

1) Identify stakeholders, and select a formal working group from that pool.

Harpswell has a working group of eight members, including: three commercial fishermen, one commercial shellfish harvester, two oyster farmers, one marina/restaurant owner, and one former legislator who has served on the Marine Resources Committee.

2) Identify specific questions/concerns in the community

Our first, most pressing concern was that new aquaculture permits may potentially interfere with commercial fishing areas, and there was limited confidence that Maine DMR would assess that issue fairly and accurately.

3) Discuss how to solve the problem

We decided that the root of this problem was a lack of information about our active fishing areas – aquaculture applicants had no idea where they were located, and DMR has no basemap of this information either to help guide their reviews. The most straightforward answer was to create accurate, local maps of our commercial fishing areas, which everyone could use.

4) Make a plan, do the work, keep it transparent

We decided the simplest way to collect our local commercial fishing information was to ask all of our commercial fishermen to take colored markers (different colors for each fishery) and mark their areas on large poster maps we created, using a NOAA chart underlay with a blow up of the town boundaries and waters. We held several public meetings and invited everyone to come participate. We also created smaller paper maps of every area in Harpswell that could be sent home to anyone who could not make it to the public meetings. This process took several months.

Once everyone had a chance to submit their mapping information, we georeferenced the maps from everyone into GIS format, and held several more meetings to review the work, giving the fishermen and the public a chance to review, edit, ask questions, etc. so we could fine-tune the maps and make any additions or adjustments. We also invited Amanda Ellis from the DMR Aquaculture program to attend one of our working sessions, to share our efforts and get any feedback.

The final GIS shapefiles and maps will be voted on at the Town Meeting, and will be up for review and edits once a year, to capture any changes in our areas.

These maps will be posted in an interactive map format on the Town website, and will include all available GIS layers similar to those on the DMR interactive map (NSSP water classifications, current LPA and aquaculture leases, eelgrass beds), as well as local moorings and docks, and any additional information the Town may collect going forward. The hope is that all of information will help new aquaculture applicants have a better idea about the areas they are looking at, and the DMR will have a better, more detailed set of local information to assist in any decisions that may go forward (see attached map example).

5) Identify the next concern, repeat this process

The group decided that our next concern is to accurately determine whether or not oysters are harming larval clams, or otherwise “stealing” too much food from the system based on the location of the oyster farm. We are currently working on setting up local studies this summer to help us find those answers.

This is the template process that worked for us. Technical assistance from a state agency could come in the form of helping communities reach out to and convene appropriate stakeholders, and/or connecting local groups to resources (grants, interns, volunteers, specialists, etc.) needed for the projects they have decided to work through, whether that is GIS mapping, environmental testing, or something else.

Reach out any time with questions!

Darcie Couture
(207) 266-8984
Darcie.couture@gmail.com

