

Celebrating Texas Oysters Symposium

Provided by

T E X A S



Master
Naturalist™
Mid-Coast Chapter



Date: Thursday, November 14, 2024, 1:00 pm – 5:00 pm

Optional Tasting & Social Hour to follow

Location: Rockport Conference Center

106 South Austin Street, Rockport, Texas 78382

Program Format: 20 minutes/speaker

(15" presentation, 3" question, 2" turn-over)

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Program

Oysters - The Magnificent Mollusk

We open the symposium with an introduction to the Eastern Oyster, *Crassostrea virginica*, and a peak into the life, lifecycle and behavior of this magnificent mollusk. We'll take a brief look at the essential roles (ecosystem services) that the oyster provides to us and the health of our bays and estuaries.

As a nurse, **Brigid Berger**'s career included a variety of professional opportunities including critical care, project management, teaching, and software development. She and her husband, Allan became a certified Texas Master Naturalists with the Mid-Coast Chapter in 2007. Her volunteer services include teaching nature related topics to adults and students, organizing events, and website services. Brigid is a dedicated volunteer with San Antonio Bay Partnership, Mid-Coast Sea Turtle Rescue, The Nature Conservancy's Clive Runnells Family Mad Island Marsh Preserve, and various native plant gardens in Calhoun County. She currently serves as Vice President of the Mid-Coast Chapter.

Oysters - Native American's Multi-Functional Resource

Oysters have been in abundant supply in our bays dating back hundreds to thousands of years ago. Debbie will discuss and show that oysters have played a significant role in the history of Aransas County as a food source, tools and jewelry of Native Americans that inhabited the region for thousands of years.

Debbie Griffith moved to Rockport from Houston in 2018 following a career in Human Resources and Environmental Health & Safety. Being a nature and history enthusiast, she became a Texas Master Naturalist in 2019 and immediately became active in CoBALT (Coastal Bend Archeological Logistics Team) doing Paleo-Indian artifact "digs" near Victoria. She's passionate about preserving local natural resources and is on the Board of The Aransas First Land Trust, leads the Aransas County Tree Committee, regularly volunteers and helps with exhibits at the History Center of Aransas County, and gets involved in a variety of events and initiatives in the Rockport-Fulton community.

When Good Oysters Go Bad

The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) keeps the public safe when consuming oysters. This presentation will explain how DSHS determines what areas are open to oyster harvesting, the risks of raw oyster consumption, the vibrio bacteria, and how oysters are tracked from the bay to final consumer.

Mike Ordner has been with DSHS for 37 years under various positions. He started his career in Corpus Christi and ended up there now. Mike has a master's degree in marine biology from Corpus Christi State University, what is Texas A&M University in Corpus Christi.

Oyster Recycling and Research

The Coastal Conservation and Restoration Lab at the Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies works to restore Texas oyster reefs using research and partnerships with local businesses. In 2009, the Sink Your Shucks oyster recycling program was created to collect used shell from restaurants to rebuild oyster reefs. To date, the program has collected nearly 3 million pounds of oyster shell and restored over 45 acres of reef habitat. Our research examines the ability of restored oyster reefs to replace lost ecological functions, including water filtration, provision of habitat, shoreline stabilization, and carbon sequestration.

Danielle Downey is a Research Specialist in the Coastal Conservation and Restoration lab at the Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies. She received both her B.S. in Biology and M.S. in Marine Biology from Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. For her thesis, Danielle studied the effects of rapid reductions in salinity on the stress response and *Perkinsus marinus* disease levels of oysters from the Laguna Madre. Her research interests include the restoration and ecology of coastal habitats and oyster conservation in Texas.

Mike Osier came to HRI in 2023 as the coordinator for HRI's oyster recycling program Sink Your Shucks™. After being Honorably Discharged from the US Navy in 2001, Mike attended Texas State University in San Marcos where he earned a BS in Geography with an Ag minor. Since graduating, Mike has held several positions managing different businesses in the private sector. With Sink Your Shucks, he is passionate about connecting the program with local businesses, getting them more involved in program activities, and growing the program's outreach to spread the message of oyster conservation in Texas.

Oyster Management and Restoration in Texas

Texas oyster reefs provide several irreplaceable ecosystem functions such as erosion prevention, water filtration, and acting as nursery habitat. Texas Parks and Wildlife has conducted routine resource monitoring on reef systems coastwide since the 1980's. This monitoring, and increased efforts in oyster restoration, are vital to the health of oyster habitat and maintaining a sustainable oyster fishery.

Chris Steffen is currently the ecosystem leader of San Antonio Bay with Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD). He holds a master's degree in marine biology from Texas A&M University, Galveston, where his thesis research primarily focused on fisheries ecology and migration. He joined the Coastal Fisheries team with TPWD in 2020 and has been involved in managing coastal resources since.

The Importance of Marine Conservation Organizations in the Discussions and Execution of Oyster Restoration and Management of the Resource

This discussion will talk about CCA Texas and how the organization has been involved in oyster restoration and the management of the resource. Past and future projects will be discussed and what the future may hold for oyster restoration and the management of the resource.

John Blaha is a CCA Texas Assistant Director and Director of Habitat. He has worked for the Coastal Conservation Association since March of 2002, serving as an Assistant Director. In addition to his duties as an Assistant Director, Blaha is also the Director of CCA Texas' habitat initiative, Habitat Today for Fish Tomorrow (HTFT), and writes for multiple publications monthly. Fishing and working to ensure Texas's coastal resources are available for future generations is his passion. John is a life-long Texas coastal resident and has lived full time in Rockport for the last 19 years.

Oyster Gardening in Galveston Bay, Shannon Batte

This presentation will showcase Galveston Bay Foundation's (GBF) partnership with bayfront property owners interested in becoming oyster gardeners. Every spring, GBF staff train volunteers to create and maintain oyster gardens using recycled oyster shells. During the summer each volunteer suspends their oyster gardens in the water below their dock or pier then monitors the gardens for fouling, predators, and the growth of spat on the shells. In the fall, GBF staff host collection events where the volunteers return their oyster gardens to count and record the number of spat in each garden before they are transported onto nearby restoration reefs to help seed the reef and continue their important water filtration work.

Shannon Batte joined GBF full-time in August 2020 after working part-time for the Oyster Shell Recycling Program since April 2017. She is a native of the Galveston Bay area and graduated in 2010 from Texas A&M University in Galveston with a BS in Marine Biology. Before joining the Galveston Bay Foundation, she was a marine mammal observer in the Gulf of Mexico for NOAA's Offshore Platform Removal Program and for RPS Group while on board seismic vessels.

Matagorda Bay Cooperative Development, RJ Shelly

The goal of the Matagorda Bay Fishing Cooperative Program is to educate and assist the members of the Matagorda Bay Fishing Cooperative. Working with the members to promote long-term sustainable fisheries using the Cooperative Business Model, to sustain harvests from the bay systems in an environmentally responsible manner.

RJ Shelly has been the Calhoun County Coastal and Marine Resource Extension Agent since September 2019. Prior to that he spent 25 years working as an Environmental Specialist for the Department of State Health Services, Seafood and Aquatic Life Group (DSHS SALG) where he was responsible for classifying the shellfish growing waters between Mesquite Bay and the San Bernard River. Before working at DSHS SALG he spent 2 years working for TPWD Coastal Fisheries in Port O'Connor. He has been a licensed fishing guide working out of Port O'Connor from 1996 to early 2024.

ORRC – Building an Oyster Workforce in Texas, Ellis Chapman

The Oyster Resource and Recovery Center (ORRC) started in March of 2023 and works on training a competent oyster aquaculture workforce in Texas. We provide free online English and Spanish courses, hands-on internships and provide workshops to the public to advocate and promote oyster farming in Texas. This talk will go over the development of the program, the successes and challenges and next steps for the ORRC.”

Ellis “Chappie” Chapman is the program manager for the ORRC at Harte Research Institute at Texas A&M – Corpus Christi. He has worked with oysters for 10 years and with oyster aquaculture for 8 years. He started his career in Virginia, received his master’s at Louisiana State University and moved to Texas in 2020 to help start the new oyster aquaculture industry.

Expanding Texas Oyster Aquaculture

Texas Sea Grant has been involved in cultivated oyster mariculture from the inception of the industry being adopted in Texas and has assisted with every farm, hatchery, and nursery currently permitted. Sea Grant has developed programs for workforce training, education, research, business development and worked closely with state and federal regulators to further develop the industry.

Mario Marquez, Texas Sea Grant Aquaculture Project Manager, has been heavily involved in developing the cultivated oyster mariculture program in Texas and has an extensive background in oyster aquaculture. He has worked extensively with NOAA in developing tools and programs to further develop the industry in Texas and the Southeastern US.

Oyster Farmer: Who They Are & Why They Do It

Texas Oyster Farmers share their diverse backgrounds and reasons for entering this pioneering industry. From humorous to humbling, they will tell the tales of the trade.

Debbie Minns (TMNMC 2020) and **AJ Minns**, Blackjack Point Oyster Company

Amy Belaire, Big Tree Oyster Company

David Aparicio, DJs Oyster Company

Blake Branson and **Stephanie Branson**, Lone Star Oyster Company

Optional Activities

5:00 pm – 5:45 pm **Tidal Delights - A Taste of Texas-Raised Oysters** (Additional \$20 fee)

An oyster sensory workshop that offers participants a unique exploration of the flavors, textures, and aromas of oysters, focusing on farm-raised varieties from specific regions of the Texas Coast. Attendees will learn to distinguish subtle differences in taste and texture, understand the impact of environmental factors on oyster quality, and gain skills in proper tasting techniques. It's a hands-on, educational experience that deepens the appreciation for these coastal delicacies.

Oyster tasting with raw oysters offers a pure experience, allowing you to fully appreciate the unique flavor profile of each oyster. With nothing added and only water to rinse the palate, each oyster reveals its unique flavor profile as it is chewed, reflecting the distinct characteristics of its marine environment. This minimalist approach allows the natural brininess and subtle nuances to shine, offering a true taste of the bay!



Amy Nowlin is the Matagorda County Extension Agent for Coastal & Marine Resources. She earned her M.S. in Curriculum and Instruction and Educational Leadership from Texas A&M International University. Amy is an active member of the Texas Master Naturalists, Class of 2023, and serves in an advisory capacity through AgriLife Extension for the Mid-Coast Chapter.

5:00 pm – 6:30 pm **Social Hour** (cash bar and appetizers)

Winery By the Bay, Debbie and Dan Parker, featuring local Rockport wines and craft beer.

