

# The Lincoln County News™

The only weekly newspaper locally owned, printed, and published in Lincoln County.

CURRENT NEWS

SPORTS

COMMUNITY

OPINION

OBITUARIES

EVENTS

**NEWCASTLE**  
**REALTY**  
 207-563-1003



## Damariscotta River Study Shows Decline in Soft-Shell Clams, Rise in Oysters

September 24, 2019 at 9:34 am

**Evan Houk**



**The Damariscotta Board of Selectmen reviews a handout about a shellfish resilience study by Kara Pellowe, a researcher at the Darling Marine Center. From left: Chair Robin Mayer and Selectmen Mark Hagar, Amy Leshure, Louis Abbotoni, and Joshua Pinkham. (Evan Houk photo)**

The Damariscotta River's soft-shell clam population is down and its oyster population is up, according to the results of a shellfish resilience study this summer.

Kara Pellowe, a researcher at the Darling Marine Center in Walpole, presented her preliminary findings from the baseline survey to the Damariscotta Board of Selectmen on Wednesday, Sept. 18.

"The shellfish populations in the Damariscotta River had never been systematically surveyed, as far as I understand. So this is an important starting point, especially for the Damariscotta-Newcastle Joint Shellfish Committee to be able to effectively manage the resource and protect this valuable local fishery," Pellowe said.

The full report will be available in December.

Pellowe said the survey involved excavating and sifting through 300 square feet of mud flats at low tide in 30 locations, documenting any shellfish larger than 2 millimeters.

A \$13,173 grant from the Maine Community Foundation's Broad Reach Fund paid for the study. Damariscotta Town Manager Matt Lutkus applied for the grant on behalf of the Damariscotta-Newcastle Joint Shellfish Committee.

The survey of the Damariscotta River is one of 15 across the state that are part of the Maine Shellfish Restoration and Resilience Project. The project is a collaboration between the Broad Reach Fund, the Maine Shellfish Advisory Council, the Senator George J. Mitchell Center for Sustainability Solutions, and the University of Maine's Department of Communication and Journalism.

The goals of the Damariscotta River survey, listed on a handout provided by Pellowe, are to “establish a baseline of current shellfish populations and historic trends” and “engage shellfish harvesters and students in better understanding our local resources.”

One part of the survey involved talking to eight shellfish harvesters who hold shellfish licenses from Damariscotta and Newcastle. Pellowe said 100% of those harvesters said they have noticed changes in shellfish populations and the environment over the past 20-30 years.

The handout states that increased engagement with shellfish harvesters in surveys is essential for the multiple-year monitoring of shellfish populations.

The changes cited the most by harvesters were the decline in soft-shell clams and rise of wild oysters.

Selectman Amy Leshure asked if the “wild” oysters could be escapees from oyster farms on the river, or if they are naturally occurring.

“The simultaneous increase in oyster aquaculture throughout the river is probably why we’re seeing more oysters settling and growing on the banks of the river,” Pellowe said.

She said it is a benefit to the oyster farmers that the oyster spat, or larvae, is settling on the banks of the river.

She said there are so many oysters that the precise abundance could not be measured properly with the study’s methods. She said it is possible that additional studies in the future could find higher numbers of oysters.

Pellowe said it is currently unknown why the soft-shell clams have decreased in number.

Some harvesters have found they can no longer make a living off of soft-shell clams alone and have had to diversify, she said.

The



**Kara Pellowe, a researcher at the Darling Marine Center, answers a question from a resident at the Sept. 18 meeting of the Damariscotta Board of Selectmen. (Evan Houk photo)**

ecological part of the survey involved studying shellfish populations at five different points in the Damariscotta River: Jacks Point, Chadborn, Westview Acres, Hog Island, and Perkins Point.

The survey areas were chosen in collaboration with local harvesters.

Pellowe said the types of shellfish at different points in the river vary widely. The research team found mostly quahogs, oysters, and soft-shell clams. Only three razor clams were found throughout all areas.

At Chadborn, there was an average of two shellfish per square foot and most were soft-shell clams.

Hog Island had the highest population, at 8 1/2 shellfish per square foot. The majority of the shellfish there were quahogs.

“We found that the sites that were accessible only by land had significantly lower densities of shellfish than sites that were accessible only by boat,” Pellowe said.

Selectman Louis Abbotoni asked if the density is being affected by green crabs, a predator of soft-shell clams that has been on the rise in recent years.

“The study that we did didn’t specifically look at predation, but it is an important starting point for leading us to questions that science can help us answer,” Pellowe said.

Pellowe noted that the survey is not yet complete.

“We have ongoing ecological data collection happening. We deployed recruitment boxes. ... There are nine of them, deployed in very early June, and they will catch shellfish spat (larvae) as it’s settling through the water column,” Pellowe said.

She said the comparison between the population densities of the baby shellfish and what the researchers found this year in the mudflats should provide insight into predation.

Pellowe said she and her partners have discussed ways to improve and expand the survey and they plan to conduct another one next summer.

She said the team will actively search for grant funding for next year’s study.

## Related Stories



[Damariscotta Selectmen Approve Marijuana Regulations](#)

---



Damariscotta Selectmen Agree to Bar Marijuana Edibles



Damariscotta Selectmen Send Solar Proposal to Voters



Bremen Officials Say Ordinance Would Fix Problems, Opponents Voice Concerns



Damariscotta Selectmen Discuss Ordinances on Marijuana, Plastics

**Share this:**



*To stay informed on local happenings, sign up for our newsletter!*



**NEWSLETTER**

Stay in the loop with all the news, happenings, and goings-on in Lincoln County with our twice-weekly email newsletter! You may unsubscribe at any time.

\* indicates required field

Name:\*

015251

Email:\*

heather.m.leslie@gmail.com

SUBMIT

---

## CURRENT NEWS

Waldoboro to Have New Website

---

Bremen Broadband Committee Mulls  
Options for High-Speed Internet

---

Nobleboro Selectmen Adopt Ordinance on  
Posting Roads

---

Nobleboro Selectmen Adopt Ordinance on  
Posting Roads

---

Whitefield Consults Damariscotta Official on  
Marijuana 'Opt In'

---





---

## NEWCASTLE

51°F Here to view NWS Forecasts.



---

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Historic Tidbit Tasting Tour of Damariscotta**

10/02/2019

**Red Cloak Haunted History Tour of Damariscotta**

10/03/2019

**Antonio Lopez & Friends**

10/04/2019

Boothbay Harbor

**Oktoberfest**

10/05/2019

Wiscasset

**Misfit Love Day 2019**

10/05/2019

Bremen

---

### INFORMATION

[About](#)

[Contact](#)

[LCNME](#)

[Terms of Service](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

### ACCOUNT

[Log Out](#)

[My Account](#)

[Subscriptions](#)

### The Lincoln County News

116 Mills Rd., Newcastle, ME

Phone: 207-563-3171

1-800-339-5818

Fax: 207-563-3127

Mailing: PO Box 36, Damariscotta, ME 04543

[info@lcnme.com](mailto:info@lcnme.com)



Printed & published by  
The Lincoln County Publishing Company