

STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF MARINE RESOURCES
21 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE
04333-0021

JANET T. MILLS
GOVERNOR

PATRICK C. KELIHER
COMMISSIONER

SEAWEED FISHERIES ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING
March 24, 2023
ONLINE MEETING

Meeting Minutes

Note: This is a summary of meeting minutes and is not a transcript. Information from parties in this meeting was summarized and was not written verbatim.

A meeting of the Department of Marine Resources' (DMR) Seaweed Fisheries Advisory Council was held online on the date listed above. Council members who attended: Shep Erhart, Dave Preston, Micah Woodcock, Sara Redmond, Jake Patryn, Dr. Nichole Price and Jaclyn Robidoux.

DMR Staff: Pat Keliher (Commissioner), Deirdre Gilbert, Meredith White, Katie Tilton

Members of the public: Alison Feibel, John Grotton, Jean-Sebastian L., Maya Pelletier, Jake Wilson, Trey Angera, George Seaver.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Seaweed Fisheries Advisory Council members and DMR staff introduced themselves.

2. DMR Updates

A. Staffing Updates from Deirdre Gilbert, DMR:

New Supervisor: Meredith White, Nearshore Marine Resources Program

New Marine Resource Scientist 1: Katie Tilton, Nearshore Marine Resources Program

Resource Management Coordinator position to be funded: Nick Popoff left in 2019, and the Department was not able to fill the position. It was downgraded. Current budget restoring position, so when it passes in July DMR should be able to start the hiring process.

B. Seaweed fund explanation and updates from Deirdre Gilbert, DMR:

Fund Report standard for how DMR tracks dedicated accounts for license fees and surcharges. Fund collects fees from licenses and surcharge on seaweed buyers based on wet tonnage reported.

Annually fund collects between \$21,000 and \$29,000. Only item the department funds from account is a quarter of one DMR staff position. In 2018 some small projects occurred and a total of \$10,000 of work was done. Annually a small amount is taken by the state administration process (STACAP).

In Net, total expenses are \$15,000 - \$36,000. Question to council: Is there interest in doing additional small projects you have done before? Some latitude in fund. Caution not spend all down.

C. Legislative Updates from Deirdre, DMR:

1. Bill title with relevance to this sector: Harvester would be required to produce written permission from the upland landowner to harvest rockweed (it would need to have been on a person when

harvesting or else would have been a violation). Bill withdrawn before it got to a public hearing and not considered this legislative session.

2. **Bill title with relevance to this sector:** Another bill, similar to the bill that Representative Evangelos had submitted in a previous session, that would have asserted that the state does own the intertidal came up. Representative Warren from Scarborough asked for leave to withdraw from the chairs of the committee and it was granted.
3. In 2020 when the Legislature adjourned at the beginning of COVID, they passed a law that had authorized councils to meet remotely during the emergency declaration of the pandemic. Once they were back in session, they passed another law stating that if not in a state of emergency, in order for councils to meet remotely they would have to adopt a remote meeting policy. It has to be adopted at an in person meeting. DMR has developed a template remote meeting policy for all councils and there is a process to post, have the public provide comment and then the council can adopt. Because this policy is not in place within this council, it cannot take any formal action in an online meeting. However, in the future, we can adopt this policy.

3. Updates from Seaweed Fisheries Advisory Council

A. Biomass Assessment Methodology Update from Nichole Price:

Nichole summarized a workshop where the group worked on remote sensing technology to evaluate rockweed biomass. The technology utilized drone technology at low tide. Ground truthing with boots on the ground effort information came from the Schoodic Institute Project Assessing Seaweed Via Community Observations (ASCO). Project ASCO used the quadrat system to evaluate locations, etc. Spectral libraries are now publicly available. There has been a lot of feedback from available practitioners and Nichole is getting results of the meeting to share with council.

B. ASCO Citizen Science Program from Maya Pelletier:

Current project coordinator with Schoodic Institute. Project began in 2020 to measure the biomass of rockweed on the coast of Maine. Project works with citizen scientists to train them so they can collect data on their own. Project also goes to historic sites where data was previously collected in a variety of different papers. People can access their data through the Anecdota Platform, available to anyone ([Project ASCO \(Assessing Seaweed via Community Observations\) | Anecdota](#)). They are planning to continue this project through the next two years, and the end of 2024. Goal is to have a modeler do biomass modelling based on their data. If there is desire to continue the research, Schoodic would be interested in continuing with DMR, but right now they don't plan to do work past 2024 because funding will run out. The Commissioner responded to council questions of putting state funds towards this program to continue it, saying the DMR would have to look beyond what the state has in place and if there is a benefit from a management perspective.

C. Update on Current Legal Effort:

Industry working on effort to raise money for a public perception campaign. Need good public perception and have a lot of bills that keep bumping into this problem without intercepting it. No legal complaints right now about trespassing. Part of the problem is that there's a discrepancy on what people may have on their deed and what was actually owned from before that. The conveyances in the language of those deeds is altered. It's something that is going to need to be addressed. There have been some cases where there has been a legitimate transfer to the low water mark in deeds. Big problems are islands, in the deeds. Industry has asked landowners to mark their property. The burden is on the landowner to show where their property lines are. DMR has had several calls. Brought a couple cases to the local district attorney. The DA said they would not prosecute on some of these deeds. So, DMR tries to diffuse the issue on the water to keep everyone happy. DMR playing same role as before Acadian vs. Ross.

D. Best Sustainable Practices Guide Update from Shep:

Hope to publish document digitally this fall. Maine Sea Grant will assist with the process in the final stages. BSP Guide covers both wild harvest and aquaculture sectors. Supportive materials will be included. Guide was initiated by Maine Seaweed Council members who wanted to update their existing harvester guide. Guide pulls together what industry has learned from wild harvesting and seaweed farming. It will cover harvesting, handling and primary processing protocols for nine main commercially harvested seaweeds, historical harvest information, traditional and current usage; mostly *Ascophyllum*. Guide also includes industry overview, climate change, markets, sustainability approaches, detailed biological and ecological profiles for each species, detailed bed site selection for wild and farmed by species, food safety and it's rapidly changing evolution for seaweeds. What makes the document unique for wild harvest is that all practices are based on collective seaweed community wisdom and interviews with current harvesters. Guide directly connects to the UN Sustainable Goals, using their metrics. On the aquaculture side, industry is hoping the guide will capture and document best practice recommendations. Many come from the Maine Sea Grant trainings. DMR sees value in this guide and would like to review it once complete to provide suggestions / comments.

E. Seaweed Aquaculture Opportunities and Concerns from Dr. Nichole Price:

Selective breeding: At recent Maine Blue Carbon Network Symposium, growing evidence of loss of seaweeds in southern Maine and difficulties this may pose to harvesters in a climate changing environment. Can cause hardship on harvesters in summer months. Research in other countries surrounding thermal tolerant species. Research often performed using developed forms of sterile seaweed that cannot contribute reproductively to the environment. Genetic diversity of Maine species is broad and quite a bit of mixing of what we thought were distinct genetic populations. As these bodies of evidence grow, what information is the council or DMR looking for to help evaluate when policies should be changed in terms of allowing for selective breeding and out planting of aquaculture species or of different regulations in terms of selectively bred individuals? DMR responded that if at any point they can base decisions on good sound science to move forward, they will pursue this option. DMR's overarching concern though is impact to the natural habitat, wild stocks and the environment. The DMR hopes to have more resources available to address aquaculture questions through placing the program under Kohl Kanwit.

Group Oceans 2050 submitted paper to Nature Climate Change looking at the deposition of carbon under 22 seaweed farms across the globe, including a farm in Maine. Results demonstrate some farms can contribute to carbon deposition in the sediment beneath the farm. Lots of interest from funding agencies in developing measurement, reporting and verification tools to make seaweed farmers, or other marine carbon dioxide removal strategies, eligible for pursuing carbon credits or offsets in a market; meaning certified markets that have oversight, a peer review process and lean on evidence. Likely be methodologies where seaweed farmers can apply for these credits. The Maine Climate Council and its strategic plan to help the Maine Won't Wait Program of achieving carbon neutrality has listed blue carbon as a part of that strategy, specifically seaweed farming. The Bureau of Air Quality is going to use seaweed farms in their carbon assessment in 2023 and is going to ask this group whether the permitting process for seaweed farms will include any disclosures about the attempts for carbon storage or carbon sequestration. For both Vera and Gold Standard, they insist the process adhere to the UN Sustainability goals and get stakeholder feedback.

What also came up in discussion is that the DMR has sent letters to many different towns, defining what the aquaculture authority is. In state waters, it's DMR's authority. Towns can have some authority in the intertidal. DMR can also make some progress in the landed value piece of their webpage based on industry concerns.

F. Rockweed FMP and Current Work on Assessment and Reporting by Sector from Shep:

Making progress towards putting pieces together to implement the FMP. Encouraged in the progress of the biomass assessment and project ASCO. The Nearview Drone work creating spectral libraries is encouraging as well and will be useful in putting the two together. Industry now reports by sectors, but we don't have real-time reporting yet. Wondering if we could work on that, is there willingness to consider a modified version of the FMP by the DMR? Which may not include allocations of sectors to individuals? Just biomass per sector, being able to open and close sectors like DMR does in different fisheries? DMR responded that real-time monitoring of sectors is a capacity issue for DMR and the Landings program. Real-time is not needed right now because seaweed fishery is not quota driven. DMR could track some information though via VESL or LEEDS, which is all electronic so it's not as heavy of a lift. This would be low cost monitoring changes from a department standpoint and still achieve the goals of sector management. DMR could also look through Landings Data from past few years and compare it against recent biomass assessment information to determine what percentage is being harvested in each of the sectors. That would give DMR an estimate of how close we are, before reaching an amount to close a sector.

4. Motion to Adjourn the online meeting

No questions from Seaweed Fisheries Advisory Council

Adjourned Meeting