

Introduction

Hello, my name is Jeff Auger and I have been working at Mook Sea Farm for 8 years overseeing our market oyster production. Our mission at Mook Sea Farm is to grow wholesome, healthy, high quality shellfish using science, technology, and the principles of stakeholder capitalism that will advance the global effort towards sustainable food production. The lease we have applied for will help us continue this path by easing our day to day logistics and maintaining our growth as a company.

Mook Sea Farm has been growing oysters in the Damariscotta river for 35 years. We start raising oysters from their "birth" (spawn) in our hatchery and continue the grow out process in our Oystergro cages in the Damariscotta River. Four years ago, in 2016, I testified regarding our winter lease down at Peters Island. In that testimony we described how our company had quadrupled in 5 years, employed 14 year round workers, and with the granting of the Peter's Island lease had the opportunity to add 7 more full time jobs. Since the award of the Peters Island lease we have more than doubled our market production, added over 10 full time employees, and constructed a one of a kind state of the art facility designed to improve the company's resiliency in the face of rapidly changing environmental conditions.

Aquaculture is growing in Maine. It will play a key role in diversifying Maine's marine economy and helping to sustain working waterfronts, which have defined the character of Maine's coast for generations and draw millions of visitors every summer. We are passionate about protecting and preserving our natural resources while providing competitive jobs that attract young professionals. Over half of our employees have moved to Maine for their careers and are under 35. We are trying to provide a desirable work environment to attract a young work force to the community we love.

Our Application

The proposed lease boundaries are the product of numerous meetings, discussions, and concessions that we have made with Maine's Department of Marine Resources (DMR), riparian landowners, and commercial fisherman in the area. By going through the state's lease process we have met with local harbor masters, state officials, and advocates for commercial fisherman to address their concerns. We held a very well attended scoping session where we presented numerous layouts of the lease and allowed public input to dictate where the final lease was placed. The current proposal is by no means our original layout, but rather is the evolution of our site through the state's process.

For this application to be approved by the DMR, we must address several criteria that are spelled out by statute:

1. Riparian ingress and egress

The closest private docks/floats (not owned by Mook Sea Farm) sit 500 feet¹ to the south and 402 feet² to the north of our lease. There is one mooring 60' to the south of our site (that appeared after our scoping session) but this is not an unreasonable distance. All of our leases have moorings in their

¹ Site Review Report, page 9

² Application, page 17

vicinity. Our DAMEL3 site has a pre-existing mooring within the lease that is 100 feet away from our gear, and another mooring that was put in a few years ago which sits 90 feet from our gear. Our DAMPI2 site has moorings 37 and 48 feet from our gear. Close moorings are not an unreasonable interference on Ingress and egress but rather help illustrate how mixed uses can coexist. There is ample room to the south of our lease site, if the owners are worried about the moorings proximity they could easily move it farther south. We feel the lease poses no unreasonable interference with Riparian ingress and egress.

2. Navigation

We agree with the site review report which found the 2,500 feet of open water to the western shore sufficient to not impede navigation³. The only vessels navigating in the area are usually heading to private docks on the eastern shore of the river, however the lease area is generally avoided due to the ledge located within it. The site does not unreasonably interfere with navigation.

3. Fishing and other water related uses

As previously stated, we picked the lease boundaries after discussions with numerous individuals, including lobster fisherman. There occasionally is a lobster pot near the site, and rarely inside it; however the area is not heavily fished when compared to other spots on the Damariscotta river. Lobster traps can still be fished around the perimeter of the lease, which does not represent an unreasonable interference. We have witnessed no commercial bass fishing in the area. Some kayaking occurs along the coast in the area but our lease doesn't exclude this activity. In fact our town now has kayak aquaculture tours that routinely run in and around our sites up river. These minor impacts are not an unreasonable interference.

4. Other Aquaculture Uses

There are no aquaculture activities occurring within 1,000 feet of the site and the closest one is just under 2,000 feet away⁴. Our lease would not constitute an unreasonable interference with them.

5. Existing system support

No eelgrass has been observed on the site, and the closest historical bed is located almost 800 feet away.⁵ This site will have minimal impacts to wildlife.

³ Site Review Report, page 10

⁴ Site Review Report, page 10

⁵ Site Review Report, page 10

Conclusion

Before I conclude I would like to acknowledge the site report correctly pointed out we had applied for bottom culture on our application but failed to mention how we would undertake that process.⁶ I erred in selecting bottom culture, as stated in our application “We currently have no plans to drag this site”.⁷

We understand that no one owns the water or lease that they are granted. We have made a concentrated effort to be stewards of Maine’s public resources and feel we have a good track record of following lease rules/regulations and being a good neighbor. We look forward to working with our neighbors, DMR, or any others to address any more concerns over the site. Thank you.

⁶ Site Review Report, page 2

⁷ Application, page 9