



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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STARFISH POPULATION INCREASES TENFOLD TO THREATEN LONG ISLAND OYSTER INDUSTRY

The starfish, which is usually just another marine animal, has suddenly developed into a threat to the Long Island Sound oyster industry, the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries of the Department of the Interior Fish and Wildlife Service reports.

The crisis developed because of a "bumper crop" of starfish which increased that population about 10 times normal size. Eight years ago another such crisis occurred in Long Island Sound when invading starfish wreaked havoc upon oyster beds up and down the Connecticut coast.

The 1958 starfish invasion, which has ruined from 60 to 90 percent of the oyster crop in some beds, is the latest of a series of problems which have beset the oystermen of the area. Lack of seed oysters necessary to maintain the fishery, an excess of the ever-present oyster drill, and the action of destructive storms are among the troubles of this unit of the industry.

The Bureau and the oyster industry have joined forces to attack these many problems. One policy upon which the scientists and the industry agree is the establishment of refuges in certain estuaries on Long Island Sound where oysters could be placed during these invasions, since neither the drill nor the starfish can tolerate brackish water. Such a move would not only offer a haven against predators but would probably increase the setting of oysters to provide badly needed seed for the continuation of the industry.

The Bureau, through its biological laboratory at Milford, Connecticut, has done considerable work on oyster problems of Long Island Sound. One Bureau project which has been carried to a successful conclusion in the laboratory stage is a method of artificial propagation of oysters. Another problem which the Oyster Institute, acting under contract with the Bureau, has been probing, relates to the use of natural ponds and estuaries in the seed oyster program. Other projects which are contemplated include expanded research on oyster larvae, their food, diseases and predators to determine the cause of good and bad setting years.

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