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CareerSource Gulf Coast a Partner in \$6 Million Oyster Program Grant

PANAMA CITY, FL – CareerSource Gulf Coast is poised to assist Franklin County oystermen displaced from their livelihood due to the failure of the Apalachicola Bay oyster fishery. Governor Rick Scott has announced that the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) will receive a more than \$6 million federal grant from the National Oceanic Atmospheric Association (NOAA) to assist with the recovery of the fishery.

DEO will work with CareerSource Gulf Coast on the hand shelling and vocational training components of the grant, according to Kim Bodine, Executive Director of CareerSource Gulf Coast.

“We remain dedicated to helping folks in the region revitalize the fishery, while providing support for their transition to other career fields,” she said. “Developing workforce options for some of our oystermen, and assisting with the shelling program contributes greatly to the economic vitality of the area.”

Through CareerSource Gulf Coast, GED and vocational training programs will be available. These include Correctional Officer, Commercial Cook, HVAC, Electrician, Heavy Equipment Operator, Licensed Practical Nurse, Welder and on the job training opportunities. The training program selection was based primarily on surveys completed by oystermen involved in shelling and the temporary jobs program operated by Franklin County following Tropical Storm Debby, according to Bodine.

“There are actually two grants available,” she said. “One is the extension of the National Emergency Grant for Tropical Storm Debby. Only those same participants, who were part of that grant, are eligible for the extension of the National Emergency Grant. This time around, the eligible individuals have an opportunity to enroll in full-time vocational classroom, GED, or work experience training and will receive needs-related payments of up to \$275 per week.”

All participants will be reviewed for appropriate progress, Bodine explained. It is expected that most of the vocational training will take place during the first two years, but some may continue into the third year. Generally, the training programs that are a part of the grants take between eight weeks and one year to complete.

“The second grant is the Fisheries Failure Grant,” Bodine said. “There are funds there to complete a second round of hand shelling and to assist a limited number of individuals with training and GED preparation. These would be folks who meet similar eligibility requirements, but were not in the shelling or temporary jobs program under the National Emergency Grant for Tropical Storm Debby.”

Potentially eligible individuals are those who depended on the Bay in 2012 for their livelihood. Those interested in training should call the CareerSource GulfCoast office in Apalachicola at 850-653-4981.

In addition to CareerSource Gulf Coast, the services and activities funded by this grant will be a collaborative effort of DEO, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission.

“DEO looks forward to partnering with other state agencies and CareerSource Gulf Coast to administer these funds to the greatest benefit of the community,” said DEO Executive Director Jesse Panuccio. “We are pleased to continue our economic and environmental restoration efforts in the Apalachicola Bay area.”

In 2012, Governor Scott requested the U.S. Secretary of Commerce to declare a commercial fishery failure for Florida’s oyster harvesting areas in the Gulf of Mexico and in August 2013, a fishery resource disaster was declared. With it, more than \$6 million in funding will be made available to the state to assist in the restoration of the oyster fishery. In addition to vocational and educational training, the funding will assist communities affected by the commercial fishery failure with the restoration of oyster habitat, monitoring of existing oyster resources and of restoration efforts, and processor facilities upgrades. The full breakdown of the more than \$6 million includes:

- Oyster Habitat Restoration, \$4.5 million - The shelling of wild oyster reefs will be conducted by fisherman in shallow areas and by barge in deeper water areas. Adding shell to an existing oyster reef is a typical habitat improvement technique. CareerSource Gulf Coast will only be involved with the hand-shelling portion of this effort, with the City of Apalachicola assisting with the paying of the oystermen as vendors. For eligibility guidelines, please visit www.careersourcegfc.com and visit the “Special Projects – Shelling” page.

- Monitoring of the Wild Apalachicola Bay Oyster Population, \$415,000 - The oyster population will be monitored to help evaluate the success of shelling programs, and so that the fishery can be adaptively managed as the oyster population recovers.
- Vocational and Educational Training for Apalachicola Bay Oyster Industry Workers, \$538,000 - Vocational and educational training will be conducted so that those in the oyster industry can have a greater diversity of job opportunities.
- Apalachicola Bay Processor Facilities Upgrades, \$769,500 - In order for the oyster industry to remain viable, sanitation upgrades in the processing facilities are needed.

CareerSource Gulf Coast works to meet the business needs of both job seekers and employers. One of 24 Florida workforce regions, CareerSource Gulf Coast earned the 2013-14 top ranking in job placements as part of Governor Scott's goal to put more people to work. Offices are operated in Bay, Gulf and Franklin Counties, with the primary Job Center located in Panama City at 625 Highway 231. Visit www.careersourcegc.com to learn more about the organization.

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ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Tropical Storm Debby National Emergency Grant

- You must be unemployed and
- Served under the Tropical Storm Debby temporary jobs grant as a sheller or in a temporary job with the county

Fisheries Failure Grant including Oyster Habitat Restoration (Shelling) and Vocational and Educational Training

- You held a salt water products license in 2012
- You earned 80% or more of your income from the Bay in 2012
- You can provide proof of income from the Bay in 2012 (for example, trip tickets, 1099 from a dealer, receipts for piece work)
- You are unemployed and not receiving unemployment compensation
- Some restaurant workers who lost employment and are still unemployed may also be eligible

Please note, if you will be using your boat, it must be at least 20-feet long, seaworthy with an up to date license.

For questions, please call the CareerSource Gulf Coast office in Apalachicola at 850-653-4981.