

Conserving oyster reefs

Protecting oyster reefs benefits the economy and the environment

Issue

- Oysters are ecologically and economically important
- Harvest activities have diminished oyster reef structure and degraded fish habitat
- Restored reefs can mitigate lost oyster habitat but are often not protected

Impacts

Estimated **harvest value** of oysters from degraded reefs: \$880 per acre¹

Estimated **non-harvest value** of oysters: \$2,000-\$40,000 per acre¹

- Providing habitat that increases biodiversity and fish production
- Reducing waves and stabilizing shorelines
- Improving water quality by filtering large volumes of water
- Producing oyster larvae that renourish harvested reefs

Estimated **recreational fishing** value of restored oyster reefs: \$23,000 per acre²

Solutions

- Designate sanctuary areas for natural reefs that are protected from commercial harvest
- Create a conservation strategy to provide permanent sanctuary status to restored reefs
- Incorporate measures of reef structure into management criteria



Stockpile of dredged oyster shells at Nueces Bay containing 50,000 cubic yards of shells. Corpus Christi Caller Times, July 16, 1955.



Protected oysters provide habitat and produce larvae that benefit harvested reefs.

¹Grabowski et al. 2012, DOI: 10.1525/bio.2012.62.10.10; ²Carlton et al. 2016, TAMU-SG-16-211