

Journal for Oyster Reef Restoration Literature Review

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January 13, 2024

- 1 Summary of Ecosystem Services Model**
- 2 Summary of Foundation Species Model**
- 3 Application of Models to Oyster Restoration and Aquaculture**

Oysters and oyster reefs are conceptualized using both the ecosystem services model and the foundation species model — sometimes in the same paper (Mercaldo-Allen et al., 2023). There is evidence in the literature to support the use of both of these models for understanding oyster ecology but the different models lead to different conceptualizations of the system. The foundation species model proposes that an ecosystem contains one or a few species that have a disproportional effect on community structure by altering the physical, chemical, and biological processes of an ecosystem to facilitate and stabilize a specific community (Fields & Silbiger, 2022). The presence of foundation species creates and stabilizes the physical environment by minimizing fluctuations in temperature, moisture, pH, or other physical parameters (Ellison et al., 2005). Foundation species can also alter ecosystem production through changes in nutrient cycling, in some cases increasing (Fields & Silbiger, 2022) or decreasing (Ellison et al., 2005) nutrient availability. A main effect of the foundation species is to literally build the three-dimensional habitat that other species require (Angelini, Altieri, Silliman, & Bertness, 2011; Mercaldo-Allen et al., 2023). By facilitating the growth and persistence of organisms that would not be able to colonize a patch, foundation species create a unique, stable, and often more biodiverse community.

Conceptualizing an ecosystem based on the foundation species model, means understanding that system as being structured by the specific facilitation interactions of one or more numerically dominant species (Dayton, 1972; Ellison et al., 2005; Angelini et al., 2011). Because they are capable of building large biogenic structures that can persist for long time periods, sometimes centuries (Lockwood & Mann, 2019), of altering local physical conditions (Lenihan,

1999), and of processing large volumes of materials via filter feeding (Newell, 1988) oyster reefs can be conceptualized as foundation species where they occur. The three-dimensional structure of an oyster reef (mainly its height above the otherwise flat sediments) and its heterogeneous complex structure creates, a unique environment that facilitates the growth and persistence of the oysters themselves (Lenihan, 1999), sessile producers and consumers (), and mobile consumers (Smith, Lusk, & Castorani, 2022; Searles, Gipson, Walters, & Cook, 2022). This facilitation, in part, relies on the way that the reef alters the physical environment by altering flow around the reef to alter the temperature, dissolved oxygen, and other physiochemical factors (Lenihan, 1999). The reef also alters species trophic interactions by providing cover for both predators and prey organisms (Smith et al., 2022) and aggregating and increasing resources for consumers (Newell, 1988). As a result of these integrated effects oyster reefs support a unique community of sessile and mobile organisms who's growth and persistence is facilitated by the reef (Lenihan, 1999; Smith et al., 2022).

Consistent with the idea of a foundation species, when the reef structure is destroyed (mostly by destructive harvest methods), then the community becomes less diverse and dominated by non-reef-building organisms. Following the decline of oyster reefs in through the 19th and 20th centuries from overfishing, the habitats previously occupied by oysters became colonized by other benthic filter feeders (e.g., *Corbicula fluminea*) indicating a significant shift in the food web (Newell, 1988). The loss of the reefs also significantly affected material cycling within the estuarine system, since the oysters were no longer concentrating phytoplankton biomass into feces and pseudofeces to provided resources to benthic consumers, benthic-pelagic coupling significantly decreased (Newell, 1988). What these observations support is the idea that the effect of the reefs on the system are due to emergent properties that result from the interactions between the oysters and other organisms in a "mature" reef. The function of oyster reefs is dependent on their structural development and complex ecological interactions, indicating that it is the creation of a particular habitat and its associated conditions that drives the effect. For example, Searles et al. (2022) found that reef-associated macroinvertebrate communities recovered on the interior of restored reefs but not their margins, suggesting that a certain oyster density and/or reef structure was required to facilitate the colonization of the specific assemblage of macroinvertebrates that typify a reef community. One reason for this effect is likely that the alteration of the physical environment is a key factor in the way that oyster reefs create the specific ecological communities associated with them (Lenihan, 1999; Searles et al., 2022). Because the effects of the reef on the structure and function of the reef community are the result of emergent effects that result from the "physical-biological coupling" of the reef and the estuarine environment, the deconstruction of the reef by harvesting practices that destroy the three-dimensional characteristics of the reef, as well as remove individuals will result in the deminishment or elimination of the facultative properties of the reef (Lenihan, 1999). In this way the reef as a foundation species is defined by the emergent properties that arise from the integrated function of the oysters and the other organisms that are facilitated

by the effects that the oysters have on the physical–biological coupling of the system (Lenihan, 1999; Ellison et al., 2005; Angelini et al., 2011).

In contrast to the foundation species model, the ecosystem services model conceptualizes systems based on the "services" that they provide, most particularly services that are valued by humans.

4 Impact of Models on Understanding Oyster Management

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