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Inside ExploreLI

TOP STORIES

A purely shellfish act

Hempstead puts mollusks in bay to aid filtration

BY JOHN ASBURY

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Armed with a fire hose, aquaculture specialist Gregg Rivara sprayed 12 tons of surf clamshells into Baldwin Bay to create a habitat on the ocean floor for new oysters and marine life.

During the next three months, biologists and Hempstead Town conservation and waterways workers will dump 1.5 million market-size clams and 8 million oyster seedlings into the bay to build a sea life sanctuary that also is designed to boost water filtering.

The project is part of a \$5.3 million grant awarded by the State Department of Environmental Conservation to the Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County, which is also servicing sites in South Oyster Bay, Huntington, Bellport and Shinnecock Bay.

Officials said they must first lay down a base layer of the surf clamshells and fragments to create a rocky surface on the normally muddy ocean floor so that oyster seedlings don't sink into the ground.

The clamshells, which are harvested off the coast of New York and stripped for bait and clam strips, are treated for a year to eliminate bacteria before workers spray them into bay.



Hatchery staffer Matt O'Connor, left, and aquaculture specialist Gregg Rivara cox shells into Baldwin Bay.

The Town of Hempstead also received \$400,000 from the governor's office to expand the shellfish hatchery in Point Lookout, to contribute oyster seedlings to be deposited into the bay.

Biologists raised the 4-month-old oyster seedlings on shells, which were then thrown on top of the clamshell habitat where they can grow to full size in the

next year. A full-grown oyster can filter up to 50 gallons of water per day.

With an additional 8 million oysters planned in the water next year, town officials hope the new oysters can some day filter up to 200 million gallons of water per day.

The shell habitat is also expected to attract other marine life such as fish and blue claw crabs seeking protection from

predators.

"We're looking at improving ways to repopulate our waterways and back bays with shellfish that were once so prevalent here," Hempstead Supervisor Laura Gillen said.

"This will create new ecosystems to support our marine life and these shellfish will help keep our waterways clean for generations to come."

State to hold public sessions on recreational pot

BY WILLIAM MURPHY

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The state will hold a series of public sessions in the next six weeks to get community input on the implementation of a regulated recreational marijuana program, the governor's office announced.

A session will be held on Long Island on Sept. 27 at a location to be determined, the officials said. The first session will be Wednesday in Albany and the final session is scheduled for Oct. 11 in Watertown. There will also be

sessions in each borough of New York City.

"Community input is critical as we work to draft balanced and comprehensive legislation on a regulated marijuana program in New York," Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo said in a news release.

The listening sessions will be held in the evenings, officials said, and preregistration through ny.gov is encouraged.

The state says topics to be discussed include reducing the harmful impacts of illegal marijuana and the black market, establishing an age limit, use of

tax revenue and addressing the criminal records of people with marijuana-related offenses.

On Aug. 2, Cuomo directed a state panel to draft legislation to allow recreational marijuana use. A law allowing the open sale of marijuana could be enacted in the legislative session that begins in January, Cuomo said.

The state approved legislation in 2014 that legalized marijuana for medical use.

Cuomo, a former prosecutor and attorney general, had long been opposed to recreational use of marijuana. But he di-

rected the state Health Department in January to make a decision and in July the department found the positive aspects outweighed the negative.

Democratic gubernatorial candidate Cynthia Nixon, who debated Cuomo at Hofstra University on Wednesday, has called for legalizing recreational marijuana.

With Michael Gormley

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