**Taylor Shellfish Farms Oakland Bay Floating Oyster Container Project**

**Background**

Taylor Shellfish Farms is in the process of permitting a new shellfish farm in Oakland Bay. Once operating, the new farm will provide significant benefits to the company’s business operations, reinforce its position as a major employer in Mason County, and further support a decades-long tradition of working to improve the bay’s water quality.

The company plans to install a floating container shellfish farm in a portion of Oakland Bay that previously was the site of the Simpson Timber log boom. The new farm will be used to grow oyster seed to a size that can be transferred to tidelands to mature to market size, or be immediately harvested for processing, as circumstances allow.

The floating container farming method is used throughout the world. The approach floats a double line of four-foot square containers on both side of a center line. This design allows the containers to be flipped, encouraging shell development and healthy growth of the oysters. At full farm build out, Taylor Shellfish anticipates 30 double lines, spaced 20-30 feet apart, using about 9 acres of the 50-acre lease area. Build out is expected to take several years.

The farm will be anchored to the bottom of the bay. A thorough survey of the area finds it to be of a mud and silt composition, without observable submerged aquatic vegetation, including eelgrass. Although anchored, the farm can be moved to a nearby temporary location in coordination with the Squaxin Island Tribe, allowing for the tribe’s access to the area for fishing.

Taylor has been a strong advocate for local wastewater treatment improvements, restoration, conservation purchases, and land use planning to improve habitat and water quality in Oakland Bay. In keeping with this stewardship ethic, the farm is designed to minimize adverse impacts to the area’s environment and wildlife. Further, the natural ability of shellfish to remove human-caused nutrients in the bay is expected to improve the overall water quality.

Floating farms are visually low profile. The proposed lease area is a minimum of 1,000 feet from shore and operations and maintenance will all be done by boat.

The farm’s lease area is within Washington State’s Department of Natural Resources (DNR) managed aquatic lands. Oakland Bay is home to several commercial operations, including such adjacent uses as log storage, a marina, floating mussel culture, gravel barge loading and a shellfish Floating Upweller System (FLUPSY) operated by Taylor Shellfish and used to grow shellfish seed.

For Taylor Shellfish, the floating farm will support seed survival and increase the overall capacity to provide the seed volumes needed to support the business and for sale to other shellfish farms. The company is headquartered in Shelton and a major regional employer. Much of the equipment needed for the farm’s development is designed and manufactured locally by the company. Floating farms also are more efficient to operate and as they are not dependent on tides, allow more predicable work schedules for employees.

**Key Messages**

* **Overview:** The proposed farm will provide significant benefits to the company’s business operations, reinforce its position as a growing employer in Mason County, and continue to support a decades-long tradition of working to improve the bay’s water quality.
* **Proven Approach/Minimal Impact:** Floating containers are a farming method used around the world. The approach has minimal impact to wildlife and the environment and provides numerous advantages for growing high-quality seed and oysters. Visual impact also is minimal because of the farm’s location away from shore and low-profile design.
* **Supports Business Needs:** The Oakland Bay farm will increase much needed capacity in seed management and do so in a manner that is labor efficient and enhance the work environment for Taylor’s team members. The farm is in keeping with the area’s adjacent commercial uses.
* **Growth Benefits the County:** Local design, manufacturing and operations of the new farm helps keep Taylor Shellfish growing, which benefits Mason County by continuing to provide the region quality jobs and growth opportunities for employees.
* **Water Quality Benefits:** In keeping with Taylor’s stewardship ethics, the farm is designed to minimize adverse impacts to the area’s environment and wildlife, while the natural ability of shellfish to remove human-caused nutrients is expected to improve overall water quality in the bay.

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