

Figure 1. Vicinity map.¹

Location: East of Hodgsons Island, Damariscotta River, South Bristol, Lincoln County, Maine

Purpose: Experimental lease for bottom and suspended culture of American/eastern oyster (*Crassostrea virginica*)

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Report Preparation: Meryl Grady and Amanda Ellis

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all figures in this report were created in ArcGIS Pro version 3.3 using digitized NOAA Nautical Charts or georeferenced aerial photographs provided by The Maine Office of GIS.



Application Overview

The applicant, Blackstone Point Oyster Co, is requesting a 2.17² acre experimental lease east of Hodgsons Island in the Damariscotta River for the suspended and bottom culture of American/eastern oysters (*Crassostrea virginica*). The applicant intends to use this site to experiment with winter harvesting at a commercial scale, as well as to determine the quality of the product produced. Gear will remain on the surface year-round, and the site will be in operation year-round. Bottom cultured oysters would be harvested by drag or SCUBA diver.³

General Characteristics

On June 3, 2025, Department of Marine Resources (DMR) scientists assessed the proposed lease site. DMR scientists arrived on site at approximately 11:35 AM. Hodgsons Island to the west of the proposal has a rocky shoreline with patchy, cobble beaches leading to forested uplands. Directly to the west of the proposal, the Hodgsons Island shoreline consists of cliffs and bluffs. Farmers Island to the east of the proposal has a rocky shoreline with scattered cobble beaches leading to forested uplands.

Depth

DMR scientists began collecting water depths at the proposed site shortly before low tide at approximately 11:40 AM (Table 1). Measured depths at corners of the proposed lease site ranged from 12.3 to 21.0 feet. Correcting for tidal variation derives approximate water depths at corners of the proposal at mean low water (MLW, 0.0 feet) to be from 11.3 to 20.0 feet. Approximate depths at mean high water (MHW, 9.4 feet⁴) at corners of the proposal are 20.7 to 29.4 feet (Table 2). The water current direction was northerly at the time of the site visit.

Table 1. Predicted tidal heights in Walpole, Damariscotta River, Maine.⁵

Date	Time	Height (ft)
2025/06/03	5:37 AM	9.0 H
2025/06/03	12:03 PM	0.9 L
2025/06/03	6:18 PM	8.8 H

Table 2. Collected and derived depths at corners of the proposed lease area.

Corner	Measured Depth (ft)	MLW Depth (ft)	MHW Depth (ft)
NW	16.4	15.4	24.8
NE	20.6	19.6	29.0
E	20.1	19.1	28.5
SE	21.0	20.0	29.4
SW	12.3	11.3	20.7

² Applicant originally requested 2.19 acres. DMR calculations indicate the area is 2.17 acres.

³ Application pages 6-7

⁴ MHW in Walpole is 9.4 feet, NOAA Tide Station 8416731

⁵ <https://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/oaatidepredictions.html?id=8416731>



Bottom Characteristics

DMR scientists observed the bottom characteristics of the proposed lease site via a remotely operated vehicle (ROV). Bottom characteristics were categorized using the Coastal and Marine Ecological Classification Standard (CMECS), a national standard for describing features of the marine environment (Table 3). Sediment information was determined based on visual analysis of the video. The bottom of the proposed lease site is composed of mud with a sheet algal bed overlay.

Table 3. Bottom characteristics of the proposed site.

Substrate Origin	Substrate Class	Substrate Subclass	Substrate Group
Geologic Substrate	Unconsolidated Mineral Substrate	Fine Unconsolidated Substrate	Mud
Benthic/Attached Biota	Aquatic Vegetation Bed	Benthic Macroalgae	Sheet Algal Bed

Position and Distances to Shore

The measuring tool in ArcGIS Pro 3.3 was used to verify the distances and bearings between proposed lease corners. Distances to shore were determined using the measuring tool in ArcGIS Pro 3.3, a nautical chart provided by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and the application coordinates (Table 4, Figures 2-4).

Application Coordinates (WGS84) – 2.17 Acres

<u>Corner</u>	<u>Latitude</u>	<u>Longitude</u>	
NW	43.896383°	-69.572769°	then 103 feet at 91° True to
NE	43.896372°	-69.572378°	then 346 feet at 167° True to
E	43.895447°	-69.572089°	then 331 feet at 179° True to
SE	43.894539°	-69.572072°	then 142 feet at 267° True to
SW	43.894511°	-69.572608°	then 684 feet at 356° True to NW

Table 4. Approximate distances from proposal corners to surrounding features (Figures 2-4).

Feature	Distance
NW corner to Hodgsons Island shoreline at MLW	~60' to the west
NW corner to Farmers Island shoreline at MLW	~325' to the east
NE corner to Hodgsons Island shoreline at MLW	~160' to the west
NE corner to Farmers Island shoreline at MLW	~225' to the east
E corner to Farmers Island shoreline at MLW	~245' to the east
SE corner to charted rocky shoal south of Farmers Island	~340' to the east
SE corner to Farmers Island shoreline at MLW	~350' to the northeast



Feature	Distance
SE corner to Hodgsons Island shoreline at MLW	~200' to the west
SW corner to Hodgsons Island shoreline at MLW	~50' to the west
SW corner to Farmers Island shoreline at MLW	~480' to the northeast

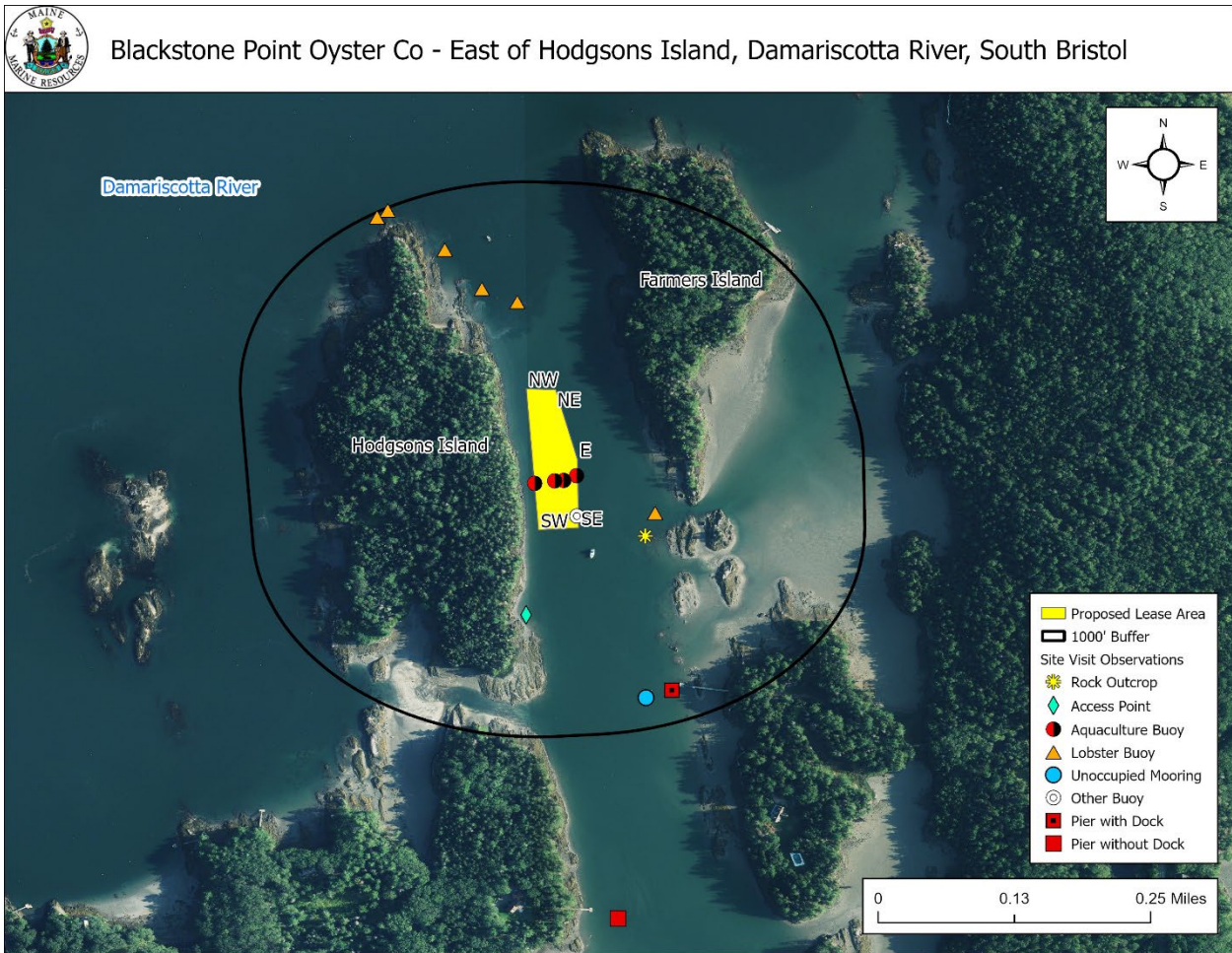


Figure 2a. Proposed lease area with site visit observations.

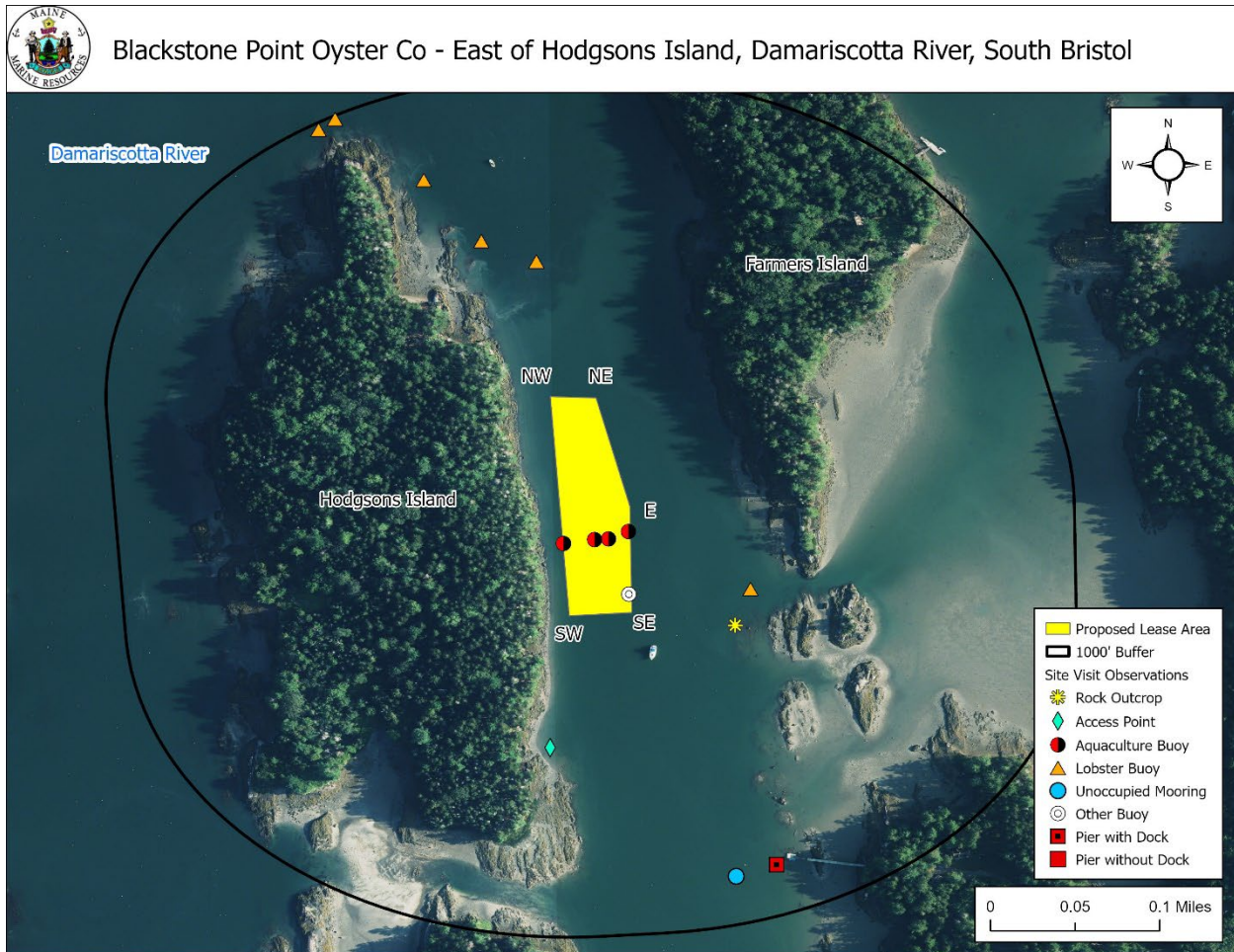


Figure 2b. A closer view of the proposed lease area with site visit observations.

Pursuant to statute and regulation, aquaculture leases are evaluated in consideration of applicable decision criteria. The Site Report documents DMR’s observations of the area and other information, in consideration of those criteria, as noted below:

(1) Riparian Ingress and Egress

The proposal is approximately 50 feet east of Hodgsons Island at MLW and approximately 225 feet west of Farmers Island at MLW. DMR scientists did not observe any structures or docks along the eastern shoreline of Hodgsons Island, and no structures or docks were observed along the western shoreline of Farmers Island. According to aerial imagery⁶, there is a dock on the northeastern shoreline of Farmers Island approximately 1,100 feet from the proposal. DMR observed one pier with a dock and an associated unoccupied mooring in the vicinity of the proposal. The dock was approximately 850 feet southeast of the proposal and attached to land that is connected to the mainland by an isthmus, which contains an access road. The unoccupied

⁶ Coastal\orthoCoastalMidcoast2023



mooring was approximately 855 feet southeast of the proposal and was labeled "Gardner" (Figures 2a and 2b). DMR also observed one pier without a dock approximately 1,900 feet south of the proposal (Figure 2a).

A Harbormaster Questionnaire was sent to the Town of South Bristol. DMR did not receive a response.

(2) Navigation

The proposal is situated outside of the main north-south navigational channel within the Damariscotta River. The main navigational channel is approximately 2,000 feet northwest of the proposal (Figure 3). The proposal is located at the entrance to Seal Cove. A portion of the proposal, approximately 1.07 acres, is located within the deeper water access to Seal Cove (Figure 4). There is approximately 50 feet of water between the proposal and Hodgsons Island to the west at MLW, and approximately 225 feet of water between the proposal and Farmers Island to the east at MLW. During the site visit, DMR scientists observed a tidally exposed rocky outcropping approximately 235 feet east-southeast of the proposal (Figures 2a-2b). At lower tidal stages, the outcropping would be exposed, which may cause vessels to navigate westerly of the hazard.

According to aerial imagery⁷, there are approximately 14 piers/docks south of the proposal in Seal Cove, including the two piers observed during DMR's site visit. There are three navigational entrances to Seal Cove. The entrance between Hodgsons Island and Farmers Island has deeper water access compared to other possible navigational routes to and from Seal Cove. Therefore, it is likely the most used navigational route for vessels entering and exiting Seal Cove due to the deeper water. There is an entrance south of Hodgsons Island. This narrow navigational route contains an intertidal sandbar, rocky outcroppings, and navigational hazards. Approximate water depth in this area at MHW is 9.4 feet. This navigational route could likely only be used by paddle craft or vessels with a very shallow draft during certain tidal stages. There is another entrance south of Farmers Island. This navigational route has approximate water depths of 0.5-3 feet at MLW. There is a narrow, 30-foot-wide channel south of Farmers Island to pass through. This navigational route could likely only be used by paddle craft or vessels with a very shallow draft (Figures 2a-4).

During DMR's site visit, no boating activity was observed in the vicinity of the proposal.

⁷ Coastal\orthoCoastalMidcoast2023

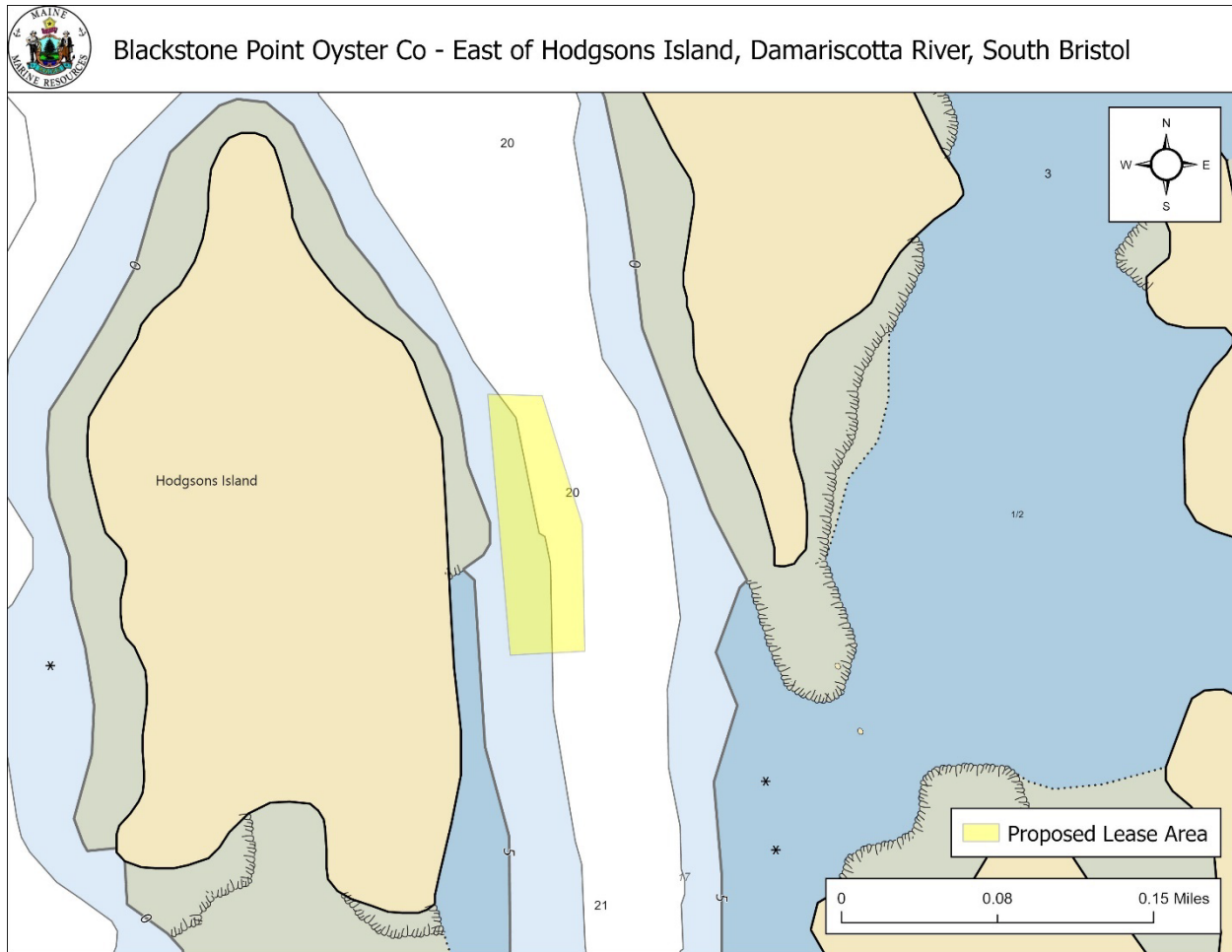


Figure 4. The proposal in relation to charted navigational channels.

(3) Fishing and Other Uses

During the site visit, DMR observed six lobster buoys and one unknown buoy in the general vicinity of the proposal. The closest lobster buoy was located approximately 270 feet east of the proposal. The unknown buoy, labeled as “other buoy” in Figure 2, was located within the proposal boundaries (Figure 2). The buoy was located approximately 5-10 feet south of Limited Purpose Aquaculture (LPA) site MPAR324 (Images 1 and 2). No other commercial or recreational fishing was observed during the site visit.

Hodgsons Island, also referred to as Stratton Island, is managed by Coastal Rivers Conservation Trust (CRCT). The island contains recreational trails and according to CRCT, it is only accessible by paddle craft, boat tender, or skiff.⁸ CRCT states the best spot to land a boat on the island is a small, gravel cove at the northeastern end where the trailhead is located, or the southern end can be accessed by small boat.⁹ The Hodgsons Island shoreline directly to the west of the

⁸ <https://www.coastalrivers.org/trails/stratton-island/> (accessed 10/9/2025)

⁹ Ibid



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proposal consisted of cliffs and bluffs, which would preclude vessels from being able to land in this area. DMR observed a possible shoreline access point to Hodgsons Island approximately 400 feet southwest of the proposal (Figures 2a-2b, Image 3).

Image 1. (left): Unknown buoy observed at the southern end of the lease proposal. Image taken facing easterly with Farmers Island in the background.

Image 2. (right): Close up of unknown buoy.





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Image 3. Possible shoreline access point on Hodgsons Island. Image taken facing westerly looking at the eastern shoreline of Hodgsons Island.





(4) Other Aquaculture Uses

There are four LPA sites within the boundaries of this proposal. MPAR124, MPAR224, MPAR324, and MPAR424 are licensed to Mackenzie Parsons. According to the application, if the experimental lease is granted any LPAs within the boundaries would be relinquished.¹⁰ There are no aquaculture leases within 1,000 feet of the proposal (Figure 5).

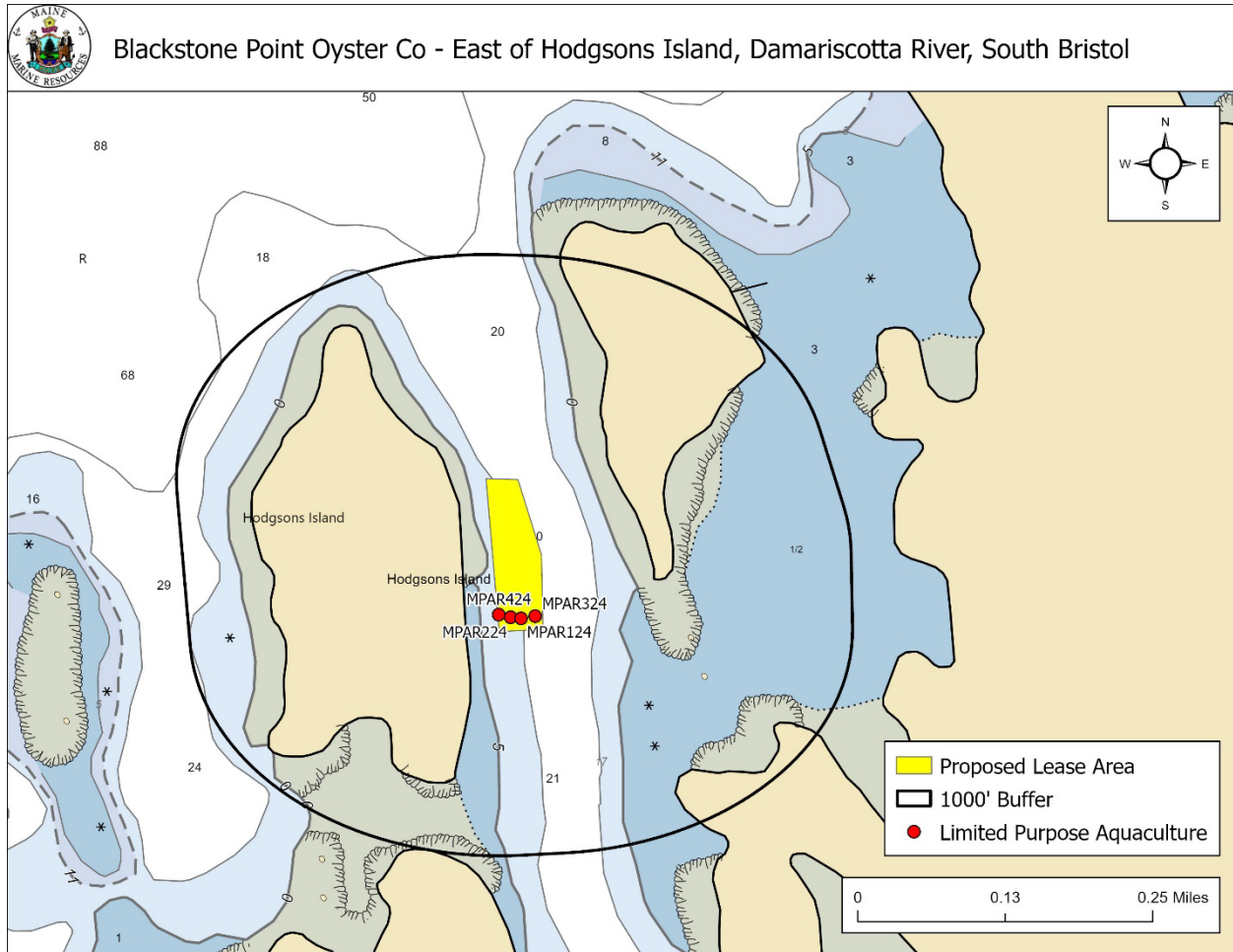


Figure 5. Aquaculture leases and LPA licenses in the vicinity of the proposed lease area.

(5) Existing System Support

Epibenthic Flora and Fauna

DMR scientists utilized an ROV to assess the epibenthic ecology of the proposed lease. The relative abundance of epibenthic flora and fauna observed in the video footage is described below in Table 5.

¹⁰ Application page 10



Table 5. Species observed on underwater video footage.

Species Observed	Abundance
Mysid Shrimp (<i>mysis</i> spp.)	Abundant
Wormweed (<i>Ascophyllum</i> spp.)	Common
Sugar kelp (<i>Saccharina latissima</i>)	Occasional
Crab (unidentifiable species)	Rare

Eelgrass (*Zostera marina*)

Records of seagrass collected by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) in 2023¹¹ indicate the nearest mapped eelgrass is approximately 950 feet southwest of the proposal (Figure 6). No eelgrass was observed on underwater video footage within the proposal boundaries during DMR’s site visit. According to data collected by DMR in 1994 and 2005, the nearest historically mapped eelgrass was southeast of Farmers Island, approximately 460 feet east of the proposal.

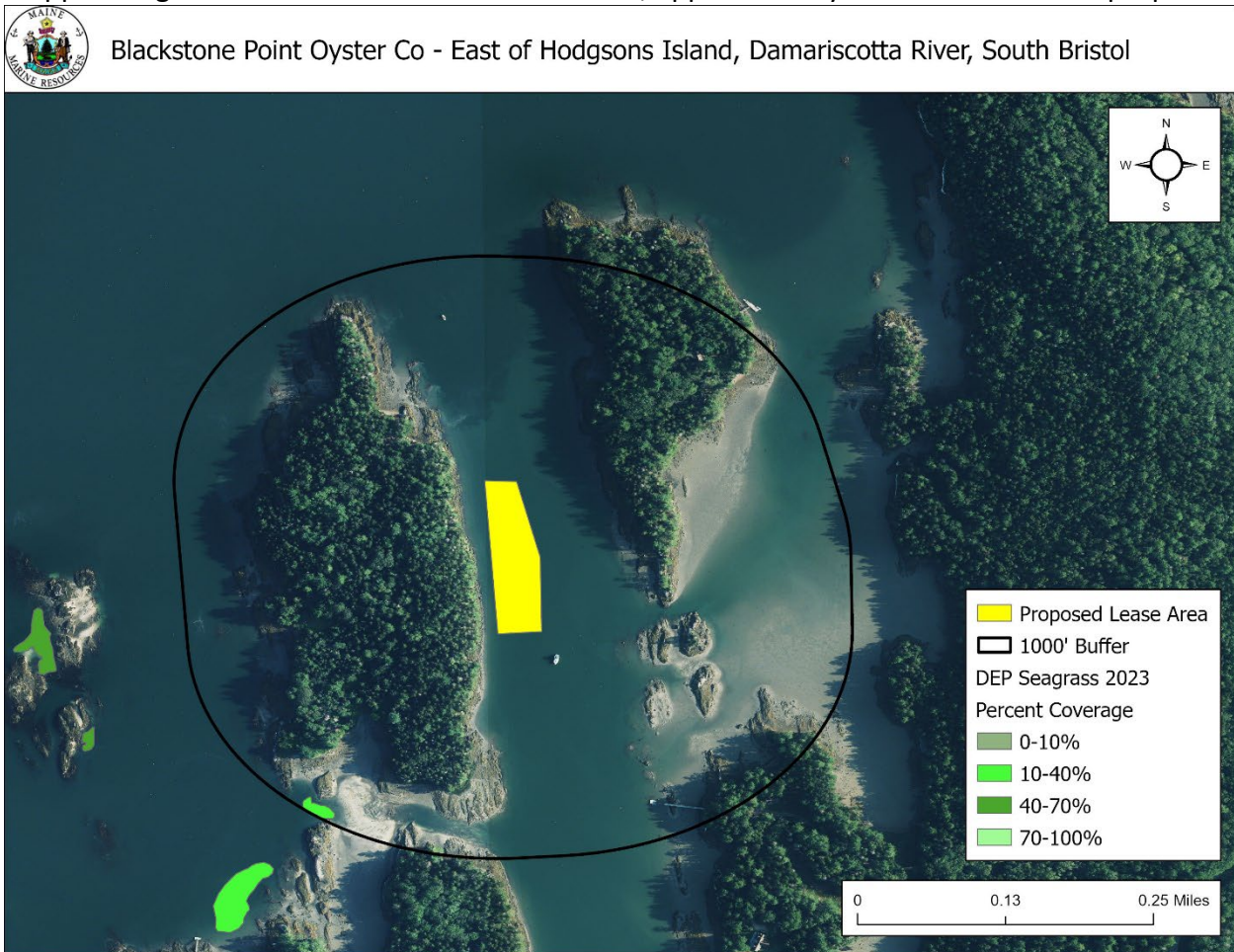


Figure 6. Mapped eelgrass (*Z. marina*) in the vicinity of the proposed lease area.

¹¹ Data obtained from The Maine Office of GIS “GISVIEW.ME/DEP.Seagrass2023”. Widgeon grass was observed only in a tributary to the Great Salt Bay, upstream of a culvert that likely restricts tidal flow. Eelgrass was the dominant vascular species in all other locations. This is the most current record of mapped eelgrass within the vicinity of the proposal.



Wildlife

During DMR's site visit, scientists observed herring gull (*Larus argentatus*), harbor seal (*Phoca vitulina*), Canadian geese (*Branta canadensis*), common tern (*Sterna hirundo*), song sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*), and American crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) in the general vicinity of the proposal. The harbor seal was observed swimming in the vicinity.

The Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (IFW) has jurisdiction over inland fisheries and wildlife resources of the state. IFW also has the authority to conserve wildlife populations and their ecosystems through applicable state laws and rules. DMR provides IFW with notice and the opportunity to comment on all complete lease applications. In addition, the Site Report also includes IFW designated and mapped habitat types that are within 1,000 feet of the lease proposal, if applicable.

According to Geographic Information System (GIS) data maintained by IFW and available through the Maine Office of GIS (MEGIS), there is one mapped habitat type within 1,000 feet of the lease proposal. The proposal is near Tidal Waterfowl and Wading Bird Habitat (TWWH), which is a type of Significant Wildlife Habitat designated and regulated by IFW.¹² Based on data maintained by IFW, the nearest mapped TWWH is approximately five feet northwest of the proposal (Figure 7).

Though bald eagles are no longer listed on Maine's Endangered and Threatened Species List, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) may also have jurisdiction over the management and conservation of the species based on applicable law and rule. Data collected by USFWS in 2023 by aerial nest survey shows there is one mapped bald eagle nesting site within 1,000 feet of the proposal. The bald eagle nesting site is mapped approximately 638 feet northwest of the proposal. A small portion of the proposal equivalent to approximately 0.01 acres is within the 660-foot buffer (Figure 7).

IFW was provided with the opportunity to comment on this proposal. On May 29, 2024, a Resource Biologist with IFW responded by email to a "Request for Agency Review and Comment" stating that minimal impacts to wildlife are anticipated.¹³

¹² <https://www.maine.gov/ifw/programs-resources/environmental-review/significant.html>

¹³ Email correspondence between IFW and DMR

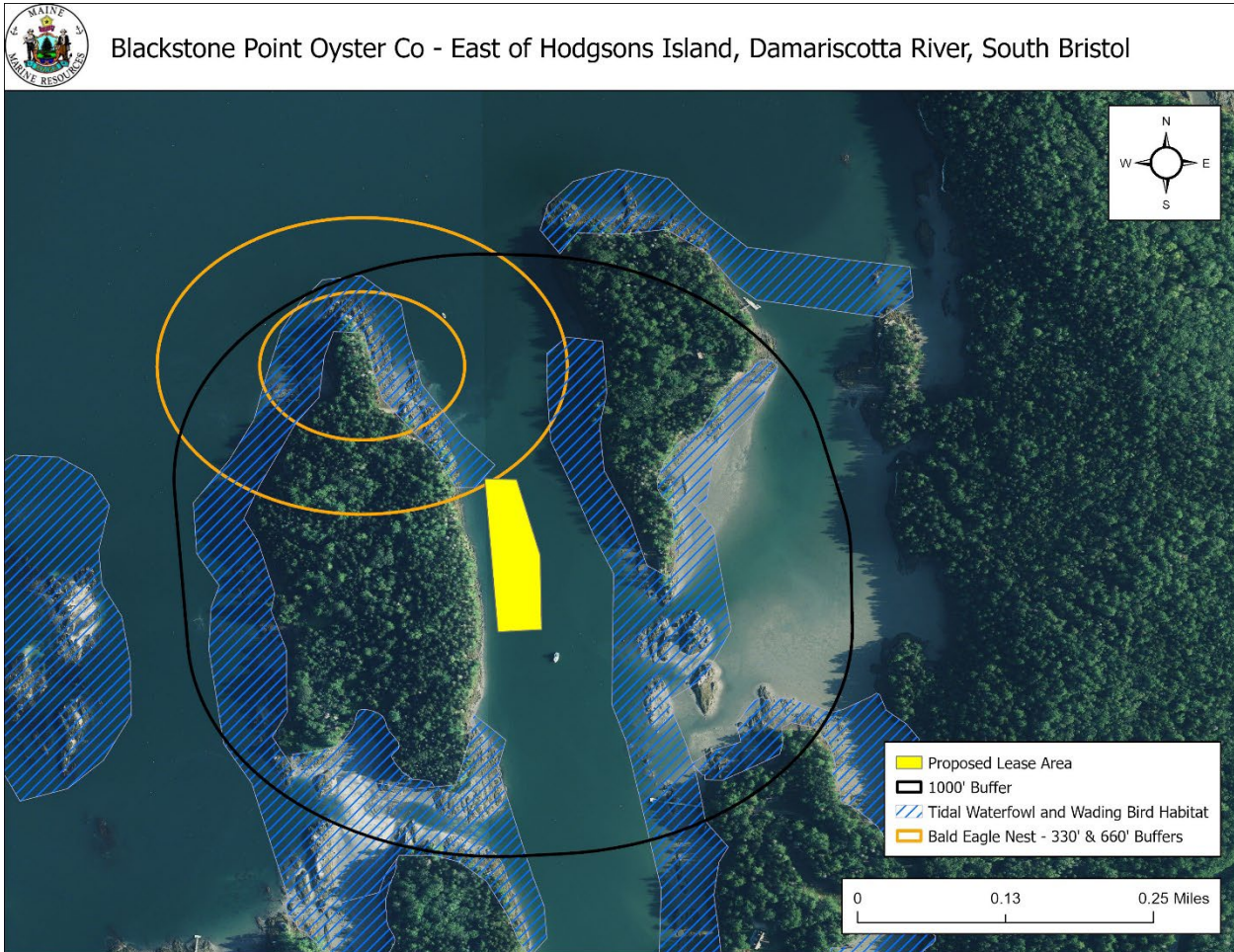


Figure 7. Mapped habitats in the vicinity of the proposed lease area. ¹⁴

(6) Interference with Public Facilities

The proposed lease is not within 1,000 feet of any beach, park, or docking facility owned by federal, state, or municipal governments.

(7) Growing Area Classification

The proposed lease is currently located within an area classified as Approved by the DMR Bureau of Public Health and Aquaculture (BPHA).

¹⁴ Data obtained from USFWS “Bald_Eagle_Nests_-_Maine_2023” and IFW “EHRTERN”, “EHLVTRN”, “GISVIEW.MEIFW.Twwh”, “ShorebirdAreas”, and “SNI”.