

## **Alma Bryant students help with Oyster Gardening project**

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The Oyster Gardening project has wrapped up another successful year with the help of four students from Alma Bryant High School.

The students, Alex Callister, Gabriel Denton, Darrel Wright and Shaun Jenkins, comprise the Alabama Delegation for the second National Student Summit on Oceans and Coasts. Accompanied by their advisors, teacher Lynn Stewart and Discovery Hall Marine Educator Hazel Wilson, the students assisted the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program's Kara Lankford and Auburn University Marine Extension and Research Center personnel with the counting, collecting and planting of more than 60,000 oysters grown by volunteers in Mobile and Baldwin counties.

The Auburn University Shellfish Lab, managed by Scott Rikard, contributed an additional 56,000 oysters to the students and the Oyster Gardening program for planting on reefs on both sides of the bay. The reefs are selected in areas where oyster survival is expected and closed to harvesting.

The students have researched the role of the oyster within an ecosystem. They have developed an understanding of the size of the watershed that feeds into Mobile Bay, and have the opportunity to speak before Congress during the summit on the various impacts that influence the ecological quality of the bay ranging from development upstream within the watershed to pollution and runoff.

Through their efforts, the students have developed an appreciation of Mobile Bay's sensitivity to activity, both helpful and harmful, almost anywhere within the state of Alabama. It is this appreciation they plan to pass along not only to the members of congress, but to their peers and audiences through continued involvement with the Oyster Gardening program.

Among the summit's requirements of the students is the sustainability of the project. Their involvement in the Oyster Gardening program will continue with presentations to other students and citizen groups on the bay's ecosystem and watershed.

Additionally, future students from Alma Bryant High School will continue to work with the National Estuary Program and Auburn University Marine Extension and Research Center through the Oyster Gardening Program and its volunteers to inform citizens of the impact their actions have throughout the state on the ecological quality of Mobile Bay.

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