

# Oyster Culture in Crisis: the Socioeconomic Implications of Environmental Decline on Apalachicola's Future

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## Background

The Apalachicola Bay System (ABS) once supplied 90% of Florida's oysters and contributed nearly half of local income<sup>1</sup>. Unfortunately, there has been a global decline in oyster populations for a variety of reasons.

### Understanding Apalachicola Bay Collapse

Decline of Apalachicola Bay oysters is due to combination of factors

- Lower freshwater flow
- High juvenile mortality
- Harvest
- Increased predators
- Removal of shell material



A presentation from FWC shows the decline in oysters at the Apalachicola Bay, despite a five-year ban on harvesting. (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission)

- There is a reported **95% decrease in oyster population**, despite a 5-year ban on oystering and restoration efforts<sup>1</sup>.
- Beyond economic loss, this decline disrupted Apalachicola's deeply rooted "oyster culture," which transcended the seafood industry<sup>2</sup>.
- While prior research examined its impact on oystermen, the **effects on indirect stakeholders** remain largely unexplored.

## Research Problem

**How has the oyster collapse influenced social, cultural, and economic dynamics in Apalachicola, Florida?**

## Identified Societal Implications

Previous research has documented the loss of generational heritage and the degradation of local "oyster culture" in Apalachicola<sup>2</sup>. Past literature and preliminary findings culminate in anticipated sociological effects<sup>3</sup>:

- **92% tourism economy** in Franklin County
- **Migration** – Displacement of former industry workers seeking alternative livelihoods.
- **Loss of social and personal capital** – Weakening of community networks and support systems.
- **Loss of traditions, values, and identity** – Decline in cultural practices tied to oystering.
- **Loss of local, traditional, and Indigenous knowledge** – Erosion of ecological expertise and harvesting techniques passed through generations.

## Methodology

**Study Design:** Semi-structured interviews and online surveys.

**Participants:**

- Indirect stakeholders of the Apalachicola Bay oyster collapse
- Current and past residents of Apalachicola, including individuals outside the seafood industry

**Analysis:**

- Identifying themes related to social, cultural, and economic impacts.
- Comparing perspectives across different stakeholder groups.

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## References

