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DRAYTON HARBOR IMPROVED WATER QUALITY OPENS MORE AREA TO SHELLFISH HARVEST

BLAINE— Effective October 22, 2019 a new area of 765 acres is approved for commercial shellfish harvest in Drayton Harbor. Drayton Harbor is located near Blaine in Whatcom County. Washington Department of Health approved the new acreage for commercial harvest after determining that marine water quality and shoreline conditions meet necessary standards. The reclassification of the shellfish growing area reflects the Drayton Harbor watershed community commitment to finding and fixing preventable sources of human and animal bacteria pollution.

“The long-term commitment to water quality improvement by local and state agencies, tribes, and community members has been paramount to the success seen in this area. Data shows that pollution prevention actions are working and the community can be proud of their accomplishments,” said Scott Berbells, Washington State Department of Health Shellfish Growing Area Section Manager.

This latest 765 acres are in addition to 810 acres of shellfish growing area approved for commercial harvest in December 2016. The 2016 upgrade followed 21 years of work to reduce preventable fecal bacteria pollution from freshwater creeks and other human-influenced sources surrounding the harbor. Formation of a shellfish protection district and community oyster farm in the mid-1990s helped residents, shellfish growers, tribes, agencies, and interest groups work together to find ways to support water quality improvement work. The Whatcom Clean Water Program, a partnership of local, state, tribal and federal agencies, was formed in 2012 to strengthen and coordinate activities to reduce bacteria.

With community members, the City of Blaine has invested in improved wastewater and stormwater management infrastructure. Residents are helping prevent pollution from human waste by regularly evaluating and repairing septic systems and consistently using marina pump out stations. To reduce bacteria pollution from animal waste, landowners have fenced farm animals out of waterways; created protected heavy use and manure storage areas to better manage pastures, manure, and mud; planted shrubs and trees along creek banks; and picked up pet waste. Continued actions like these are needed to help maintain clean water conditions to keep the shellfish beds open and local waterways safe for people.

Drayton Harbor Shellfish Protection District Advisory Committee members and local partners invite everyone to celebrate healthy waters and fresh harvest during the 4th Annual SHELLEBRATION event, being held at H Street Plaza in Blaine on Friday, December 13 from 4-6 PM.

This free event will include refreshments, oyster samples courtesy of the Drayton Harbor Oyster Company, and presentation of community awards.

This reclassification of commercial harvest area does not change Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) recreational harvest regulations in the harbor. Recreational harvest is open only in the Drayton West area. Naturally occurring biotoxins can accumulate to levels that make recreational harvest unsafe during certain times of the year, recreational harvesters should always “Check Before You Dig” to determine if it’s safe and legal to harvest. For current beach health status and harvest seasons visit www.doh.wa.gov/shellfishsafety.html. Contact Tom Kunesh from the Whatcom County Health Department at 360-778-6034 or tkunesh@whatcomcounty.us with questions regarding local shellfish harvest. Please also check for licensing and harvest season requirements at www.wdfw.wa.gov.

For more information about Drayton Harbor water quality visit the Whatcom County Public Works – Natural Resources website at: <http://www.whatcomcounty.us/1072/Water-Quality>



Drayton Harbor, Photo by Rick Beauregard

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