

**Minutes of the Guilford Oyster Ground Committee Meeting
February 7, 1984
As Recorded by Tim Visel**

Present	Guilford Oyster Ground Committee	Madison Shellfish Commission
	William Green	Timothy Visel
	Bob Ketchale	Dick Regan, Director Internship Program
	Becky Mars	
	Sally Richards	

Public Attendees

Mr. Frank Nolan
Mr. Jack Thompson
Mr. Werner Schirmer

- 1) A. Introduction by Chairman Green reviewing the status of the new Shellfish Commission (Public hearing scheduled February 15) ordinance. Will be acted upon after hearing - all welcome to attend hearing.

B. The purpose of tonight's meeting is to discuss the cooperative agreement with Madison of East River. Tim Visel is here at my invitation to discuss this proposal with us.
- 2) T. Visel on behalf of the Madison Shellfish Commission, I wish to affirm our (Madison) support of a cooperative agreement for the East River.
- 3) William Green – Could you summarize the status of the agreement?
- 4) T. Visel – the agreement would continue the verbal agreements in place for the last 5 years. The written agreement originally submitted two years ago called for the creation of an independent commission for the East River. This has been deleted from the agreement including item 6 which was included by error on the revised text.

General discussion of Licensing and fee splitting.

- 5) T. Visel - we have already agreed to fee splitting on October 14, 1983.
- 6) William Green – I feel that the new Shellfish Commission should sign this agreement and not this Committee which will soon be disbanded.

Guilford Oyster Ground Committee agrees.

- 7) William Green – I would however, like a motion to go before the Committee and be recorded into the minutes.

Guilford Oyster Ground Committee agrees.

- 8) William Green – I would like to make a motion that Guilford and Madison enter into a cooperative agreement for the management of oyster beds with natural growth harvesters above Cedar Island and the continuing of the recreational relay are below.

- 9) William Green – Tim, could you give us an idea how you feel about the condition of the beds and any programs you think should occur.
- 10) T. Visel – I'm in a rather unique position of appearing before you tonight not only as a member of the Madison Shellfish Commission, but also a licensed commercial fisherman and a University Extension Specialist. My interest in the East River dates back ten years to this month, and gives me a "before and after" viewpoint. Basically I think we're doing a good job, the beds are in excellent condition compared to what they were previously. I think it is important that I read some historical references from Goode (1889) concerning management of river natural beds.

General discussion of benefits of shelling pg. 278 paragraph 2.

General discussion of benefits of hand dredging p. 279 paragraph 2.

General discussion of benefits of employment opportunities.

- 11) William Green – Do you think we need to shell the river?
- 12) T. Visel – No, not at the present time, the shell base is sufficient for at least five years. The sets have been so heavy that cultch is not a problem. We should, however, plan for the future and establish a "cultch fund," eventually we will need to shell.
- 13) William Green – You (Madison) collect 50 cents/bushel from natural growers, where does the money go?
- 14) T. Visel – The per bushel fee is designed to be put into shell (cultch) programs. The Chesapeake Bay oystermen pay 45 cents/bushel to support state shell programs on public beds. At the present time, we (Madison) are trying to deepen the rivers, especially the Hammonasset River. Monies go for educational programs, and obtaining equipment (boat engines dredge, etc.) However, in the future, shell will be needed as well as patrols and survey work.
- 15) William Green – What do you think the East River can produce (lower section) each year?
- 16) T. Visel – The lower section can produce 5 thousand bushels of oysters each year.
- 17) Frank Dolan – I agree with Tim Visel, when the men were allowed to tong (up to 1963) we purchased 6 to 8 thousand bushels from the East River yearly and there were other buyers.
- 18) T. Visel – Dick Regan, program director of our Internship Program is here tonight and he can give us some precise information on spatfalls.
- 19) Dick Regan reviews program and present spatfall information.
- 20) Frank Dolan agrees, "East River got a good set."
- 21) Werner Schirmer – the upper section open to natural growers is still thick with oysters.
- 22) T. Visel – Five year ago the beds were in very poor condition in our rivers. The creeks, because of restricted flows were in very bad shape. For the East River tremendous mortalities occurred between 1963-1979.

- 23) Frank Dolan agrees, but also states the large quantities of oysters were wasted by both Guilford and Madison by placing oysters in deep waters and transplanting much too many.
- 24) T. Visel – We (Madison) transplant less and are more careful as to areas planted (relayed) and utilize adults only.
- 25) Frank Dolan doubts if Guilford needs 2,000 bushels a year.
- 26) T. Visel – The relay of 500 bushels of adult oysters were very successful in Madison last fall.
- 27) Frank Dolan – When we first started dredging in the East River, the oysters were very thick with large oysters and beds were deep. It was hard to penetrate the beds. It was hard to penetrate the beds. Hand dredges would just skip over the top and kill oysters. But now the oysters are quality halfshell oysters and we get good sets in the river.
- 28) William Green – We missed a season this fall. I would like to make a motion that oysters be transplanted for a recreational season beginning May 1, 1984.

Guilford Oyster Ground Committee agrees.

- 29) Motion made and seconded to have Mr. Dolan transplant 2,500 bushels to Great Harbor with mechanical dredges.
- 30) T. Visel – Madison has requested that relays be done with hand dredges.
- 31) William Green – How do you feel about mechanical dredges?
- 32) T. Visel – From a resource standpoint continuous mechanical dredging is very destructive on seed beds. I've always felt what we did was special – we move so many oysters in such a short time by a mechanical dredge that it was not damaging, but actually beneficial. It's always nice to have that option of moving hundreds of bushels in a day. A natural growther would take weeks (months) to transplant 2,000 bushels of adult oysters.
- 33) William Green – Frank (Dolan) would the relay be 1 to1?
- 34) Frank Dolan – yes 1 to1.
- 35) William Green – Werner (Schirmer) if you were to bid on such a relay what would you estimate your bid would be?
- 36) Werner Schirmer – About 10 to1.
- 37) T. Visel – Would the oysters be culled and shell plus seed oysters returned.
- 38) Frank Dolan – The top layer of oysters contain 75% oysters, as you go deeper the percentage drops. We would give a fair count.

- 39) T. Visel – Madison has a cull law. We have requested that shell and seed oysters are returned to this area for growth and future recreational use.
- 40) Frank Dolan – We use 4 inch squares in dredges so small oysters and shells fall through.
- 41) William Green – Our transplant area supports growth and small seed do well.
- 42) T. Visel – We (Madison) do not have a good grow out areas for the public (access). Our program is a “put and take” relay in a seasonal fishery. Any seed oysters would be consumed by oyster drills or starfish. Any summer transplants would curtail swimming activities because of sharp shells. We do however, transplant clams in the summer and that was extremely successful.
- 43) William Green – I feel that we should investigate the legality of using mechanical dredges on designated natural beds.
- 44) T. Visel – John Volk should examine our program and I will report back to the Madison Shellfish Commission – perhaps we could get together then.
- 45) W. Green – Tim we have recently discussed a proposal to reestablish the lower East River oyster bed. Could you give a short presentation on this.
- 46) T. Visel – As an extension agent and having been employed in four states in the last ten years. I have had the opportunity to talk to a great number of oystermen and shellfishermen alike. Nearly all of them have stories of pollution, dredging or land fill activity that put them out of business directly or restricted them economically. No where is this more profound than with the oyster industry. More than 60 natural oyster beds have been destroyed in New England, especially from New York to Cape Cod, Mass. These natural beds provided thousands of job opportunities to those individuals who gathered seed oysters to be sold to oyster growers. Natural river beds are critical suppliers of seed oysters (they are protected from salt water predators) and are especially valuable. Seed oystering is also beneficial to local economies. The proposal we discussed would involved replacing natural beds that were destroyed.
- 47) William Green – Tim could you explain the process.
- 48) T. Visel – For all practical purposes, the natural oyster bed at the lower end of the East River (from junction of Neck to Guilford sluice) has been removed. In all respects it no longer functions as a natural oyster beds it is destroyed as a seed area of grow out ground. It would take 150,000 to 200,000 bushels of clam shell (oyster shell is too valuable to use as a base) to harden the river bottom so that it would support oyster culture. I calculate this at 10,000 bushels per acre at a total cost of 250,000 dollars.
- 49) T. Visel – Frank (Dolan) do you agree?
- 50) Frank Dolan – yes, and probably more.
- 51) T. Visel – If it could be demonstrated that oyster beds could be replaced, it will help rebuilt dozens of natural oyster beds lost in Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

- 52) General discussion about town funds for bed re-establishment or a state cultch program.
- 53) Frank Dolan – The last time they dredged we tried to get the corps (Army Corps of Engineers) to only dredge up to C 7 instead of C 9 (buoys). We even went to the First Selectmen by they still dredged up to the Black can. We took 4 loads of set up the river so it would not be killed.
- 54) If this program is approved, I would like to be on board to take photographs and obtain research information (T. Visel).
- 55) Frank Dolan – Jacobs Beach to Guilford Point Joshua Cove and Hoadley Creek are other locations.

General discussion of oyster bed replacement.

- 56) Guilford Oyster Ground Committee feels that re-establishment of natural oyster bed is a good idea but will be addressed by new Shellfish Commission.

Meeting adjourns.

Oyster Grounds Committee Meeting
February 7, 1984

The following positive actions were taken by the Committee (those present were Bill Green, Rob Ketchale, Becky Mars, and Sally Richards).

A motion was passed (made by Green, seconded by Ketchale) that Guilford and Madison jointly manage the oyster grounds in the East River above Cedar Island; all permit funds and bushel fees will go into a joint account to be split equally by the Madison Shellfish Commission and the Guilford Oyster Grounds Committee.

A second motion was passed (made by Ketchale, seconded by Green) that: to provide the public with enough oysters, we recommend Frank Dolan catch and transport 2500 bushels of oysters, on a 1 for 1 basis, from the lower East River (south of Cedar Island) to Great Harbor in an area so designated by the Oyster Grounds Committee. This work is to commence around the first of May.

Thirdly, the present Oyster Grounds Committee wishes to advise the future Shellfish Commission to coordinate the re-establishment of a natural oyster bed(s) in Guilford with the advice and interest of the Marine Advisory Extension Officer, Timothy Visel. Some areas to be considered are: between Jacobs Beach and Guilford Point; Joshua Cove; and the Hoadley Creek area.

INSIDE CONNECTICUT

South Central/Shore Edition

Marine scientists study oyster beds

Divers filming underwater in Guilford

By Cheryl Serra
Courant Correspondent

GUILFORD – Patty Meyers and Bob DeGoursey adjusted their air tanks and secured weight belts over wet suits, then eased themselves over the side of a wooden boat and into the East river Thursday.

Tim Visel and Richard Stoecker carefully handed a 75-pound underwater video camera to the divers as they descended into the murky water for the second time on a glorious end-of-summer day.

Moments later, DeGoursey surfaced with his prize catch, a thriving oyster. Visel obviously was pleased by the site of it.

Visel, a marine extension agent with the University of Connecticut's Sea Grant Program, and Heather Crawford, a graduate student at the university's Marine Science Institute at Avery Point in Groton, said the underwater filming of the oyster beds represents the first survey work on the restored oyster bed.

Restoration of oyster beds, Crawford, said, is relatively new to the eastern portion of the state, although similar projects have been conducted in the Bridgeport area in the past. Crawford said restoring the beds, and the later cultivation, will maintain the channel depths and will eliminate the need for dredging. When beds are not maintained, oysters can pile on top of each other, collecting silt and reducing channel depths.

Many areas beds have been neglected since 1950 because of the prohibition against shellfishing as a result of pollution, she said.

Oyster beds in the nearby Neck River in Madison grew so high that boaters had

difficulty traveling in the water, Visel said. When oysters were removed in 1979, access was easier. The same problem occurred in the West River in Guilford until oysters were removed there in 1985, he said.

Maintaining oyster beds is labor intensive: Harvesters must remove silt, predators and debris at least once a year, Crawford said. With a 28,000-bushel donation of large shells by local brothers, Frank and Joseph Dolan, three years ago, Visel proposed to Guilford a restoration of the area. The shells provide a place for oyster larvae to grow.

"This year has been a fantastic year for oyster spawning," Crawford said.

The videotaping of the beds has been a three-year, cooperative effort. The National Undersea Research Program sponsored the project, the Madison Shellfish Commission has lent its boat for the venture and Madison Community Television has lent its equipment. Madison Public Television will air the videotape after it is completed, and Visel will show the tape to shellfish commissions, regulatory agencies and other interested groups.

Crawford sees the oyster restoration as part of a project to restore natural habitats of a variety of marine life.

"If you bring back one section of the habitat, it will eventually correct other problems," she said.

REGION

State oyster program showing returns

By Lynn Bonner
Day Staff Writer

GUILFORD – For years the victims of pollution and neglect, the state's oyster beds can be returned to productivity with the proper care, about 40 people learned Saturday at a two-acre revitalized shellfish bed.

Timothy C. Visel of the Sea Grant Marine Advisory Program showed oyster beds can be revived and managed areas can yield more live oysters than natural beds, during a state Department of Environmental Protection Family Discovery Program presentation. In the early 1900s, about 15 million bushels of oysters, much in demand by gourmands, were harvested each year in Connecticut. The restoration program is part of a federally funded program designed to improve, restore, maintain and manage oyster beds, Visel said. The Neck River and the East River meet at a point close to the state boat launch in Guilford. In 1985, a local oysterman, Frank Dolan, began to reestablish part of an oyster bed in the East River that the Army Corps of Engineers dredged to create a mooring area in 1957. The Neck River has a natural bed a few hundred yards away.

The small boat Visel and Bruce C. Beebe of the Madison Shellfish Commission used to pull a hand oyster dredge, tipped to one side as the men hauled the apparatus filled with the shellfish onboard.

Two 25-second tows of the East and Neck Rivers yielded a bucketful of live oysters and shells from each bed. The shellfish were placed in separate piles on the bank.

“This is what made Connecticut famous,” said Visel as he held up a Connecticut blue[blue point] oyster. The state's oyster production peaked in the early 1900s, he said when about 15 million bushels were harvested. By 1966, the harvests were off 98 percent, he said. To create a hard bed for the young oysters, 22,000 bushels of New Jersey surf clam shells were dumped into the East River. The juvenile oysters must attach to a hard surface to survive. The shells Visel pulled from the river included a few clamshells where oysters were beginning to grow.

When oysters are allowed to grow under crowded conditions, they become elongated, crooked and may die, Visel said. He held up a three-inch long oyster from the natural bed that was bent in the middle at a 45-degree angle. About 75 percent of the oysters taken from the managed bed were alive, while about 90 percent of the shellfish taken from the natural bed were dead.

The oysters taken from the Neck and East rivers must be purified before they can be sold. They are placed, live, in clean salt water for 14 days. The restored two-acre bed now produces hundreds of bushels of oysters, Visel said. Visel has worked on a number of restoration projects in the state, including East Lyme's. Oyster restoration in the Pattagansett River has not been as successful as the East River project.

