



Salt Ponds Coalition
PO Box 875, Charlestown, RI 02813



Salt Ponds Coalition's position on two proposed aquaculture leases in Quonochontaug Pond.

The Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) is seeking to permit two commercial viability oyster leases on Quonochontaug Pond: one site just west of Nopes Island, adjacent to Ski Beach in Westerly, and another in the northeastern corner of the pond in Charlestown. Should these test sites succeed, the applicants will likely seek a commercial aquaculture lease (usually about 3 acres) at each successful site.

SPC is generally supportive of oyster aquaculture, as long as it doesn't go on top of high-value habitat and doesn't conflict with established and meaningful uses of a pond, such as popular recreational places or clamming grounds that are used by a significant number of people. Within reason, we feel aquaculture is good for pond water quality and can help repopulate oysters in the ponds since some of the farmed animals spawn before being harvested.

Regarding these two proposed sites, we have opposed the site in the spawner sanctuary (Westerly) and have not opposed the site in the northeast corner of the pond (Charlestown):

- The spawner sanctuary was designated for shellfish restoration, and is closed for harvesting. In over thirty years, since it was established, DEM has stocked many hundreds of bushels of mature scallops, oysters and quahaugs to spawn and replenish shellfish stocks throughout the pond. SPC, its partners, and many volunteers have planted over 800 bushels of quahaugs in recent years to restock the sanctuary as part of a \$60,000 NOAA grant. We believe leasing and privatizing this public resource to a private party is a violation of the public trust.
- The site located in the northeastern part of the pond is out of the mainstream of activity. Resource and user conflicts appear to be minimal. Those managing the Natural Resource Conservation Service/Roger Williams (OGRE) oyster stocking program, adjacent to West Beach Road, have stated that the proposed site would not conflict with their restoration work. Based on that, Salt Ponds Coalition did not take a position, but didn't object.

The Board of Directors authorized a letter to be sent to CRMC stating our opposition to the Westerly site, which is located inside the DEM Spawner Sanctuary. The position of Salt Ponds Coalition is driven by our mission to be stewards and advocates for the resource, and is based on good science and protection of the environment. Our position is resource-based.

We felt the state did a poor job of notifying those who might have a concern, so Salt Ponds Coalition quickly alerted neighborhood groups, fire districts, yacht clubs and land trusts around the pond and most of these groups have submitted letters opposing the spawner sanctuary location, siting conflicts with the sanctuary as well as with recreational boating.

I (Art Ganz), as president of Salt Ponds Coalition, also met with both the town manager of Westerly and Charlestown Town Council and reported our position. Subsequently, the Charlestown Town Council voted to oppose the Westerly site and not oppose the Charlestown site. This has angered certain local residents who also oppose the northeast pond site.

The purpose of this email is to inform our members of these application proposals, to state the position of Salt Ponds Coalition, and to provide you with links to further information, should you be concerned and want to take further action. The comment period on these proposals has been extended to February 25th, 2013.

Details on the proposals and our letter to CRMC are posted on our website:
www.saltpondscoalition.org

If you would like to express your comments or concerns about either project, contact:

Dave Beutel, Aquaculture Coordinator, CRMC, at 401-783-3370 dbeutel@cmc.ri.gov
Janet Coit, Director of RI DEM, at 401-222-2771 or janet.coit@dem.ri.gov

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