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### Oyster Project Honored by Coastal America

LEWES, Del. — The [Delaware Bay Oyster Restoration Project](#), an ongoing effort to revitalize Eastern oysters in Delaware Bay, was honored with a [2008 Coastal America Partnership Award](#) on October 4 during a bayside ceremony held at the University of Delaware's [Coast Day](#) festival in Lewes, Delaware. The Coastal America Partnership Award is the only environmental award of its kind given by the White House.

Virginia Tippie, director of Coastal America, together with Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army (Policy and Legislation), [Terrence Salt](#), presented plaques, certificates, and congratulatory letters from President Barack Obama to representatives from each of the Delaware Bay Oyster Restoration Task Force's 12 member-organizations.

"It has been deeply gratifying for us to play a role in bringing back Delaware Bay's oysters," said [Lt. Col. Thomas Tickner](#), commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Philadelphia District, which manages the project for the federal government. "No fewer than 12 agencies, public and private, joined forces in common cause and have seen tangible success as a direct result of their efforts."

Coastal America's Partnership Award recognizes the collaborative, multi-agency effort that was needed to leverage and combine enough resources to successfully restore, preserve and protect Delaware Bay's population of Eastern oysters. It furthermore recognizes the value of the task force's outreach efforts, an example of which could be seen at Coast Day in the form of an exhibition booth hosted by the Partnership for the Delaware Estuary, complete with freshly roasted Delaware Bay oysters available for free to thousands of festival goers.

"New Jersey is proud to be a partner in the Delaware Bay Oyster Restoration Project and a co-sponsor with the State of Delaware. Our region will continue to yield significant environmental and economic benefits from this innovative project," said [Mark N. Mauriello](#), acting commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. "We also recognize that this celebration of success was made possible through the solid support we received from Governors Jon Corzine and Jack Markell, congressional members in New Jersey and Delaware, and our colleagues in the State of Delaware as well as those in academia, government agencies and non-government organizations."

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Since 2005, the Delaware Bay Oyster Restoration Task Force has strategically placed, or “planted,” over 2.1 million bushels of clam and oyster shells onto historic reefs in Delaware Bay thanks to \$5 million provided by Congress and administered by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. It has done so to achieve two objectives: to enhance survival by providing clean shell to which juvenile oysters can attach and grow, and to maintain the ecology of the bay by sustaining oyster reefs that would otherwise degrade over time due to natural processes.

“The Delaware Bay is a recreational treasure and an economic engine for our region,” said [Collin P. O’Mara](#), secretary of the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control. “The Delaware Bay Oyster Restoration Project supports both the ecological restoration of our native oyster and the revitalization of our commercial oyster industry. The project’s outstanding success reflects the close cooperation between New Jersey, Delaware and all partners and the dedicated commitment to improving the health and sustainability of the Delaware Bay.”

This program has successfully stabilized the oyster beds of Delaware Bay. In fact, 2007 was the first year since 1999 that the oyster-shell resource has been in equilibrium or increased. More importantly, there has been a substantial increase in the survival of juvenile oysters. The projected harvest quota for oysters reared in 2008 is now the third-highest since the mid-1980s, and the estimated impact of the 2007 fiscal-year program alone is \$90 million — equating to more than \$40 for every federal dollar invested.

This award adds to a growing list of accolades for the bi-state project; a list that also includes a gold medal from the Federal Executive Board in May and a 2008 Government Award from the Water Resources Association of the Delaware River Basin in April of last year. Nevertheless, the Delaware Bay Oyster Restoration Project recently exhausted the last of its federal funding on September 30. Task force leaders are currently pursuing every lead available to them in an effort to raise new funds for continued shell planting.

Due to a decrease in funding, this year’s planting effort was the leanest to date at approximately 212,000 bushels, down from a peak of more than 681,000 bushels in 2007. Less shell planted in Delaware Bay means less habitat where juvenile oysters can grow.

“The shell-planting program has brought the bay back from the lowest abundance of oysters in 2004 observed since the early 1950s to a level capable of sustaining an important fishery and providing the ecological benefits obtained from healthy oyster habitat, but cessation of funding will rapidly rob the momentum we have gained,” said [Dr. Eric Powell](#), director of Rutgers University’s Haskin Shellfish Research Laboratory, which sits beside the bay in Bivalve, New Jersey. “Continuation of the program is critical for maintaining the long-term health of Delaware Bay.”

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Members of the Delaware Bay Oyster Restoration Task Force include the:

- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Philadelphia District
- New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection
- Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control
- Rutgers University's Haskin Shellfish Research Laboratory
- Delaware River Basin Commission
- Partnership for the Delaware Estuary
- Delaware State University's College of Agriculture and Related Sciences
- Delaware River and Bay Authority
- Cumberland Empowerment Zone Corporation
- Delaware Bay Section of the Shell Fisheries Council
- Delaware Shellfish Advisory Council
- Commercial Township, New Jersey

Coastal America is a partnership of federal agencies, state and local governments, and private organizations whose mission it is to protect, preserve, and restore the nation's coasts. For more information, please visit [www.DelawareEstuary.org](http://www.DelawareEstuary.org) or [www.CoastalAmerica.gov](http://www.CoastalAmerica.gov).

**The Partnership for the Delaware Estuary, a National Estuary Program based in Wilmington, leads collaborative and creative efforts to protect and enhance the Delaware Estuary, and its tributaries, for current and future generations. We envision everyone working together to make the Delaware Estuary the most inviting, prosperous and healthy natural resource of its kind in the nation.**

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