

Matt Cheney  
Freeport

I am writing regarding the proposed rule for airboat operation.

I live with my wife and two young children on Bartol Island Road in Freeport. We own 500 feet of frontage on the Harraseeket River. The clam flats in front of our home are some of the most productive in Freeport and are routinely harvested. We are very supportive of traditional uses of the waterfront and feel that supporting such livelihoods are critical to the health of our community and state. We personally have gotten to know a number of clam harvesters in our area. We contribute to the Downeast Institute. Perhaps most importantly, we allow continued access to the clam flats in front of our property via a traditionally used path across our land. We are glad to continue to do this. I also understand that in order to harvest clams in Freeport, one must be a Freeport resident. I want to support our community members in their important work.

While we support clam harvesters, we strongly oppose the use of airboats for this purpose without stricter limits in place. We specifically would like to see a more reasonable decibel limit from shore and hours of operations restricted between ~7PM and 7AM. The currently allowed airboat noise is excessive. It frightens our children, it is harmful to their hearing, it disrupts their sleep. Given the geography of our cove, the sound is frequently amplified and echoes. Perhaps more importantly, I suspect it is detrimental to the numerous shorebirds/animals who live in the area. These pieces of equipment should be subject to tighter regulation and should not be allowed special exceptions that would allow any more noise generation than a standard outboard motor.

If there were no other means of accessing the clam flats in our neighborhood, I frankly would be less opposed to airboats. However, we personally, as well as an abutting preserve, provide ample access to the resource with adequate parking. I see many clam harvesters accessing the flats via small powered boats, or by walking with sleds. This seems very appropriate, and is also much less impactful on the land, wildlife, and human neighbors. I do not understand why airboats are necessary, particularly given their harmful noise pollution.

I would argue it would be beneficial to landowners and clam harvesters alike if a program could be developed to ensure and even improve access to the resource over land. As development pressure and coastal construction has increased in recent years, traditional access has declined. This is unfortunate. I would suggest that maps be generated via interviews and surveys where clam harvesters have traditionally reached the shore. Land-owners could then be approached and asked that access be allowed, perhaps even via permanent easements on the land in exchange for a nominal benefit (slight reduction in taxes or similar perhaps).

I thank you for your time in reviewing my letter and in recognizing my formal request that the proposed rule be made more stringent as above. Please add this to the public record. I would be very happy to discuss in more detail at any time.

I oppose LD 114.

Respectfully submitted,

Matthew Cheney  
33/38 Bartol Island Road  
Freeport, ME