

Ordinance may tighten geoduck restrictions

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of the Gateway

Commercially growing geoducks in Pierce County could soon become a more difficult proposition.

The county is considering a set of interim regulations on geoduck aquaculture as part of its Shoreline Master Plan update.

Originally proposed last fall, the interim rules include keeping geoduck farms away from eelgrass beds, requiring operators to mark their equipment and pay bonds to insure site cleanup, among others.

More than 25 shoreline residents, activists and shellfish industry personnel attended Monday's hearing before the Pierce County Council's Community Development Committee.

Proponents said geoduck farms should be limited to more isolated locations, with high bluffs, located away from neighbor-

hoods.

Environmental activists and residents cited concerns over aesthetics, noise, pollution and beach erosion resulting from geoduck farms.

Shellfish industry representatives urged the committee to take a pass on the regulations and defer to recently passed House Bill 2220, which limits state leases to geoduck growers and requires stakeholder policy review.

Tris Carlson, representing Seattle Shellfish, agreed, urging the committee to "take a look at the legislation and think about holding back on this."

Robin Downey, executive director of the Pacific Coast Shellfish Growers Association, deemed the regulations "bad policy that hasn't gone through the proper legal procedure."

While one resident, Mayo Cove's Orrin Souers, sided with the industry, the majority of citizens — including several neighbors of a geoduck farm on Case Inlet — voiced their concerns.

Some suggested more regulations, such as site-specific habitat studies and tax credits for living aquaculture.

"Who will compensate the loss of paradise sold for gold?" asked Case Inlet resident Dennis Flan.

Earlier, shellfish representatives announced a toll-free hotline to report wayward shellfish gear: 1-800-964-6532.

Key Peninsula resident Virginia Hebron held up pieces of PVC tubing commonly used for geoduck farming.

"I'm going to be seeing this crap," she said angrily. "I'll be dialing that number."

The ordinance, which would amend the county's shoreline-use regulations, has yet to be approved by the full Pierce County Council.

If approved, regulations would sunset at the 2009 adoption of Pierce County Shoreline Master Program, originally adopted in 1974 and currently undergoing a three-year update.

Last September, the Pierce County Council directed the Planning and Land Services Department to develop recommendations with the state Department of Ecology.

The proposed ordinance, the subject of a contentious public hearing on Monday, also includes new restrictions on piers and docks.

Development permits

The interim shoreline regulations call for a number of requirements for granting substantial development permits for shellfish aquaculture as well as piers, docks and related structures. They include:

Shellfish aquaculture

- ▶ Requiring baseline study of when site is within 180 feet of eelgrass beds and other critical areas.
- ▶ Geoduck tubes should be colored to match beach area, and tubes, nets and other equipment marked to shown ownership.
- ▶ Tools and equipment should be taken from site when the day's harvest is completed. Pipes and nets should be removed as soon as possible.
- ▶ Neighbors should be notified of upcoming harvests five days in advance.
- ▶ Beaches within a half mile of either end of farms should be patrolled for wayward gear, such as PVC pipes and nets.
- ▶ Workers' access to farms should be primarily via the water, not area roads or beaches. Heavy equipment on the beaches should be minimized.
- ▶ Hours of operation should be identified as a condition for approval.
- ▶ Applicant shall prove they have the right to farm on the parcels in question and must submit a recorded survey of the inter-tidal land in question.
- ▶ Grower must obtain a bond or financial guarantee of \$1 per tube to ensure removal.
- ▶ Prohibit geoduck farms in urban and rural residential zones.

Piers and Docks

- ▶ Encourage construction of joint-use or community-use docks and piers to lessen number of structures projecting into the water.
- ▶ Prohibit covered piers, docks, floats and boat lifts.
- ▶ Anchor buoys limited to one per waterfront lot owner.
- ▶ Floats and floating boat lifts are not to exceed 100 square feet.
- ▶ Saltwater docks in urban areas to intrude no farther than 50 feet out, or to depth of eight feet, whichever is less.