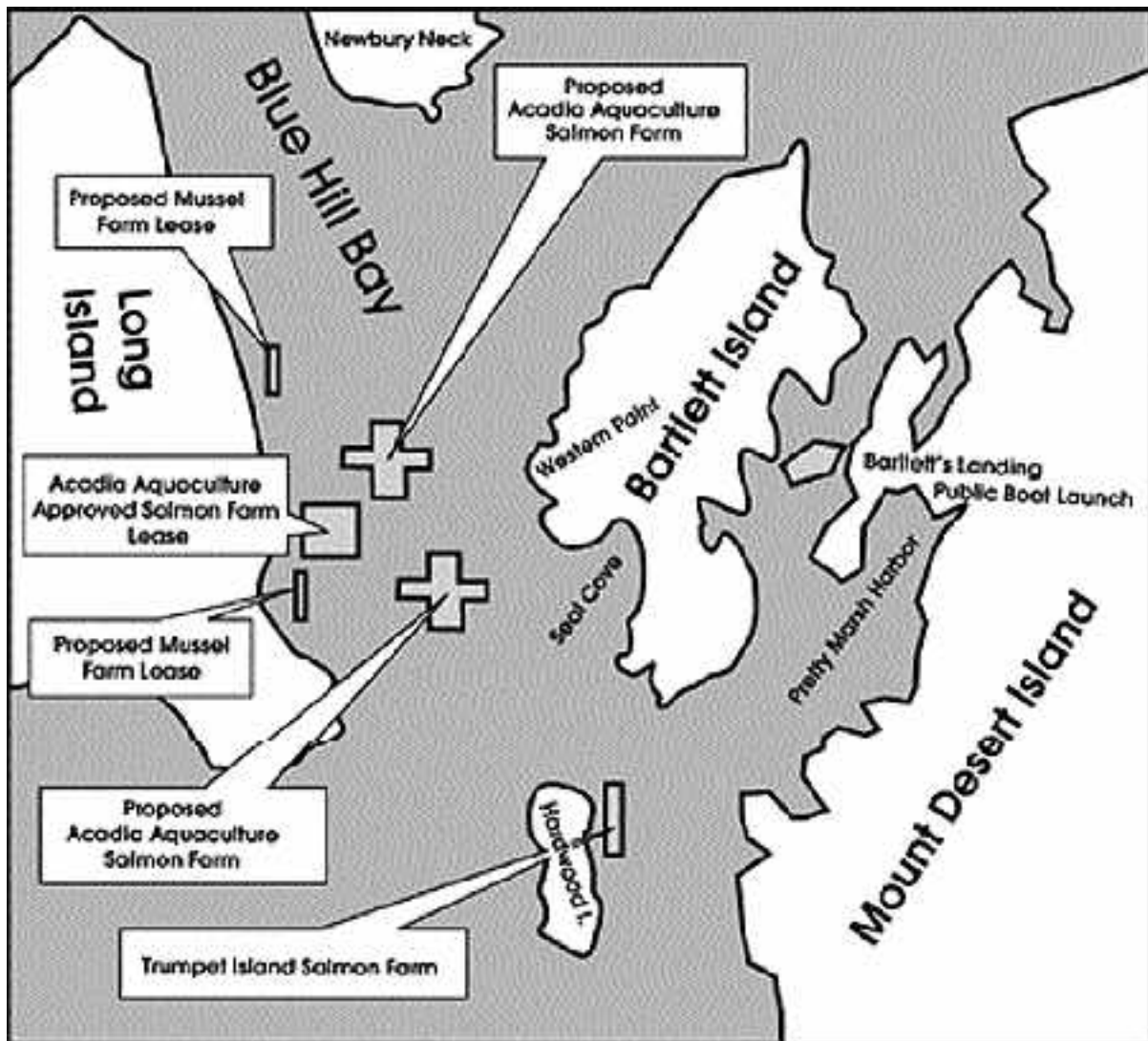


Two New Salmon Farms Proposed By Swanson for Blue Hill Bay

By Aaron Porter

BLUE HILL—Public hearings on applications for two more salmon farms in Blue Hill Bay will be held in the Town Hall March 13 at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m.

An informational meeting on the same proposals will be held in the Town Hall Feb. 25 starting at 6 p.m. to allow residents to ask questions of the applicant, Erick Swanson of Mount Desert.



The stretch of Blue Hill Bay between Long and Bartlett islands could be home to five new aquaculture leases this year if all pending applications are approved by the Department of Marine Resources. A hearing on the two latest candidates will be held March 13 in Blue Hill.

STAFF GRAPHIC BY MARY HASLAM

The two leases requested by his Acadia Aquaculture Inc. would each encompass 39.96 acres and hold up to 14, 79-by-79-foot steel cages apiece. Each surface array would measure about 607 feet by 184 feet and be held in place with 24, 770-pound anchors. The applications are for 10-year leases.

The farms will share a 40-by-20-foot steel service barge and each farm will have a 140-ton steel cone barge or equivalent for automated feeding.

According to the application, each salmon farm could hold as much as 4.4 million pounds of fish at full production. Market-sized fish will be stocked at 40,000 salmon per pen.

Swanson intends to operate one or two trips a day from public boat ramps and landings at Bartlett's Landing in Pretty Marsh and Seal Cove in Tremont to service the farms.

Fish will be fed from one of two automated feeders on barges. During the warm growing season they will be fed two or three times a day. In the winter that rate will taper off to average less than one feeding per day.

Swanson estimated the feed volume for a year at maximum production in 14 pens at about 1,377 metric tons. The applications limit antibiotic use to oxytetracycline as prescribed by a veterinarian.

His applications specify weekly dives to inspect the integrity of the net pens and to check for dead fish.

There will be predator nets hung outside of the pen to keep seals out. An audible seal chaser will help deter seal intrusion. Nets over the top of the pens will keep birds from preying on the salmon.

In order to clean marine growth from the nets, they will be changed four times from spring through fall of each year as well as washed with high-pressure water two or three times during the summer.

Harvesting will go on through the year based on market demand. A boat that carries the fish in a live-well will transfer the fish by pump from the pens for transportation to the processing facility off site.

According to his applications, Swanson's farms each will involve four full-time employees on site; two each of contract feed delivery personnel, divers and laborers; two full-time equivalents at the Connors Aquaculture hatchery; two contract carriers to move the fish; and up to 25 full-time equivalents at the processing facility during harvest.

In his application, Swanson describes two possible schedules of use for the two proposed leases in conjunction with two leases he already has in the bay.

Swanson currently operates a 25-acre lease off Hardwood Island as Trumpet Island Salmon Farm Inc. and has an approved 35-acre lease off Long Island which remains undeveloped pending a decision on discharge permitting from the Environmental Protection Agency. The Hardwood Island site started in 1993 and was developed by Swanson and Connors Aquaculture to an 18-cage salmon farm by 1999.

The two new leases would give him four sites among which to operate. Leaving one site fallow and either mixing fish of various ages on one farm or keeping so-called year classes separate would be possible depending on the particulars of emerging state regulations to protect against outbreaks of infectious salmon anemia.

The cost of each new farm is projected at \$4.4 million, to be financed through a local bank and contract growing agreements with Connors Aquaculture.

As for possible conflicting uses on the bay, Swanson contends in his applications that there is little commercial or recreational use of the waters designated between Bartlett and Long islands. Swanson said in spite of the array of mooring lines, the area around the pens would be open to any lobstermen who might want to set traps there. He added that he would like to keep the profile of the entire operation as low as possible. He said he's looking at using a feed barge that looks more like a boat than the boxy cone barge in the application.

The two farms would be located 2,600 feet and 1,800 feet, respectively, from Long Island: well in excess of the 1,000-foot separation required under the state's aquaculture lease laws. Much of the Long Island shore facing the farms is owned by the town of Blue Hill and is protected by a conservation easement with the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Swanson said he would reach an agreement with Blue Hill's Board of Selectmen about debris management and restriction of access on Long Island similar to one already reached for his Dunhams Cove lease.

There are two proposed mussel farm leases in the area awaiting Department of Marine Resources approval. One would be held by Evan Young of Hancock and the other by Ron Doane and Susan Waite of Trenton.

For more information about the pending applications, contact Laurice Churchill, Department of Marine Resources, P.O. Box 8, West Boothbay Harbor, Maine 04575. Phone 633-9584.