

Blue Horizon

News and Notes from Friends of Blue Hill Bay

Issue 1



Summer, 2003

New Salmon Farms Planned for Blue Hill Bay

Public Hearings Set for August 4th 5th & 6th

The Department of Marine Resources (DMR) will hold public hearings on an unprecedented expansion of salmon farming in Blue Hill Bay at the Tremont School on Mount Desert Island on August 4th, 5th, and 6th, 2003. Several proposals will be heard.

On Monday, August 4th, at 10:00 am the DMR will consider the application by Acadia Aquaculture for a 54.7-acre salmon farm off the eastern shore of Tinker Island. The north end of Tinker Island is owned by Maine Coast Heritage Trust and the entire island is protected by a conservation easement. This would be one of the largest salmon farms in Maine and would contribute pollutants from feed and fish feces into the waters of an otherwise pristine area.

On Tuesday, August 5th, at 10:00 am the DMR will consider the

application of Trumpet Island Salmon Farm for a 17.5-acre expansion of its 25-acre salmon farm it presently operates off Hardwood Island's eastern shore. This farm has been plagued with problems over the last ten years including destruction of the habitat beneath the salmon pens, escaped salmon, discharge of pollutants and a negative impact on marine mammals and birds.

On Wednesday August 6th at 5:00 pm the DMR will consider the application of Trumpet Island Salmon Farm to renew its 25-acre salmon farm lease off Hardwood Island's eastern shore. While the public may question applicants at the earlier hearings, Wednesday evening is the only opportunity for public comment on these three proposals.

These three projects would

encompass nearly 100 acres, contain 1.2 million farmed salmon, and result in more than 7,456,000 pounds of feed and the resultant feces being dumped into the Bay annually.

Friends of Blue Hill Bay asserts there is a strong case against this expansion based on research indicating that the Bay has limited ability to assimilate this waste. The increased nutrient loading and decreased dissolved oxygen in the water are of serious concern.

FOBHB has joined forces with the Conservation Law Foundation and the Maine Coast Heritage Trust to oppose these proposals. Please attend the hearings — particularly on August 6th when public comment will be taken.

Don Eley

National Park Service Voices Concern

Cumulative Impact of Leases Could Pose Threat

Acadia National Park Acting Superintendent David Buccello expressed strong concerns to the Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR) in a November, 2002 letter addressing the issue of mussel farm leases along the eastern shore of Long Island. Acting Superintendent Buccello clearly indicated that the state should not issue leases within Maine waters without consideration of the impact that aquaculture operations might have on significant conservation easements held by the federal government through the National Park Service.

The Park's greatest concern stems from the present DMR lease system that issues permits to indi-

vidual lease applicants without consideration of the cumulative impact of increased aquaculture development off Long Island. Acting Superintendent Buccello indicated that Long Island cannot be used by aquaculture companies for commercial purpose.

The Park Service's concern stems from its Congressional mandate "to acquire and preserve conservation easements within the Acadian archipelago. A strong component of our mission is to protect the scenic, natural and cultural resources of federally owned lands and conservation easement properties within Acadia National Park for future generations."

Mussel Farm Leases Approved

Over objections from the National Park Service and Friends of Blue Hill Bay, the Department of Marine Resources recently approved three mussel farm applications to be sited along Long Island's eastern shore. Each two-acre site will support up to three 40 x 40 foot floating rafts.

Friends of Blue Hill Bay (FOBHB) participated as intervenors in public hearings for all three lease applications to express concern over the impact these mussel farms will have on navigation and public use of the area. Working closely with the National Park Service, FOBHB emphasized the need to protect the "for-

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Letter from the President

by Don Eley

Summer has finally arrived here in Maine and it seems as though it is already going by too fast. This past year has been a very busy one on the aquaculture front for Friends of Blue Hill Bay (FOBHB). The aquaculture industry and the State of Maine seem intent on exploiting Blue Hill Bay for industrial aquaculture.

Much of our time, effort and resources have been spent on legal action, legislation, and scientific research to retain the unique quality of Blue Hill Bay. We have enjoyed a number of successes over the past five years including: 1) no new salmon farms in the Bay; 2) tighter controls on salmon farm pollution; and 3) a legislature that is listening to our concerns.

We hope this newsletter, a new effort for FOBHB, will keep you informed about the issues we are working on and aware of the serious threat salmon farming poses to the Bay's healthy future.

The most immediate threat is the proposal for a huge expansion of salmon farming in the Bay. On August 4th, 5th, and 6th, the Department of Marine Resources (DMR) holds public hearings on nearly 100 acres of proposed salmon farms off Tinker and Hardwood Islands.

It is imperative that we stand up and let the State hear our objections. On August 4th and 5th, formal testimony opposing the salmon farms will be presented by Maine Coast Heritage Trust, the Conservation Law Foundation and Friends of Blue Hill Bay. On Wednesday, August 6th, beginning at 5:00 pm, the public will have its only opportunity to speak out. Please attend these important hearings. This past February many of you wrote letters to both the Governor and the DMR expressing your concerns. You were heard and we thank you. Let's keep up the pressure.

FOBHB's concerns are being echoed by voices of increasing scientific stature. Recently, the PEW Oceans Commission released its re-

port on America's Living Oceans. It is a critical review of past mismanagement of ocean resources and is a call to make changes that will insure this invaluable resource will be available to future generations. Among the report's recommendations is a moratorium on finfish aquaculture until national maritime aquaculture standards and policies are established. Read the full report at www.pewoceans.org.

Please enjoy this first issue of Blue Horizon. It will give you a real sense of the threat we face and what FOBHB is doing to counter that threat. We are committed to protecting this precious resource for traditional marine fisheries and so that its unique aesthetic qualities can be enjoyed by many. Thank you.

Speak Up

Please express your views to state regulators concerning new salmon farms in Blue Hill Bay.

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Research Project Nears Completion

Over the past three years Dr. Neal Pettigrew, Associate Professor of Oceanography at the University of Maine, has conducted a physical oceanographic study of Blue Hill Bay funded by Friends of Blue Hill Bay (FOBHB).

Data collection buoys were placed in the Bay for over a year to measure and record current velocities. Dissolved oxygen levels, stratification and mixing data also were documented.

This information provides a mathematical model of water movement within the Bay. Though Blue

Hill Bay has a ten-foot tide, very little water actually flushes out into the Gulf of Maine. Rather, it appears that water that exits with the last tide largely returns with the next.

This means that the Bay has little ability to process increased pollution and nutrient loading associated with industrial salmon farming. It confirms that Blue Hill Bay is an inappropriate place for salmon farming.

The importance of this research cannot be overstated as it provides concrete information regarding the amount of time waste

products spend in the Bay before flushing out (residence time). This basic science analyzes pollution accumulation in the Bay and refutes the notion that fish farm wastes flush out rapidly with the tide. Dr. Pettigrew's model will be used at the upcoming DMR hearings to emphasize that State regulators overestimated the Bay's ability to flush pollutants and that this inability should be considered when approving any expansion of fish farming.

Excerpts of the study will be available on our web site.

Don Eley, John Knutson

Friends of Blue Hill Bay is a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving the natural ecology, traditional marine fisheries and the unique aesthetic quality of Blue Hill Bay. Friends of Blue Hill Bay is a federal and state tax-exempt 501(c)(3) corporation.

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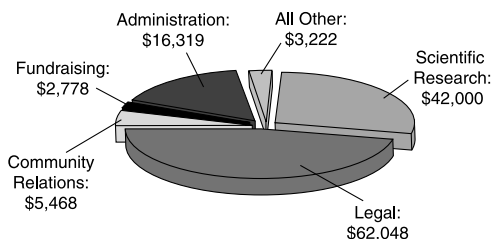
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Blue Horizon is a publication of Friends of Blue Hill Bay

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Financial Review

FOBHB Expenses
July 2002 - June 2003



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ever wild" status of Long Island and its surrounding waters as pressure mounts for increased aquaculture sites in Blue Hill Bay. The leases will be reevaluated in three years.

Legislative Overview

Thirteen aquaculture-related bills were submitted to the 2003-2004 Maine Legislative session. The concept of bay-wide management led the aquaculture agenda with a total of three bills submitted. Ultimately, these bills were consolidated into one bill creating a "Blue Ribbon Task Force on Aquaculture." The bill also provides for a "Stakeholders Advisory Panel" to advise the Task Force. The Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate will appoint members to the Stakeholders Advisory Panel. The Blue Ribbon Task Force on Aquaculture will report to the Legislature in February, 2004 unless it asks for and receives an extension.

Friends of Blue Hill Bay (FOBHB) has long recommended the development of a bay-wide management plan so that the Bay's ecological health drives economic development and recreational use. Aquaculture lease applications could then be more meaningfully evaluated to determine if they fit the criteria of a comprehensive plan designed to develop and protect the Bay.

In other legislative action, FOBHB collaborated with Senator Dennis Damon to introduce a bill that would establish a portion of the Bay that would be off-limits to salmon farming. Consideration of this legislation has been postponed until the second half of the session. By the time this legislation is considered the Blue Hill Bay Research project - sponsored by FOBHB - should be complete. This research will enable us to arm legislators with scientific data to support legislation that can protect the Bay.

BEP Finalizes Pollution Discharge Permits

Over the last several months the Maine Board of Environmental Protection (BEP) has been developing criteria for regulating the discharge of pollutants into Maine's coastal waters by industrial salmon

farms. The authority to issue National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits was handed from the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to the Maine Department of Environmental Protection last year. All the salmon farms in Maine have been operating without NPDES permits for the last 15 years, in violation of the Clean Water Act. Friends of Blue Hill Bay (FOBHB) joined the legal efforts of several conservation groups here in Maine to participate in the development of these discharge permits.

This winter FOBHB intervened at several hearings to present testimony and data supporting the need for strict controls over salmon farm pollution. In mid-May we met with the Governor and the Commissioners of the Departments of Environmental Protection and Marine Resources to express our concerns regarding the negative impact salmon farms bring to the Blue Hill Bay area.

This was a long and expensive battle that resulted in much tighter control over the salmon farming industry. The new permits impose restrictions on the salmon farmed, the pollution discharged, and the impact they can have on water quality.

One of FOBHB's goals was to see that Blue Hill Bay not fall under the general pollution discharge permit that will apply to salmon farms Downeast. Each aquaculture site in the Bay will be required to have its own NDPES permit. This allows us to work for even more stringent regulation and monitoring of salmon farms.

Aligned with our efforts was a recent federal court ruling that found two of the major salmon farms in Maine in violation of the Clean Water Act. This reinforces the argument we have made for several years that salmon farms are discharging pollutants illegally into Maine's waters.

Don Eley

Bald Eagles Abandon Nest

The Maine Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Service (MIFWS) recently surveyed the nesting Bald Eagles on Hardwood Island and discovered that the nest, with an egg, had been abandoned. The Wildlife Service expressed that the industrial operations of a salmon farm within 600 feet of the island may have disturbed the pair causing them to abandon their nest.

This appears to be evidence that industrial salmon farming can be harmful not only to the Bay's water quality but also to area wildlife. If approved, the proposed expansion of the Hardwood Island facility would bring its operations within 60 feet of the shore. Please attend the August 6th public hearings to speak out against this expansion.

Friends of Blue Hill Bay
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“Encompassing nearly 4.5 million square miles - an area nearly 25 percent larger than the land area of the nation - America's oceans are perhaps its greatest public trust. Our oceans include a diversity of animals and plants far greater than that on land, yet for centuries we have treated them as a limitless resource beyond our ability to harm. We now know that is not true. The scientific evidence that we are fundamentally altering the oceans ecosystems continues to grow. During the 20th century, our nation came to regard the air we breathe, the water we drink, and our spectacular public lands as part of the public trust. With this recognition came the political will to conserve these resources for the benefit of current and future generations. Now we must acknowledge that the oceans, too, are part of our common heritage and our common responsibility.”

Leon Panetta
Chair, PEW Oceans Commission

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