

# EAST COAST SHELLFISH GROWERS ASSOCIATION



The East Coast Shellfish Growers Association represents over 1,000 shellfish farmers from Maine to Florida. These proud stewards of the marine environment produce sustainable, farmed shellfish while providing thousands of jobs in rural coastal towns.

The ECSGA informs policy makers and regulators to protect a way of life.

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## The Mouth of the Bay

### Cedar Key Struggles to Recover from Hurricane Hermine



Executive Director  
Bob Rheault

After meandering around in the Gulf of Mexico as a tropical depression that seemed like nothing much to worry about, Hurricane Hermine gathered steam and made a beeline for Cedar Key, Fla. on Sept 2. The first hurricane to hit Florida in 11 years, Hermine did most of her damage with a seven-to-nine-foot tidal surge and waves driven by 60-70 knot winds.

Cedar Key and a couple of other small coastal fishing and tourist communities bore the brunt of the storm. If you have ever visited Cedar Key you know that this unique community reinvented itself as a clam-farming town after the net ban eradicated most commercial fishing. Dozens of growers support ancillary businesses like

hatcheries, nurseries, processors, dealers, boat builders and equipment purveyors. Recently, many in the town had begun experimenting with suspended oyster culture.

Damage to hard-clam crops and oyster gear has been described as catastrophic. Even though the community made significant



progress cleaning up debris with the help of a record turnout of volunteers for their annual Coastal Cleanup, Cedar Key needs more help from outside sources. Seed demand is going to skyrocket as growers try to get back to where they were, and damage to local hatcheries will only compound this challenge. Seed supply was

tight even before the storm. I hope that hatcheries up and down the coast can work with local broodstock to help these growers get back on their feet.

The Cedar Key Aquaculture Association has opened a dedicated Hermine Recovery account to fund efforts to clean up farm gear and marine debris, replace Private Aids to Navigation, help rebuild infrastructure (shellfish hatcheries, processing plants, land-based nurseries, aquaculture-designated docks), and to purchase shellfish seed.

We wish the Cedar Key community the best in the weeks and years ahead as they struggle to rebuild. Those of us who saw Hermine pass and suffered little more than a few downed branches should be thankful for our luck. I hope we can all help out those in Cedar Key who took it on the chin. See the end of this story to find out

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## Preventing Shellfish Theft

by Robert Rheault,  
ECSGA Executive Director

The explosive growth enjoyed by the shellfish aquaculture industry over the past few years has come with an unwelcome side effect: increasing incidents of shellfish poaching. Shellfish theft is an age-old problem, whether of animals bottom-planted in sanctuaries intended for restoration, or for privately-owned shellfish grown in containerized gear. Unfortunately, the few miscreants who have managed to actually get caught tend to get off lightly. Furthermore, it's a sure bet that many thefts have gone completely undetected. Adding insult to injury, several heists have involved cases where one grower was stealing from another, taking not only the shellfish, but expensive cages and gear as well. Years ago I was a victim for several months before I managed to apprehend the culprit who was helping me harvest on a regular basis.

It's clear that we cannot really count on the authorities to protect us. Instead we must look for workable solutions to protect the crops we have worked so hard to rear. The best plan of attack is to deter any theft before it happens, as enforcement and prosecution seem to be failing our industry.

I have yet to see any really affordable off-the-shelf surveillance and monitoring gear, but many innovators



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The Eagle Vision 3000 series of rugged long-range cameras includes models with detection ranges of 1 km to over 20 km, and that work in every light condition from bright daylight to dark, fog and smoke. But the hefty price tag (starting at \$19K) makes it a viable option only for the largest operations or groups of growers working in the same area.

out there are working on this issue. A few months ago I asked readers of our Listserv to take a survey about theft, and within a few short weeks 74 growers had responded. They were mostly from small operations (66 percent had fewer than three employees) and most were established veterans. While only 12 percent of respondents thought theft was a big problem,

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## Shellfish Theft

30 percent said they had experienced occasional problems, while 20 percent were not sure. Almost a third said they would be willing to spend \$2,000 for an effective deterrent or a conviction.

The challenges in building monitoring systems are many. Some growers could rely on a land-based system, but many would need the equipment to operate remotely, floating offshore.

Naturally, any equipment would need to be robust enough to withstand the punishing effects of the marine environment, and ideally should be effective in darkness and fog. To

prove that a violator was harvesting within the confines of a lease and actually get a conviction, it would likely be necessary to discern boat numbers and to present a video recording to law enforcement authorities. In many cases a grower's only recourse is to rely on

understaffed marine patrols that may have very long response times following a complaint.

I looked into a land-based radar system from KelvinHughes.com that looks as if it would be up to the task of detecting a boat on a lease under almost any conditions, but it comes with a hefty price tag of more than \$20,000. One of our members has installed a high-resolution web cam on his dock that provides remarkable color images of his lease, day or night, from a mile away. He can remotely pan and zoom, and the camera can identify vessels and even individuals in starlight or daylight. Again, the downside is affordability: the starlight cameras start at \$19,000 (UnitedVisionSolutions.com),

making these solutions affordable only for large firms, or perhaps by groups of growers working in close proximity.

A few months ago I talked about the needs of our industry with a firm in Fall River called Aquabotix, which designs underwater cameras and has developed a system for monitoring leases above water. The AquaLens Connect boasts a full 1080p HD camera with pan/tilt and recording capability. In addition, multiple cameras can be connected together through the Aquabotix control application to create a security network of underwater and surface cameras. The camera costs only \$1,500 and is designed to withstand full submersion, so water

is not a problem. Add in the price of a phone hotspot and some batteries, and you could probably deploy a system for under \$2,000. They will be rolling out their new system in Canada later this month, and hope to be displaying their wares at the Northeast Aquaculture Conference

and Expo (NACE) that will be held in Providence, R.I., January 11-17, 2017 (visit [www.northeastaquaculture.org](http://www.northeastaquaculture.org)). Check out AquaLens Connect at [Aquabotix.com](http://Aquabotix.com).

If you have computer and camera skills you should be able to cobble together a system for even less money. Kyle Hess of Chessawanock Island Oyster Co. in Rhode Island put together a solar-powered camera that includes a Geovision GV-BX220D box-camera housed in a watertight enclosure. Kyle recommends using a 5-megapixel camera at minimum.

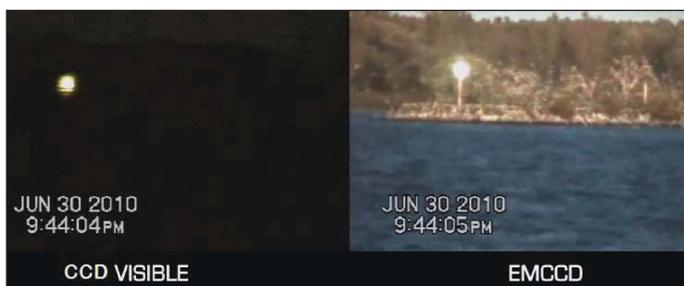
Others have suggested placing a simple infrared-activated game camera on access roads to catch land-based thieves as they come and go,

as long as you know how they are accessing your site. One enterprising grower has even used a drone to survey his lease, and is working on a mechanism to trigger an alert when someone transits his lease so he knows when to fly it. I would think that a high-powered, highly-focused spotlight might be enough to chase off most would-be thieves, if you could figure out a way to have it come on at the appropriate time and focus the beam on the intruder.

Judging from the amount of e-mail I've received on this topic, I can tell it's a high-priority issue for our community. The subject may be addressed in a session at NACE in Providence in January. Just one more good reason to make plans to attend.

On a related topic, I recently heard a member complaining that he was taking heat from other growers because he was selling to a restaurant that was thought to be involved in an oyster theft incident earlier this year. He pointed out that the alleged thief was no longer associated with the restaurant, and that, "besides, they pay well," and it was simply "a business decision."

I am hardly the arbiter of morality here, but it is my opinion that if your business decisions have the appearance of supporting thieves and scofflaws, then don't be surprised if others hold you accountable for the appearance of not caring about your fellow growers. Our industry is stronger when we work together and support each other as a community.



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The same scene shot in darkness using a camera that senses only visible light (l) and one using EMCCD technology (r) capable of detecting single photon events and using a unique electron multiplying structure built into the sensor.



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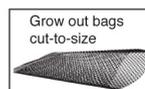
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