

Setting the S.C.O.R.E.

Written by Mark Shaffer

Wednesday, 17 June 2015 06:22



South Carolina Oyster Restoration and Enhancement proves habitat forming

Story & Photos by Mark Shaffer

It's a perfectly beautiful June morning on the edge of Hunting Island's Russ Point. A steady stream of boaters stream by from the nearby landing to get a look at this curious group of people working in a line that stretches from the road to a strip of mud and sand at the shoreline. These volunteers – about 50 in all – heave sacks of recycled oyster shells out of a trailer and down the line where experts from the Department of Natural Resources' SCORE program put them in place.

With the inception of the SCORE program in 2001 the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) has had remarkable success in increasing the state's crucial oyster

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habitat. Oysters are absolutely essential for a healthy estuarine system filtering out impurities while providing habitat and food for countless creatures in and out of the water. Nine years ago when the first SCORE volunteers showed up at Russ Point the inlet side of this spit of land was mostly barren, eroded beach. Today's extension nears the end of the project with healthy, lush marsh stretching the length of nearly three football fields back toward the Fripp Island Bridge. Low tide exposes the reef itself all built on bags of recycled oyster shells.



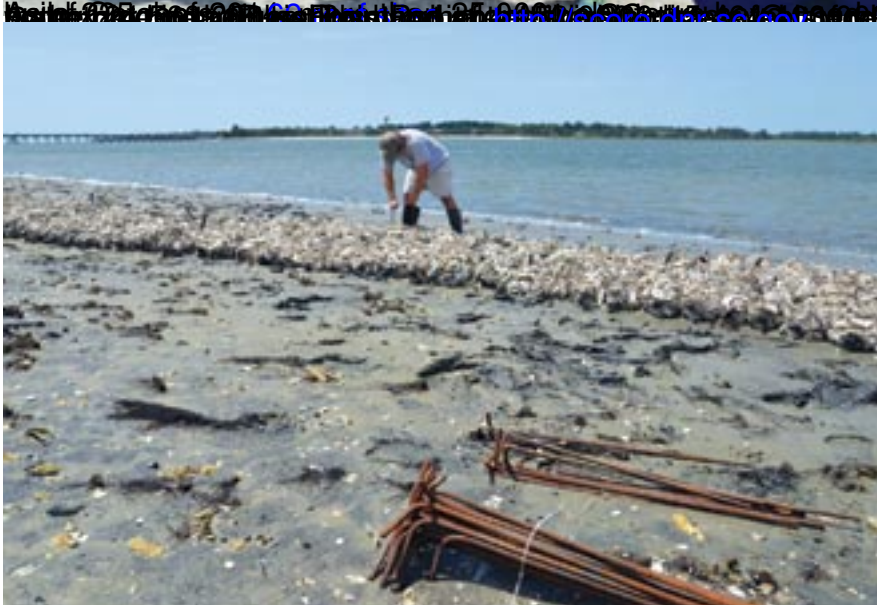
“We can put out a lot more shell in different ways with fewer people,” says the DNR’s Jared Hulteen, “but that doesn’t educate people or engage the community. This way everyone is involved and hands-on. ”

That’s a key component of SCORE – to get the public informed and involved in the

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