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## **Mussel Farmers Compromise, Submerge Rafts 10 Feet**

*By Aaron Porter*

SORRENTO — All the difficult issues had been worked through before Babe and Shain Stanley's proposed mussel and scallop farm lease made it to the public hearing stage last week.

When the Stanleys originally proposed their farming operations to be located off Bean Island between Hancock and Sorrento, there was considerable resistance from the local communities. Foremost were concerns about the 10-acre site's possible interference with recreational sailing in the area. There also were complaints about the aesthetic effect that 20 aquaculture rafts would have on the area.

With only 16 interested residents at the March 30 hearing, it was obvious that much of the opposition had disappeared.

The reason for that was Stanleys' plan to sink their farm 10 feet below the surface of the bay and to tend it between dawn and 11 a.m. from June to mid-September.

"There was really a lot of resistance to rafts on the surface, I really don't blame anyone for that," Babe Stanley said.

His solution was not to withdraw his application or push ahead in spite of the local opposition. Stanley talked the issue through with a group of Sorrento residents and then looked for solutions. In conjunction with Maine Sea Grant and the University of Maine, Stanley worked on a prototype for a mussel raft that would be submerged far enough below the surface to allow the passage of moderate vessels and be less visible from boats or the shore.

Stanley said the submerged raft also has the advantage of being less vulnerable to extreme wind and sea conditions. A video of a model in a university tank indicated that the raft would remain essentially stable in even 8-foot seas.

Stanley conceded, "It's a little tricky getting the thing up and down."

Stanley said he plans to build a 20-foot-by-20-foot prototype of the commercial 40-foot-by-40-foot rafts he will eventually need. He'll have the small version in the water this summer if the lease is granted.

He explained how the raft would have a substantial foam buoy at each corner, as well as air hoses coming to the surface, which an air compressor can be hooked up to in order to bring the raft to the surface for seeding, cleaning or harvesting. By

late morning enough air can be let out to allow the raft to go back down to the 10-foot level in time for the afternoon racing to commence.

Stanley is committed to making the submerged raft alternative work to the point that he has signed a legal agreement with the Conservation Law Foundation that limits his farm to submerged operations and specifies the time of day he can work at the site. Roger Fleming, an attorney with the foundation, said he supports Stanley's application and the research that is being done to allow the cultivation of blue mussels from submerged rafts. Part of the agreement includes the payment of \$3,000 from the foundation to Stanley as a contribution to his raft research.

Fleming and Stanley asked that their agreement be included in the department's approval of the 10-year lease.

Hearing Officer Mary Costigan said, "The department always hesitates to incorporate a private agreement." However, she said some provisions in the agreement might show up as exact conditions of the lease.

As well the mussel rafts, Stanley's application includes the capacity to grow scallops in 200 cages resting on the bottom of the site. He said the cages would be tended by divers. He said the substantial corner buoys on each raft would be reduced in size as soon as their most practical size had been determined.

There is a possibility that the Coast Guard could require some lighting or other marking to define the site.