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SHELLFISH MANAGEMENT PLAN 2024

for Washington County Territories

The Washington County Territories submits the following information as required by DMR Regulations Chapter 7.20, which states that the Shellfish Management Plan shall consist of:

- A. A written statement of goals and objectives the municipality plans to achieve as a result of its conservation program
- B. A description of the various conservation measures the municipality intends to employ to reach those goals.

Shellfish have existed in Maine waters for a long time and, in spite of all the advances in knowledge about shellfish physiology and reproduction, there is still no absolute understanding of why some years the reproductive process is very successful and other years it is unsuccessful. The inherent uncertainty created by this lack of understanding is a significant challenge in the task of shellfish management. Because of the uncertainty factor, management has often emphasized restoration and protection of shellfish habitat and a balancing of human demands on the resource such as direct harvesting of the shellfish.

Issues that need to be addressed on the level of management policy/strategy include: 1) resource management via feasibility studies, habitat surveys, etc.; 2) access, ownership and use issues; 3) water quality and habitat issues; and 4) public information, education and awareness issues.

The Committee held a public information session to explain the planning update process and solicit input concerning the current state of shellfish management issues and challenges. During the course of that meeting, a prioritized list of issues and challenges was developed:

1. **Need to balance competing uses:** moorings, shellfishing, navigation, recreational and commercial fishing, public access
2. **Boating Issues:** Moorings, seasonal, navigation
3. **Water Quality:** Need to maintain and improve water quality for shellfish. Concerns with geese/fecal coliform, and nonpoint source pollution from runoff
4. **Jurisdictional Issues:** local vs. state vs. federal, multitown jurisdiction over river and bay areas, riparian land owner friction.
5. **Public Access,** esp. small craft launching
6. **Waterfront Development**

Statement of Management Goals and Objectives:

The waters of Washington County Territories support rich shellfish populations that are an important natural resource. The Committee has identified or in some cases, reaffirmed, with public input, the following goals, objectives, and strategies to promote public and private sector participation to advance the sustainable use of shellfish resources and the marine environments they are part of.

- Develop enabling frameworks of goals, policies and regulations that specifically recognize the unique characteristics of Washington County Territory coastal waters to both protect aquatic environments and foster sustainable development of shellfish resources, within the scope of Title 12 MRSA Section 6671.
- Recognize the importance of aquaculture and other marine uses in the region and the corresponding need for balanced expansion of shellfish and shellfish habitat for the benefit of current and future generations.
- Enhance water quality to maximize the extent of town coastal waters open to recreational and commercial shellfish harvesting activities.
- Improve and strengthen regulations and enforcement mechanisms in an integrated manner for the sustainable management of coastal and marine resources.
- Facilitate and implement effective harvesting strategies to achieve responsible shellfishing in the region, by sharing information and expertise with other shellfish committees, State and Federal regulatory agencies, marine scientists and technologists and the shellfish industry.
- Acknowledge the importance of maintaining and enhancing public access to intertidal shellfish beds.
- Loss or degradation of habitat results in loss of shellfish resources. Accordingly, habitat protection, restoration and enhancement, within the scope of Title 12 MRSA Section 6671, are critical to the Committee's mission.

As in the original Shellfish Management Ordinance, the Washington County Territories' Shellfish Committee has identified key strategies to maintain the productivity of the shellfish resources and meet the goals and policies established above. These strategies can be broadly classified as:

- 1) resource management,
- 2) water quality maintenance,
- 3) equitable access, ownership and use,
- 4) public awareness, information and education.

1. Resource Management Strategies:

- Maximize the amount of productive, open shellfish beds for public recreational harvesting.
- Examine all shellfish resources for integration into a comprehensive management plan.
- Develop a shellfish survey program to provide harvest and utilization data from commercial and recreational sources.
- Identify nursery/seed areas and areas for possible transplanted sites.
- Adopt an equitable fee schedule to allow the shellfish management program to be self-supporting.
- Develop an internship program with local high schools and colleges.
- Examine habitat restoration and introduction or reintroduction of shellfish into appropriate town waters, within the scope of Title 12 MRSA Section 6671.
- Promote and manage responsible new technologies for shellfish propagation (Aquaculture)

2. Water Quality Maintenance:

- Reexamine water quality testing of areas with potential for conditional openings of shellfish beds.
- Encourage town to repair or replace faulty sewer systems that may have adverse effects on water quality and monitor all systems near water.
- Encourage and examine the possibility of restoring circulation in constricted coves and estuaries, either with culverts, removal of debris, etc.
- Request sanitary surveys of structures adjacent to shellfish waters while obtaining statements from all appropriate regulatory and funding agencies, at all levels of government, on their responsibilities in bringing about improved water quality.

3. Equitable Access, Ownership and Use Strategies:

- Recognize need to balance shellfishing activities with other competing uses, with an emphasis on habitat protection and enhancement, within the scope of Title 12 MRSA Section 6671.
- Clarify ownership of any granted or leased grounds within the Territories' waters.
- Provide delineation, signage and maintenance of all legally available public right-of-ways to shellfish resources.
- Examine possible access to areas being considered for conditional openings and encourage appropriate access.
- Ensure consistency between state and local regulations to facilitate harvest and management of shellfish resources.
- Encourage state and municipal adoption of bulkhead and channel lines to prevent further encroachment on, or diminished access to, shellfish resources.

4. Public Awareness, Information and Education Strategies:

- Develop an educational program on shellfish resources and their dependence on land use policies and practices for public education.
- Provide maps of approved and closed shellfish growing areas and public access points with all shellfish permits.
- Encourage legislation to more clearly define and fund agencies and programs which can protect or restore shellfish habitats and resources.
- Monitor harvests and provide assistance, possibly in the form of additional shellfish wardens, to enforce shellfishing regulations.

Description of Conservation Measures:

Description of specific measures we plan on taking through 2024 to achieve these goals include:

- Provide unlimited recreational and commercial licenses for residents.
- Assess population levels (Softshell Clam) to determine if they are being overharvested. Surveys will be done by members of the Shellfish Committee, by commercial harvesters for conservation hours, and by students from area schools. Data on 2023-24 is anticipated to focus on cits that the program has currently closed for Softshell clam seeding.
- Complete our three-year clam recruitment study to determine the role of predation versus other factors (e.g. overharvesting, global climate change) on local clam populations. The study will be completed by the committee while partnering with DEI. This data is compiled each season and analyzed, and the data is shared at the annual meeting in April.
- Explore collaborative work opportunities with other towns in the Cobscook Bay Region including research, education, and management of marine resources.
- Continue to improve access to information for harvesters both at access points and on the Territories' website, emphasizing the framework of the Ordinance and public health closures of areas due to possible contamination of shellfish due to onshore pollution, harmful algal blooms, or large rainfall events.
- Enforcement is a critical part of our conservation. The enforcement of our ordinance protects against over harvesting, protection of newly seeded areas, and secures relationships between harvesters and property owners.
- The bulk of our conservation is predator prevention, softshell clam seeding, closing freshly seeded areas for 3 years, flat surveying, and recruitment box deployment and retrieval.

Contact Information for Washington County Territories Shellfish Committee:

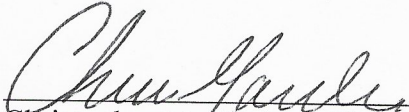
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WASHINGTON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS



Christopher M. Gardner, Chairman

2/15/24
Date

John B. Crowley, Sr., Commissioner

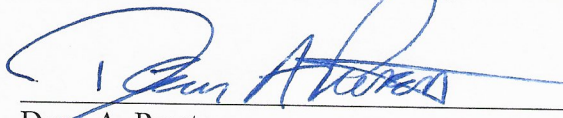
Date



Vinton Cassidy, Commissioner

2/15/24
Date

Witness for Washington County Commissioners:



Dean A. Preston
U.T. Supervisor

2/15/2024
Date

TWO (2) ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS EXECUTED; ONE KEPT IN EACH OF THE FOLLOWING OFFICES:

1. Washington County Commissioners', Machias, Maine.
2. Department of Marine Resources, Hallowell, Maine.