

SEA GRANT

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By

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The notion of restoring natural coastal environments to some prior condition isn't new. In fact, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has an entire office, the Restoration Center, dedicated to "restoring the nation's coastal, marine and migratory fish habitat." They fund and oversee projects like dam removal, wetlands restoration, coral reef restoration, and shellfish restoration (such as rebuilding oyster reefs). But what does 'restoration' mean and why is it be done?

Restoration can be defined as reestablishing healthy, functioning natural ecosystems that work like they did before they were affected by pollution, damaged, or destroyed. Typically, success has been measured by environmental measures, such as the abundance of the restored species, the amount of available habitat, and increases in biodiversity (the variety of life in a particular ecosystem). The most recent call for coastal restoration projects from NOAA, though, emphasizes the ability of coastal restoration to create and save jobs. How can coastal restoration create or save jobs?

The Restoration Center estimates that there are 28 million American jobs in the fishing, tourism and recreational boating industries – and these all depend on healthy coastal waters and habitats. In my experience, fishermen (including oystermen,

shrimpers and so on) are especially aware of how damage to the environment affects the species that they fish. Loss of habitat means loss of jobs. Coastal restoration, if successful, should create productive habitats that can sustainably support fishermen and their families, preserving a way of life.

If you're interested in learning more about NOAA's coastal restoration, visit the Restoration Center website at www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/restoration/. For further information or questions, contact Bill Walton, Auburn University Shellfish Laboratory, 861-3018.