Integrating Information from the Past into Oyster Restoration

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In the United States, the eastern oyster (*Crassostrea virginica*) is an economically, culturally, and ecologically important oyster species that ranges from Maine to Texas. Eastern oyster populations are managed by a variety of federal, state, and local governments as well as non-governmental organizations. In addition, the long history of oyster harvesting and coastal land-use change in the United States, and asynchronous fluctuations in abundance across the species range due to diverse pressures (e.g., hydrological changes, pollution, disease, overharvesting), combined with often scarce historical monitoring records documenting the timing and magnitude of the changes, have challenged the management of oyster resources for well over a century. To explore ways to help overcome this challenge, the Oysters Past Working Group (OPWG) brings together academic researchers who specialize in collecting and interpreting information from the past (paleoecologists, archaeologists, and historical ecologists) and practitioners and resource managers who work on oyster conservation, management, and/or restoration for government agencies or non-governmental organizations. More specifically, the primary goals of the OPWG are to: 1) identify oyster management needs that require information from the past; and 2) create a guidance document on best practices for applying information from the past to oyster management. Here, we report on the results of a survey that the OPWG circulated to the broader oyster resource management and policy community to gather perspectives about currently used oyster population and habitat management indicators, the timescales on which these data are typically available, and how longer-term records may be helpful for practitioners and resource managers.

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