



BLUE HORIZON

Friends of Blue Hill Bay

www.fobhb.org

Winter 2021

Issue 21

Hello to the Friends of Blue Hill Bay,

We won't talk about 2020, and 2021 is almost over. Normalcy is returning and it has been a busy time on the Bay. Covid and remote working has slowed permitting processes and reduced the ability to express concerns for proposed activities that may be detrimental to Blue Hill Bay.

At the Friends, 2021 has been the year to upgrade and refresh its website. It is a work in progress which will present current issues impacting the Bay, as well as offer a photographic presentation of scenery and activities. This newsletter presents familiar and new topics that are developing in Blue Hill Bay. Friends of Blue Hill Bay Board members have attended in person or remote hearings and meetings on these topics in order to stay informed and express the Friends' opinions.

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Army Corps of Engineers Blue Hill Harbor Dredging Study, (What's the Real Cost?)

A plan to dredge a channel to the Blue Hill town dock has progressed in 2020 and 2021. In March 2020, the Army Corps of Engineers did a public presentation of its work in Blue Hill. After concluding environmental studies, a plan was presented for dredging a 2,600-foot long, 80-foot wide, and 6-foot deep channel and turning basin in the inner harbor. Harbor sediment near the dock was found to be contaminated with polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) which are common contaminants associated with "heavier" fuels such as diesel and bunker oil as well as with coal ash and road runoff. The 92,500 cubic yards (c.y.) of uncontaminated dredged material would be disposed of off Eastern Passage, an approved spoil site in Blue Hill Bay. The PAH contamination disallowed open water disposal. The Corps proposed to bury the contaminated dredged material in an excavated pit in the harbor and then capped with clean sediment. This Confined Aquatic Disposal (CAD) Cell will receive 10,600 c.y. of PAH-contaminated sediment.

The Corps indicated at the 2020 Blue Hill presentation that its studies were completed and that it needed \$40,000 from the Town of Blue Hill to finalize the reports for permit review. There was no public notice of the funds being approved, however, the Corps presented its Navigation Improvement Project to federal and state agencies for review in January 2021.

To date the town has contributed \$144,000 toward the dredging studies. Initially the Corps estimated the cost of the dredging to be in the \$1 million range, with the town responsible for 10% of the cost up front

and 10% once the project was finished. Most recently, the Corps estimated the dredging cost closer to \$3.5 million (\$686,000 to the town). \$343,000 will be required up front and the remaining \$343,000 upon project completion from Blue Hill, which can be paid over 30 years. The town will also be responsible for the cost of any dock facilities necessary to access the dredged turning basin. In March 2021, the Town of Blue Hill informed the Corps that it supports the project and is willing to provide the cost-sharing funds pending approval of the annual budget appropriation during an open town meeting.

It needs to be recognized that the harbor, near the town dock, has historically been a mud flat since the first navigation charts of the area were produced. Once a channel is dredged the harbor will attempt to return to equilibrium by refilling the channel. In-fill material would be from channel sidewall slumping, circulation-borne sediment and the Mill Stream sediment. It is difficult to determine the actual environmental impact from the dredging or the potential future costs to the town for maintenance of the channel. Harder still is trying to determine what the impact of climate change and sea-level rise may have on not only this project but also our valued local fisheries and the harbor itself. It's important that all stakeholders in this process have the opportunity to be heard and discuss the advantages as well as the challenges of this project.



1885 Blue Hill Harbor NOAA Chart



Proposed Channel and CAD Cell Locations

Rockweed Harvesting

In 2019, the Maine Supreme Court unanimously held that rockweed, a seaweed that grows in the intertidal area, is owned by the intertidal property owner and not the public. The ruling was against Canada-based Acadian Seaplants, a large producer of marine-plant products. Rockweed, or Knotted Wrack, has been historically harvested on a small scale. More recently, a commercial harvest has emerged for fertilizer, a livestock dietary supplement, and packing material to keep seafood moist for shipping.

Although there are no known issues along the Blue Hill Bay shoreline, the Friends are aware of mechanical harvesting by Acadian Seaplants elsewhere without landowner permission or with local government approval. Complaints to the Maine DMR go unheeded as the agency still approaches rockweed management as a fishery, contrary to the Court ruling.

The Friends will continue to monitor the rockweed harvesting matter. We have a concern about commercial mechanical harvesting and would appreciate any landowners contacting the Friends should they become aware of active mechanical harvesting in Blue Hill Bay proper.

Blue Hill Bay Aquaculture Lease Update

In September 2021 the Mussel Bound, Inc. application received DMR approval for a 3.5-acre lease to grow shellfish using suspended aquaculture gear, specifically polar circles (large plastic circular arrangements with ropes suspended beneath). This is an expansion for the company that presently has the polar circles off the east side of Hardwood Island.

In May 2021 Cooke Aquaculture USA, Inc. filed for the renewal of its salmon pens off Black Island in Frenchboro. The pens experienced a massive fish die-off in August that was attributed to low dissolved oxygen levels. Cooke appeared slow in notifying Maine DMR and DEP. Cooke had been fined by the DEP in 2019 for failing to perform water sampling and reporting at this location as required by its permits. A public hearing in November was attended by FOBHB board members and fishermen who opposed the 20-year renewal of the permit.

Open Water Salmon Pens Proposed in Frenchman Bay

American Aquafarms, a Nordic company, has filed a DMR permit application for a 120-acre open water salmon farm that can produce 33,000 tons of salmon annually in 30 pens. 4.4 billion gallons of waste will be generated daily, 22,000 times greater than that of Bar Harbor. The proposed operation is 20x larger than what Norway allows. The proposal has been opposed by many, including the National Park Service and the Friends of Frenchman Bay. Historically, there has been mutual support between FOBHB and the Friends of Frenchman Bay. FOBHB supports their opposition and recognizes that these proposals can still arise anywhere in Maine's waters.

Union River Dam Permit Renewal

The federal permits for the Ellsworth and Graham Lake dams on the Union River in Ellsworth are up for renewal. In June 2021, the state DEP denied Water Quality Certifications for the dams which makes a federal permit unlikely. The 71-foot Ellsworth dam was built in 1907 and generates 8.9-megawatts of electricity, about 1% of Maine's hydroelectric power. The regulators take issue with the inability of sea-run fish to successfully pass the dams. Denial of the permits would likely lead to the dams' removal, restoration of ecosystem connectivity, and the return of Atlantic salmon, sturgeon, eels, herring, alewife, and smelt to the Union River watershed. The smaller species are prey to the over-fished commercial fish species. Black Bear Hydro, the dam owner, has filed an appeal on the ruling. The Friends will monitor the progress of the dams' fate.

Dottie Hayes Scholarship

The Friends of Blue Hill Bay had established a scholarship to honor the memory of Dottie Hayes, one of the Friends' founders. The annual scholarship awards \$2,000 to a local graduating student of George Stevens Academy who is continuing to pursue a college education in the field of environmental science. This year's award has been made to Ms. Hope Bowden of Orland who will attend the University of Maine to major in marine science. We look forward to making an award in 2022 to assist in the next generation's continued protection of the marine environment.

We thank you for all your continued support to see that Blue Hill Bay remains an environmentally healthy and economically valuable marine resource. Check our website for updates on current issues.

Friends of Blue Hill Bay, Board of Directors



Friends of Blue Hill Bay

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Friends of Blue Hill Bay is a non-profit organization dedicated to conserving the natural ecology, sustainable marine fisheries and the unique aesthetic quality of Blue Hill Bay. The health of the bay is important to everyone. To that end your contributions help our continued advocacy and legal challenges to ensure a healthy future for bay. Please visit our new website at www.fobhb.org.

Thank you for your generosity!

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