

Penny Wise and Pound Foolish

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The New Hampshire House of Representatives has proposed eliminating the Shellfish Sanitation Program from the Department of Environmental Services to save \$301,743 for the FY2012-2013 biennium. Eliminating this program would permanently close all state waters to commercial and recreational shellfish harvesting due to a lack of compliance with federal food safety requirements. In addition, all of the shellfish dealers in the state will be out of compliance and barred from selling out of state.

This proposal is a job killer. Eliminating the Shellfish Program would force a mussel farm and three oyster farms to close, and block development of this nascent industry. While shellfish farming is just getting started in New Hampshire, one has only to look to neighboring states to see the potential for growth and expansion. Maine enjoys a shellfish aquaculture industry that harvests \$7M in oysters and mussels annually and employs 50 people year-round and another 50 seasonally. Massachusetts's industry is similarly sized. Throughout New England the shellfish aquaculture industry has been growing at double-digit rates for several years. New Hampshire was just about to jump on the bandwagon.

Shellfish aquaculture is also recognized as a green industry that provides tangible environmental benefits such as improvements to water quality and habitat. Many environmental groups laud shellfish farms as a sustainable industry that requires few inputs, and uses no chemicals or feeds. These farms also provide a local source of nutritious and delicious seafood at a time when health experts tell us that tens of thousands of heart attacks could be prevented if everyone simply ate two or more seafood meals a week.

Eliminating New Hampshire's Shellfish Sanitation Program will also put residents and visitors at risk of illness or death should they ignore the recreational shellfishing ban. Since the state won't be testing the waters, residents won't know when potentially lethal red tides are a concern. Several studies have shown that residents place a high value on the ability to recreationally harvest shellfish nearby, even if they never take advantage of the opportunity. Studies in Massachusetts and Rhode Island suggest that each resident values that opportunity at \$50-100. A 2002 study on Cape Cod estimated that one would have to pay recreational shellfishers \$7.4M for them to surrender their permits.¹

At a time when the governor should be encouraging growth of sustainable industries, we believe it is shortsighted and "pound-foolish" to eliminate the Shellfish Program. Shellfish farms will be put out of business and jobs will be lost. Shellfish resources will remain unharvested, and public health will be jeopardized. Is this worth the \$301,743 in projected short-term savings? I hope the Senate will review the House's math and restore funding for this vital program.

1. *Damery, D.T. and Allen P.G. (2004) An Economic Valuation of Recreational Shellfishing on Cape Cod. UMass Amherst Working Paper 2004-10*

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