



NOAA FISHERIES

Office of Habitat
Conservation

The Restoration Center is NOAA's only office solely devoted to restoring the nation's coastal, marine, and migratory fish habitat.

With our national network of partners, we leverage funding and develop high-quality restoration projects within four primary areas:

- 1. Recovering threatened and endangered species.*
- 2. Sustaining fisheries.*
- 3. Reversing the damage from oil spills and toxic releases.*
- 4. Strengthening the resilience of coastal communities and ecosystems.*

Habitat Restoration to Sustain Fisheries

The NOAA Restoration Center, housed within the Office of Habitat Conservation in NOAA Fisheries, invests in habitat restoration across the country where our fisheries need it most.

Our Work Supporting Sustainable Fisheries

NOAA Fisheries is responsible for the stewardship of the nation's marine resources, which are among the largest and most sustainable in the world.

By protecting and restoring priority habitat, the Restoration Center serves as a non-regulatory tool for ensuring the long-term sustainability of commercial and recreational fisheries. Our funding and technical assistance support the healthy habitats that valuable species of fish, crabs, oysters, shrimp, and more rely on to thrive.

Coastal and estuary habitats are home to more than 75 percent of our nation's commercial fish catch and 80 to 90 percent of the recreational fish catch. As a whole, U.S. fisheries support nearly 1.6 million jobs and \$208 billion in sales each year.

Our work restoring the habitats that these fish and their prey rely on—including wetlands, underwater grass beds, oyster reefs, coral reefs, and more—helps maintain sustainable fisheries for the social, cultural, and economic benefit of the nation.

In some cases, barriers such as dams and culverts may block access to habitat, preventing migratory fish from returning to their historic spawning grounds or stopping juvenile fish from reaching coldwater rearing habitats that they rely on for refuge. By reopening these migratory pathways, we work to restore access to healthy habitat for fish and their prey.



Example Projects

Harris Creek Oyster Restoration – Maryland

- We're working with partners through our Community-based Restoration Program to restore oyster reefs in Maryland's Harris Creek, a tributary of the Chesapeake Bay. At 350 acres, this is the largest sanctuary oyster restoration project in the country and represents an unprecedented level of coordination, funding, science, and monitoring for Chesapeake Bay oyster restoration.
- Oyster reefs support valuable marine species by filtering the surrounding water, providing nurseries for juvenile fish, and serving as habitat for forage fish, invertebrates, and other shellfish. They also support coastal communities by providing food, jobs, and income and by protecting waterfront properties from waves and flooding. Today, however, oyster populations are at historic lows. Erosion, habitat loss, disease, and pollution have greatly diminished oyster reef habitat on all our coasts.
- Three years after oyster reef restoration in Harris Creek was completed, monitoring results showed that 98 percent of Harris Creek reefs are meeting the success criteria for density and biomass. In addition, a fishing tournament now held annually on the restored Harris Creek reefs has recorded catches of fish like spotted sea trout, striped bass, and white perch.
- According to modeling estimates, these reefs provide \$3 million worth of nitrogen and phosphorous reductions each year. Modeling also predicts that, 10 years post-restoration, the combined benefits of restored reefs in Harris Creek and other nearby waterways will generate a 160 percent increase in blue crab harvest and \$11 million annual increase in dockside fisheries.

Fort DeSoto Tidal Flow Restoration – Florida

- In the late 1950s, tidal flow between bays in the Fort DeSoto Park Aquatic Habitat Management Area in Pinellas County, Florida, were severed due to dredging and filling activities. High summertime temperatures led to very low dissolved oxygen levels and severe seagrass stress, threatening the underwater species that use these areas as habitat.
- Wetlands and seagrass beds provide tremendous benefits: they filter our water, protect communities from floods, and provide vital habitat for fish and wildlife. Coastal wetlands generate more than half of our nation's commercially harvested seafood.
- Unfortunately, coastal regions are losing thousands of acres of these valuable habitats each year to development, drainage, erosion, subsidence, and sea-level rise. That's why we provide funding and technical assistance to help restore coastal wetlands that have been lost or degraded by invasive species, oil spills, or decreased tidal or river flow.
- In Fort DeSoto Park, we worked with our partners and volunteers to construct a bridge that restored circulation to the back bays, which improved water quality and restored nearly 1,200 acres of habitat for fish and shellfish. Within a few days of the project's completion, fish and crabs had already migrated into the area.

Town Brook Restoration – Massachusetts

- Through our Community-based Restoration Program, we worked with the Town of Plymouth, the State of Massachusetts, and other partners on projects that removed or provided passage around seven dams along Town Brook.
- Close to 400 years ago, the Mayflower touched down near Town Brook, a stream flowing into Cape Cod Bay. When, after a devastating winter, river herring returned to Town Brook in the spring, the abundant fish provided the Pilgrims with a rich source of food and helped the new colony to thrive.
- By the early 2000s, however, Town Brook was blocked by multiple dams and barriers, reducing herring runs from nearly one million to just 150,000 annually. For years, staff and volunteers with the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries had to carefully scoop thousands of herring out of the river and truck them around multiple dams to help them reach their spawning habitat.
- With the removal of four dams, improvements to two fish ladders, and the lowering of one dam, river herring are now able to swim unassisted to an additional 269 acres of spawning habitat in the Town Brook watershed.

Photo credits: page 1, Chesapeake Bay Program.