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Shellfish Restoration Project A Success

Monitoring Program shows 80% of clams surviving and healthy in Quonnie and Ninigret Ponds.



After two years of transplanting nearly 80,000 pounds of shellfish (approx. 400,000 individual clams) into sanctuaries in Quonochontaug and Ninigret ponds, we're thrilled to announce that based on our summer-long monitoring program, the transplants were a success. Through a partnership with several groups and agencies, the restoration effort dramatically increased the total number of clams in the sanctuaries. The project is part of the national partnership between the *NOAA Community-based Restoration Program* and *The Nature Conservancy*, and also included the R.I. Department of Environmental Management, Save the Bay, the Salt Ponds Coalition, and Dr. Marta Gomez-Chiarri from the University of Rhode Island. The Rhode

Island Shellfisherman's Association, Narragansett Bay Commission, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service also supported the project.

The monitoring program tracked the overall population of the clams as well as the health of the individual clams. "We found that roughly 80% of the 400,000 clams we transplanted into the ponds survived and prospered," said Jules Opton-Himmel, Conservancy marine scientist who directed the monitoring. "The clams are healthy, growing, and spawning. As filter feeders, they are helping to clear the ponds of excessive plankton growth. This can improve water clarity and improve the overall health of the pond ecosystem. "

Our research showed that more transplanting needs to be done next year in both ponds, especially in Ninigret where fewer clams were found. The density of clams in Quonnie is nearly 20 times that of Ninigret.. More transplants are needed to fully restore and restock Ninigret Pond.

Opton-Himmel also praised the partnership that made the restoration go smoothly.. "The transplants went off without a hitch- an impressive logistical feat to purchase clams from hard-working diggers in East Greenwich, transport to salt ponds on a flat-bed truck, and organize volunteers and boats to plant the clams in the spawner sanctuaries all in one day." A total of 117 volunteers donated over 428 hours during the two year project. "Without the help of the Salt Ponds Coalition, the Department of Environmental Management, Save the Bay, and of course our funders at NOAA, these transplants never could have happened." NOAA and TNC provided over \$143,000 towards the project.

He added that as a result of working together on the transplants the partnership is now tackling new environmental challenges in the ponds, like dealing with land-based pollution and poor water circulation. All of these factors are believed to be degrading the ponds. The Conservancy and its partners including the Town of Charlestown, are looking into ways to correct this through better lawn and waste management and possibly through improved management of the pond breachways.

March 07, 2011

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