

**Bay SAMP Aquaculture Element Working Group**  
**February 7, 2022 from 4:00 - 6:00 pm (virtual meeting)**  
**Summary Notes**

**Purpose of the meeting:** The meeting focused on actions the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) will be implementing to enhance the aquaculture permitting process in response to the public comments received over the past several weeks.

**Welcome and Agenda Overview:** Jennifer McCann, of the University of Rhode Island Coastal Resources Center, started the meeting by welcoming approximately 30 online attendees and providing the purpose of the meeting. She then introduced Jeff Willis, CRMC Executive Director, who thanked the attendees and all who had contributed comments. Willis reminded the group that the CRMC is working overtly through the revision process for the Aquaculture Element to specifically make changes that will make the regulations, which have been considered nationally as both useful and thoughtful models, better for all stakeholders – from all perspectives of conservation, recreational activity, coastal protection, and economic development. He also said that the amount of perspective and information that made up the public comments was in-depth, detailed, and enabled the CRMC to do significant work on both planning administrative changes that can be implemented immediately, as well as structuring the draft regulatory changes that will require about six months for the formal adoption timeline.

**Summary of Stakeholder Comments:** A CRMC team, Willis and Aquaculture Coordinator Ben Goetsch, provided the overview of three categories of administrative changes that, based on the comments, can be implemented for all stakeholders immediately to enhance how decision-making and dialogue about proposed aquaculture lease permits take place.

***NOTE: These notes provide an overview of the administrative changes; to see the detailed PowerPoint presentation of the changes, see: <http://www.crmc.ri.gov/aquaculture.html>. The recording of the virtual meeting is at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bb-U62SvGGM>. A full list of all the sites and tools that appear in these notes is included at the end.***

**Summary of Planned Administrative Revisions:** Willis and Goetsch reviewed with the group the three categories of administrative changes that reflect public comments and suggestions and can be put in effect immediately: Notification process, the Permit Determination process, and Aquaculture Gear guidelines. Key information about each of these three administrative categories that can be changed now:

1. Notification process: This is one of the main areas in which people provided comments; Willis indicated that many comments were directed at, as the CRMC intended, enhancing the process by which people learn about, or are made aware of, proposed

aquaculture lease permits. He said that due to comments, the CRMC will be going beyond its already generous process of requiring alerts for property abutters and stakeholders within a 500-foot circumference of the proposed lease site – the new circumference is 1000 feet, which will double the area and ensure that more stakeholders than ever before are notified of proposed leases. Willis said that the CRMC has traditionally alerted property owners about proposed lease sites, and has worked with state and municipal partners to alert stakeholders of permit processes. He said that this change will widen the circle of those formally notified. Also, a major addition of the notification process, which is already in use, is the CRMC Aquaculture Element listserv – anyone can sign up here: [http://listserve.ri.gov/mailman/listinfo/ri\\_aquaculture](http://listserve.ri.gov/mailman/listinfo/ri_aquaculture).

*Tool tour and discussion:* A little later in the meeting, this effort to increase notification was described further, when mapping technician Chris Damon, of the URI Environmental Data Center, provided the working group and attendees with a tour and tutorial for using two tools that will help them understand where a proposed lease site is, what the 1000-foot circumference for notification is, and what parcels are within the circle, so property owners and abutters or other entities can be looked up further in municipal offices. One tool is the Hard Constraints Map and the Aquaculture Lease Screening Tool. Both can be linked to on the Bay SAMP web site. Damon encouraged everyone to make use of the easy-to-use tools, and said he is available should anyone need help working with the items. It should also be noted, said Willis, later, that another tool to assist with aquaculture permit planning, SHELLFAST-RI, is expected to be ready for use in March, and furthermore, the CRMC is constructing an online database for permit planning – it is in the works, but it is an extensive undertaking, and is going to take the CRMC more time and money to complete.

2. Permit Determination process: Willis said that while he was surprised that comments did not encourage the introduction of a community scoping forum to the existing permit determination process, he said it was extremely useful to receive stakeholder guidance that the most important thing the CRMC can do for this aspect is continue to listen and work hard with the permit applicant to ensure that a proposed project fits with the needs and goals of the host community and neighbors. To that end, the CRMC will immediately implement, if needed, a second applicant meeting so that the proposed project can continue to receive close scrutiny and advice and guidance by the permitting staff, working in concert with state and municipal partners and stakeholders.
3. Aquaculture Gear Siting guidelines: The change here is that immediately, the guidelines will recommend that low-profile growing gear (no more than four inches above the water surface) be used. The information here is extensive, and the full guidance should be consulted in the presentation. Goetsch indicated that gear use involves understanding and discussion of the kinds of activities with which a proposed farm may be nearby or interacting with – a gear choice needs to consider the kinds of fishing or

recreational boating activity that may be taking place in the farm locale, so nuanced discussion is necessary. Guidance is intended to make it possible for farmers to use an efficient cultivation method in a way that minimizes the visual impact of the operation.

**Discussion:** After the presentation of the three categories for the immediate administrative changes, McCann facilitated discussion so the group and attendees could ask questions of Willis, Goetsch, Damon, or of each other. Again, it is useful to view the recording, to hear each question and response, as they covered all three aspects of the administrative changes. However, two particular discussions gained the most attention and thought. The first of these questions came from Gary Dorfman; he asked the CRMC and the group to think about how aquaculture leases could be permitted to leverage opportunities for other bay activities; for example, could a proposed lease be designed to serve as a buffer, protecting swimmers from motorized vehicles like Jetskis, or providing recreational anglers with richer fishing locales? In response, the CRMC, including Deputy Director Jim Boyd, indicated that it has been impressed with the creative degree of thought that stakeholders are providing to the process, and that these kinds of design discussions are increasingly a part of coastal and ocean planning. The other discussion that prompted group thinking was brought up by Bob Rheault, of the East Coast Shellfish Growers Association, who brought up two issues, as a farmer: first, he asked the group to consider that the current guidelines regulations are such that farms have no choice but to stay precariously small and undeveloped – he said if farms are to become the economic engine the state envisions, the current paradigm does not work. Second, he asked the CRMC and the group to give care to gear guidelines, because here too, certain guidelines, like the recommendation for low-profile systems, inherently require farmers and hands to do a lot more work, and expend time and money, to keep the shellfish defouled and healthy. Goetsch said that these discussions are important, but also reminded the group that Rhode Island’s aquaculture regulations are considered models around the country, as they go a distance to serve farmer and public needs. He indicated the restriction on size of leases in the upper bay has been in regulation since 2017.

**Next Steps:** McCann and the CRMC staff thanked the group for their significant input and comments and Willis said that the administrative changes will go live now, and that the CRMC will continue to work with the group to move through the formal process for adoption of the regulatory changes which will take about six months. More information and meetings will be scheduled for spring and summer. The meeting was then adjourned.

List of Websites and Tools:

1. Recording of the Feb 7, 2022 working group meeting: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bb-U62SvGGM>
2. PowerPoint Presentation of Planned Revisions to the CRMC Aquaculture Application process: <http://www.crmc.ri.gov/aquaculture.html>
3. CRMC Aquaculture Listserve: [http://listserve.ri.gov/mailman/listinfo/ri\\_aquaculture](http://listserve.ri.gov/mailman/listinfo/ri_aquaculture)