An Underwater Look at North Carolina's Oyster Sanctuaries

Overview:

This activity will give students an understanding of what oyster sanctuaries look like and the fishes that use them for habitat. It will also demonstrate what factors should be considered when deciding where sanctuaries should be located.

Materials:

- Oyster sanctuary video

Background:

As a result of the drastic decline in oyster populations, many states have begun programs to restore oyster reefs. One such activity that NC has began is setting up oyster sanctuaries in the Pamlico Sound. These sanctuaries provide “virgin” oyster reefs, which increase oyster larvae leading to more oysters in the surrounding areas. Oyster harvesting is not allowed within the sanctuary but hook and line fishing is. As discussed in the background Power Point presentation, factors other than harvest can kill oysters including storms, disease, anoxia, and predators. All these factors should be taken into account when choosing a site for oyster sanctuaries. Please refer to background Power Point presentation for a more detailed background.

Activity:

1) Watch the video

2) Pay attention to the following: where the sanctuary is within the Pamlico Sound, how dense the oysters are, how many dead oysters you see, and other organisms on the reef.

Questions:

1) Which sanctuary had the healthiest oysters (fewest dead and highest density)?

2) Name some factors that might be causing the differences.

3) Other than oysters what animals did you see in the videos?

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4) What effect could these organisms have on the oyster reefs?

5) Where would you put new sanctuaries and why?

6) What are three other actions that the state could take to restore oyster reefs?

7) What could you do to help restore oyster reefs?