



For More Information Contact:
Kathy FitzPatrick, (772) 288-5429
kfitzpat@martin.fl.us

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Break out of your shell at the Oyster Reef Restoration open house event Public invited to a shell of a good time at the kick-off gathering

Stuart, Fla. (October 10, 2009) – The public is invited to an open house to learn more about the Oyster Reef Restoration project that will restore oyster reef habitat in the St. Lucie and Loxahatchee Estuaries.

**Wednesday, September 2
5:30 - 7:30PM
Stuart Recreation Center
201 SW Flagler Ave
Stuart, Florida**

With just the right mix of information and fun, the event will educate and inspire attendees about the environmental, recreational and economic benefits of the Oyster Reef Restoration project to the citizens of Martin and Palm Beach counties. Festivities include a brief overview of the project, live entertainment, hors d'ouvres, beverages and cash bar.

To RSVP for the Oyster Reef Restoration Open House, contact The Firefly Group at 287-5272 or info@fireflyforyou.com.

For questions about the Oyster Restoration project, call the project info line at 772- 221-1387. Citizens will have another resource for information regarding this important habitat restoration project on the website www.oysterrestoration.com. Look for the announcement of the new site coming soon.

About the Oyster Reef Restoration Project

The Oyster Reef Restoration Project involves the placement of approximately 30 million pounds of cultch (fossilized shells, coral and other similar materials produced by living organisms) within the St. Lucie Estuary and the Northwest Fork of the Loxahatchee River to provide critically needed habitat so that oysters can repopulate the estuaries.

Oyster habitat is crucial to the health of our estuaries, effectively filtering nutrients, fine sediments and toxins from the water. Just one adult oyster can filter between 20 and 50 gallons of water per day. The newly constructed reef habitat, when fully populated with oysters, could filter the total volume of the St Lucie Estuary in about a month.

Oyster reefs also provide essential habitat structure for many other forms of marine life including shrimp, clams, crabs, snails and a variety of fish including gag grouper, gray snapper, redfish, sheepshead.

The project, funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, takes a significant step toward the fulfillment of one of the goals of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) and will be implemented by Martin County's Engineering Department.

In addition to many environmental and recreational benefits, the Oyster Reef Restoration Project will also provide economic returns by safeguarding existing jobs and creating new ones - ranging from marine construction to scientific research - within the community over the expected twenty-four month project period. Environmental improvements resulting from the implementation of this project will provide additional recreational opportunities far into the future. This project is an investment in the long-term economic health of the area's recreationally-based economy.

Partnerships

The Oyster Reef Restoration project is being coordinated through Martin County's Coastal and Water Quality groups, both of which have been involved in water quality and oyster reef restoration efforts in the St. Lucie Estuary area for more than a decade. A coalition of supporters including government agencies, non-profit organizations, and community and business leaders and volunteers are participating in various aspects of the restoration project. Key partners include the Loxahatchee River District, the South Florida Water Management District, Florida Fish & Wildlife Research Institute, Continental Shelf Associates International, Florida Oceanographic Society, Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute, Florida Atlantic University, Florida International University and many others.

###