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NIMBY stupidity

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When one lives in the Puget Sound region of Washington state, one expects a protest to most everything anyone does or wants to do.

In some cases, the protest is needed and justified. In the case of the geoduck farm in Pierce County run by Taylor Shellfish, it's another sad example of not-in-my-backyard (NIMBY) stupidity of the highest order.

Taylor has 12 acres of geoducks planted at its Pierce County site, working the last six years to build its farm, plant the geoduck seed and wait the five to six years for the high-priced clams to grow to market size.

Protests by some homeowners on shoreline land near the farm, and the pressure they put on the weathervane politicians and county government officials, has led to a wrong-headed interpretation the company's five-year permit and one-year extension is expired.

A hearings officer last week told the company it no longer could operate the site without a valid permit.

With a geoduck crop awaiting harvest at the farm in question worth between \$15 million (€9.5 million) and \$20 million (€12.7 million), the decision by this one NIMBY-loving bureaucrat is at the least egregious and deserving of reprimand and at the most cause for a mental health exam.

"We were rather shocked they came up with [the opinion] our permit had expired," Taylor CEO Bill Taylor told me Friday. "We had done what we said we would do in the permit. We planted the farm. It was quite clear in our permit application that these took six years to grow, and we were doing it sequentially, planting a couple of acres a year.

"It was obvious we thought the permit was in perpetuity, like it is for almost every other marine thing. Sometimes certain permits do specify an end date; this permit doesn't have

a specified end date.”

Taylor says the company will appeal the decision, either to a county shoreline hearings board or through a land use petition appeal via county Superior Court. It's yet to decide whether to harvest the geoducks without a permit, or risk losing the crop and the money it will bring in.

The company sells about a half-million pounds of geoducks a year. While it has no contracts, there are buyers relying on the firm to provide them with product, said Taylor.

“They can sit there for some time but we've got it included in our budget,” he said. “They can live for long period of time but one thing that happens is, if they live there too long, they grow beyond what the size that we traditionally sell these farmed geoducks.”

With other farms sites operating in Pierce County - and with other oyster growing sites throughout Washington state - Taylor Shellfish can't just pull up its stakes and move to another location. With its more than 100 years of history of shellfishing in the Pacific Northwest, Taylor has proven itself a responsible and valued corporate citizen.

Neither the company nor its 400 employees should have to wonder whether the business will suffer as a result of one hearings officer with a severe lack of common sense, or a group of petulant homeowners who don't like living near a shellfish farm.

Here's hoping someone at the next level of appeal shows some intelligence and, at the very least, allows the company to harvest the geoducks it has planted.

Better yet, the judge or hearings officer should reverse this narrow-minded interpretation of the permit rules to show not everyone in government can be bullied by some NIMBY neighbors and, more importantly, to prevent this dumb decision from becoming a precedent that governs future decision involving similar permits for Taylor and other shellfish growers.

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