

# The Sun

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## Hudson May Teem With Oysters Again Under State Plan

By MICHAEL HILL, Associated Press | January 30, 2006

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**ALBANY- OYSTERS ONCE THRIVED IN THE LOWER HUDSON RIVER. MILLIONS OF POUNDS A YEAR** were pulled from the water for food and oyster reefs lined New York Harbor.

"The harbor used to be paved with oysters, basically," a participant in River Project in Manhattan, Cathy Drew, said. "The whole bottom was oyster beds."

Oysters virtually disappeared from the river in the last century, most likely victims of pollution.

Now they might be poised for a comeback. With the river on a rebound, state officials want to determine whether conditions are right to reintroduce oysters in large numbers. A feasibility study will begin this year and, depending on results, a two-year pilot reseeding program could begin in 2007, the of head of marine resources for the state Department of Environmental Conservation, Gordon Colvin, said.

The oyster program is a small part of a broader plan by New York to revitalize the Hudson River. A recently released four-year "action agenda" for the Hudson River Estuary also includes plans to increase river populations of striped bass and American eels, create more swimming spots and conserve riverside scenery.

Mr. Colvin said that long ago, oysters were found as far north as Westchester County. They were likely a food source for ancient hunter-gatherers. Recent high-tech mapping of the river bottom shows evidence of reefs going back thousands of years. Henry Hudson, who explored the river in 1609, reported oysters as big as dinner plates, according to Ms. Drew.

By the 19th century, oyster farming was a brisk business around the mouth of the Hudson. The state offered 15-year underwater leases for businessmen and oyster barges floated off the Manhattan shore. Almost 25 million pounds of oysters were pulled from the Hudson and New York waters in 1911.

Then the decline started. More water pollution, more people and overfarming are likely culprits. Typhoid cases linked to tainted shellfish led to the condemnation and abandonment of some shellfish beds. Oyster populations dwindled to a ghost of their former glory by the '60s.

Ms. Drew said there are still some oysters around New York Harbor and their numbers are growing modestly. But conditions are rough for them - Ms. Drew suspects wakes kicked up by ferries endanger the oysters - and the mature specimens she has seen top out at about four centimeters.

Still, state officials are heartened enough by the overall condition of the river to fund a study of the extent of the historic oyster habitat and the reasons for its decline. Researchers will then check the feasibility of restoring oysters. A modest pilot project could start by 2007. The entire project will cost \$266,675, most of it paid by a federal grant.

**Advocates say an oyster reintroduction would not only restore a native species, but would create reefs that would provide a habitat for other species ranging from fish to anemone.**