

OYSTER CONSERVATIONIST VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

It takes a village to raise an oyster.

Oyster Conservationists are volunteers that grow and care for juvenile oysters (also known as “spat on shell”) in cages off their docks or moorings throughout the Great Bay estuary and its tributaries.

Volunteers participate in this 10-week program from July to September each year. At the end of the season, the homegrown oysters are deposited on our oyster restoration sites to contribute to our reef restoration efforts in Great Bay. Additionally, data collected by volunteers throughout the season helps to inform and support future oyster restoration efforts.

We are grateful to these amazing and dedicated volunteers for directly contributing to oyster restoration efforts in a powerful and positive way!

Oyster Conservationist Program Vision:

To foster a program that inspires individuals and connects communities to contribute and advance conservation strategies in coastal New Hampshire.

Oyster Conservation Program timeline:


- May-June**
TNC staff prepare cages and move oyster shell into cages for larval settlement.
- Early July**
Oyster larvae arrive and are set on oyster shells at UNH Jackson Estuarine Lab in remote setting tanks. After ~2 weeks, volunteers count spat for the program’s first spat counting week.
- Mid-July through early September**
Young oysters are put into cages and delivered to Oyster Conservationist (OC) volunteers. OC’s take care of spat and record data for 10 weeks.
- Mid-September**
Collect cages from OC’s. Volunteers count and measure spat for the program’s second spat counting week.
- Early October**
TNC and UNH staff deploy oysters grown by the volunteers all summer on top of the oyster restoration sites.

LEFT: John Bloom uses a caliper to measure the oyster spat found on the shells in his grandparent’s oyster cage in Dover. © Jennifer Emerling
RIGHT: Volunteers prepare cages of oysters for the Oyster Conservation Program. © Emily Lord/Nature Groupie



Turning the Tide at Great Bay

 Reef Restoration

 Great Bay Partnership
Protected Land

 Other Conservation and
Public Lands

