

Harbor Icing

The fall and winter of 2017/2018 presented a difficult time for our commercial oyster fishery. Demand for oysters fell dramatically in the fall, leaving wild fishermen without markets and aquaculturists with large unsold inventory of market-ready oysters. This created an economic incentive to delay overwintering activities.

Mother nature ... and markets

- The ice up happened around the holidays and came quick and relatively early.
- This is the first year that the date on the overwintering agreement was preceded by significant ice.
- There was a lack of good (big) tides before the ice. Many grant holders were waiting for the big tides of the last weekend of December to get their equipment off. Ice came first.
- The fall and early winter oyster market was very poor, leaving grant holders with thousands of marketable oysters, which have poor pit survival as compared with smaller oysters. This meant that people were keeping their oysters on the grants as long as possible to try and get them sold.
- We empathize with the losses of both gear and shellfish stock incurred by growers this year.

The Shellfish Department's bottom line for this winter was to collect overwintering agreements from all grant holders who were leaving rigid gear out. The agreements specified that all gear was tagged, pumped to within 8" of the bottom and how many were left. Compliance was poor.

- All grant holders were notified of necessity of tagging all racks before the ice and getting the paperwork in during our fall and winter grant inspections. All were handed agreements and verbally told that this was the bottom line to which the entire harbor was going to be held accountable.
- Only eight overwintering agreements were turned in by grant holders before the ice came.
- An additional eleven grant holders turned in paperwork late.
- The two biggest impacts of ice on aquaculture gear:
 - Unsightly and dangerous gear gets strewn around the harbor, which can present hazards to navigation and other users of the harbor.
 - When loose, untagged racks and gear tear up a person's quahog nets, we have no way of holding anyone accountable for reparations.

Regulation 7.19.3: Marking of Gear

Every licensee shall clearly and permanently mark any and all trays, boxes, holding cars and all other aquaculture gear with the license number of the license area in a manner that is clearly visible.

- If we enforce this regulation, it would take a significant investment of man hours during big tides and effort would need to be pulled off of vibrio patrol and other issues.
- Enforcement will be invasive because every bag will need to be inspected, no matter what other activity is occurring, such as planting clams.
- Our solution is that all rigid gear is tagged well in advance of winter weather.
- During grant inspections, we asked that all racks that were taken off for the winter, would come back out in the spring already tagged.

DISCUSSION – issues to reach consensus on:

- What gear will be tagged (and compliance enforced)
- Dates for getting it tagged
- Revision to overwintering agreement language and deadlines