



SHARED EXPERIENCE:

NWQMC DATA SHARING

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Volunteer Monitoring Aids Morro Bay Oyster Farms

Submitted by Annie Gillespie, January 2013

Morro Bay, California: The Morro Bay Volunteer Monitoring program monitors coastal access points and the creeks that drain in to Morro Bay for pathogenic indicator bacteria. Volunteer monitoring for E. coli and enterococcus was designed to target areas that are popular for swimming and recreation that are not monitored by other local agencies or groups. While the effort was designed to protect recreational uses, the data has become a valuable resource for aquaculture management in Morro Bay.

The last five years have seen the resurgence of commercial oyster operations in the intertidal areas of Morro Bay. While the growers adhere to a strict schedule of bacteria monitoring in the areas that they farm, they do not have the resources to monitor other locations that could help identify sources of bacterial contamination. The data collected by volunteer monitors fills an information gap about the condition of the creeks that drain into the bay, and covers a greater geographic extent of shoreline sites across the bay.



Volunteer data is actively considered by the aquaculture operations and the CA Department of Public Health to monitor and better understand bacteria concentrations in Morro Bay. While the data cannot be used to determine closure status, it provides context for the magnitude and duration of bacterial contamination events when they occur. Frequent communication among program staff, Department staff, and aquaculture operators has helped ensure the continuing safety (and growing popularity) of oysters and recreation in Morro Bay.

Although volunteer monitoring bacteria data doesn't meet the criteria for regulatory use in aquaculture, it provides greater context for understanding bacteria sources and identifying problem areas.

A few additional websites of interest are:

<http://morrobayoysters.pinnaclecart.com/> and <http://www.grassybaroyster.com/>