



Friends of Blue Hill Bay
PO Box 1633
Blue Hill, ME 04614
207-546-2018 (O)
bsarter@fobhb.org
www.fobhb.org

Letter to the Editor Published by Ellsworth American (May 6) & Blue Hill Packet (April 22)

Maine Should Abandon Net Pen Salmon Aquaculture

Dear Editor,

In Maine, farmed-raised Atlantic salmon are raised in floating open mesh net pens measuring roughly 30x30m and extending into the water roughly 20m deep. The nets are open to the surrounding waters and because of the use of feed inputs and the concentrated nature of net pens, finfish aquaculture produces excess quantities of waste feed, antibiotics, vaccines, pesticides (for sea lice), feces, and dissolved nutrients, which are released into surrounding waters. This fallout causes algal blooms, hypoxia and dead zones, and degraded waters. A European study concluded that the pollution from an average salmon farm is equivalent to discharging raw human sewage from a town of several thousand people.

Despite an EPA ruling in 2002 that requires a permit for discharge from any aquaculture site, Maine finfish aquaculture industry continues to pollute our waters. According to a 2009 NY Times article, the top ten violators to the Clean Water Act in Maine between 2004 and 2007 included the following finfish aquaculture facilities: Maine Coast Nordic Cutler Harbor (15 violations), Heritage Salmon Cutler North (21 at 2 locations), Atlantic Salmon of Maine (27 violations at 3 locations), and Birch Point Fisheries (9).

Maine Department of Environmental Protection data indicate the presence of the pollution-tolerant worm, *Capitella capitata*, and bacteria, *Beggiatoa spp.* in the areas beneath the salmon farms, thus clearly demonstrating the pollution problems that are ever present. Polluted conditions, as a result of these salmon farms, continue to occur in the state's public waters. Warned violators appear to continue their salmon farming operations unrestrained.

There is also concern that residual pesticides entering the water column are harming the benthic community, specifically crustaceans, such as lobsters. Sea lice pesticide applications are suspected in a recent lobster die-off near Grand Manan Island off Machias. The CBC news reports that "it probably originated at salmon farm sites, with people attempting to control a very serious problem they had with sea lice." According to recent Maine DEP data, there were 318 sea lice pesticide applications over 5 months at 7 locations in Maine waters in 2009 alone. That's an average of 45 applications per site in less than half a year.

Maine has an opportunity to become a leader in sustainable and responsible management of its marine resources by banning open net pen aquaculture and moving to closed containment systems or closed-loop recirculating systems where waste would be contained and pollutants would be removed and/or treated before being discharged into our bays. These systems are already in use in British Columbia, Massachusetts, West Virginia, and at the University of Maine Center for Cooperative Aquaculture Research in Franklin. Closed containment systems would

be a solution that allows for a commercial scale salmon farming industry without jeopardizing the marine ecosystem.

The Friends of Blue Hill Bay strongly opposes the general discharge permitting of the Scrag Island aquaculture site off Swan's Island by Atlantic Salmon of Maine, LLC because we are not confident they will be able to comply with the terms and conditions of the General Permit and that the health of public waters of the State of Maine will be jeopardized. Furthermore, we oppose the current practice of open net pen aquaculture in Maine because it creates a continual stream of pollutants into our bays and estuaries, the methods are not sustainable, and the product and its by-products are not organic.

The state agencies involved in aquaculture permitting and pollution enforcement should have more concern for the overall health of the state's water quality rather than sacrifice it for the sake of farmed Atlantic salmon. The Maine Department of Environmental Protection, the Maine Department of Marine Resources, the Maine Board of Pesticides Control and the legislature should be more diligent in ensuring that the salmon farming industry develops Best Management Practices that keep net pen salmon farming from polluting Maine's waters. It's time to move to the more environmentally sustainable method of closed containment systems ashore for raising farmed salmon in Maine.

Don Eley
President, Friends of Blue Hill Bay