

Chapter 1. Connecticut's Shellfish Heritage

Connecticut's Shellfish Heritage

Shellfish are an important ecological, economic and recreational resource to Connecticut citizens. Shellfishing has a rich history in Connecticut, beginning with Native Americans who seasonally gathered oysters and clams along the shoreline, then the generations of colonists who followed, first establishing a fishery and then later developing aquaculture methods and farming vast tracts of Long Island Sound. Today, both residents and tourists flock to the shore to enjoy the popular pastime of digging a basket full of shellfish.

Connecticut shellfishing includes the production of oysters, clams, mussels, and scallops, and is the state's largest seafood sector. Aquaculture revenues are estimated in excess of \$30 million dollars annually¹. Recreational shellfishing draws thousands of people to the shore that purchase harvest permits and supplies. The sales of permits alone contributed greater than \$100,000 to the local economy².

In 1986, the Connecticut Aquaculture Commission developed a plan to support aquaculture and shellfisheries development in the state³. Within a decade many of the objectives were met, including the construction of a new state shellfish office and laboratory and two high schools devoted to aquaculture instruction, and the restoration of thousand of acres of natural oyster beds. Thirty years later, the Connecticut Shellfish Initiative aims to further support the growth and protection the state's shellfisheries, shellfish populations and shellfish habitats, as well as increase public awareness of Connecticut's shellfish heritage and the state's commercial, recreational and natural shellfish resources.