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Contact: Shelley Dawicki
508-495-2378
shelley.dawicki@noaa.gov

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Milford Laboratory Mussel Research Featured in Aqua Kids TV Show

Season Opener Week of September 29

Mussels, and some Milford Laboratory scientists, star in the 10th season opener of Aqua Kids, a children's television program that educates young people about the importance of the marine environment and motivates them to protect and preserve aquatic environments and wildlife. The half-hour episode airs the week of September 29, 2014 on television stations around the country.

The season opener, "Mussels and Water Quality," features research at the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC)'s Milford Laboratory that uses ribbed mussels to naturally filter toxins from nearshore waters. Researchers Gary Wikfors, Julie Rose, Judy Li, and Mark Dixon have test sites at several locations in Narragansett Bay, including one near Providence managed by Save the Bay, a non-profit environmental advocacy and educational organization, where this episode was filmed.

Milford Laboratory scientists are using ribbed mussels in filter feeding experiments at these test locations to determine the capability of the mussels to improve the bay's water quality. The scientists worked with the show's cast of high school and college students, who typically do hands-on activities in each program, during the day-long filming in late July.

"The students set flow rates for chambers containing mussels, and collected water, feces, and pseudofeces – particles that have been rejected as unsuitable for food that are expelled without passing through the digestive tract – from the mussel chambers," Wikfors said. "They filtered the samples onto glass-fiber filters, then archived and labeled the filters for later analysis in the laboratory." At each step, Milford Laboratory staff explained the importance of the procedure and how it would be used in evaluating the different sampling sites for possible bio-extraction applications.

"The students and the production crew members were enthused about using shellfish aquaculture as an active way to address and reduce coastal nutrient problems – something we can start doing rather than stop doing," Wikfors said.

Other episodes in Season 10 will focus on oyster farming, salt marsh migration, sea turtle rescues, urban gardens, horseshoe crabs, and the use of grasses for storm surge protection.

Aqua Kids began broadcasting in 2005 and has won a number of awards, including 2 Emmy Awards and 15 Telly awards in children's programming.

NEFSC staff and research have been featured in previous episodes, including several in 2013 on endangered Atlantic salmon in Maine. In "Maine-Penobscot Biodiversity," the cast, in collaboration with Christine Lipsky and Justin Stevens from the NEFSC's Maine Field Station at Orono, set a fyke net in the Penobscot River estuary and examined the catch to learn about the health of the river. In "Maine Salmon, Outlook and Future", the show visited the Narraguagus River, the fish ladder at the former Veazie Dam, and Craig Brook National Fish Hatchery. "Sturgeon" in the Penobscot River was the subject of another episode in season nine.

NOAA Fisheries researcher Christine Lipsky at the NEFSC's Maine Field Station in Orono serves as the program's science advisor. Check the show times and list of episodes for stations near you at: <http://www.aquakids.tv/showtimes-episodes/showtimes/>.

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Related links:

Aqua Kids: <http://www.aquakids.tv/>

Milford Laboratory: <http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/nefsc/Milford/>

Ribbed Mussels Offer Possible Natural Way to Improve Urban Water Quality:
http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/press_release/2011/SciSpot/SS1106/