



The State of New Hampshire
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES



Thomas S. Burack, Commissioner

March 30, 2015

The Honorable Chris Christensen, Chair
Resources, Recreation and Development Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 305
Concord, NH 03301

RE: SB 168 *An act relative to the duties of the commissioner of the department of environmental services.*

Dear Chairman Christensen and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on SB 168. This bill amends RSA 487 to require the commissioner of the Department of Environmental Services (DES), jointly with the executive director of the Fish and Game Department (FGD), to make recommendations concerning the lease of certain state-owned submerged lands in the Great Bay estuary for the purpose of shellfish restoration. DES supports this bill.

Scientists at UNH have estimated that coastal New Hampshire has lost about 98% of its historic shellfish population. Just between 1993 and 2000, the standing stock of oysters in the Great Bay Estuary declined from 25 million to 1.21 million. The cause of these declines is disease, harvest and water pollution. This reduction is quite significant given oysters' natural ability to filter the estuary to improve water quality. Over the past 10 years, oyster stocks have started to recover, so attention to this issue is timely.

DES has awarded grants to support oyster restoration and believes that enabling a lease process to protect oyster restoration projects in Great Bay provides an important protection for the public funds invested in this effort. In addition, enabling the DES commissioner and FGD executive director to jointly initiate a lease, with the public benefit of the restoration vetted through RSA 4:40, will provide a level of comfort to future public and private funders as to the likely sustainability of the shellfish restoration projects they fund.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter. If you have questions or need additional information, please contact Steve Couture (steven.couture@des.nh.gov or 603-271-8801) or me (Thomas.burack@des.nh.gov or 603-271-3449).

Sincerely,

Thomas S. Burack
Commissioner

CC: Sen. Watters, Sen. Fuller Clark, Sen. Prescott, Rep. Bush, Rep. Bixby