



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Gateway
National Recreation Area

Public Affairs Office
210 New York Avenue
Staten Island, NY 10305

718-354-4606 phone
718-354-4605 fax

Gateway News Release

For Immediate Release

Contact: Dr George Frame
Phone number: 718-354-4546
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Hard-Shellled Oysters Not So Hardy Anymore Gateway National Recreation Area Asks for Public Assistance in Identifying Eastern Oyster Populations in Jamaica Bay

The Jamaica Bay Unit of Gateway National Recreation Area is considering restoring the once thriving population of Eastern Oysters (*Crassostrea virginica*) to the ecosystem. Over harvesting, habitat destruction, pollution, and diseases have decimated native oyster populations in Jamaica Bay. To begin the process of possible restoration, the park must first find remnant populations of the original Jamaica Bay oyster. To accomplish this, the National Park Service (NPS) is reaching out to the residents, public and stakeholders of Jamaica Bay to aid in the search for local oysters. NPS policy requires the use of a native strain (genotype) for restoration of the Eastern Oyster. "This is a great opportunity for the public to have a positive impact on the future of Jamaica Bay," said NPS Biologist Dr George Frame.

To begin the process, park staff must document the current status of oysters in Jamaica Bay. Assessing the state of oysters in the bay is a difficult task. Park staff searched Jamaica Bay, but found only a few oysters, and all were likely illegal or accidental recent introductions. However, park staff is aware through anecdotal history and conversations with area residents that oysters might well still exist in the bay.

If you are aware of any naturally occurring Eastern Oyster beds in Jamaica Bay please contact the park so staff can visit the location and determine whether such a specimen would be the best oyster to use in any restoration efforts. If you have any information about where these naturally occurring populations are located, please contact Dr. George Frame, NPS Division of Natural Resources, at 718-354-4546 by August 31, 2008. (more)

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The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

Historically, Eastern Oysters were the daily food for coastal Native Americans and early European settlers. However, because of over-harvesting, Eastern Oyster populations experienced a drastic decline around 1812. Despite small and temporary successes in restoration during the late 1800s and through the World War I era, the population decline continued. The Jamaica Bay oyster and clamming industry was closed in 1921 because of the daily discharge of 50 million gallons of sewage into the bay. The final blow to the oyster population was delivered by the Hurricane of 1938, which caused further devastation to the Eastern Oyster beds by covering them with layers of mud, effectively destroying their habitat.

Two diseases also severely limited oyster survival along the East Coast in recent decades. They are Dermo (*Perkinsus marinus*) and MSX (*Haplosporidium nelsoni*). These diseases will likely affect any possible oyster restoration efforts in Jamaica Bay.

Eastern Oysters are an important component of a clean and healthy ecosystem. Oysters, clams, mussels, and other filter-feeding mollusks act as a link between the benthic and pelagic food webs. They improve water clarity as they filter suspended sediment and micro-algae from the water. In addition, Eastern Oysters create hard bottom and reef structures that are hiding places for fish and other organisms.

Gateway National Recreation Area's Jamaica Bay Unit, in Brooklyn and Queens, includes a wealth of history, nature, and recreational opportunities. These include New York City's first municipal airport, former coastal fortifications, a world-renowned wildlife refuge, and outstanding ocean beaches.

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