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Cover Memo

North Totten Inlet Mussel Farm Draft EIS

Environmental Review. This Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is being distributed to agencies, Tribes, organizations and individuals with an interest in the North Totten Inlet Mussel Farm in Thurston County, Washington. The EIS analyzes the potential environmental impacts of a 1996 Shoreline Substantial Development Permit application proposal to develop and operate an additional floating mussel aquaculture facility along the east shore of Totten Inlet. The tidelands adjacent to the proposed mussel farm site are part of a farm 1.6 miles in length owned and operated by Taylor Shellfish Company, Inc., (Taylor) that presently includes the Gallagher Cove Mussel Farm. The species to be cultivated is *Mytilus edulis galloprovincialis*. Taylor has cultivated this species of mussel at its existing farms within Totten Inlet since 1992.

Thurston County Action Required. The mussel aquaculture proposal requires a Shoreline Substantial Development Permit from Thurston County. The County's Shoreline Master Program (SMP) implements the Washington State Shoreline Management Act (SMA) for shorelines of the State that are within the jurisdiction of Thurston County. This permit will specify development regulations and performance standards under which the proposed mussel farm can be located and operated in order to achieve compliance with the County's SMP and the State SMA. Additional information regarding the Shoreline permit required is provided in Draft EIS Chapter 2, Section 2.4.6.1.

State and Federal Regulatory Compliance Required. The proposed action will require an Aquatic Lands Lease from the Washington Department of Natural Resources. Federal oversight will include: a Department of the Army, Corps of Engineers Section 10 Individual Permit; National Marine Fisheries Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Endangered Species Act (ESA) and Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act compliance determinations; a Coastal Zone Management Act consistency determination; and U.S. Coast Guard Aids to Navigation compliance. State and Federal regulatory compliance requirements are described in Draft EIS Chapter 2, Sections 2.4.6.3 through 2.4.6.6.

Public Review and Comment Opportunities. Public and agency comment is invited regarding the proposed action and alternatives. The Draft EIS and final Technical Reports prepared for the North Totten Inlet Mussel Farm proposal are available in electronic format on a compact disk (CD) from the Thurston County Resource Stewardship Department, Land Use and Environmental Review Section. A CD was distributed to everyone on the Draft EIS Distribution List (Chapter 5). Additional copies are available from the County. These electronic files are also available on the County's website at: www.co.thurston.wa.us/permitting. Complete printed versions of the Draft EIS and final Technical Reports are available for review at the Thurston County Resource Stewardship Department, Olympia Timberland Library, and Thurston County Fire District #13 (locations and hours of operation provided below). Comments on the Draft EIS, proposed action and alternatives can be submitted in writing or by e-mail to the Thurston County Resource Stewardship Department:

Robert Smith, Senior Planner
Thurston County Resource Stewardship Department
Land Use and Environmental Review Section
(open to the public 8:00 AM to Noon, Monday through Friday)
2000 Lakeridge Drive, 2nd Floor, Olympia, WA 98502
360.754.4023
E-mail comments can be submitted to: smithr@co.thurston.wa.us

Additional locations where the North Totten Inlet Mussel Farm Draft EIS
and Technical Reports can be reviewed:

Olympia Timberland Library	Thurston County Fire District #13
313 8th Avenue SE	3707 Steamboat Loop NW
Olympia, WA 98501	Olympia, WA 98502
<i>Hours: 10:00 AM to 7:00 PM Monday–Thursday; 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM Friday and Saturday</i>	<i>Hours: Monday–Friday 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM with potential closures depending on staffing</i>

Comments are due to the Thurston County Resource Stewardship Department by 4:00 PM on Monday, July 12, 2010.

All comments submitted within the 45-day comment period (May 26 through July 12, 2010) will receive a response in the Final EIS. A public meeting / open house is planned during the Draft EIS comment period, at least 15 days following the date of issue of the Draft EIS. Notice of the meeting will be mailed to everyone on the Distribution List and published in *The Olympian*.

The Proposal and Alternatives. The applicant’s Preferred Alternative (Alternative 1) for the North Totten Inlet Mussel Farm is a 58-raft proposal that would occupy approximately 1.36 acres within an Aquatic Lands Lease area approximately 11.25 acres in size. Because localized and sometimes adverse seasonal effects on bottom-dwelling organisms (benthos) will occur directly beneath the mussel rafts and for a short distance beyond the footprint of the mussel rafts, an alternative raft configuration is evaluated in the EIS, along with an alternative mussel farm management strategy in which these rafts would be relocated every 3 years into the adjacent gap between rafts to allow any build-up beneath the rafts to assimilate at a faster rate. The Two-Row Alternative (Alternative 2) would consist of 50 rafts within a 16-acre Aquatic Lands Lease area. Full development of the North Totten Inlet mussel farm is projected to occur over a period of approximately 5 years or less. The first phase will likely consist of 12 to 24 rafts. Subsequent phases would likely consist of 12 to 20 rafts per year, depending on the availability of mussel “seed,” market demand, and the availability of financial resources for construction. The No Action Alternative is also evaluated in the EIS.

Key Environmental Issues. The Thurston County Hearing Examiner specified a limited scope for this EIS (as described in Draft EIS Chapter 1, Section 1.2). The primary purpose of this environmental review is to evaluate the capacity of Totten Inlet to support additional shellfish aquaculture. The five issues evaluated include: impacts to bottom-dwelling organisms (i.e., the benthic community); impacts to the surrounding water column (tidal circulation, water quality, nutrients, and dissolved oxygen); potential impacts to the phytoplankton resource, and the effects this could have on other aquaculture and aquatic life in Totten Inlet (including protected, endangered, and threatened species); impacts that could be caused by the escapement and propagation of mussels; and impacts to marine navigation (lighting, and vessel navigation around the proposed mussel rafts). Technical studies prepared for this analysis are written in a manner consistent with standards of practice for the scientific analyses performed. A lengthy process of review and comment occurred with oversight from an Independent Technical Review Committee (ITRC) assembled by the County. A separate CD of electronic files of draft documents and ITRC comments is available from the Thurston County Resource Stewardship Department.

Thurston County appreciates your interest in this proposal. If you would like more information about the North Totten Inlet Mussel Farm proposal and/or the environmental review that has been conducted, please contact Robert Smith, Senior Planner, at the physical address, e-mail address, or telephone number indicated above. The history and background of this application, and of SEPA procedures and public involvement opportunities is described in Draft EIS Chapter 1, Section 1.2.



Robert Smith, Senior Planner

Date: May 26, 2010