

Clammer Earns Approval For Goose Cove Experiment

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TRENTON — From a distance, Goose Cove, a shallow bight tucked behind Alley Island and Haynes Point in West Trenton, is unprepossessing.



Blue Hill clammer Joe Porada has harvested wild quahogs from the flats in Goose Cove for several years. Now he will try to cultivate the hard shell clams on his new aquaculture lease site.— PHOTO COURTESY OF MAINE SEA GRANT

Wide and shallow, with mostly gentle, grassy shores, the cove seems an unlikely source of riches. Despite that, a Blue Hill clam digger and a Downeast scientist think that Goose Cove could provide the foundation for a new Maine fishery.

Last month, the Department of Marine Resources (DMR) granted three two-acre experimental aquaculture leases to Joseph Porada. Over the past several years, Porada has harvested hard clams, also known as quahogs, from the flats in Goose Cove. Although common in southern New England, natural populations of hard clams are rare along the Maine coast.

In late 2005, working with Brian Beal of the University of Maine at Machias and the Downeast Institute for Applied Marine Research and Education, Porada harvested some hard clams to serve as broodstock for an experiment to determine whether the species could be cultivated in Goose Cove. Porada said that he received assistance from Maine Sea Grant aquaculture extension agent Dana Morse in developing his plans.

The clams were taken to the Downeast Institute hatchery on Beals Island for conditioning and spawning. Larvae from the spawning were overwintered during 2006 to seed the Goose Cove flats in 2007. At a public hearing on Porada's lease applications, held in April, Beal described the process as "groundbreaking."

The three contiguous lease sites approved by DMR are located a little more than 1,000 feet offshore, just below the mean low tide. Together, they cover an area about 1,250 feet long in an east-west direction, and 208 feet wide. At low tide, the sites are just barely covered, but at high tide, the sites are covered by 8-10 feet of water.

Porada plans to seed the lease sites with some 500,000 to 750,000 hatchery-reared juvenile clams. He will set the seed at different densities on various plots within the lease to determine which density produces the fastest growth rate.

It generally takes three to five years for juvenile clams to grow to the legal 1-inch minimum harvest size. While they are growing the tiny clams are favored diet items for a variety of seabirds and crabs. Porada plans to cover two of the sites with lightweight, small-mesh netting anchored to the bottom of the cove to determine whether it can deter or reduce predation.

According to Beal, Porada's experiment could have real benefits for Maine's hard-pressed shellfish industry. If Porada is successful, Beal said, the techniques he develops could be exported beyond Goose Cove to provide diggers in other parts of the state with another resource in addition to soft-shell clams and worms to harvest.

Porada's application to bring hard clam aquaculture to Goose Cove generated some opposition from fishermen and landowners. Several shellfish harvesters complained that Porada would still be allowed to harvest wild quahogs from the rest of Goose Cove while they would be prohibited from harvesting clams in the area where his leases were located. Despite those concerns, DMR determined that Porada's operations would have, at worst, a limited impact on other harvesters who would have continued access to 110 to 150 acres of flats in Goose Cove.

Another concern was the buoys that Porada will use to mark his site. Some owners of land bordering the cove complained that a concentration of buoys in the six-acre area of the leases would be visually obtrusive. Others expressed the concern that the buoys wouldn't be sufficiently visible to recreational boaters and kayakers using the area.

Maine law allows DMR to grant short-term, small scale experimental aquaculture leases. Porada received a lease for the maximum three-year term on each site. He will have to pay the state an annual rental charge of \$600 and will also have to provide a \$5,000 performance bond.

"I'm very happy to get this," Porada said after learning that the leases had been approved.