Wellfleet Shellfish Department

TOWN OF WELLFLEET on Cape Cod

300 Main Street, Wellfleet, Massachusetts 02667

Wellfleet Shellfish Department Operations Plan

December 1, 2015

The Wellfleet Shellfish Department's mission is first and foremost to ensure healthy levels of Shellfish throughout the harbor and to respect all user groups of the harbor to ensure balance and opportunity for everyone interested in shellfishing. This is accomplished through many tasks including enforcement, education and propagation.

1. **Enforcement Patrols**: The Wellfleet Shellfish Department is a seven day a week department conducting daily patrols on the flats in order to make sure every fisherman has a valid Wellfleet license, size limits and daily bag limits are respected. During winter months there is only one daylight tide due to shorter days, however, during summer months there are days when two patrols, are necessary. Depending on the height of the tide we typically come in two hours before low tide and finish up two hours after. During the summer months covering the whole harbor can be a challenge; traffic on Route 6 can make it difficult to reach access points in a timely fashion. The most important piece of equipment to perform this task is the Department trucks. Presently the Department operates a Ford Ranger pickup truck and a Ford F-150 pickup. The Ford Ranger trucks are very light duty and are in the shop on a regular basis. The DPW is responsible for the upkeep of these vehicles and oil changes are performed regularly. Additionally, in the summer months, Indian Neck is open to recreational fishing on Wednesdays and Sundays and must also be patrolled. Our all terrain vehicle (ATV) is used for this task as well as in our propagation program. In the winter months the ATV is used by the DPW to plow the sidewalks in town. When low tide is over, we wash the trucks daily. During summer months, there might be a few draggers working and we run our 24' boat out to check their catch as well.
    a. Staff required: Normally two staff work each tide, but days off and some other tasks, such as propagation can result in a single individual patrolling. Every attempt is made to schedule vacations when areas are closed and staff demands are the lightest.
    b. Equipment required. Equipment use depends on available staff:
        i. ATV.
        ii. Trucks – most commonly two trucks are used.
        iii. Boat – the department has a single 24 foot skiff. This size boat was selected because in prior years larger boats proved unwieldy and smaller ones could not handle some rough conditions.

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2. **Cultching**: Cultching is a practice which has been taking place in Wellfleet since the late 1980's. Cultching is deploying sea clam shells into the harbor in order to catch a "set" or seed oysters. Typically this takes place in the month of June and is completed by the fourth of July. It is essential to time this event since oysters start to spawn when the water temperature reaches 68 degrees which usually occurs in early July. If the shell is deployed too early, the shell can "slime" up and becomes smooth and won't catch a set since oysters need something rough to attach to. Years ago, fishermen would volunteer their time and labor to manually shovel the shell over which was back breaking and time consuming. Presently, we have an old highway sanding from the DPW. which deploys the shell from the Department barge. It is a two man operation, a Shellfish Department employee running the barge and a D.P.W. employee hauling the shell from the transfer station. The barge still functions well, however. it's not getting any younger and is a bit weathered. We are getting grants for higher amounts of cultch and a second barge would surely be required to handle the workload. During winter months, the barge stays in the water since hauling it would be a risk due to its age. Every fall the outboard fuel is treated so it will be good in the spring. The outboards remain on the barge during winter months. Maintenance is performed on the beach next to the L pier at low tide so hauling can be avoided.
    a. Staff required:
        i. While two staff per barge is preferable, the Department has historically used a single person crew on the barge.
    b. Equipment:
        i. Cultch barge(s): Currently one, a second one is being procured as part of the fiscal 2015 capital plan.
3. **Propagation**: In order to help with the wild stock of hardshell clams the Shellfish Department grows 300,000 clams a year purchased by our budget supplemented with approximately 200,000 additional clams from the County. These tiny clams "size of a grain of sand" are planted in 4' x 4' trays which we constructed a few years ago. They grow from June until September when they reach the size of a dime. Then they are planted directly into the ground and covered with nets which protect them against crabs and ducks which can wipe them out over night. Ten years ago these clams would get to legal size in just over two years however, for reasons unknown, quahogs now take four, five and in some cases six years to reach legal size. For this reason it has been increasingly difficult to satisfy fishermen wishing to harvest these species. Most of these clams supply Indian Neck during the summer months. Due to the slow growth, many fishermen who enjoy coming to the Cape in the summer to go clamming, have become more frustrated and in some cases down right angry towards the Department. Growing these clams takes a lot of time and effort. First, each cage must be lined with window screen each year to ensure the small seed clams stay in the trays. Two Department employees work on this gear in the winter months when the Department is not as busy. Next each cage must be filled with sand, hauled down to the town bed where the seed clams are then placed inside sealed, and secured to the bottom. After being planted and grown to legal size, they are harvested by hand using a bull rake, transported by boat, and spread out on the flats where they

are then quickly plucked out of the water by the hundreds of people who fish Indian neck in the summer months. In order to keep non commercial shellfish permit holders happy, one employee has to dig the grant at least two day a week and the other employee must patrol this area two days a week. This activity takes a lot of time which makes performing the Department's other tasks difficult. This year the Department is going to purchase clams from draggers to keep this program going as I believe it brings people into town where money is spent which boosts the local economy.

a. Staff required:
    i. One staff person patrols the non commercial areas two days each week. Another digs clams to distribute over the public areas one or two days per week. Both staff are used for these purposes during the entire period the flats are exposed. During the summer months the department is stretched thin and a part-time seasonal employee would certainly make a huge difference in performing all the necessary tasks which are expected of us.

b. Equipment:
    i. The ATV is used for patrols.
    ii. The skiff is used for digging clams and patrolling draggers.

4. **Public Relations and Education**: As town employees, it is necessary for us to conduct ourselves as professionals when dealing with the public even when this can be difficult. Many people visiting the Cape, especially during summer months, are curious about shellfishing and ask a lot of questions. It is important to answer their questions as well as possible while being friendly and respectful. We really enjoy sharing something new and interesting as these people come from all walks of life and in some cases have not even seen the ocean before. We like to explain what we do but also enjoy hearing what they do since it's usually something completely new to us. Education is something important in our line of work. Many new license holders need to be taught how to measure an oyster or just where to go to get the best catch. Over the years several talks have been given in schools, for the boy scouts, and the general public such as my annual talk at OysterFest. The Department has also been on the news, and several papers and magazines promoting the product.
    a. Staff required:
        i. Shellfish Constable, as opportunities arise.
5. **The Private Sector**: Wellfleet is currently the largest aquaculture town in Massachusetts with approximately two hundred and forty acres of licensed areas. There are three types of aquacluturiststs in town. Those who are full time, those who grow shellfish as a supplement to another business, and finally those who do the bare minimum. As well as our duties to the general public, the Shellfish Department has certain duties it must perform in the private sector. My duties as Constable include assigning new grants, assign or denying extensions to existing grants, renewing grant licenses, making sure minimal productions have been met, visiting grants to ensure all regulations are being met as well as all essential paper work Due to our daily patrols we see most grants daily on Indian Neck, Lieutenants' Island, and Mayo Beach. Egg Island is more difficult due to monitor

due to tides which hide a lot of these grants and their equipment. Town shellfish regulations require a once a year inspection by the Shellfish Constable. The time of year when you can observe everything or a particular grant is in the spring and summer months since days are longer and the best extreme tides are always early morning and late in the afternoon. Winter time presents more of a challenge since a lot of these grants are not accessible during daylight hours. The Department's plan this year is to visit each grant every month and write a report for each grant to ensure regulations are followed.

a. Staff required:
    i. There are approximately 100 shellfish grants in Wellfleet Harbor. Excluding the deep water grants which do not reveal much during an inspection, the Department still lacks the staff necessary to inspect each grant monthly. The Department estimates that they do 15 grant inspections monthly.

6. **Working with the Division of Marine Fisheries**: The Shellfish Department works with the DMF on a regular basis. We bring a member of the DMF out on our boats monthly to take water samples throughout the harbor to ensure that the shellfish that are harvested are safe for human consumption. We also work together on surveying areas for potential shellfish grants, creating regulations, as well as monitoring diseases such as Vibrio which recently has become an issue in the summer months and will be highly regulated this coming season. We also work with county biologists performing regular tests on our shellfish to help detect and understand other diseases which affect our shellfish.
    a. Staff required:
        i. Shellfish Constable. Once or twice a month DMF biologists are taken to sites using the Department skiff for water samples. This usually takes 1 – 2 hours each time. The department also supports DMF in assisting with the setting and removal of temperature sensing gear annually.
    b. Equipment:
        i. Department skiff.

7. **Equipment Maintenance**: All of our equipment is serviced regularly per manufacturer's recommendations, which includes oil and fluid changes, as well as worn out parts such as water pumps breaks tires etc. I have recently set up a spread sheet on our computer so I can more accurately document all maintenance done on equipment.

Andrew Koch
Shellfish Constable