

Oyster River Ecology

Suncoast Community-Led Oyster Reef Revival

Oyster River Ecology's (ORE) mission is to restore ecosystems and preserve ecological functions while increasing the understanding of the natural systems on which we all rely. Since 2023, ORE has been building a 10-acre oyster reef in the Manatee River, in a grassroots effort that empowers residents, especially youth, to take hands-on action to improve water quality and revive critical habitat in the Manatee River. It currently carries out this work on a relatively small scale, relying on undersized, borrowed trucks, boats, and trailers. ORE innovated a new, cost-effective oyster restoration method, the Oyster Rag Pot (ORP), which reduces costs to less than half of the traditional techniques and engages community members in hands-on restoration. The ***Suncoast Community-Led Oyster Reef Revival*** initiative would accelerate this process with the purchase of three pieces of work equipment, allowing it to achieve its goals more efficiently.

Our grant would fund the \$108,000 total initiative budget, which includes \$50,385 for a pick-up truck, \$41,258 for a coastal work skiff (small boat), \$12,154 for a cargo trailer and \$4,203 for branding and accessories. The cargo trailer would support community events, enabling more gatherings and providing secure storage until enough oyster pots are ready for installation. The skiff would significantly improve the efficiency of installation events by transporting more volunteers and materials, overcoming a major current limitation. The pickup truck would be used to move the trailer and boat, transport oyster pots to staging areas along the Manatee River and facilitate community events.

This equipment would allow an increase from two to four oyster restoration-focused events monthly, restoring 4,000 square feet of oyster reef and engaging 160-200 people monthly. This would quadruple its restoration capacity and community reach, accelerating the restoration of the Manatee River and setting an example for others to follow.

A single adult oyster filters about 25 gallons of water per day, and each acre of oyster reef supports roughly a million oysters. Therefore, this 10-acre project would create a natural, self-sustaining filtration system capable of filtering 250 million gallons of water every day. The long lifespan of the equipment would sustain vital restoration work for years to come, as ORE expands beyond the 10 acres once completed.

By scaling up its grassroots efforts with the right equipment, ORE would engage more people, restore more habitat, and make a lasting impact on our waterways and communities to benefit quality of life for humans and wildlife now and for generations to come.