

## Defining Co-Management: Oyster Fishery, Aquaculture, and Habitat Management in Florida

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### Abstract

Facing local and regional oyster population decline and associated loss of fisheries and ecosystem services, the State of Florida is championing a new approach to recovery and restoration. Without a comprehensive oyster management and restoration plan, the State is exploring the development of plans at the bay-scale and state-wide to provide a path forward for the recovery of oysters. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in Florida piloted the first bay-scale recovery plan – the Oyster Fisheries and Habitat Management Plan for the Pensacola Bay System (Plan) – by convening a Stakeholder Working Group (SWG) composed of diverse community interest groups, including oyster harvesters and aquaculture farmers, state and local management agencies, scientists, economic and development interests, universities, and community organizations. SWG members observed that resource co-management was necessary to achieve sustainable ecosystem services and harvest. Co-management is not well defined and has not yet been attempted in the State of Florida. The purpose of this project is to advance the understanding and eventual implementation of co-management strategies for two groups: state management agencies and aquaculture industry members, that will benefit the sustainability of the oyster resources in the state of Florida. The NRLI fellows achieved this by hosting a virtual meeting of representatives from relevant state agencies and conducting one-on-one interviews with members of the aquaculture industry. Information collected from these efforts will be used to further inform a state-wide oyster co-management strategy that rebuilds oyster populations, bolsters oyster ecosystem services, and provides a sustainable resource for wild-harvesters and aquaculturists.