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# A Vision for Connecticut Shellfish

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# Vision for Connecticut Shellfish Resources

by Tessa L. Getchis



*Some say, "It's about time!"*

*Others question, "Why now?"*

*Still others wonder, "Is this going to be another layer of regulation?"*

Whatever the viewpoint, there is not a lack of opinions. In my line of work, that is not necessarily a problem. I work with a broad group of individuals ranging from shellfish industry members, regulators, town shellfish commissions...just to name a few! There are at least two commonalities among us all: enthusiasm and shellfish.

Who would argue against protecting this abundant natural resource we share with our friends, families, and neighbors? For those of us who eat love seafood - or any food for that matter - don't we desire locally produced products that are grown or harvested by people we know and companies we trust?

My viewpoint is that people who have a stake in a shellfish business, or enjoy a day digging clams, or who ponder whether oyster reefs could serve as a means to protect our shoreline from storm damage, could stand

to benefit from a vision for our state's shellfisheries and shellfish resources. I firmly believe that vision cannot (and should not) be developed without input from them all.

Beyond a vision – our ideal view of what our shellfisheries and shellfish resources will be in the future – we need a strategy to get there.

Shellfish aquaculture is an important industry in Connecticut. There are more than 40 companies based in our state that provide approximately 300 maritime jobs. Recreational shellfish harvest opportunities exist in most coastal towns, and between commercial and recreational harvest areas, shellfish grounds occupy nearly 80,000 acres of underwater land.

This number doesn't include natural populations of shellfish, commercially valuable or not, that occupy vast tracts of sea bottom. While commercially cultivated shellfish beds thrive in Long Island Sound, a number of

organizations are interested in conservation, as well as other potential ways to benefit from natural shellfish reefs or assemblages, ranging from things like habitat restoration to bioextraction (using shellfish to remove excess nutrients from the water) to shoreline protection.

Both challenges and opportunities exist, but understanding the interests and concerns of the various stakeholders may be mutually beneficial. Engaging in an open dialogue could help to identify more common ground among individuals, agencies, and institutions. Exposure to a variety of perspectives could bring about a broader and more comprehensive understanding of the economic, environmental, social issues with respect to shellfisheries and shellfish resources.

My organization, Connecticut Sea Grant/UConn Extension, is facilitating the development of a Shellfish Management Plan (SMP) that will identify a vision for the future of shellfish in

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Shellfish play a critical role in the marine ecosystem. Filter-feeding shellfish such as oysters, clams, scallops, and mussels can improve water quality and clarity. Reef-forming shellfish also provide habitat essential for a myriad of species, and depending on size, structure, and location, may provide a buffer against wave action from coastal storms.



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Connecticut and the goals and strategies that will help us move forward. We have identified three focus areas: commercial, recreational, and natural shellfish resources.

Our role (always in the world of extension work) is to serve as a neutral party, and provide a forum that encourages open dialogue. We are relying on the support of our sister NOAA office, the National Marine Fisheries Service Milford Laboratory, as well as a committee comprised of leaders from industry, recreation, and natural resource interests, and regulatory and planning agencies to help guide our work.

As you read this story, we have wrapped up a series of initial scoping meetings to gather feedback from various stakeholders. On February 24, 2014 we invite you

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

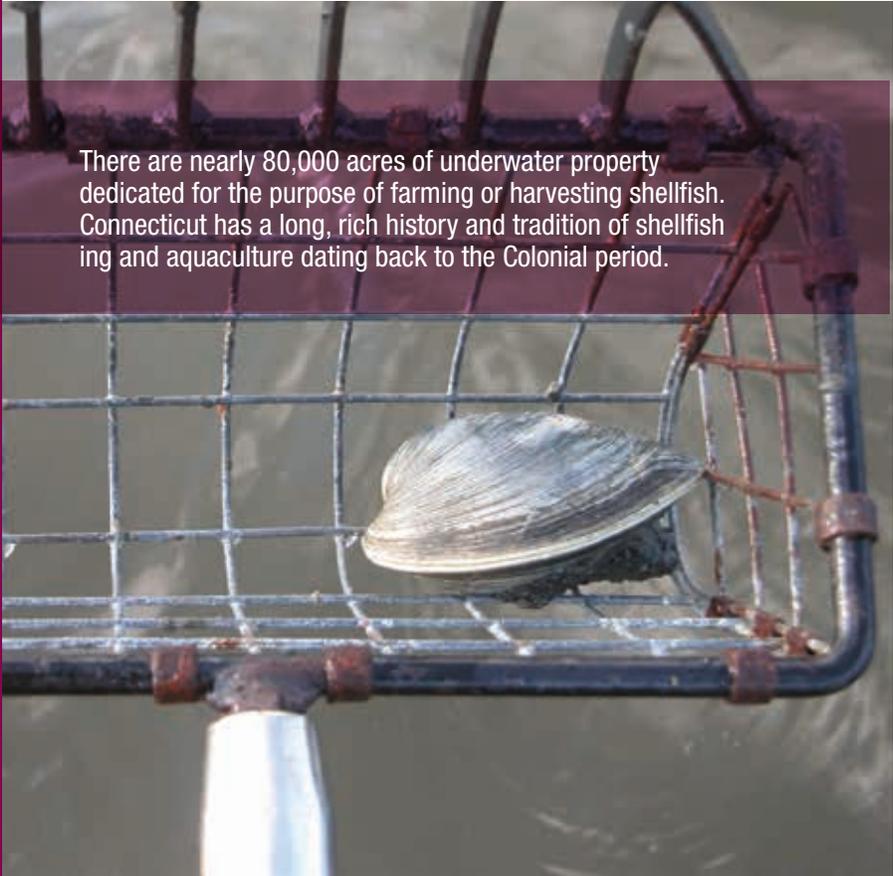
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to join us at our kickoff meeting to officially launch the Shellfish Management Plan initiative. This will be an opportunity to learn about and contribute to 'all things' shellfish in Connecticut. The meeting will be held at the Courtyard Marriott in Shelton, from 9 am to 6 pm.

I hope you voice your opinion because this is a chance to make your voice heard.

We all have a stake. We do not have a lack of people with a passion...for shellfish.

To learn more about this initiative, visit: <http://smp.uconn.edu>.



There are nearly 80,000 acres of underwater property dedicated for the purpose of farming or harvesting shellfish. Connecticut has a long, rich history and tradition of shellfish ing and aquaculture dating back to the Colonial period.