



## Indian River Lagoon Update

Fall/winter 2011

### Volunteers giving Mosquito Lagoon oyster reefs a second chance

Mosquito Lagoon's oyster reefs are on the mend, thanks to the labor of thousands of volunteers and a clever invention known as an "oyster mat."

The humble oyster plays a key role in the health of the lagoon, filtering its estuarine waters, stabilizing eroding shorelines and providing food and shelter for more than 140 different species. The troubling news is that oyster reefs are disappearing. Globally, oyster reefs have declined by at least 85 percent and are now considered one of the most imperiled marine habitats. Many of the lagoon's oyster reefs are threatened due to constant wakes from boats.

"Boat wakes dislodge oysters from the reefs," says Belhaim "Frank" Sakuma, Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program project administrator, who has helped install oyster mats in the lagoon. "The oysters tumble on one another and create mounds that become exposed above the high-tide mark. The exposed oysters die, and you end up with barren shells that create the bleached-out, dead margins we see exposed at the top of a reef."

The good news is that people can make a big difference in helping to restore oyster populations and the reefs they build, says Anne Birch with The Nature Conservancy. The Nature Conservancy, together with Dr. Linda Walters, of the University of Central Florida (UCF), have been leading the charge since 2005. Their efforts involve collaborating with many partners such as



Students and adults have participated in making and distributing oyster mats in the lagoon. After students have assembled the mats (top), other volunteers (bottom) install the mats in reef restoration areas.

