

# Habitat Conservation Division Aquaculture Best Management Practices

NMFS offers following Conservation Recommendations as best management practices for aquatic farms to minimize adverse impacts to Essential Fish Habitat:

1. Monitor the lease site for presence of eelgrass and record any beds observed. If present, avoid disturbing the beds during maintenance and harvest, and locate the lease site to avoid shading any established beds. A buffer zone of 10-20 feet can allow for the expansion of eelgrass beds without the need for moving the aquaculture operation.
2. Vessels should be operated at sufficiently low speeds to reduce wake energy, and no-wake zones should be designated near established eelgrass beds.
3. Articulate a crew monitoring plan to ensure no loss or entanglement of gear after storm events separate from general monitoring.
4. Include a requirement to remove all mooring buoys, anchoring systems, etc. and restore the aquatic farm site once you decide to vacate the operation to minimize continued impacts to EFH from abandoned structures.
5. Consider establishing an escrow account where funds would be returned to the applicant once complete cleanup of the location had been completed. Escrow requirements could be proportional to the size of the operation.
6. If operating a kelp farm, survey the site for herring presence in the spring and for herring spawn. If spawn-on-kelp is present, no kelp harvests can occur until after the eggs have hatched. Maintain a record of herring spawn surveys and results.
7. If operating an oyster farm, do not dump any shells in productive areas under or adjacent to the proposed farmsite as they create a barren zone on the bottom that will not grow submerged aquatic vegetation. Dispose of oyster shells on land or in water at least 200 feet deep and 1/4 mile offshore.
8. If operating an oyster farm, require the applicant to use new materials for the oyster grow-out rafts, suspended culture tray system, and other structures in contact with the seawater to minimize the potential for an invasive species introduction. Ensure that oyster spat transported from other areas are free of nonindigenous species.