



## Coastal Shellfish Influence

### Shell bottom influence:

As much of a problem as oyster beds can be for boaters, they play a major role on our salt water ecosystem. A majority of Shellfish bottom comes from oysters. As a keystone species, oysters help supply many species of fish a safe environment to breed and feed. If the oysters do not serve as a food source themselves they attract smaller species of fish which in turn attract larger fish that prey on the smaller species.

As filter feeders oysters can help keep waters clean and are commonly used to help control excessive nitrogen levels, which could potentially cause harmful algae to the ecosystem and deplete oxygen levels. Historically the Chesapeake Bay oyster population would clear its entire volume of water from excessive nitrogen pollutants every 3-4 hours, today it would typically take a year to clean the entire body of water.

### Fish dependent on oyster beds:



Striped Bass



Red Drum



Spotted Sea Trout



Blue Crab

## Healthy Balance

There has been a drop in population from common shell bottom (such as the oyster) due to heavy harvesting or disease. Grassroots organizations and North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources have help increase the population, specifically the Eastern Oyster population. By protecting habitat, building larger beds, disease resistant brood stock and improving the effective of current rules surrounding both shellfish and oceanic habitat.

### Learn More:

DIVISION OF COASTAL MANAGEMENT

<http://dcm2.enr.state.nc.us/Facts/habitat.htm>

COASTAL PROTECTION PLAN

<http://www.ncfisheries.net/habitat/chppshellbot.html>

2005 COASTAL HABITAT STUDY

[http://www.ncfisheries.net/habitat/chppdocs/D\\_Shell%20Bottom.pdf](http://www.ncfisheries.net/habitat/chppdocs/D_Shell%20Bottom.pdf)

WIKIPEDIA OYSTERS

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oyster>