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CULTCH DEPLOYMENT POLICY

Statutory Authority: O.C.G.A. 27-4-196

This policy is to establish guidelines for cultching and planting activities on leased shellfish water bottoms in Georgia in accordance with O.C.G.A. §27-4-196. The Department must approve a Cultch Deployment Plan before any activities are performed on the lease. All Cultch Deployment Forms must be submitted annually by December 31st for Department review and approval. A Pre-Construction Notification (PCN) must also be submitted to and approved/acknowledged by the Army Corps of Engineers prior to cultch deployments. Signage or hazard markers may be required to mark cultch depending on the cultch material and relief from natural sediment bottoms. The approval by the Department and/or the Army Corps of Engineers may contain specific requirements for signage. Failure to adhere to this policy shall be treated as a breach in the contractual lease agreement and may result in the forfeit of rights and privileges as deemed by the Department.

WILD HARVEST CULTCH REQUIREMENTS

All shellfish lease holders on **state-owned water bottoms** that participate in the wild harvest of oysters and clams are contractually obligated to meet minimum cultching requirements on each of their leases.

- For wild oyster harvest the leaseholder must place **on each lease** the equivalent of at least 10 bushels of cultch per acre of intertidal bottom **OR** the quantity of cultch equivalent to at least 33 1/3 percent by volume of the landings reported **from that lease** from the previous year, **whichever is greater.**
- For wild clam harvest on **state-owned water bottoms**, the leaseholder must annually replant seed clams no smaller than Four (4) millimeters in width or transplant larger clams, in the amount of at least a two to one (2:1) ratio of planted clams to harvested clams from the previous year from that lease. If smaller seed clams are planted, additional cultch will be required to establish viable clam habitat and serve as a protective barrier from predators.

All shellfish lease holders on **privately-owned water bottoms** that participate in the wild harvest of oysters are also obligated to meet minimum cultching requirements on each of their leases.

- Each leaseholder is required to place the quantity of cultch equivalent to at least 33 1/3 percent by volume of the landings reported from that lease from the previous year.

ACHIEVING CULTCH REQUIREMENTS

There are several approved techniques to meet the required planting quotas that are covered in this policy. The Department must be notified **10 working days before** any cultching or planting activities occur on your lease to receive credit towards the cultch requirement and to ensure that staff is available to supervise the deployment. In some cases, cultch or planting site conditions may need to be assessed before the placement of cultch or planting occurs. CRD will notify the leaseholder if a pre-evaluation of the site is necessary with the approval of their Cultch Deployment Plan.

A U.S Bushel is equal to 1.25 cubic feet. One cubic yard of shell is equal to 27.1 U.S. Bushels. If you plan to use a cultch material not in the conversions below, CRD biologist must assess your cultch for volume and will assign a bushel credit value.

- Recycled Oyster Shell 60LBS = 1 BU.
- Recycled Clam Shell 75LBS = 1 BU.
- Recycled Scallop Shell 40LBS = 1 BU.
- 2 in. Fossil Stone (Marl) 90LBS = 1 BU.
- Wood Bundles 3'H x 10'L 1 BUN = 10 BU.
- Crab Trap (non-fishing) 1 Trap = 1 BU.

CULTCHING TECHNIQUES

Shell Cultch

Shell used for cultching may include oyster, clam, whelk, mussel, scallop and any other shell species native to Georgia. Green shell coming from out of state sources must be cured before use and must be placed on land for a minimum of six (6) months before use. Shell may be deployed using a variety of methods including scattering loose shell on to suitable bottom and bagging with approved materials and placing bags on untreated pallets on the bottom. The scarcity of shell may restrict this method and the lease holder is encouraged to develop recycling strategies with customers who purchase shell stock to ensure future access to shell. **Shell Cultch can count up to 100% of the annual cultch requirement.**

Alternative Cultch

Due to limited sources and the high cost of available shell cultch, the Department will grant credit for the use of alternative cultch materials. Examples of materials that have been approved and used include untreated wood (tree limbs, pallets, and wooden stakes), bamboo, vinyl coated wire (non-fishing crab traps), non-galvanized wire, PVC (spat sticks), crushed aggregate (gravel, limestone, etc.) and Bio-concrete (oyster reef balls, oyster restorations tiles, etc.). Requests for approval of other alternative cultch materials must be submitted in writing and may be approved by the Department. A Cultch Deployment Plan with specific details of how the material will be configured and used must be approved by the department **before** any credit will be granted for the use of alternative cultch material. A CRD

biologist must assess your alternative cultch for volume and will assign a bushel credit value. **Alternative cultch can count up to 100% of the annual cultch requirement.**

Rake-Down or Breaking Clusters

Rake-Down of oyster beds is a method of breaking down clusters of small or unmarketable oysters and placing the oysters in the lower intertidal zone. Research has shown that oysters thrive and are most productive along the lower portions of the intertidal slope. This activity generally creates a reduction in the numbers of animals per square meter which results in accelerated growth of marketable oysters and promotes new growth for the oyster bed. **Before** this technique can be used CRD biologist must complete a pre evaluation of the beds considered and be present during the rake-down process. A cultch credit amount will be given during the pre-evaluation process. **Rake-Down can only be up to 50% of the annual cultch requirement.**

Clam Seed Planting

Clam seed no smaller than 4mm in width should be planted in areas with a protective overburden. To create an area of protective overburden, the bottom may be planted with oyster shell, seed oysters, gravel, limestone aggregate, etc. to a depth of approximately 3 ½” inches. The protective overburden creates a habitat for the seeded clams to provide protection from predators and enhance survival. This technique is best accomplished during January and February, a period of limited predator activity. CRD will need to validate an area of protective overburden **before** clam seed can be planted. Any seed purchased must come from an approved in-state or out of state source and follow the CRD Seed Importation Policy. **Clam seed planting must meet 100% of the annual cultch requirement.**

Request to reduce cultch requirement

A lease holder can apply for a reduction in the annual cultch requirement. A request for cultch reduction must be submitted **in writing** to CRD **no later than June 1st**. CRD will evaluate the request using current sound principles of wildlife research and resource management and determine if the reduction is warranted and continues to meet sustainable yields for the property. Some percentage of the cultch requirement must be met every year, even in events of major oyster mortalities or other natural catastrophic events.