

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

about the South Carolina Oyster Restoration and Enhancement program

Q-What is SCORE?

A-SCORE is a community-based oyster habitat restoration project. Volunteers work with SCDNR scientists to build new oyster habitat.

Q-Why is oyster habitat important?

A- Oysters build reefs, which become habitat for many other estuarine animals, including fish, crabs and shrimp. Oysters filter water and improve water quality. Oysters protect fragile marsh from boat wakes and waves.

Q-Why do oysters need restoration and enhancement?

A-Oyster larvae must attach to a hard substrate, ideally another oyster shell. As adult oysters are harvested, shell (representing available substrate) is removed from the system. If this shell is not replaced, habitat is lost. Other contributing factors are the impact of boat wakes, which can severely damage oyster beds, especially in smaller creeks, and excessive silt loads resulting from land development.

Q-What methods does SCORE use to restore and enhance oyster habitat?

A-The primary method is to plant recycled oyster shell at suitable sites. Plastic mesh bags much like onion bags are used to retain the shell and prevent it from washing away. Over time, as oysters and mussels recruit to the shell, the bag becomes integrated into the reef.

Q-What makes a site suitable for restoration or enhancement?

A-Oysters prefer intertidal locations with high salinity. Thus most sites will be in tidal creeks. The proposed site should have a relatively firm substrate to facilitate working on the reef and to prevent the shell bags from sinking too rapidly. Shell is easier to stabilize on banks, which have a gentle slope than on steep banks. The presence of oysters in the vicinity indicates potential for success. Since one of our goals is to reduce shoreline erosion and protect *Spartina* marshgrass, many sites will be located adjacent to saltmarshes. Finally, accessibility by volunteers is important, so most sites are located adjacent to public access points such as boat landings or parks. SCORE does not normally construct reefs on private land.

Q-When do you restore oyster habitats?

A-Adult oysters spawn (and therefore larvae settle) in the summer months. Shell should be planted from late May through late August for the best "catch". Shell that is planted outside that window will accumulate considerable fouling before oyster larvae are available to settle. Larvae are less likely to settle on heavily fouled shells.

Q-Where do you get the shell to plant?

A-Oyster shell recycling is an important component of the SCORE program. Most restaurants and resorts and many caterers throw oyster shell in the garbage; others use it for driveway fill. This shell is a valuable resource that needs to be returned to the water to provide substrate for juvenile oysters. Currently less than 10% of the oysters harvested in SC are returned to SCDNR for use in habitat restoration.

Q-How can I help?

A-There are many volunteer opportunities. Volunteers are needed to fill shell bags, build reefs, monitor water quality, monitor reef development, and recycle shell. Sign up to be placed on our mailing list. We will notify you of workshops, workdays, and volunteer opportunities.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Visit our web site <http://score.dnr.sc.gov>