

**From:** [Darlene Schanfald](#)  
**To:** [Robyn\\_Thorson@fws.gov](mailto:Robyn_Thorson@fws.gov)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] The USACE agrees that the Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge will be destabilized  
**Date:** Thursday, March 3, 2022 1:52:31 PM  
**Attachments:** [NWS-2007-1213, MFR from FA-21-138.doc](#)  
[ATT00001.htm](#)  
**Importance:** High

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Robyn Thorson, Regional Director

Regional Director's Office-R1

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Dear Director Thorson:

As an update to my earlier correspondence (below), I am attaching the USACE decision-making document / "MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD" (MOR) on how the Corps believes the Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge will be destabilized if the industrial oyster operation is implemented.

The word "destabilize" isn't in the document. That is my term. The Corps uses these words equal to "destabilize" :

**more than minimal impacts. will alter convert stressed preclude change**

With this information now in your purview, It seems clear that the mission of the Refuge and the mission of the USFWS to protect this Refuge will be seriously harmed if this industrial operation is allowed to proceed.

Excerpts from the MOR:

P. 5: The permits and the lease do not contain protective measures. **"The District Engineer determined the adverse environmental effects of the proposed activity were more than minimal due to the proposed project being sited entirely within the Dungeness National**

## **Wildlife Refuge creates more than minimal impacts to the refuge.” (P. 5)**

P. 12: The European green crab exists in the area. It is likely that the concentration of oysters could provide habitat and a food source potentially resulting in an increase in oyster drills and highly invasive European green crab, recently found adjacent to the project

P 1 2 : Bag culture could possibly **entrap** fish species by creating a physical barrier across the tidelands. This barrier may temporarily impound water and/or prevent fish from returning to deeper water during a receding tide which would result in stranding fish on the tidelands

### Under 4. Coordination

**P. 14 Corps Response:** The Corps agrees the project site is an area of both national and regional significance for migratory shorebirds and waterfowl, including Brant geese. The Corps believes the aquaculture work activities will **alter the behavior and availability of feeding, resting/rooting and grit collection habitat necessary for these species at the project site.**

### P. 17: Under Topic 5 **Impacts to Eelgrass**

Para. 4 and on to next page. **The project would convert a sand/mud tidal substrate with intermittent eelgrass to a high-density Pacific oyster dominated substrate.** The shift would be expected to alter the benthic substrate and ecological community to one more favorable to a rockier shoreline and would predictably exclude the flocks of shorebirds which feed by probing sandy/mud sediment as the tide recedes. This shift would be expected throughout the 34 acres in oyster cultivation. The up to 20,000 plastic mesh bags secured with lines and anchors could potentially result in entrapment of wildlife...or have talons that become snagged in the openings... Also, small or juvenile fish have been documented to become entrapped in the mesh bag openings. The implementation of ESA conservation measures would prevent or minimized the potential for the bags to become unsecured.

### P. 18:

**There is a potential for eelgrass to be stressed by boat grounding, anchoring or prop scarring. Eelgrass can also be stressed by trampling.** The ESA Programmatic conservation measures require a 16 horizontal ft. set-back to eelgrass to avoid disturbing the rhizomes. In addition, the ESA Programmatic does not allow vessels to ground or anchor in native eelgrass or kelp or establish paths through native eelgrass or kelp. If there is no other access to the site other than through native eelgrass, a site specific plan must be developed with practices to minimize negative effects to eelgrass and kelp from vessel operations and accessing the shellfish area.

The bag cultivation area will be sited with a 25-ft. buffer to native eelgrass. Once installed the bags would **preclude colonization** by eelgrass in the footprint of the bag cultivation area.

**P. 29: Aesthetics:** The proposed project would **change the visual landscape** from its current state. The proposed location of the aquaculture operation may have visual impacts for visitors coming to enjoy the beauty of the refuge and to connect with nature. The visitors to the Refuge use the driftwood backbone of the spit as a blind to observe wildlife in a natural setting. Visitors participating in wildlife-dependent uses, such as watching birds, marine mammals, and the visiting the

historic lighthouse, typically are using binoculars or scopes and will have a clear view of the 5 acres of plastic oyster bags at low tides and the workers. Aquaculture activities such as maintenance, planting, and harvest would be expected at the low tides, which from April through September coincide with the highest visitor use.

P. 32: Shoreline Erosion and Accretion: If the sediment accumulates from the placement of 20,000 bags/acre or due to the high density of Pacific oyster shell, this may result in a **change in the longshore transport of sediments.**

The Corps did not even consider an EIS/EIR.

I hope you will reconsider and vociferously oppose the pending tragedy. You can ask that the USACE rescind its permit. You can ask the WA State Dept. of Nature Resources rescind its permit.

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