



CHOCTAWHATCHEE BASIN ALLIANCE

Northwest Florida State College

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ST. JOE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION FUNDS HIGH SCHOOL OYSTER PROGRAM

CBA earns \$18,300 grant to bring Spat On! program to 250 high school students.

December 5, 2018 – To engage area youth in oyster restoration, the St. Joe Community Foundation is granting the Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance (CBA) \$18,300 to bring their Spat On! program to 250 high school students in Walton County. In addition to providing monthly instruction and in-class lessons to foster understanding of oyster ecology and estuarine habitat, CBA will work with area high schools to build two new oyster reef breakwaters in the Choctawhatchee Bay.

According to the Nature Conservancy, 85% of the world's oyster reefs have been lost due to disease, pollution, declining habitat and over harvesting in the last decade. This makes oyster reefs the most severely impacted marine habitat on Earth (Shellfish Reefs at Risk Report, 2009). The oyster population in Choctawhatchee Bay is no exception, and the decline has led to a reduction in biodiversity and water quality. As NOAA's Office of Habitat Conservation reports, oysters are a keystone species in the estuarine habitat because of the critical role they have in maintaining the ecosystem, and each adult oyster can filter up to 50 gallons of water each and every day. Through Spat On! students will play a direct role in improving oyster populations in their communities.

"One of the best aspects of our program is that the students are learning *and* doing," says Amanda Briant, CBA Education Coordinator, "There is nothing better than seeing their sense of accomplishment after they've built the oyster reefs."

ST JOE QUOTE

The St Joe Community Foundation's mission is to enrich the quality of life of the people who live, work, and play in Northwest Florida. Created in 1999, the Foundation provides grants to the areas of education, environmental stewardship, building healthier communities, and programs that honor the cultural arts.

Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance is a non-profit organization striving to enhance swimmable, fishable waterways through monitoring, education, restoration, and research. For over 20 years, CBA has promoted water stewardship within the Choctawhatchee watershed, growing the network of supporters who join in CBA's mission to provide a future for these precious, natural resources.

For more information, please contact CBA's Communications and Marketing Coordinator, Erika Zambello, at zambelle@nwfsc.edu.

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