

## Residents discuss 'bay management'

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ELLSWORTH - If a developer proposes a new luxury hotel or paper mill, Maine communities have rules in place to determine where and how construction should occur to protect homeowners, other businesses and the environment. But when aquaculture companies, kayak guide services, liquefied natural gas tankers and lobster boats seek to set up shop in Maine's coastal waters, the process is far more complicated.

Six federal agencies and seven state agencies, in addition to municipal governments, have a hand in management of shore regions - areas where some of Maine's most valuable resource-based businesses are centered, and where residential development is occurring at a rate that far exceeds most of the rest of the state.

Wednesday night, nearly 40 people attended a session at Ellsworth High School to share their experiences of how local waters are used and whether conflicts exist. The State Planning Office and Maine Department of Marine Resources hopes to use their comments and those of Mainers at similar meetings up and down the coast, to decide whether and how the state should pursue "bay management."

Precisely what bay management is, however, remains to be seen.

Some worry, and others cheer, that bay management could be a conservation strategy, impeding some uses in order to protect fish nursery areas and other important habitats.

In fact, one man stood up Wednesday night, accusing the state of "pussyfooting around" the idea of zoning coastal waters for different uses - something that has been done in other states.

Several others suggested that the controversial term "bay management" be dropped to avoid misunderstandings.

"Bay management implies, to me, zoning, and zoning implies, to me, speculation," said James "Howdy" Houghton of Bar Harbor.

Facilitators Wednesday night assured the crowd that Maine's nascent planning effort, as directed by the Legislature, specifically calls for a "multiuse" system to meet public needs.

There is "no proposal in the back pocket that [we're] going to spring on you," said Ron Beard of the University of Maine Cooperative Extension and Maine Sea Grant.

However, balancing human activities with ever changing natural systems must be a part of bay management, said John Sowles, head of the ecology division at the Department of Marine Resources.

Lobsters make seasonal migrations, eelgrass beds expand and contract in response to natural factors, and fish spawning areas change over time.

Humans are nearly as hard to predict, said local people at Wednesday's session. From aquaculture to lobstering to second-home construction, countless uses have expanded their scope in recent years. Other uses, such as the cruise ships that visit Frenchman Bay each fall, have emerged over the past decade.

On Wednesday, coastal residents spoke of conflicts over sewage pollution from outdated treatment plants and from boats' overboard discharges fouling shellfish flats. They spoke of depleted fish stocks and the fact that salmon farming operations tend to prefer the same areas that wild fish need as nurseries. They described sailboats becoming entangled in lobster gear, and mussel and oyster rafts' impact on the views that draw wealthy summer residents.

David Opdyke, who lives in Salisbury Cove, described the frustration of dealing with many different levels of government.

"It's a right-hand-left-hand issue," he said. "We talk to totally different people."

Most of the group's suggestions Wednesday related to thinking big - understanding the interrelationships of different kinds of fish habitat, communicating across community and governmental agency lines, and considering the impact of land-based activities, such as bridge construction and agricultural pesticide use, on the ocean.

"You can't clean up a bay if you don't clean up the watershed," said Jesse Leach, who raises oysters in the Bagaduce River.

Challenges on this scale won't be resolved easily. But the state intends to continue its public process through 2007 in hopes of drafting a management system restrictive enough to protect today's economic and environmental needs, but flexible enough to respond to the inevitable changes that await us, according to DMR.

"We want predictability ... [we're asking] how do we devise some sort of a scheme that won't trap us or preclude us from coming up with new solutions that we hadn't anticipated," Sowles said.

Meetings already have been held in Portland and Rockland, and meetings are scheduled at the Wells Estuarine Reserve next week, and in Eastport from 6 to 9 p.m. Thursday, March 31, at Washington County Community College's Boat School on Deep Cove Road.

For more information, visit <http://www.state.me.us/dmr/baystudy.htm>.