

Colin Brannen
Heron Island Oysters

Coastal Maine has always been a place where people can make a living and build businesses working on the water. It's special in that small scale operations have a chance of succeeding due to strong support from State agencies and fair regulations that take into account the needs of entire communities, not just the well to do. LD 1146 puts that balance into jeopardy.

My name is Colin Brannen and I own a small oyster farm (Heron Island Oysters) on the Damariscotta River. Oyster aquaculture is an inherently sustainable activity that cleans Maine's coastal waters and promotes balanced ecosystems after centuries of natural resource extraction and industrial development. Current farm stocks are a fraction of historical oyster populations. I totally support the need for rules governing the shared use of Maine's public waters, but this bill is not about that. By allowing opponents of farms to require visual impact studies and by including amendments designed to reduce or eliminate the ability to sell aquaculture operations or pass them down to our children, this bill would re-orientate Maine's coastal priorities to those of the wealthy land owner.

What is the point of investing in and growing a business if you can not sell it or pass it down? I'm sure the proponents of this bill would not get into a business that they could not profit from or pass on. DMR is already stretched thin and resources used to repeatedly study spurious arguments attacking oyster farming could be used elsewhere. As it is, getting an aquaculture lease through the permitting process takes about a year and is not cheap for small scale farmers. Increasing costs and review times would be a great burden for smaller growers.

For the most part, Oyster farmers do what they do because they are passionate about working on the water and preserving the ecosystems that they and their farms depend on. We produce a delicious, sustainable product and provide jobs for our communities. Maine should be proud of her oysters and her oyster farmers. Maine oysters are world renowned and have helped make Maine a culinary destination. Maine attracts people and is being energized by younger generations who are enthusiastic about local food production. With this passion for growing/catching the best ingredients, brewing great beer, or cooking amazing dishes comes the knowledge that yes, sometimes you may have to actually look at where your food is being produced.