

# Great Harbor's pier site free of eel grass

By **PETER B. BRACE**  
INDEPENDENT WRITER

Great Harbor Yacht Club, the Nantucket Land Council and the town found few samples of eel grass and bay scallops within the 11,910.06-square-foot dredge area for the club's new pier and docks.

Since the 10-day public comment period for the club's permit from the Army Corps of Engineers ended on Oct. 31, it is possible for the club to start the dredge work before the end of the year and to build the docks and piers before the start of summer 2009.

The Great Harbor Yacht Club 2008 Eel Grass Survey, completed in late September by the club's engineering firm of ENSR International of Sagamore Beach, Mass. and performed under the supervision of Nantucket Land Council eel grass expert Dr. David Burdick and town shellfish biologist Jeff Mercer, found mostly decomposed seaweed and very few scallops.

In the 593 plots survey, 16 bay scallops from seed size to two-year adults were found.

"The seafloor within the proposed GHYC footprint at the time of the 2008 survey was comprised of what appeared to be a decomposing, organically enriched seafloor that is a result of decaying, unrooted, eel grass blades and benthic algae," said ENSR in its executive summary of the report. "This

dead organic material is likely trapped in the southern basin of Nantucket Harbor, which includes the proposed project area, as a consequence of fall and wintertime prevailing northeastern winds."

Mercer confirmed that this survey report is "pretty accurate" and that there is very little to see on the harbor bottom where Great Harbor plans to dredge. He added that any quahogs and soft-shell clams that the club finds in this area must be relocated elsewhere in the harbor.

"The area that we'll be dredging has a very high density of decomposing material – codium ( a type of seaweed) – and there actually is a benefit to removing the codium, as it's an invasive species and removing it may benefit eel grass," said Great Harbor Yacht Club Co-developer Gary McCarthy.

Since there is a very small amount of eel grass in the dredge area, the Conservation Commission mandated 10-to-1 mitigation of eel grass lost to dredging is not likely to produce the large amounts of eel grass transplanted into thinning areas in the harbor as expected by the Land Council and the town.

McCarthy said he expects the club's replacement of 30 traditional mushroom-anchor-and-chain moorings in front of the Monomoy area with Helix moorings will significantly enhance eel grass habitat in that part of



PHOTO BY PETER B. BRACE

Great Harbor's pier is in the clear of eel grass, according to an eelgrass study performed by the Nantucket Land Council and the Town of Nantucket.

the harbor. The traditional moorings each scour an average of 530 square feet of bottom, while the Helix has ground tackle that does not touch the bottom.

"The good news for Nantucket Harbor is that we are providing many magnitudes of additional eel grass habitat to the harbor than we are impacting at the site," said McCarthy.

Additionally, as part of Great Harbor's settlement with the Land Council and nine commercial scallopers who challenged in Superior Court the ConCom's order of conditions as well as making a request for the superceding Order of Conditions, the club committed to planting 25,000 square feet of eel grass in the harbor, the location to be

designated by a committee consisting of representatives from Land Council and town officials. Great Harbor also agreed to contribute \$35,000 a year for 10 years toward environmental enhancement projects in the Nantucket Harbor.

Although an executive summary of this survey is written, Great Harbor Yacht Club has not presented the report in its entirety to the Mitigation Plan Review Committee formed to guide execution of the club's order of conditions as it pertains to eel grass mitigation.

ConCom administrator Dirk Roggeveen will schedule a meeting of the committee to hear Great Harbor's presentation sometime in the next two weeks. ■

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