

March 08, 2007

Share the bay

How easily this debate could be framed as a battle between the wealthy waterfront homeowner vs. the blue-collar fisherman trying to eke out a living off the shores of Osterville.

But the controversy over floating oyster bags in the Three Bays system, which includes West, North and Cotuit bays, is not only about the view from trophy homes; it's also about the appropriate use of a public resource.

On one side of the battle is Al Suprenant, owner of Cape Cod Oyster Co., which is trying to raise oysters in floating aquaculture bags that cover up to a half-acre of water surface. On the other side are homeowners in the area who think the floating bags are unsightly, pose navigational hazards, and restrict public access to fishing and sailing.

"It's a typical multi-user conflict between the people who live on (the water) and the people who farm it," said Barnstable Shellfish Biologist Tom Marcotti.

The logical solution, then, is for the interested parties to sit down and reach a negotiated settlement. If necessary, hire a mediator and find a compromise.

After all, the town of Barnstable has issued multiple licenses to Suprenant to work the Three Bays system, and the state Department of Environmental Protection and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have

approved the floating bags. The Corps allows a maximum of 20,000 square feet of floating bags per licensed area.

At the same time, the Friends of West Bay allege that Suprenant installed a 20,000-square-foot floating bag system in West Bay last summer even though his company had no license to farm that area.

And last week, the Barnstable Waterways Committee voted not to recommend Suprenant's application to put floating bags near the busy entrance to West Bay. Likewise, Wellfleet prohibits growers from using floating bags because of navigational hazards in the town's busy harbor.

What's ironic, however, is that nutrient loading of the bay system, caused, at least in part, by septic systems from the ever-increasing number of homes along the shore, is the very reason why oysters must be grown in the floating bags. Oysters grown on the bottom in Three Bays tend to become overwhelmed by algae caused by excess nitrogen in the water.

Nevertheless, one possible solution to the controversy is to divvy up the 20,000-square-foot tracts into smaller operations and place them in more remote areas of the bays.

The town of Barnstable has formed a joint committee of the shellfish and waterways committees in an effort to find a solution. So far, however, a compromise has eluded the joint committee.

Natural Resources Director Doug Kalweit predicted there could be litigation filed by those who aren't satisfied with any decision. "Don't see how it won't go there," he said.

That would be a shame because it is the government's responsibility to strike a balance between private aquaculture and the public's use of Three Bays.

Posted March 8, 2007 12:00 AM | [Permalink](#)

POSTED COMMENTS

These homeowners cant be serious? Oystering is a essential activity that has been a cape tradition for many more years than they have their houses there. Restricting water access? Give me a break it covers a half acre of surface water, it isnt sitting on your beachfront walkway or on a town landing, launch your boat on the clear side of the half acre it's taking up, simple as that. A half acre especially on the surface is barely anything at all. Walk a couple hundred feet and cast your fishing line where the bags aren't located. The whole argument which isnt mentioned in this editorial but is mentioned in the full article is that people think they are unsafe? Do these people need their heads checked? The oysters are in the bags growing, no they arent going to jump out and bite you. The fact of the matter is, oystering is a essential activity and I would

be willing to bet it has been going on in that area long before these homeowners bought their waterfront property. You complain about farm raised fish, but then attack the legit companies trying to grow them on our local shores? Forming joint committees and holding hearings is pointless in this case, the homeowners simply need to accept the fact that the oystering is legal, and not harmful to anything on the water. Maybe then these people can find a actually legit topic to complain about and waste taxpayer dollars "investigating"

Posted by Elijah Ellis | March 8, 2007 04:56 PM

As a High School teacher, sailing instructor, and non 'trophy' homeowner, I have a vested interest in the welfare of the three bays. During the summer months I spend most of my time teaching young children to sail on the three bays, and enjoy the rest of my time as an experienced boater. As a teacher/instructor, my primary objective is the safety of my students. I spoke out against the floating bag system at the February meeting citing that these bags would result in increased incidents between smaller vessels and yachts restricted to the channel. These incidents would primarily consist of young children who are learning how to sail or kayak. These bays, and narrow channels, are supporting enormous boat traffic during the summer months, and the use of a floating bag system would result in a dramatic decrease of navigable waters; forcing these young boaters from the protection offered outside the channel (proposed bag sites) and placing them directly in the path of larger, less maneuverable boats. If this battle is truly between the 'wealthy' and 'blue collar' families, then why are Three Bays Preservation, Waterways Committee, and even Wellfleet and Edgartown opposed to the floating bag system? Serious discussion needs to take place regarding potential policy changes, and the ramifications of each option needs to be scrutinized to find the one that is least intrusive, environmentally friendly, reduces the nitrogen levels, and above all reflects the desires of its citizens. Lastly, just to set the record straight, this is not a conflict between the 'trophy' homeowners and 'blue collar' families, it really is between Residents and Businesses. After all, I would hardly classify Al Suprenant as 'blue collar', as he owns a home in Oyster Harbors!!

Posted by brent jansen | March 8, 2007 09:02 PM