

ANNUAL REPORT 2020

Massachusetts Oyster
Project, Inc.



Who We Are

The Massachusetts Oyster Project is an all-volunteer non-profit working to strengthen our coastal environment by restoring native shellfish populations to our beaches and coastal estuaries. Through oyster cultivation, shell recycling, education and advocacy we can improve water quality, increase the diversity of sea life and mitigate the effects of climate change.

Letter From The President

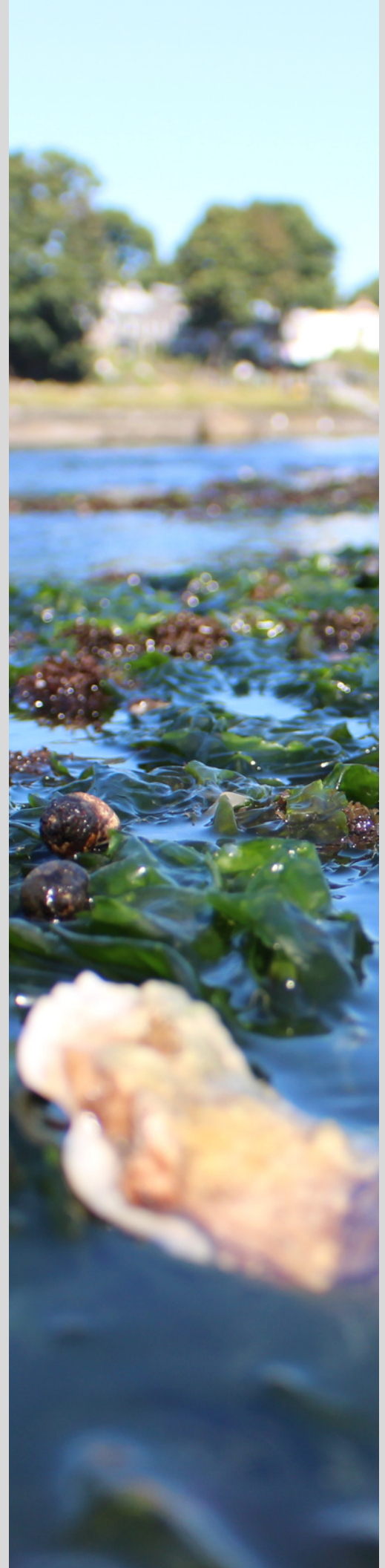
I took over as President shortly before the pandemic hit. It's safe to say that 2020 didn't go as planned, but I'm proud and grateful for all we accomplished.

Somehow, though a pandemic, we expanded our upweller program and ended 2020 with more cash on hand than we started with. We launched new initiatives like the Oystah Count and the Virtual Oyster Fest. In so many ways, our team's creativity and supporters' passion propelled us forward.

We also expanded our footprint, growing our reach and expanding our website content. Even this report is something new for us. This is our first annual report in over a decade, but as our organization grows, we can celebrate our accomplishments with accountability and transparency.

Lastly, I want to thank all our partners, board members, supporters, and volunteers.

For the oysters, Sarah Valencik



Upwellers

We currently support four upwellers across Massachusetts. Upwellers provide a protected environment for oysters to grow until they can survive on their own. In the beginning of the summer, we buy baby oysters, called spat, from a supplier. They begin as the size of the head of a pin, and will grow to about an inch by fall. At that point, we release the oysters at arranged locations. Current state regulations prohibit the release of oysters in restricted waters. Prior to release, we work with the Division of Marine Fisheries and town shellfish wardens or constables to select appropriate release sites.



In early 2020 we closed out our two year Massbays Healthy Estuaries Grant, which funded our upweller projects in Gloucester and Marblehead for the 2018 and 2019 seasons. Through this grant, we were able to raise a total of 390,000 oysters and engage the local community in the process. These oysters were released to the Mill River and Ipswich River and will be monitored in the coming years for survival and reproduction.

Each upweller shows how oysters improve water quality, helps grow oysters for our restoration efforts, and serves as important tools to get the general public interested in shellfish conservation.

In 2020, we required everyone to wear masks and to observe safe social distancing practices at our upwellers. We discontinued our in-person educational programming and invested in content for our website. We look forward to getting back to in-person education again, as our upwellers provide a great way for people of all ages to learn about the benefits of oysters.



Neoplasia Response

In fall 2020, as we prepared to outplant the oysters from our Gloucester upweller, we received some unexpected and unpleasant news. Before oysters can be transferred from the nursery to Massachusetts waters, they require routine laboratory testing for common diseases, and this year, we learned that some of our oysters tested positive for a little-known disease called Neoplasia.

In order to protect our Mill River restoration site, we destroyed the Gloucester and Marblehead crops of oysters. The rest of our oysters from Nantucket and Hyannis were disease-free and out-planted as normal.



Marblehead

In 2018, we partnered with the Marblehead Charter School Shark Club to set up an upweller. It's been going strong since then, and has seeded almost 120,000 oysters to sites around the North Shore.

Marblehead Shark Club is a group of students interested in marine science. The students help with the maintenance and operation of the upweller.

Gloucester

We launched this upweller in 2017 as a pilot program, partnering with Maritime Gloucester to build on their newly renovated main pier downtown. We run educational tours all season long for visitors and student groups, but cancelled those tours in 2020 out of safety concerns. The local Sea Scouts group ran experiments and programs over the summer.

In the three seasons Mass Oyster has operated the upweller on the Gloucester waterfront, it's become a local landmark. While inspiring and educating visitors, it's nurtured nearly 200,000 oysters, released at our Mill River restoration site.



Hyannis

In partnership with the Barnstable Clean Water Coalition and the Town of Barnstable, we built and installed an upweller in 2018.

The upweller grew 50,000 oysters its first year, and 120,000 its second. This year we grew 120,000 oysters. Oysters from the Hyannis upweller are planted in Cotuit Bay in Barnstable.



Nantucket

Even with COVID concerns, we launched this new upweller in 2020. The upweller was built and supported in partnership with Madaket Marine. This upweller is about half the size of our others. We grew about 20,000 oysters this summer, which were planted in Cotuit Bay in Barnstable.

We're hopeful that in future years, oysters from this upweller will be able to be planted at Nantucket's restoration site, Shimmo Reef.



Shell Recycling

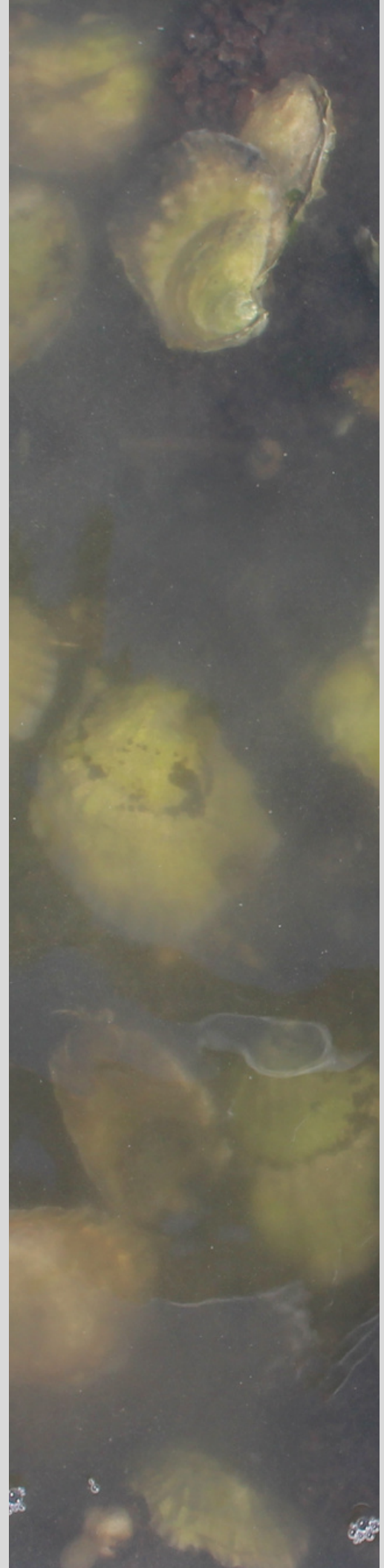
Getting a successful recycling program up and running has been an ongoing challenge. In 2018, we ran a pilot on the North Shore. COVID-19 social distancing requirements and the pressures on restaurants across Massachusetts made it too difficult to consider another pilot in 2020.

We don't yet have the resources to ensure ongoing, consistent pickup, the backbone of a successful recycling program. We would need to visit each restaurant partner up to 3 times per week. We have a number of partner restaurants eager to work with us, but we need to make sure it works for them.

We are pushing for support from the state government. Other states with more successful recycling programs often have a recycling tax credit to help subsidize the program.

This year, we closed up our shell storage and drying facility at the request of the owner. That included donating 8 cubic yards of already-collected and processed shell to an oyster restoration site in Wellfleet. We'll be looking for a new facility in 2021, as storing and drying out shell for a year is a critical part of the recycling process.

We will continue to try and get the pieces in place to set up a sustained program, and in the meantime hope to expand our list of interested restaurants.



Restoration at Mill River

The Mill River Oyster Restoration is a collaborative project to restore eastern oysters to the Mill River watershed. We are running this effort with the Town of Gloucester and Maritime Gloucester. This is the main location where we plant oysters from our Gloucester upweller. We've developed a scientific assessment protocol to determine how successful our stocking program is at this location. We're also making an effort to determine the impact of the harvest on our efforts. This program builds on the past 3 years of oyster restoration in the Mill River, a component of our Massbays Healthy estuaries Grant. This year, we didn't plant any oyster in the Mill River, but we plan to continue the partnership in 2021.



Website

In 2020 we made strides in building out our website, focusing on sharing more about oysters and oyster restoration. We invite you to explore our new content.

- Upwellers: massoyster.org/upwellers
- Oyster information: massoyster.org/oyster-information
- Oyster anatomy: massoyster.org/oyster-information/anatomy
- Oyster reefs: massoyster.org/oyster-information/reefs
- Oyster farming: massoyster.org/oyster-information/farming

Oystah Count

This year, we kicked off a new initiative that seeks to better quantify oyster restoration across the Commonwealth and engage our supporters. The Oystah Count is an annual survey to identify existing oyster populations across the state and gain a better understanding of their status and distribution for conservation purposes. It was designed as a safe outdoor activity for families, student groups, and local organizations.

We created instructions people could download from the Internet. Over 40 users signed up to conduct oyster counts, which is encouraging.

We didn't get enough substantive data to put together a report this year, but are hopeful the Oystah Count can grow into an annual tradition.



Financial Overview

2020 was a surprisingly strong year for us, financially. Because of the pandemic, we were unable to hold any of the in-person fundraising events that typically generate the bulk of our revenue. However, virtual events and small-dollar online fundraising helped us end the year with slightly more cash on hand than we started with.

Proud Pour

Proud Pour is one of our longest-running partnerships. Proud Pour donates a portion of the profit from each bottle of their Save the Ocean Sauvignon Blanc to various coastal restoration organizations. We're proud to be one of them. This year, that brought in over \$1300.



Virtual Oyster Fest

We usually host our main fundraiser, Oysters on the Pier, in August. While we weren't able to this year, we wanted to create an opportunity to connect and celebrate our shared passion safely.

That's why we hosted the Virtual Oyster Fest. During the month of August, supporters could order custom T-shirts as well as other merch, and we urged them to post pictures on social media shucking oysters at home and celebrating with family. We also held a virtual raffle.

Considering this was uncharted territory, we're happy with the result. Based on the conditions in 2021, we might consider hosting it again.





Our Supporters

This year, we focused on online fundraising. That included both the Virtual Oyster Fest as well as two major online fundraising campaigns. We raised much more online (over \$12,000 total) than we have in any other year. We had 163 total donors and the average donation was about \$77. These numbers don't include any merch orders from our store.

We don't do our work alone. We were excited to make new partners and deepen relationships in 2020.

Our Partners

Proud Pour - One of our longest-running partnerships. Proud Pour donates a portion of the profit from each bottle of their sauvignon blanc to various coastal restoration organizations. We're proud to be one of them.

Maritime Gloucester - For the 4th year in a row, Maritime Gloucester partnered with us to provide a location for our Gloucester upweller.

The Town of Barnstable - Has partnered with us to provide a restoration site for seeding our oysters.

Marblehead Community Public School Shark Club - The kids and adult leaders at the school were once again helpful volunteers at our Marblehead upweller.

Madaket Marine - New friends who helped set up their own upweller in Nantucket.

Intern Spotlight

Dana Smoller joined the Mass Oyster team for much of 2020, working on special projects, grants, upweller operations, marketing, publicity and fundraising.

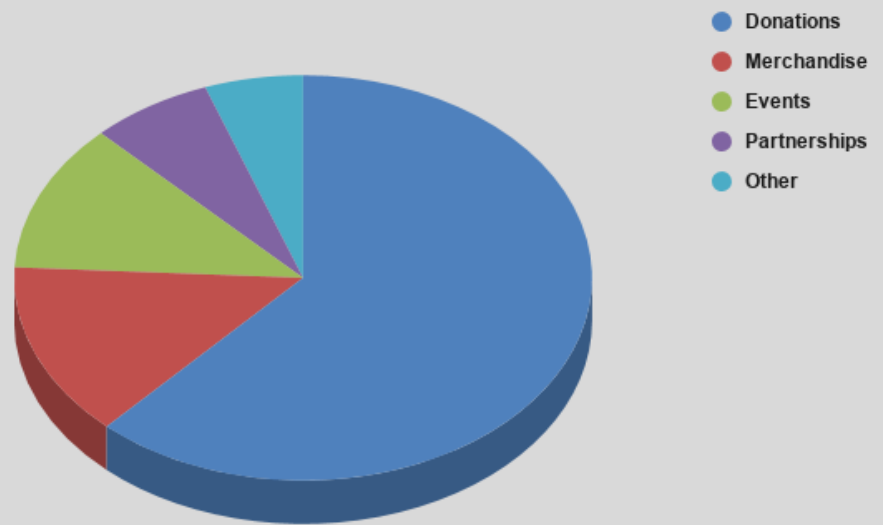
Dana hopes to do community outreach work in the nonprofit space after graduating from the University of Florida.



Finances

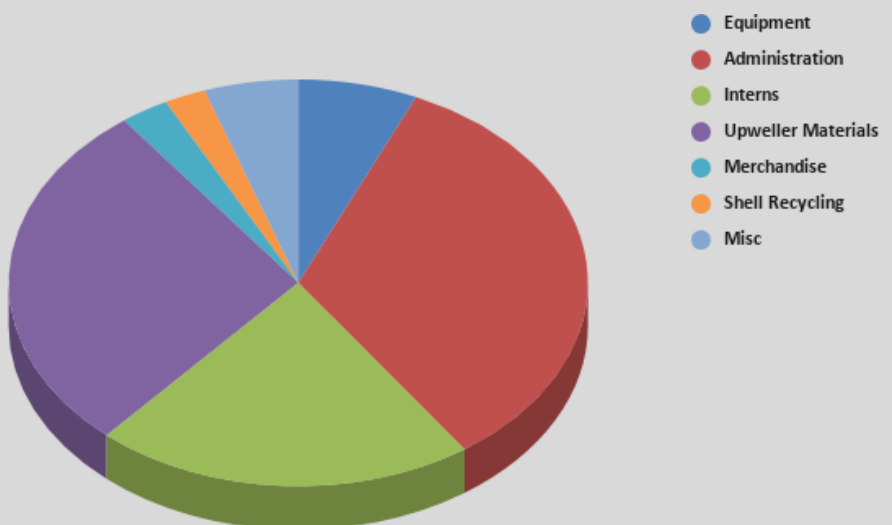
Income

\$19,659.08



Expenses

\$21,561.33



Board of Directors

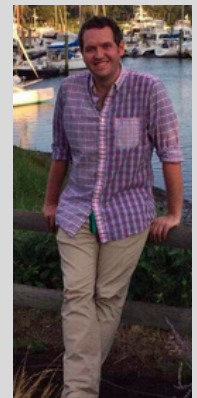
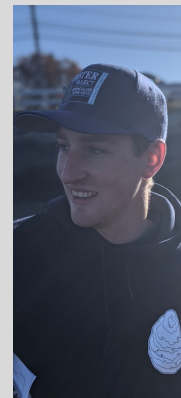
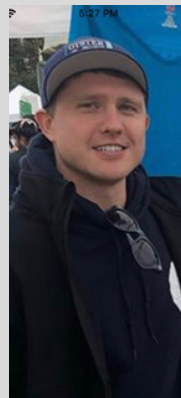
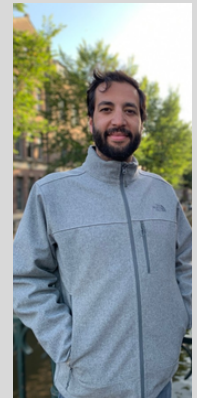
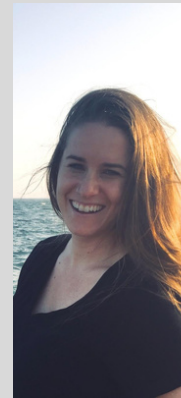
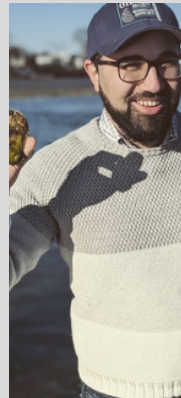
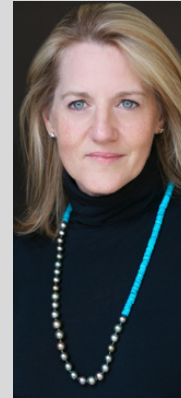
Sarah Valencik, President
Theresa Baybutt, Vice-President
Michael Bridges, Treasurer
Nate Bernitz, Assistant Clerk
Andrew Hutlin
Alexandra Coughlin
Jon Pollak
Mike Doneghey
Joshua Gee

Advisory Board

Steve Parkes
Adam Heilemann

Current as of 3/9/21

Special thank you to Matt Harke and Thomas King, who also served on the board during 2020, and Steve Parkes, who served as board president earlier in 2020. We also thank founder Andrew Jay for his ongoing support.





Massachusetts Oyster Project

Editor: Josh Gee Design: Nate Bernitz

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81 Pine Grove Ave

Newton Lower Falls, MA 02462

contact@massoyster.org

massoyster.org

