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**Galveston Bay Foundation Works With
Local Bay Residents to Restore Near-shore Oyster Reefs**

Webster, TX – September 14, 2011 – The Galveston Bay Foundation (“GBF”) worked with residents from several communities along Galveston Bay this summer as part of GBF’s community-based oyster reef restoration program. The program was reinstated as a result of the devastation to native oyster populations from Hurricane Ike in 2008, when sediments were deposited across reefs, suffocating 50% of Galveston Bay’s oysters. Volunteers in San Leon, Bayview, and Kemah, Texas, joined together to restore Galveston Bay’s oysters and became “oyster gardeners”, raising oysters that will be used to seed nearby reef restoration sites.

On Saturday, September 17, 2011, community members in San Leon will remove the oyster gardening bags from their piers and place the live, gardened oysters on several adjacent constructed reef pads in an effort to expedite colonization by oysters. This particular reef restoration site is five acres and extends along the north shore of Eagle Point. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department constructed the reef pads, and GBF is aiding with community involvement. On the reef pads, the oysters become mature within their first year and will quickly begin spawning to further the reefs’ development. For the past three summers, volunteers in the community of San Leon have been gardening oysters to help restore reefs and have witnessed the results firsthand—better fishing and cleaner water. This summer, Kemah and Bayview residents have joined the oyster gardening effort.

Residents who participate in oyster gardening first hang bags of reclaimed oyster shell from their piers over the summer months. They then monitor the growth of baby oysters, called *spat*, which naturally attach to the shells inside the oyster gardening bags. As part of their monitoring and maintenance of the bags, volunteers also remove algae and predators from the bags. After months of growth and development, the oysters are removed from the piers and their bags, and are distributed across artificially-constructed reef pads nearby where they will flourish as part of a restored oyster reef. Because these restored oyster reefs are located within 200 feet of the shoreline, they are not for

consumption, but only for ecosystem services such as water quality, habitat creation, and shoreline protection.

A recent study of the state of oyster reefs found that about 85% of the world's oyster reefs have been destroyed, making them the most endangered of all marine habitat types. We are fortunate to have some of the world's remaining healthy oyster reefs in Galveston Bay, but it is imperative that we tend and nurture these reefs to ensure their survival across Galveston Bay. Oyster reefs are critical for Galveston Bay's health—they filter the water, provide habitat for numerous bottom dwelling fish and invertebrates which in turn are food for larger game fish, they protect our shores, and provide economical benefits to the region.

Galveston Bay Foundation's Community-Based Oyster Reef Restoration program is made possible through various grantors and supporters, including the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Texas Coastal Management Program, Restore America's Estuaries, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, ConocoPhillips, ERM Foundation, Hillcrest Foundation, KBR, Samson Lone Star LLC, and The Dow Chemical Company.

About Galveston Bay Foundation

The mission of the Galveston Bay Foundation is to preserve, protect, and enhance the natural resources of the Galveston Bay estuarine system and its tributaries for present users and for posterity. The Foundation was incorporated in 1987, and is a non-profit organization under Section 501 (c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. GBF is located at 17330 Highway 3 in Webster, Texas. For further information, contact GBF at 281-332-3381, or visit the website at www.galvbay.org.

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