

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed March 6, 1930.

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OYSTERS KILLED BY FLOODS

An excessive amount of fresh water discharged by rivers in time of flood is sometimes responsible for heavy mortality among oysters living near the river mouths. The U.S. Bureau of Fisheries says on this subject:

"Although the oyster is very tolerant to changes in the salinity of the water, and by shutting its valves and keeping them tightly closed can survive, even in a very low concentration of salts, yet the condition may occur when the dilution of the sea water is too great or the exposure to fresh water lasts longer than the organism is able to endure. Every spring a great number of oysters inhabiting the estuaries near the mouths of large rivers are killed by freshets."

In rare cases nearly the whole oyster population over a great area near the mouth of a river is destroyed in this way. This happened in Mobile Bay, Alabama, in the spring of 1929. The flood that killed these oysters was due to the unfortunate coincidence, for the first time in 37 years, of high water stages in the Tombigbee and Alabama Rivers, together with heavy rainfall near the bay. A survey made in May, 1929, showed that the percentage of survivors on the reefs in Mobile Bay ranged from 0 to 6.6. In Grant's Pass, at the mouth of the bay, 15 per cent survived.

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