

## DMR Schedules Scoping Meeting For Second Mussel Farm

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Maine Cultured Mussels has set out dozens of buoys on a 50-acre site off the shore of Long Island to support suspended longlines on which mussels are grown. The company is in the early stages of applying for another aquaculture lease nearby.—STAFF PHOTO BY STEPHEN RAPPAPORT

**BLUE HILL** — Another shoe is about to drop in the battle over the expansion of mussel farming in Blue Hill Bay.

On Wednesday, Sept. 26, the Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR) will conduct a “scoping session” in connection with a plan that could double the size of a mussel farming operation off the eastern shore of Long Island.

The meeting, scheduled for 6 p.m. in the Blue Hill Town Hall, will give the public its first formal opportunity to raise questions about the plans of Maine Cultured Mussels Inc. and Mussel Bound Farms to expand their operations.

In May, DMR approved an aquaculture lease allowing MCM and Mussel Bound to grow mussels from suspended ropes on a 51.4-acre site in eastern Blue Hill Bay. The 1,600-by-1,400-foot site is situated north of Dunhams Cove, its western side about 950 feet off the Long Island beach.

In July, Erick Swanson, MCM’s operations manager, met with Blue Hill Selectman Jim Schatz and Harbormaster Dennis Robertson to outline the company’s plans to apply for another mussel aquaculture lease. The proposal he described encompassed approximately 53.4 acres located about 1,000 feet south of the existing farm and closer to Dunhams Cove.

The proposal Swanson described isn’t necessarily the proposal the public will see at the scoping session, or that will find its way into an eventual aquaculture lease application. The purpose of the scoping session is to put some flexibility into the lease application process and allow a potential applicant to modify its plans in response to public comment before filing a formal application with DMR.

Swanson’s proposal was not well received by the Blue Hill selectman. Schatz said that, as far as he could tell, DMR paid no heed to criticisms of a proposed aquaculture operation raised by the public during formal hearings on a lease application.

If MCM and Mussel Bound filed a new application, Schatz told DMR hearing officer Diantha Robinson, “I don’t want to see the same outcome.”

The Swanson family’s aquaculture ventures in Blue Hill Bay have generated considerable controversy in the past.

For a many years beginning in the early 1990s, Erick Swanson operated Trumpet Island Salmon Farm Inc. and raised Atlantic salmon on a 25-acre lease site east of Hardwood Island. The salmon farm raised substantial concerns among local environmental groups, primarily Friends of Blue Hill Bay. In 1999, Swanson began to raise mussels on the site and, by the end of 2005, the

salmon farming operation was gone and the lease size had been reduced to 15 acres entirely devoted to mussel culture.

Earlier that year, DMR granted MCM an aquaculture lease to grow mussels on suspended ropes on a 53.4-acre site east of Tinker Island I lower Blue Hill Bay. In 2006, the Hardwood Island site was transferred to MCM.

Maine Cultured Mussels is owned by Swanson's wife, Susan, of Trenton. Mussel Bound Farm is operated by his son, Spencer, a student at Maine Maritime Academy. The elder Swanson oversees the day-to-day operations of the company's farm sites, including the mussel farm off Long Island. In June, Friends of Blue Hill Bay filed suit in the Superior Court in Hancock County to overturn the DMR decision granting the Long Island lease.

Shortly after suit was filed, DMR Commissioner George Lapointe threatened to revoke the MCM lease because, he said, the company had begun operations and set out dozens of buoys on the site before complying with lease requirements that the company receive a permit from the United States Army Corps of Engineers. Ultimately the company received the necessary Corps permit.

At the July meeting in Blue Hill, Swanson suggested that MCM might consider reducing the size of its operations at Tinker Island. According to Swanson, the site is extremely exposed and difficult to operate during winter weather.

No commitment was made to actually reduce or abandon the Tinker Island operation at any specific time. If MCM and Mussel Bound Farm actually apply for and receive a 53-acre aquaculture lease, they would the acreage in Blue Hill Bay under their control and devoted to mussel culture would total approximately 170 acres.

For information, contact State Aquaculture Coordinator Samantha Horn Olsen at DMR by calling (207) 624-6554.