

Geoduck dialog continues here

Editor, the *Journal*:

In your editorial, you mentioned that the Washington State Department of Natural Resources is "an agency charged with extracting economic value from lands under their control and [were] encouraged to do so by votes of the Washington Legislature." The phrase "extracting economic value" is correct as far as the State Timber Trusts are concerned. However, regarding aquatic lands, this is not correct. The Aquatic Lands Management Guidelines in 79.105.030 of the Revised Code of Washington state: "The manager of state-owned aquatic lands shall strive to provide a balance of public benefits for all citizens of the state."

Included in the benefits is "encouraging direct public use and access." It is this use of the public tidelands that is the basis of our concern.

Regarding votes in the Washington Legislature, there have been three actions. The first was the feasibility study mentioned in your article. This was a line item in the omnibus budget bill enacted in 2003 through ESSB 5404, Section 308-15. The second was in 2005 where SB 5006 changed the wording in existing law to classify the geoduck as "valuable materials."

The third and most publicly debated action was HB 2220 as it placed extensive limits and restrictions on what the DNR was planning to do in their geoduck aquaculture program. This bill also provided \$750,000 for research based on the legislature's concerns regarding the ecological impact of geoduck aquaculture. Note that this bill applies to all geoduck aquaculture on both public and private lands.

The people I represent, citizens of Harstine and Stretch islands, are not anti-shellfish; we recognize the historical and future importance of the industry to Mason County. A properly regulated industry is the goal for all to look forward to. Our "beef" is with the DNR and its decision to use the precious public beaches for this activity. A recent survey conducted by Mason County identified access to both fresh water and salt water as the top priority of its citizens. Based on this, we have gained the support of the county, as well as state policy makers in asking the DNR to keep the beaches used by the public free of any restrictions and available for all to use and enjoy. It was with this spirit

that I invited the shellfish industry to take the public sentiment into account and voluntarily withdraw from the DNR geoduck aquaculture program. Your article mentioned this. Unfortunately, not a single member of the shellfish industry responded to my invitation.

Finally, I must say something about our friends on Stretch Island. As you know, this is a very small island with a long history and one of the first commercial vineyards in Western Washington. The DNR wants to use all the public beaches on Stretch Island for geoduck aquaculture. This is wrong — just plain wrong.

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