

NEWS RELEASE

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Shells Fly in the Bronx as the Largest Oyster Restoration Project Ever Attempted in New York Harbor Commences

NEW YORK (June, 24th 2013) – Today, at the mouth of the Bronx River, the Oyster Restoration Research Project (ORRP), a partnership of scientists, not-for-profit groups and government agencies, began construction of a reef in the shallow waters off Soundview Park. Using high pressure water pumps mounted to a 100-foot barge, the team carefully positioned the barge and directed a steady stream of water at a mound of clam shells. The shells – 100 tons of them – were imported from Massachusetts where they have been dried out on land for over a year (a process known as “curing”).

These shells will create a layer of hard material over the existing soft, fine-grained sediments, which will provide a surface on which both wild and aquaculture-grown oysters can attach and grow. The research partnership hopes that the combination of wild oysters finding their way to the site and the addition of 125,000 transplanted oyster spats (juvenile oysters) that will be placed there later this summer will be sufficient in achieving a self-sustaining population within the planned one-acre reef. The Soundview Park Oyster Restoration Project is the largest oyster recovery effort ever attempted in New York Harbor and represents a significant step forward in restoring oyster populations in the Harbor and lower Hudson River.

While sustained success is not assured, the ORRP partnership is confident that large numbers of the transplanted oysters will survive and that wild oysters will settle on the new reef based on the promising results of ORRP’s recently completed two-year research study and New York City Department of Parks & Recreation Natural Resources Group’s (NRG) study at the Soundview Park site completed in 2012. The ORRP Phase 1 Study report can be downloaded at: http://www.hudsonriver.org/download/ORRP_Phase1.2013.pdf

The ORRP partnership has more than 30 partners, including the Hudson River Foundation, New York/New Jersey Baykeeper, New York City Department of Parks & Recreation Natural Resources Group (NRG), Urban Assembly New York Harbor School, University of New Hampshire, Florida State University, Bronx River Alliance, Rocking the Boat, Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), New York/New Jersey Harbor & Estuary Program, US Army Corps of Engineers and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Restoration Center.

The Soundview Park project is supported by Congressman Serrano and received funding from the WCS-NOAA South Bronx Waterfront Partnership.

Statements from partners:

“I am proud to continue to support the restoration of a natural and wild Bronx River estuary,” said Congressman José E. Serrano. “From our beavers to the alewife herring to these new oysters, the Bronx River is truly becoming a wildlife habitat and a natural wonder. I applaud all those involved and look forward to good news about the oyster population in the future.”

“This reef represents a major advance in the effort to understand the feasibility of significant oyster restoration in the region,” said Clay Hiles, Executive Director of the Hudson River Foundation. “We have come to this point through an extraordinary collaboration of key organizations and agencies committed to conducting the research necessary to bring back the legendary New York Harbor oyster and its important function in the ecology system of the Hudson River and the Harbor.”

“We've been planning this expansion for about a year and a half,” said Meredith Comi, Oyster Restoration Program Director with NY/NJ Baykeeper, “and it really is a great example of how partnerships can produce successful projects.”

New York City Parks Department, Bram Gunther, Chief of Forestry, Horticulture and Natural Resources:

“New York City, once home to hundreds of thousands of acres of oyster beds, was known as the oyster capital of the world. By the 1930s however, the local population was nearly extinct. As part of the remarkably successful rejuvenation of the Bronx River, Park's Natural Resources Group (NRG) initiated oyster reef restoration in 2006, thanks to a grant from the Wildlife Conservation Society - National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. NRG has been restoring and conserving important natural areas across NYC for three decades. Since 2007, NRG has worked closely with partners, in particular the Hudson River Foundation, NY/NJ Baykeeper, the Bronx River Alliance and Rocking the Boat to help continue expanding this restoration work, culminating in today's event. Oysters not only represent our unique natural history, they can help the city become more resilient along its coastlines and river corridors.”

“The Bronx River Alliance is pleased to be part of this strong partnership effort to restore oyster reefs in the waters off Soundview Park at the mouth of the Bronx River,” said Linda Cox, Executive Director of the Bronx River Alliance and Bronx River Administrator for NYC Parks. “It's exciting to us to find that this area is proving to be a promising site for restoring oysters to the New York Harbor.”

“Oysters once supported a great fishery here, to the extent that New York City was once considered the oyster capital of the world. The Soundview Park project is an important step forward in helping to restore this vital founding resource to the Bronx River estuary,” said James Turek, NOAA Coordinator for the WCS-NOAA Partnership.

“We're proud to be part of this partnership that has turned this proposal into a reality,” said John F. Calvelli, Executive Vice President for the Wildlife Conservation Society's Public Affairs Division. “This project will continue to build on the collaborative model that has been so successful for the Bronx River. Oysters were once a vital part of the regional ecosystem. By working together we will help restore a self-sustaining population of oysters that will transform the waters of New York City.”