

# Shellfish Farming in Dungeness Bay – Fact Sheet



The Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe has resumed oyster farming on a Washington State owned tideland parcel in Dungeness Bay, within the Wildlife Refuge, where the Tribe has held the lease since 1990. In 1990 Tribal Elders sought to re-establish a shellfish farm in their ancestral place – so that S'Klallam could renew the practice of their ancestors and again, depend on the Dungeness Bay for subsistence and trade. The S'Klallam have harvested clams and oysters on this land for thousands of years. With this farm, the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe (a sovereign nation) and Jamestown Seafood (a Tribally-owned business) protect, enjoy and share their ancestral resources in a sustainable manner, growing a naturalized species in Dungeness Bay.

## **What is the current extent of the Tribe's shellfish growing activities in Dungeness Bay?**

Jamestown Seafood has "out planted" 200,000 Pacific oyster seed within < ½ acre area of the lease and observed growth and survival over the past 3 years. These initial growing efforts have been successful, and the Tribe will continue to only use the beach oyster cultivation method as long as it is viable to do so.

## **What type of shellfish farming is occurring in Dungeness Bay?**

The Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe is permitted to grow Pacific oysters using two on-bottom cultivation methods: on-bottom bags and loose beach oysters. Juvenile oysters are "out planted" in durable mesh bags that are secured to the seafloor, flipped by hand 1-2 times per month and grown out for approximately 14 months after which the bags are removed. Beach oysters grow freely on the beach to maturity, are harvested by hand and placed into harvest bags that are lifted onto a boat during high tide.

## **Why farm oysters within the boundary of the Refuge?**

The farm site is on a Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR)-owned tideland parcel legally designated for commercial shellfish farming. This site had been continuously used for commercial farming Pacific oysters from 1963 – 2005. The oyster farm was acquired by the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe in 1990 but in 2005, the Tribe was forced to fallow operations due to deteriorating water quality in the Bay. Jamestown supplied both funds and staff time, providing leadership in successful community efforts, to improve water quality conditions. The improved water quality meant the Tribe could resume oyster farming at this site for economic and cultural purposes. Dungeness Bay is the ancestral homeland of the Jamestown S'Klallam people. Harvesting, consuming and trading shellfish has always been a way of life for S'Klallam.

## **Is the oyster farm fully permitted?**

Yes, as of July 2021 the Tribe received all the required local, state and federal permits to grow Pacific Oysters on their 50-acre DNR lease site in Dungeness Bay. Two types of cultivation methods were permitted within the lease area: 1) up to 34-acres of beach oysters that grow naturally on the beach without the need for gear, and 2) up to 5-acres of on-bottom grow bags to protect oyster seed from predators and "blow out" (wave action from strong winds).

## **Will there be a lot of oyster bags on the tidelands?**

The Tribe is committed to resume oyster farming in the ancestral waters of Dungeness Bay using growing methods with the least impact. Growth of farm activities has been proposed in phases; starting with spreading loose juvenile oysters and up to 5 acres of on-bottom bag cultivation. Maximum commercial bag density is permitted for 4,000 bags per acre. Any farm growth will occur incrementally, informed by farm productivity and monitoring results. The Tribe's goal is to grow oysters without the need for any gear.

### **Does oyster farming result in loss of habitat to Refuge wildlife?**

This site had been used for Pacific oyster cultivation for over four decades. During that time, no reports were made stating previous farming activities caused harm to Refuge wildlife. The Tribe's oyster farm follows ESA conservation measures, protects eelgrass habitat with a 25-foot buffer, and conducts activities lower on the beach than documented forage fish spawning habitat. In fact, much research has documented ecosystem benefits from oyster cultivation including increased water filtration, habitat structure for invertebrates and juvenile fish, and promoting the recovery of seagrasses. Similarly, data from the mid 1990's, collected by the Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge, indicates that both shorebirds and geese were preferentially distributed within and directly adjacent to the oyster farm area when ~ 20 acres of oyster cultivation was actively occurring at the lease site.

### **We have heard about environmentally damaging shellfish farming practices. Are any of these practices being used in Dungeness Bay?**

No. There is a lot of misrepresentation of the Tribe's shellfish farming activities. The following practices are NOT occurring: graveling/frosting, anti-predator netting, pesticides/chemicals, land vehicles, dredging, suspended cultivation, floats, mechanical harvest, hazing of wildlife, or removal of any flora or fauna.

### **Are conservation measures and monitoring required?**

Yes. Permit conditions specify conservation measures including seeding and harvesting oysters by hand, reduced vessel noise and speed; eelgrass avoidance and buffering; boat path and anchor location; reduced light; reduced work windows for sensitive species; forage fish avoidance and monitoring. Monitoring includes avian; sediment transport; forage fish; eelgrass and gear placement/movement.

### **Will the oyster farm ruin the visual aesthetics of Dungeness Bay?**

Current practices of loose oyster culture have no visual impacts. The visual impact associated with on-bottom bags are minimal. On-bottom bags have low relief (< 1 ft. ), blend in with the substrate, and are only exposed at low tide (< 0 ft. MLLW) so they are difficult to see beyond a distance of approximately 300 ft. without use of visual aids (i.e. binoculars). Human activity is also minimal. Under current growing practices, 3-6 farm workers access the site by boat during lower tides (< 1 ft. MLLW) no more than once per month. If it is determine that the use of on-bottom bags are required then access may increase to 2-4 times per month; however, the Tribe has not yet needed to rely on the gear for growing oysters.

### **Which entities have provided authorization?**

Clallam County – Shoreline Use Permits;

WA Dept of Ecology – approval of Clallam County Shoreline Use Permits; and Coastal Zone Management – Certification; and Water Quality Certification;

WA Dept of Fish and Wildlife – shellfish transfer permit;

United States Fish and Wildlife Service – Endangered Species Act Compliance;

United States Army Corps of Engineers – Water Quality Sect 404b Authorization;

WA Dept of Natural Resources – Lease for Aquaculture.

