



## Section 6: Pine Island Sound and National Wildlife Refuge

Muggy and the school of mullet swim through Pine Island Sound. There are 17 islands in the Pine Island National Wildlife Refuge. Some of these mangrove islands are closed to the public and are home to herons, egrets and pelicans. These birds like to eat mullet, so the school stays away.

Pine Island Sound is home to many kinds of shellfish, including clams. Just west of Cork Island, the school of mullet swims over clams growing under mesh. They have been “planted” by clam farmers. The mesh protects the clams from being eaten by stingrays, sheepshead, blue crabs,

tulip shells or king’s crowns. The farmers have to remove sponges, sea squirts and barnacles that grow on the mesh so the clams will live.

A boat drifts above and Muggy hears the first man say, “Fishing for a living was easier before the net ban.”

“You bet,” the second man says.

The first man says, “Remember when we were mullet wrappers? We knew we had a school when a bunch of mullet started jumping.”

“Or when the pelicans started circling and diving. Don’t forget them.” The second man laughs.

The first man says, “I hated it when they tried to steal the

mullet as we wrapped the nets around the school.”

Muggy noses the hull of the boat.

“That was the fun part. The real work was hauling that net in, pulling the mullet through the mesh and icing them down,” the second man says.

“It was work, but not like farming clams,” the first man says. “At least when we were out in the boat, I felt free.”

“You’re out in the boat now, free as can be!” the second man says.

“It’s not the same,” the first man says.

Muggy and the school of mullet scoot away.

### SHELLFISH AND AQUACULTURE

by Carol Mahler

More than 275 kinds of shellfish live in the estuary. In the past, people harvested clams, oysters and scallops to eat. Shellfish feed on things floating in the water, so they work as filters. If the water is clean, the shellfish are healthy. But when red tide, bacteria or chemicals are in the water, the shellfish keep those harmful things. They can cause the

shellfish to die, or the shellfish may make the people who eat them sick. Pollution has closed many parts of the estuary to shellfishing, but not Gasparilla Sound and Pine Island Sound. Clam farmers there lease bottomlands to raise clams for people to eat. This is a type of farming called aquaculture.