

Geoduck Action Plan

by Stan Moffett, Water & Salmon Committee

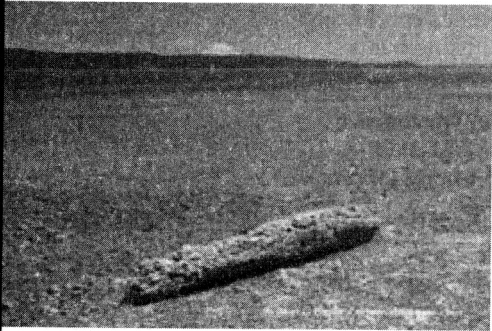
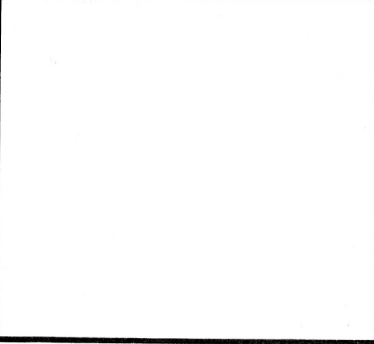
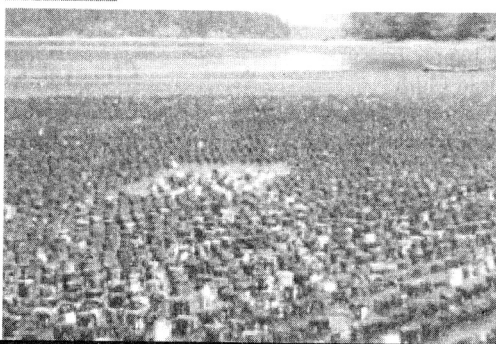
The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is continuing to accept bids on public tidelands for geoduck aquaculture. This farming activity begins by placing 35,000-43,000 PVC tubes per acre (4" or 6" in diameter, ~12" long) in the sand and planting 3-4 small geoducks in each tube. These tubes are covered with predator netting. The tubes are removed 18-24 months later and harvesting begins after about 5 years. Harvesting is done with high-volume water jets that emulsify the beach up to 3 feet deep for each of the estimated 70,000 geoduck per acre.

The potential ecological damage is obvious. Of particular concern is that the DNR is accepting bids on beaches identified by Fish and Wildlife as forage fish spawning areas. One of these fishes is the sand lance. The sand lance, whose larvae share a diet with geoducks, is important because it represents 60% of the diet of juvenile Puget Sound Chinook salmon.

Natural densities of intertidal geoducks are in the 0.3 per square meter range compared with 17 per square meter in a geoduck farm. An employee of Taylor Shellfish testified in a Pierce County Administrative Appeal that geoducks on a geoduck farm filter 13-14 million liters of water per acre per day. How can the sand lance larvae compete with this voracious depletion of their food by the planted geoducks?

If sand lance mortality increases due to the presence of the geoduck farm, what will happen to the threatened Chinook salmon? In 2006, the Washington Council of Trout Unlimited called for management of aquaculture using the "Precautionary Principle," which uses prudent foresight to avoid unacceptable or undesirable situations. This "cautious" approach is critical and it is not happening.

The DNR plans to lease 250 acres of tideland for geoduck aquaculture. Geoducks are planted on a beach from mean low tide to extreme low tide. Assuming a band of beach 100 feet deep, 250 acres of farm is a strip of beach 20.6 MILES long. Add to this expanding aquaculture on private tidelands and significant damage is likely.

<p>Harstine Beach</p> 	<p>Tradeoffs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Income to State*10 yr NVP: \$80,376/acreEcological Issues<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Forage Fish• Chinook Salmon• Beach Micro-Cultures• Birds• Marine Mammals• Eel Grass
	

We encourage our members to contact their state officials and the Governor and urge that they put a moratorium on this environmentally unsound program of the DNR (see contact info in the back of this issue).

Stan Moffet is treasurer of the Cascade Chapter Water & Salmon Committee; William Burrows is Senior Lecturer Emeritus at the University of Washington and a concerned citizen of Harstine Island, where DNR has accepted bids on 3 acres of public tidelands.