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Marine Fisheries Advisory

State Opens Long-Closed Shellfish Area in Revere and Saugus

BOSTON - The Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF), in cooperation with the City of Revere and the Town of Saugus, this week opened a shellfishing area in Revere and Saugus that had been closed to shellfish harvesting for decades.

The Lower Pines River and Center Bar, known to shellfish harvesters as N26.1, opened for the Conditionally Restricted commercial harvest of soft-shell clams on Monday. Lower Pines River had been closed since the early 1970s, and Center Bar since 1989. In reopening the area, DMF officials cited improved water quality, and noted that restrictive harvesting regulations and a comprehensive management plan developed with both communities will ensure that clams harvested from the area are safe to eat.

The area covers approximately 230 acres, including many very productive spots for soft-shell clams. The state will allow seasonal digging, October 1 through July 15 according to a once-weekly schedule set by DMF and the city of Revere. As a Conditionally Restricted area, Lower Pines River and Center Bar will be closed by the state following significant rainfall, since runoff can result in degraded water quality. DMF plans to close the area for four days following rainfall of .25 to .4 of an inch, and for seven days following heavier rainfall.

Only Master/Subordinate Diggers licensed by the DMF are eligible to harvest soft-shell clams from Lower Pines River and Center Bar. Before clams can be sold and safely consumed, they must be transported to the DMF Shellfish Purification Plant in Newburyport for depuration - a process that purges shellfish of bacterial contamination so that they are safe for humans. Soft-shell clams and other bivalve mollusks can become contaminated by filtering bacteria and viruses out of seawater in the process of feeding and respiration. These organisms can be transmitted to people if contaminated shellfish are eaten raw or undercooked.

In operation since 1928, DMF's Shellfish Purification Plant processes an average of 15,000 bushels of soft-shell clams annually. Upon arrival, clams are placed on pallets and lowered into a 3,500 gallon tank filled with clean salt water. Shellfish purge their digestive systems of particulates over the course 2 ½ to 3 days, while the water is continuously recirculated with

pumps and sterilized by ultraviolet lamps. Clean clams are returned to diggers, who sell them to shellfish dealers for processing and/or resale.