

Wampanoag Tribe gets a federal grant for three-year scallop restoration project

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By Nelson Sigelman



The Wampanoag tribe will use federal funds to restore fisheries in Menemsha Pond. Photo by Susan Safford

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service last week announced the award of a \$247,500 grant to the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) for a three-year project designed to restore Menemsha Pond's once thriving bay scallop fishery.

In a prepared press release, Beverly Wright, Wampanoag chairman, said the tribe was delighted that Interior Secretary Gale Norton recognized the importance of the tribe's aquaculture efforts in Menemsha Pond, which include a shellfish hatchery and "a six-acre aqua farm in an isolated section of the pond where oysters, clams and scallops are nurtured."

"The aqua farm is helping us to preserve an industry that is traditionally and historically critical to our survival and also benefiting the fishing industry as a whole," she said.

Bret Stearns, tribal director of natural resources, said the ultimate goal of the study is to find out what is holding back productivity and restore the pond to the way it used to be when people used to make a living on its waters. He said the tribe and the towns of Aquinnah and Chilmark are in a good position to look at the problem.

Mr. Stearns, along with Rob Garrison, Wampanoag shellfish hatchery director, submitted the winning grant. Mr. Stearns said it was a very competitive

process. The Wampanoag grant was one of 28 awarded nationally to federally recognized tribes totaling \$6 million under a program initiated by the Bush administration.

According to the grant summary, the bay scallop restoration project will involve multi pronged approach which will include stocking various size scallops, transplanting eel grass to provide scallop habitat, green crab predator control and water monitoring.

Rick Karney, Martha's Vineyard shellfish group director, said the federal grant represents a significant sum of money. He said hopefully the project will help researchers looking for answers to explain the decline of scallops numbers along the East Coast, a problem he said is tied to the loss of habitat, principally eel grass beds.

In 1995, Menemsha Pond was one of three sites chosen for a Federally funded bay scallop restoration project of coastal embayments. The goal was to see if a massive stocking effort of millions of large scallops could help restore the local scallop fishery. It did not.

Bay scallops grow rapidly and are able to spawn in their second summer of life. According to the state Division of Marine Fisheries, the majority of scallops spawn only once in their life and only 10 to 20



Improving prospects for bay scallops in the pond is a project goal.

percent live to be two-years old.

For that reason state and local laws and regulations are designed to protect scallops less than a year old. Spawning occurs from mid-June to mid-August. They are the only swimming bivalve and are capable of jetting through the water backwards.

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