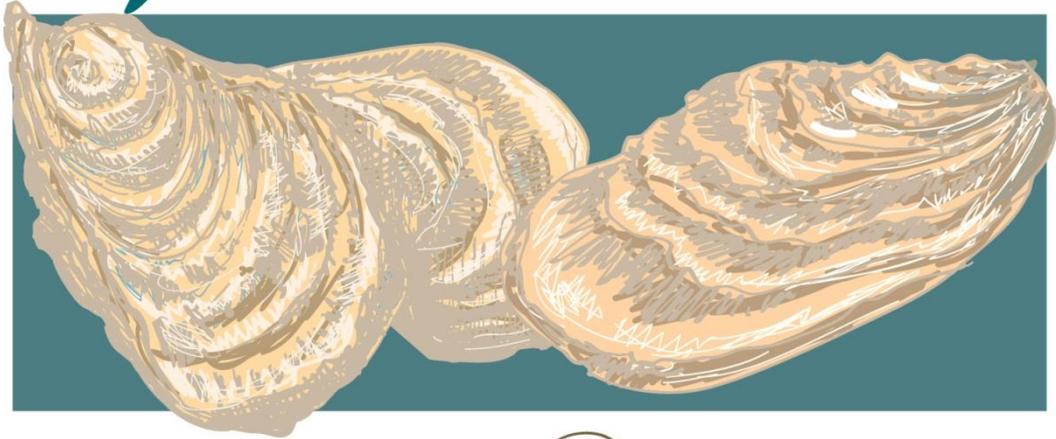


— the Governor's — Oyster Council



RESTORATION & RESILIENCY

The Governor's Oyster Restoration and Resiliency Council ("Oyster Council") was created by Executive Order by Governor Phil Bryant on February 2, 2015.

Composition: Citizen, Scientist and Seafood Industry Leaders representing a broad cross-section of interests and disciplines

Mandate: Through intensive collaboration with individuals and organizations that work in or are impacted by the oyster industry, the Oyster Council will

- Develop a comprehensive Oyster Resource Resiliency Plan that is prioritized as to recommended actions to be taken and that is based on best practices in the national oyster industry and regulatory framework.
- Propose any recommended regulatory (or statutory) revisions determined necessary or advisable in order to implement actions contained in the Plan.
- Propose management strategies based on best practices in the regulatory sector of the industry.
- Propose one or more projects and programs, including aquaculture, (pilot or ongoing) with sufficient information and clarity to be implemented as part of initial actions to be taken in accordance with the actions recommended in the Plan.

Deliverable: A written Oyster Restoration and Resiliency Plan incorporating all mandates of the Oyster Council, which will be accessible to policy-makers and citizens.

KEY DATES AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

Chair of the Oyster Council: Dave Dennis

Executive Committee: Chair of Council, Chairs of Topic Area Committees, and MDMR Director

1. **February 10** – First Full Council Meeting
2. **February 11—March 9** – Working Groups Within Designated Topic Areas
3. **March 10** – Second Full Council Meeting
4. **March 11---May 6** – Working Groups Within Designated Topic Areas
5. **March 16-20** – Public Meetings in Hancock, Harrison and Jackson Counties
6. **May 7** – Final Full Council Meeting (Submission of Topic Committee Reports)
7. **June 2** – Release of Final Report

OVERVIEW

Where We Are: The 2014-15 season has been another low producing oyster season in Mississippi and throughout the Gulf. Ten years ago (in 2004), there were over 400,000 sacks of oysters harvested from Mississippi waters. Since then, the resource has endured the triple whammy of Hurricane Katrina, the BP Oil Spill and the Bonnet Carré Spillway opening. Last year, oysterers harvested about 70,000 sacks of oysters. This year, MDMR shellfish biologists and other marine science experts projected an even slower year, with production currently lower than 5 percent of what the industry harvested 10 years ago. The current season is expected to produce approximately 20,000 sacks of oysters. The reefs are very stressed at best; in fact, industry representatives and MDMR biologists debated if Mississippi should open the season at all.

Where We Want To Be: In spite of the outlook for the current 2014-2015 oyster season, Mississippi is positioned to become a Gulf of Mexico leader in oyster production. To get there, the State must develop a plan, that incorporates current best practices and technologies for production, management, and conservation, then implement it and have the *united* will to stick to it. By doing so, the State will reach the goals of increasing oyster harvest and creating new job and business opportunities while improving the environment through species recovery, habitat creation and cleaner water.

How We Get From Where We Are To Where We Want To Be: Develop an Oyster Resource Resiliency Plan that doesn't lose sight of immediate needs. Governor Bryant has created through executive order the Governor's Oyster Restoration and Resiliency Council. Develop an immediate communication strategy to encourage public input and participation. This process must be the beginning of a long-term oyster resource management plan and program. Such an effort requires state and federal policy makers to commit to the difficult decisions necessary to grow and protect the oyster resource. Recreating the wheel is unnecessary. Use of best practices and programs adopted by Mississippi, our Gulf neighbors and other major oyster harvesting communities will provide the starting point for developing the Plan.

The Role of this Council: The charge to the Oyster Council is to develop a Plan for Oyster resource creation and management, in accordance with the mandates set forth. First, in collaboration with individuals and organizations across the full range of subject areas, the Oyster Council will broaden the community's understanding of how to enhance oyster habitat and increase oyster production. Then, it will propose bold but attainable goals, based on the most authoritative research and reality-tested best practices. The Plan should guide Mississippi, regional and national leaders in implementing policies that increase, enhance and promote the oyster resources that make Mississippi's Gulf Coast so important, not only to Mississippians, but to the Gulf region and the nation as a whole.

The Oyster Council will explore and evaluate best practices and programs adopted by Mississippi, our neighbor states in the Gulf and other major oyster harvesting communities around the country in order to develop a bold, attainable Plan to grow Mississippi's oyster population. This Plan will not be developed just to sit on a shelf.

Oysters in the Environment Committee

Scope: Improve, restore and enlarge oyster resources, enhance water quality in growing and harvesting areas, create habitat and develop a long-term resource management plan geared toward increasing the oyster population for environmental, social and economic benefits.

Committee Chair: Allan Sudduth

Topics for Consideration:

- Determining criteria for prioritization of restoration sites
 - Use of sheltered areas to grow oyster population within an established protocol for relay activities, which will account for appropriate replacement rate within sheltered areas.
 - Restoration methods
 - Management Strategies
 - Consideration of use of oyster gardening (small scale as opposed to farming - see below) which generally is allowed in restricted areas, with the product not being consumable.
 - Consideration of establishing living shorelines utilizing oysters to reduce erosion. Oysters have been used in some locations to create a breakwater that helps reduced wave energy in near-shore environments. Environmental parameters need to be considered in locating these sites because improper location can increase erosion rates.
 - Plans to improve environmental conditions for oyster growth or keep environmental conditions from degrading below a threshold for oyster survival.
 - Establishment of a shell recovery program to recover shells from processors, restaurants and other end users. Shells recovered from processors, restaurants and other end users will be used in oyster farming, gardening and reef creation and restoration.
-

Oysters in the Economy Committee

Scope: Develop bold but implementable management strategies and programs, based on the most authoritative research and reality-tested best practices that will enhance oyster production in the near term and for the long term.

Committee Chair: Tish Williams

Topics for Consideration

- Enhancement of public oyster grounds, which can include permission for private-lease interests to transplant oysters in order to seed the private oyster lease areas.
- Establishment of a shell recovery program to recycle shells from processors, restaurants and other end users. Shells recovered from processors, restaurants and other end users will be used in oyster farming, gardening and reef creation and restoration.
- Adoption of management practices and metrics to assess health of reefs and to determine harvest capacity, by way of sacks, not days.
- Encouragement for development of privately leased areas, which benefits economic and environmental interests.
- Development of a revolving loan program for the oyster industry.
- Provision for use of different gear types for oyster dredging, which may include researching lighter dredges to reduce damage to reefs.
- Continuation of educational programs for oysterers on proper techniques for more efficient harvest and health and safety protocol.

Aquaculture and Emerging Technologies Committee

Scope: Aquaculture for both stock enhancement and commercial production; restoration for protected areas to having farming and habitat enhancement, including use of public and private leased areas; study and selection of best emerging technologies to implement aquaculture program and environmental and economic plans

Committee Chair: Clay Wagner

Topics for Consideration:

- Development of Gulf of Mexico mega-hatchery or significantly increase production in existing hatcheries.
- Utilization of privately or state-operated remote setting facilities.
- Development and utilization post-harvesting processing, e.g., radiation, must be utilized to avoid vibrio bacteria so harvest of oysters can occur in summer months.
- Utilization of stock assessment methods that adequately quantify oyster to set quota-based harvest. Need to invest in techniques to get better estimates of mortality. Need to integrate databases that have historical time series information but can also adapt to improved methods to capture data. This may include: more dive surveys, emerging sonar or Lidar technology that can resolve oyster populations, calibrating dredge surveys or changing gear (potential utilization of patent tongs).
- Application of emerging technologies that may lead to development of a revolving loan program for the oyster industry, growth of oyster farming resulting in increased commercial scale production, establishment of a public/private partnership to lease large areas for training oyster farmers and farming activities, conduct of sampling or surveys and different technologies to assist the formation and growth of off bottom farming operations, provision for use of different gear types for oyster farming, creation of a vessel monitoring system, expansion of an educational program to include aquaculture, and establishment of an Oyster Extension Agent to help farmers be successful and navigate permitting, regulations, markets and production issues.