional funding sources
- Successful Apalachicola Bay oyster restoration through the culmination of work from management entities, university researchers, and local stakeholders
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