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## No money to shell out: Lack of state funds won't dry up work on oyster hatcheries

By Paul Jefferson  
Staff Writer

The General Assembly's failure to appropriate money for planned oyster hatcheries will slow down - but not stop - efforts to help the mollusk's numbers rebound along the coast.

State Sen. Julia Boseman, D-New Hanover, sought \$16.3 million to jump-start a state-wide oyster hatchery program, but the construction funding wasn't approved. One of the three hatcheries is planned for the University of North Carolina Wilmington's Center for Marine Science.

The hatcheries would be at the forefront of raising up to 5 billion oyster larvae annually to help rebuild the state's battered oyster population.

"It's a disappointment, but we'll continue to try to maximize our efforts as best we can; that hatchery program would have been a big help to us," said

Craig Hardy, chief of the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries' resource enhancement section.

Hardy said Monday the division will continue existing programs that attempt to clean and reclaim oyster beds that have been fouled by pollution and continue oyster shell recycling to promote new oyster beds in areas deemed habitable.

He said Boseman's proposal was an important first step to restoration of the state's shellfish population, and he hopes it will be resurrected.

Boseman couldn't be reached for comment Monday.

"We're also continuing to work on critical habitat protection plans and identifying areas by shellfish mapping to find where those resources are located," Hardy said.

At UNCW, the hatchery bill's demise isn't slowing down expansion plans at the Marine Science Center on Masonboro

Loop Road.

"To put it succinctly, we're proceeding ahead as planned," said David Girardot, UNCW associate vice chancellor for facilities. "We're reserving a spot for the hatchery, and hopefully we'll be able to find the money for it."

Girardot said an operations building for the marine biotechnology unit is tabbed for completion in December.

The design for the remainder of the 70,000-square-foot expansion is in its final stages, he said.

The hatchery would be a 10,000-square-foot building linked to the marine biotechnology unit by a covered walkway, he said.

"We plan on just going ahead with the construction we had planned. No doubt we will be seeking contributions" for adding the hatchery building later, he said.



STAFF PHOTO | KEN BLEVINS

UNCW researchers, along with volunteers from St. James Plantation, work to build oyster reefs Monday along the shoreline in Waterway Park. More than 20 volunteers showed up to help build the reefs that will be used to collect spat from the natural oysters in the area to help build a stronger reef system along the waterway.