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Oyster Cleanup to Take Weeks, Tribal Leaders Tell Selectmen

By JACK SHEA

The natural resources director of the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) told the town selectmen on Friday that the cleanup from oyster aquaculture project gone astray in Menemsha Pond will be finished in five or six weeks.

“We’ll keep at it until we complete it,” Bret Stearns told the Aquinnah selectmen Friday morning.

Thousands of oyster bags, left untended since the tribe’s oyster hatchery project reportedly shut down last fall, have begun to wash up on the shore of Menemsha Pond and beyond. Some of the bags have been found as far away as the Elizabeth Islands, and last week the town began to hear complaints.

On Friday Mr. Stearns asked the selectmen for permission to borrow the town dump truck to haul away the bags that are now being collected by tribal workers. Selectmen agreed.

Mr. Stearns also suggested that the town and tribe share the expense of an assistant to the harbor master to provide monitoring of activities on the pond.

“We’re interested in having more help with the harbor. Perhaps we can merge your needs with ours,” Mr. Stearns said.

Tribal administrator Tobias Vanderhoop also attended the meeting.

Selectmen Jim Newman and Camille Rose agreed to consider the idea. Ms. Rose said the harbor master job description could be modified to fit the position. She said the job could entail regular patrols during the day in the harbor and at the hatchery operated by the tribe.

“Let’s fast track this idea,” said Mr. Newman, who is board chairman.

Meanwhile, the future of the hatchery remains unclear. Mr. Vanderhoop said a

hatchery board is trying to determine the next step. He had no information about whether the moribund oyster program would be rejuvenated.

Begun five years ago, the hatchery began raising oysters from seed. For a short time the cultured Tomahawk oysters were marketed locally and on the mainland.

Work reportedly ceased on the project last fall, and since then the oyster rafts have been left adrift.

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