



For Immediate Release

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GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF STORM RECOVERY ANNOUNCES PARTNERSHIP WITH BILLION OYSTER PROJECT AND NRG ENERGY TO ADVANCE OYSTER DEVELOPMENT IN THE RARITAN BAY FOR \$60 MILLION LIVING BREAKWATERS PROJECT

Aiming to reintroduce oysters and key ecological systems, the project utilizes green infrastructure techniques to reduce coastal erosion and protect surrounding communities.

A total of 45 New York City restaurants have participated in the effort through the collection and reusing of oyster shells; NRG Energy to provide shell curing site at its Staten Island-based Generating Station.

New York, NY (May 16, 2016) – The Governor's Office of Storm Recovery (GOSR) today announced the partnership between New York State, the Billion Oyster Project (BOP) and NRG Energy to advance the \$60 million Living Breakwaters Project, currently underway in Staten Island. The effort, which promotes the restoration of the Raritan Bay through the reclaiming, reusing and reintroduction of oyster shells, has substantial environmental and public education components to support the innovative resiliency initiative, developed through the federal Rebuild by Design (RBD) Competition. The joint endeavor serves as the next phase of the Living Breakwaters Project, which will provide critical defenses against coastal erosion and grow the natural habitat for finfish, shellfish and crustaceans on the South Shore. With GOSR providing \$160,000 to the Harbor Foundation to support the effort, BOP has been able to double the volume of discarded shells collected from restaurants per week, moving the project closer to its ambitious goal.

“Superstorm Sandy spurred a shift in public consciousness and a vast new awareness about the realities of extreme weather,” said Executive Director of GOSR, Lisa Bova-Hiatt. “From the outset of the State’s recovery, we have been committed to building back better and stronger than before. Through key partnerships such as this one, we can raise awareness about resiliency, while restoring ecological systems that will protect the South Shore of Staten Island.”

The shell collection program has enlisted 45 of the finest restaurants in New York to support the initiative through the collection of oyster shells that would typically be discarded, thereby helping to reclaim this precious natural resource and prepare it for reuse. Shells are collected throughout the City by BOP and shuttled to the Arthur Kill Generating Station of green energy company, NRG, to be cured for one year. The shells will then be reintroduced to the bay as cultch and reef

substrate, with BOP using the cured shells to grow new oysters, build habitat and improve the quality of the City and its waters. To date, 200,000 pounds of shells have been removed from the waste stream.

“Thirty-five tons of shells are produced each week in New York City from restaurants alone,” said Director of BOP, Pete Malinowski. “Through these important partnerships, we are able to capture about four tons per week toward this critical resilience and restoration effort, and at the same time prevent them from being packed in black plastic bags and thrown in landfills.”

“We’re pleased and proud to play a part in this innovative effort, which bolsters the ecosystem of New York Harbor,” said NRG Author Kill Plant Manager, Michael Straubmuller. “The BOP project fits perfectly with NRG’s philosophies of giving back to the community and supporting sustainability.”

With each reused shell able to provide habitat for up to 20 new oysters, this expansion of the Shell Collection Program represents a substantial increase in the potential number of oysters that will eventually form the reefs associated with the Living Breakwaters Project.

In April 2015, Governor Andrew M. Cuomo kicked off Living Breakwaters, which complements final resiliency plans developed by the Staten Island Committee of the NY Rising Community Reconstruction (NYRCR) Program. Containing an oyster reef component to naturally break waves and filter seawater, the endeavor depends on the collection of, and access to, shells.

"As Billion Oyster Project's founding restaurant partner, Oceana has been donating shells since 2010," says Executive Chef Ben Pollinger. "We're thrilled that our weekly contribution not only helps the New York Harbor Foundation and its students, but is now helping to protect residents of Staten Island from future storms."

"This initiative is an outside-the-box solution where all involved benefit," said Staten Island Borough President James Oddo. "Protecting our coastline, especially after the weaknesses Superstorm Sandy brought to light, is imperative. Staten Island is at the center of the effort, with the Billion Oyster Project collecting shells from restaurants and curing them at the NRG facility to use for storm recovery projects right here in the borough. In addition, there is an educational component here, as schools throughout the City help to grow and monitor the oysters essential to the creation of breakwater reefs and shellfish beds. There's nothing not to like about this project."

Sharing the State’s commitment to these ecological improvements, BOP aims to restore one billion live oysters to New York Harbor over the next 20 years and, in the process, educate thousands of young people about their local marine environment. Collaborating with schools, businesses, nonprofits and volunteers, BOP strives to restore the estuary and make New York City a healthier and more resilient place to live. BOP has successfully grown more than 16 million oysters in New York waters over the past five years, enlisting the labor and skills of public school students and working to stock floating nurseries, dockside oyster restoration stations, and experimental reef restoration sites.

Oysters spend the first two-to-three weeks of their lives as free-swimming larvae, after which time they settle out of the water column. If there is an appropriate surface for them to land on and attach to, they have a chance to grow. Although the shells of other oysters are the perfect hard substrate for allowing oysters to thrive, the reefs that were previously found in New York City’s waters have over time disappeared. Recognizing that New Yorkers consume up to half a million oysters from local restaurants every week, the Shell Collection Program seeks to intercept the

discarded shells' transportation to landfills and instead utilize them as habitat for the next generation of oysters: they are restoration gold.

Why a Billion Oysters?

Once covering more than 220,000 acres of the New York Harbor Estuary, oysters provide massive ecological benefit, including continuous water filtration, wave attenuation, and habitat for thousands of marine species. Although one billion oysters is only a small fraction of the original population, the reintroduction of this natural asset would have a significant and measurable impact.

About Rebuild by Design

Announced by the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) in June 2014, the RBD Competition encouraged interdisciplinary firms (representing the best in planning, design and engineering) to create blueprints for recovery and resiliency efforts. Initiated by the Presidential Hurricane Sandy Rebuilding Task Force, and promoting the innovative principles developed by the group in the [Hurricane Sandy Rebuilding Strategy](#), the contest recognized four outstanding project proposals from New York State. In partnership with the winning firms, GOSR is now working to implement two (one being Living Breakwaters) of these groundbreaking projects.

In addition to the \$160,000 GOSR is providing to promote shell recycling, GOSR has made steady progress on the Living Breakwaters Project as a whole. The project is currently in design, with the 30 percent design milestone expected to be completed in the fall of 2016. Supporting the overall effort, the State has thus far facilitated three meetings of the project's Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC)— a body which holds a key advisory role throughout the RBD process.

To date, GOSR has completed benthic, bathymetric, adjacent habitat, geotechnical, archeological, plant reconnaissance and onshore species studies, as well as land surveys, and carries out ongoing permitting meetings with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The Environmental Impact Statement Final Scope of Work was released April 1, 2016.

About the Governor's Office of Storm Recovery

Established in June 2013, GOSR coordinates Statewide recovery efforts for Superstorm Sandy, Hurricane Irene, and Tropical Storm Lee. Through its NY Rising Housing Recovery, Small Business, Community Reconstruction and Infrastructure programs, GOSR invests more than \$4 billion made available through HUD's Community Development Block Grant – Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) Program to better prepare New York for future extreme weather events. More information About GOSR and its programs is available online at <http://stormrecovery.ny.gov/>

About the Billion Oyster Project

BOP is an ecosystem restoration and education project aimed at restoring one billion live oysters to New York Harbor and engaging hundreds of thousands of school children through restoration based STEM education programs. Students at the Urban Assembly New York Harbor School have been growing and restoring oysters in New York Harbor for the last seven years. They have learned to SCUBA dive safely, raise oyster larvae, operate and maintain vessels, build and operate commercial-scaled oyster nurseries, design underwater monitoring equipment and conduct long-term authentic research projects all in the murky, contaminated, fast moving waters of one of the busiest ports in the country. Together and with the help of many partners these students have restored more than 16 million oysters. Fifty-four public schools have partnered with the project to provide authentic, place-based science and math lessons through the lens of oyster

restoration. Each year, thousands of students participate in these learning opportunities. BOP is an initiative of the New York Harbor Foundation.

About the Harbor Foundation

The mission of the New York Harbor Foundation is to create and support a diverse network of environmentally literate schools, students and communities working together to restore New York Harbor. It carries out this mission by supporting the Billion Oyster Project and its flagship school, the Urban Assembly New York Harbor School— a public school located on Governors Island dedicated to providing a college-preparatory education built upon New York City’s maritime experience that instills in students the ethics of environmental stewardship and the skills associated with careers on the water.

About NRG

NRG is the leading integrated power company in the U.S., built on the strength of the nation’s largest and most diverse competitive electric generation portfolio and leading retail electricity platform. A Fortune 200 company, NRG creates value through best in class operations, reliable and efficient electric generation, and a retail platform serving residential and commercial businesses. Working with electricity customers, large and small, NRG continually innovates, embraces and implements sustainable solutions for producing and managing energy. It aims to be a pioneer in developing smarter energy choices and delivering exceptional service as its retail electricity providers serve almost 3 million residential and commercial customers throughout the country. To learn more, visit www.nrg.com.

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