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## **PHASE ONE OF OYSTER REEF BREAKWATER INSTALLATION AT GANDY'S BEACH SLATED FOR OCTOBER 21-23**

***The Nature Conservancy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Partnership for the Delaware Estuary, and Rutgers University Haskins Shellfish Research Lab Team Up to Combat Delaware Bay Erosion***

**Chester, N.J.** — Volunteers and staff from project partners The Nature Conservancy, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Partnership for the Delaware Estuary, Rutgers University Haskins Shellfish Research Lab and will install the first four oyster reef breakwater structures off the shoreline at Gandy's Beach in southern New Jersey October 21-23, 2015.

In 2013, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was awarded nearly \$900,000 from Hurricane Sandy resilience funds through Department of the Interior towards this shoreline protection project, which supports partner work and volunteers including several thousand local students engaged in oyster education and conservation at the project site.

Oyster reef breakwaters provide a multitude of benefits, including filtering water, providing habitat for key commercial and recreational fisheries and diminishing the energy of waves as they move towards shore, which means less erosion for the coastline. Gandy's Beach has been hit hard by storms and rising sea levels, and the oyster reefs will provide natural defense against those effects.

The reef will be constructed with a combination of "oyster castles," stackable, interlocking blocks of concrete, limestone, crushed shell and silica that encourage oyster larvae to settle, and from bagged oyster shells collected as part of a fledgling shell recycling program with Dock's Raw Bar in Atlantic City. Since the program began in May 2014 The Nature Conservancy has

gathered 38 cubic yards of shell from Dock's, keeping the shell from entering state landfills. Through Rutgers University Project PORTS (Promoting Oyster Restoration Through Schools), local school children and Nature Conservancy student interns assembled the shell into 7,500 bags, which will serve as the building blocks for the breakwater along with the oyster castles. The partner organizations will monitor the integrity of the structure through the cold, ice and storms of winter and use findings to apply to multiple oyster reef installations in the same area next year.

"Natural features, like oyster reefs, marshes and living shorelines, can play an important role for coastal communities that are dealing with challenges like storm-related erosion and flooding," says Patty Doerr, Director of Coastal and Marine Programs for The Nature Conservancy's New Jersey Chapter. "We expect this oyster reef project will pay off in protection services for Gandy's Beach, and it has been an excellent opportunity for us to engage with the local community and youth about the value of nature, too."

Katie Conrad, fish and wildlife biologist of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, adds, "The work of this partnership will help stabilize approximately 3,000 feet of beach and tidal marsh shoreline, allowing the coast to heal itself while ongoing monitoring will measure how well the oysters recruit on the different structures, so future restoration projects can benefit from what we have learned."

"Although sea level rise and increased storms present many challenges for Bayshore communities, one future upside may be the ability to grow oyster and mussel reefs in shallower areas where they can help improve water quality and protect shorelines from erosion. We're excited to be a part of this project because it provides a rare opportunity to test some new tactics and use science to assess performance," says Danielle Kreeger, Ph.D., Science Director for the Partnership for the Delaware Estuary.

*The Nature Conservancy is a leading conservation organization working around the world to protect ecologically important lands and waters for nature and people. To date, the Conservancy and its more than one million members have helped protect 130 million acres worldwide. Visit The Nature Conservancy on the Web at <http://www.nature.org/>.*

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