



# Onslow County Shellfish Lease Hearing Meeting Minutes

Thursday, February 12, 2026

Holly Ridge Community Center  
404 Sound Rd, Holly Ridge, NC 28445  
In Person and virtually via Webex

## Attendees

### Staff

#### IN PERSON

**Casey Silva**  
Program Coordinator

**Kristina Flanigan**  
Program Leasing Biologist

**Stephen Johnson**  
Program Mapping Biologist

**Mitch Melkonian**  
Program Administrative Specialist

**Cole Grady**  
Program Environmental Tech

**Zach Harrison**  
Habitat & Enhancement Section Chief

#### VIA WEBEX

**Robert "Scottie" Tripp**  
Program Environmental Tech

**Anthony Frost**  
Program Environmental Tech

**Marla Chuffo**  
Program Administrative Officer

**Elizabeth McCormick**  
H&E Section Administrative Specialist

### Applicants

#### IN PERSON

**Old Baldy Oyster Company, LLC**  
Matthew T. Miller, Agent

**Alonzo Lee Davis**

**Stump Sound Oyster Company, LLC**  
Shawn P. Burns, Agent

**Anthony Grant**

**Joshua Thompson**

#### VIA WEBEX

### Public

#### IN PERSON

**Jessie Miller**

**George Black**

**David Coffman**

**David H. Koenig**

**Robert Hunn**

#### VIA WEBEX

**Priya Rathod**

**Jay**

**Joshua Whitty**

**David**

**Lillie**

## IN PERSON CONTINUED

**Jack Heelan**

**Paul Linkogle**

**Morgan Klein**

**Griffin Canady**

**Cary Chappell**

**Royce Bennett**

**Sam Macrae**

**Jon Beard**

**Dolphus Thompson**

**Devonda Thompson**

**David J. Garbazz**

**Phil Work**

**Hilary Thompson**

**Harold Eddington**

**Alan F Robinson**

**Jim MacRae**

**Mike Taffler**

**Sam MacRae**

**Perry McDougald**

**John Mauser**

**Jim MacRae III**

**Lee Robinson**

**Holden Sizemore**

**Andrew Couey**

**Ronald Sheffield**

## Official Transcript

### **[00:00] Casey Silva**

“The time is now six p.m., and I would like to call Shellfish Lease Public Hearing to order. My name is Casey Silva, and I am the Shellfish Lease and Aquaculture Program Coordinator for the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries Habitat and Enhancement Section. I will be serving as the hearing officer tonight.

The Director of the Division authorizes a public hearing for all proposed shellfish leases that meet all biological standards outlined under North Carolina General Statutes and Marine Fisheries Commission rules. DMF staff have already conducted the necessary biological investigations and found these leases generally compliant. The purpose of tonight’s hearing is to receive public comment on the proposed shellfish leases in Onslow County.

Tonight’s hearing is also being conducted virtually, so we have participants joining via telephone and Webex. PowerPoint slides presented tonight are also available on the Division’s website for those participating virtually.

This hearing is being recorded and is public record. All verbal and written communication between members of the public body and division staff regarding the proposed Onslow County leases are deemed public record.

This hearing is a formal process in which we accept public comment only on the proposed shellfish leases that were noticed in the Jacksonville Daily News on January 15<sup>th</sup> and January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2026, and on the Division’s website. No decisions will be made at tonight’s hearing.

This hearing is also not a forum. Each registered speaker will have three minutes to speak and all public comments should be directed to me. Any discussion or discourse should be held until after the hearing concludes. Written comments on these shellfish leases can be submitted to the Division until five p.m. tomorrow.

If you wish to speak tonight and are not already on the speakers list, you will get a chance to speak after we have gone through the registered speakers.

Now, we will do a roll call of the folks participating on Webex or by phone. Please be advised, all participants will be recorded. Mitch has been taking attendance as people have signed in to the meeting. He will now finalize that and go over the information on how to participate.”

### **[02:00] Mitch Melkonian:**

“Thank you, Casey. Currently, we do not have anyone signed on. If attendees join later, I will record their names and confirm their interest...”

### **[02:09] Casey Silva:**

“Hold on. Mitch, we can’t hear you. Try again.”

### **[02:16] Mitch Melkonian:**

“Can you hear me now?”

**[02:26] Mitch Melkonian:**

"Well, for the recording: Thank you, Casey. We currently do not have anyone signed on. If anyone joins later, I will record their names.

**[02:43] Casey Silva:**

So, there's nobody online? So, I am good? Okay."

**[02:51] Casey Silva:**

"Alrighty, so before we begin the public hearing, I will provide a brief overview of the shellfish leasing process and the role of public comment."

**[03:00] Casey Silva:**

"First, some shellfish lease basics. Shellfish leases are public trust waters leased for shellfish aquaculture. When we talk about shellfish aquaculture, we are referring to artificially propagated stocks reared in a controlled environment. This differs from wild shellfish harvesting, as leaseholders actively manage their sites to grow shellfish. Shellfish leases grant private rights to cultivate shellfish in specific areas of public trust waters. These areas remain navigable at your own risk, but the leaseholders have exclusive rights to the shellfish within their designated lease."

**[03:30] Casey Silva:**

"Shellfish leasing is governed by North Carolina law, primarily outlined in NCGS Chapter 113, Article 16. This includes all legislative changes, including changes from over 20 session laws since 1997. Additionally, regulations from the Marine Fisheries Commission and specific decisions made by the Division Director influence lease approvals. These laws and rules establish the standards that must be met for a lease to be granted."

**[03:58] Casey Silva:**

"The shellfish lease application process is comprehensive and includes multiple steps before a lease can be approved. Currently, we are at the stage of the public comment period, which lasts for 30 days and includes this public hearing. Prior to this hearing, we have already published two legal notices to ensure transparency."

**[04:15] Casey Silva:**

"Before this hearing, Division technicians conducted thorough site investigations. These investigations include:

- Marking and Acreage Verification – Ensuring the lease boundaries are properly marked and measured.
- Biological Assessments – Sampling for submerged aquatic vegetation and natural shellfish populations using patent tongs to capture both surface and subsurface samples.
- Navigation and Depth Analysis – Evaluating navigational impact at the proposed site on the day of inspection. However, this is only a snapshot and does not characterize year-round public trust usage."

**[04:48] Casey Silva:**

"The purpose of this public hearing is to evaluate whether this proposed shellfish lease is compatible with public trust usage. This hearing is not a vote, it is an opportunity for the Division to collect relevant information about potential impacts on navigation, fishing, and recreation.

Public comment may be submitted in three ways:

1. Tonight, during this hearing.
2. Online through the Division's website.
3. By letter, until the public comment period closes tomorrow at five p.m."

**[05:15] Casey Silva:**

"The Director will use your comments to assess the lease application's compatibility with existing public trust uses and make an informed decision. The possible outcomes include:

- Approval – The lease is granted as proposed.
- Conditional Approval – The lease is approved with required adjustments to address identified concerns.
- Denial – The lease is determined not to meet the defined siting standards."

**[05:39] Casey Silva:**

"When providing comments, please focus on specific uses of the proposed lease footprint, rather than general concerns about the waterbody. Examples of helpful comments include:

- I use this shoal for recreation seasonally.
- I use this specific footprint for recreational fishing.
- The specific footprint is the only navigable channel to another area.

We are not looking for broad statements about the waterbody or general opinions on shellfish leasing. Comments should be site-specific to help us determine potential conflicts."

**[06:08] Casey Silva:**

"We will now begin the public comment portion of the hearing. Here's how it will proceed:

1. First, I will present information on the proposed shellfish leases.
2. Then, I will invite members of the public who signed up to speak.
3. And finally, I will give each lease applicant the opportunity to make a statement.

With that, I will read the information on the proposed shellfish leases."

**[06:33] Casey Silva:**

"Alright, so tonight's first lease application is for a 4.78-acre shellfish bottom lease, applied for on May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2025, by Old Baldy Aquaculture, agent Matthew T. Miller, located in New River below the 172 bridge. The management plan indicates the use of clam seed on bottom with predator netting and mechanical dredging for the commercial production of clams. Division staff conducted site investigations on June 30<sup>th</sup> and July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025, which found zero bushels of shellfish and zero submerged aquatic vegetation, which I will refer to as SAV."

**[07:13] Casey Silva:**

“So, next is a lease application for a 1.19-acre shellfish bottom lease, applied for on May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2025, by Old Baldy Aquaculture, agent Matthew T. Miller, located in Stones Bay. The management plan includes the use of oyster seed and bottom gear (cages and bags) for the commercial production of oysters within the footprint of the proposed bottom. Division staff conducted a site investigation from July 8<sup>th</sup> through 10<sup>th</sup>, September 17<sup>th</sup>, and October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025, which found 1.36 bushels of shellfish per acre and zero SAV.”

**[07:50] Casey Silva:**

“Next, a lease application for a 0.76-acre shellfish bottom and water column lease, applied for on June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2025, by Alonzo Lee Davis, located in the seaside areas. The management plan includes the use of oyster seed and floating bags for the commercial production of oysters within the footprint of the proposed bottom and water column lease. Division staff conducted a site investigation on July 21<sup>st</sup>, 2025, which found 2.13 bushels of shellfish per acre and zero SAV.”

**[08:21] Casey Silva:**

“Next, a lease application for a 4.77-acre shellfish bottom and water column lease, applied for on July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2025, by Stump Sound Oyster Company, agent Shawn P. Burns, located in Stones Bay. The management plan indicates the use of oyster seed and floating cages for the commercial production of oysters within the footprint of the proposed bottom and water column lease. Division staff conducted a site investigation on August 28<sup>th</sup>, 2025, which found 1.38 bushels of shellfish per acre and zero SAV.”

**[08:53] Casey Silva:**

“Next, a lease application for a 3.73-acre shellfish bottom lease, applied for on July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2025, by Anthony Grant, located in Alligator Bay. The management plan includes the use of oyster and clam seed, and cultch on bottom for the commercial production of oysters and clams within the footprint of the proposed bottom lease. Division staff conducted site investigations on August 19<sup>th</sup> and October 6<sup>th</sup>, 2025, which found 0.88 bushels of shellfish per acre and zero SAV.”

**[09:24] Casey Silva:**

“Next, a lease application for a 0.87-acre shellfish bottom and water column lease, applied for on July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025, by Alonzo Lee Davis, located in the seaside areas. The management plan indicates the use of oyster seed and floating bags for the commercial production of oysters within the footprint of the proposed bottom and water column lease. Division staff conducted site investigations on September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2025, which found zero bushels of shellfish and zero SAV.”

**[09:54] Casey Silva:**

“Next, a lease application for a 3.73-acre shellfish bottom and water column lease, applied for on August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025, by Joshua A. Thompson, located in Ellis Cove. The management plan indicates the use of oyster, clam, and scallop seed as well as cultch on bottom, bottom gear, and floating gear (cages, bags, and a suspended longline system) for the commercial production of oysters, clams, and scallops within the footprint of the proposed bottom and water column footprint. Division staff conducted site investigations on August 26<sup>th</sup> and October 7<sup>th</sup>, which found 1.87 bushels of shellfish per acre and zero SAV.”

**[10:33] Casey Silva:**

“Next, a lease application for a 3.65-acre shellfish water column lease, applied for on August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025, by Joshua A. Thompson, located in New River below the 172 bridge. The management plan indicates the use of oyster seed and floating gear (cages, bags, and a suspended longline system) for the commercial production of oysters within the footprint of the proposed water column lease. Division staff conducted site investigations on September 22<sup>nd</sup> and October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025. This was a limited biological investigation as the proposed water column footprint is already on top of already an existing bottom lease, lease number being 8803.”

**[11:16] Casey Silva:**

“Lastly, a lease application for a 4.24-acre shellfish water column lease, applied for on August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025. The management plan indicates the use of oyster seed and floating gear (cages, bags, and a suspended longline system) for the commercial production of oysters within the footprint of the proposed water column lease. Division staff conducted site investigations on October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2025. This was also a limited biological investigation as the proposed water column footprint is on top of an existing bottom lease, 8803.

**[11:50] Casey Silva:**

“Alright, so now, I will call on the public for comments on the proposed shellfish leases. When I call your name, please come to the podium, state your name, if you are representing an organization, where you are from, the lease or leases you are commenting on, and then your comments.

Please address your comments directly to me as the Division representative, not to the audience. Your remarks are being recorded; speak loudly and clearly to ensure accurate transcription. You will have three minutes to speak. Kristina will signal when you have one minute remaining by raising one finger and will raise her hand when your time expires.

If anyone has questions, staff and I will be happy to meet with you after the hearing. For those on Webex, if you have any questions not pertaining to the leases mentioned tonight, please call, or email us. Mitch will place our contact information in the chat for you or you can write it down from the last slide.”

**[12:46] Casey Silva:**

“First, I have Harrold Eddington.”

**[13:00] Kristina Flanigan:**

“If you want to take a seat at that chair.”

**[13:07] Harrold Eddington:**

“Alright. Hi, good afternoon. My name is Harrold Eddington. I am a homeowner right there in Sneads Ferry on Poverty Point. I have been there since 2012. We have enjoyed the water there, we’ve gotten married there, we enjoy the sunrises there, and in 2021 I think is... I’m talking about Thompson’s. Can we pull up the Thompson slide so I can refresh? Yeah, the Thompson lease 20-039WC.

Mr. Thomspson already has two leases that are 100 feet from my dock. With the bird activity, and I got to tell you right now, that the bird activity is very minimal and has been very minimal over the last couple of weeks. But I have shared

photos where the bird activity is heavy. There is no bird mitigation gear on that lease, and I rode the river yesterday and didn't see it on any of the leases. And there was some heavy...and I am not here to tattle tale on anybody, but I think that somebody needs to be looking at the bird mitigation program because December we had 22 states that have sent a lot of people to the hospital for E. coli and I hate to think that someday it could potentially happen here because we are not policing up.

So right now, I am having a hard time with bird activity, stench from the cages. I shared pictures of shells that are all over my dock from where an increase in the birds are picking up clams or whatever, and dropping them on the dock. My boats are not at the dock right now, but I do encounter you know some of that you know, so it's being costly. I know these individuals and I've known them for years and they are hard workers. And I don't want that job. And I tell you, I got to hand it to him. He's out there, he's always working. I'm a commercial fisherman. That reef right there has provided spot fishing, flounder fishing. I have people that are now cutting between my dock within that hundred feet and coming between my dock close to my shoreline and in the end, my commercial fishing gear, my clam rakes, my tongs, my gill nets, my shrimp trawlers, my skimmer frames, my everything is in my boat at the dock and we continue to let all these cages get there. We bought that house there because it's a beautiful place. We don't have porpoise sightings that we've had in a long time. Aviation comes up and down that river because that is a primary route back and forth. If we continue to grant all these caged leases then that is... and I'm an aviator. I flew in the Marine Corp and I've had bird strikes. You know, so, be forewarned. Thank you."

**[16:19] Casey Silva:**

"Thank you. Next, I have Alan Robinson."

**[16:35] Alan Robinson:**

"My name is Alan Robinson. Address is 131 Everett Lane. I am neighbors to Harrold. Just the same thing as what he said. The man works hard, he does way more than what I would ever do, but it seems like to me what he has there is enough. The birds, the smell. I am building a house right beside him. We've had the property since 1952 and we love the water."

**[17:11] Casey Silva:**

"Okay, so the last name on this one is a bit difficult to read but I think it's Jim MacRae?"

**[17:20] Jim MacRae:**

"I'm Jim MacRae. I have a home in Hubert. Also, I'm here to speak on the two leases that Alfonso Davis has applied for. I think it's bottom lease 20, water column lease 21 and bottom lease three and water column lease four. One of the leases applied for is 50 yards from a tract of land we own. It will impede navigation into a bay that is used by us for fishing and a lot of other fishermen in that area. It will also impede navigation to our dock. It will impede recreation in that area. As you know or may not know, the two leases that Mr. Davis has applied for are behind Hammocks State Park which is a state park that is used by many for recreation. They kayak, they kayak trails. One of the leases applied for that is in the marsh is an impediment to navigation through the marsh. These are areas the we have traditionally used for fishing, hunting, and navigation in the area. Both of those leases impede our ability to do those things. It will also impede the ability to recreate in that area. There are regulations that deal with turtles behind there. This is a state park by its very nature that the State has created to ask people to come to, to recreate to see what this area has to offer. Is that my time up?"

**[19:26] Kristina Flanigan:**

“That’s your one minute.”

**[19:28] Jim MacRae:**

“So, I would ask that the two leases applied for by Mr. Davis be denied for those reasons. I hope that whoever has the call on this listens to what is being said about what I have to say about those leases tonight and this is not just a perfunctory hearing. I hope that all of this is taken into account and if this is allowed there are going to be more and more behind Bear Island and Hammocks Beach State Park. For the reasons mentioned previously, I would ask that this be denied. Thank you.”

**[20:10] Casey Silva:**

“Next, I have Mike Taffler.”

**[20:18] Mike Taffler:**

“So, I’m Mike Taffler. I live in Stone Bay, Sneads Ferry. I’m calling on number 25-028WC for impeding navigable water. I can talk about the birds and all that too, which is huge, but mainly it’s getting in and out of different areas to be able to fish and getting in and out of our dock areas. A lot of people swim, things like that. I just don’t want to see problems with that and also again we should be able to get in and out with our boats and things that we have. That’s all I got.”

**[20:54] Casey Silva:**

“Next, I have Sam MacRae.”

**[21:00] Sam MacRae:**

“I’m Jim MacRae’s brother. Who just spoke to you before. His voice is a little bit rougher than mine. But, anyway, I will reiterate what he said. This piece of land that’s been in our family for a while. Generations have gone down to where these leases that Mr. Davis has proposed — so I’m speaking about the same ones, his two leases. They’re back behind Hammocks Beach, and I will reiterate, you’ve got Camp Lejune immediately to the south, where you can’t really go recreate. They’ve got restrictions on trespassing. So then, past that, you come to Hammocks Beach, the State Park that’s got the ferry that goes through Cow Channel over there, and you’ve got the kayak trails all through there. And so what this man is asking to put a lease in an area that is really designated as a park. I know the beach itself is the park proper, but all the water behind it, that’s how you get there, that’s where you kayak to. And, where our property is, this lease is right over here — I’m looking out from the front of the island and Cow Channel is right over here. And when we come in to go to our dock, you have to take a right to get over there and this lease place, this one in particular, impedes the navigation to there. If you are going in there at night, you are going to run into that lease. It goes out at least 40 yards, to my understanding, into the water. Back behind the cabin is a bay that he was speaking to that we have fished for tens and tens of years. Been fishing back there all up along the grass line where this lease is proposed and now that’s not going to be able to take place anymore or its going to impede our ability. I don’t know how these leases will ultimately affect the fishing around there. It may help; it may not. It’s more about the ability to use that area that we’ve used for years and years and years for fishing and recreation. And more, not just for us but for the public itself because it’s a State Park. My understanding is you mentioned 2.3 or 2.13 bushels were gathered when they did the test. I think as I heard that may have been one of the highest ones as far as what was gathered when you did your test as to show that there was already existing shellfish around there. There are plenty of oyster beds all around that area. 113-202 says it must be as compact as possible taking into account the shape of the body of water, consistency

of body and separating a sufficient — whatever that word means — a sufficient distance from natural shellfish. I'm telling you there's plenty of natural known shellfish reasonably close to where this lease is. Okay? So, what if someone goes and takes... Thank you."

**[24:07] Casey Silva:**

"Thank you. Next, I have a Perry MacDonald, maybe?"

**[24:13] Perry McDougald:**

"Close, it's McDougald. Well, first, thank you guys for having the meeting. The Marine Fisheries and the Department of Environmental Quality—Appreciate everything you guys do, letting us have public comment. My comment is based purely for options three and six, which have just been recently talked about, by Mr. Davis. I am a fishing guide in Swansboro. My business runs out of Swansboro, and anybody who has ever fished in Swansboro is familiar with the area of Spooner's Bay. Which is exactly where our access to Spooners is, is for option number three that Mr. Davis has proposed. I do believe it will restrict my access to running my operation and running my business to access those creeks and fishable water, which I have been doing for ten years over there as a licensed guide, to where it will impact my business. I am not against oyster leases; I'm against it when it's going to start hurting me and anyone else who has been traditionally using those grounds for fishing. As far as his second lease goes, that area, it's a known fishing area, but it's a deep creek area that accesses a nice shallow bay. That is full of natural shellfish already. I've worked that area pretty much off Spooner's, right to the south of it between that and Bear Island, where both of these leases are proposed and now it's going to affect me directly. I cannot support something like that when it hurts me and everyone else who's fished Spooner's Bay area traditionally for a long, long time. Thank you."

**[25:52] Casey Silva:**

"Thank you. John Mosser is next."

**[26:00] John Mosser:**

"I'll keep this one short, because unfortunately, I think some of the stuff I wanted to talk about, when you guys did your intro, I kind of realized that's not really what you're looking for. In all honesty, my concerns more so are the state's management, or sorry to me a little bit of mismanagement, of what I consider a public trust resource that we all pay tax dollars for and now its getting set off. And I know you guys don't care about this, and it doesn't make a difference, but roping of a certain area and going okay, this is public trust this is supposed to be for everybody but now only one person benefits from it. And I know we benefit because there's more habitat for fish and more oysters and cleaner water and all of this stuff but, I mean I know you guys aren't going to write me a lease where I can go take all of Spooner's, and Onslow County, and behind Hammocks Beach State Park and say I want to fish and run charters- which is what I do- and just pay \$100 a year per acre and keep other people from getting into it. So, I know that's not important. I will say since I am up here, both of the locations—and I have no problem, I eat aquaculture, oysters. I think they are delicious. I have no problem with it. I am all for commercial fishing, I'm all for aquaculture. The two areas that are behind Hammocks Beach State Park they are absolutely, like Perry said like the MacRaes said, they are known fishing areas, known kayaking areas. It is taking away something that people use there in the State Park. There are other ones in the Swansboro area, oyster leases that have been popping up, like West Channel for example. This one just kind of hit home for me because it is in the State Park. And like the MacRaes said or somebody said, you've got Camp Lejune, access is restricted. It's one of the few natural areas where people can go enjoy, you know, the use of that waterway. And it is, both of them are in fishing areas, both of them, the one that's near (unknown) Bay, on the

north end of Spooners, is along the edge of a channel that most boats all summer long come in and out of, so there is a little bit of restriction. I don't want to sit here and complain about that because, and I have no problem with Mr. Alonzo Davis wanting to oyster farm there. If I complain about these, they are just going to get moved to somewhere else that I use for running charters making a living. I know it's just going to be pushed around until we find somewhere not enough people complain about, so I'm not here to complain about those. But I will say while I'm up here, my concern is now that we're putting them in state parks, how many more do we add next year, how many more next year, and when we hit that limit, do we extend the limit? And I have concerns, I've lived in that area for over 20 years, the waterways there are beautiful. I'm really really concerned in my heart about what it's going to look like in 10 to 15 years if we continue to put more and more oyster farms there. And again, I have no problem with oyster farming but I just don't feel like it's the place to do it. So, thank you for letting me talk."

**[28:52] Casey Silva:**

"Next is Jim MacRae III."

**[25:57] Jim MacRae III:**

"There's a lot of MacRaes. Yes, my name is Jim MacRae III. I'm here to oppose the two leases proposed by Mr. Davis. I believe that's oyster lease three and six. My argument's based purely on the statute from what I understand the allowing or disallowing of these leases is based on the statute 113-202.1 for the water column and then 113-202 for the bottom leases. As far as I know, the general purpose of that is to make sure these leases are compatible with the public trust uses, specifically suitable areas shall and that means they must meet the following minimum standards navigation. They should not impair navigation, particularly site three and site six. Site three is directly south of Cow Channel, which is a state-maintained channel. It's the channel used for transporting folks over to Bear Island, Hammocks Beach State Park. It's not far from that. And as it relates to navigation, the lease will be directly between that dredged channel over to our property there in Spooners Bay. So as far as navigation goes, it does significantly impair. I know they're looking for something significant. We are members of the public, we know the area, we know what's significant, and I'm here to tell you that it's a significant impairment for navigation, not to mention recreation. Anybody knows the area of Spooners Bay, they will know that there is a significant amount of recreation, fishing, kayaking, swimming, and just family planning and oystering that occurs in the area that will be impaired by these two leases, specifically the one in Spooners Bay number three and the one closer to Bear Island number six. As far as traditional uses, like I said, fishing, hunting is also an issue. I myself have hunted directly on the marsh's edge directly behind number three. So, that area will no longer be available for any type of hunting purposes. As far as riparian rights, I've kind of already mentioned the only way to access our property with a dock is navigating off of Cow Channel. And this particular site number three is directly interfering with that. As far as the bottom leases go, under subsection E of 113-202, it's briefly mentioned, but it's important that these leases are not adjacent to areas where there are already no natural beds, and I can tell you right now based on the 2.13 bushels per acre in Spooners Bay, there's a lot of natural beds there. There's a lot of folks that harvest oysters there and I can tell you right now there's gonna be disputes that arise if these particular leases are passed. So, for all those reasons, I ask that they're denied and I can tell you there's a lot of folks in the public who recreate, fish, hunt, and navigate those areas who may not be able to be here but would voice second opinion. So, thank you."

**[31:55] Casey Silva:**

"Thank you. Next, I have Lee Robinson."

**[32:05] Lee Robinson:**

“Hello, my name’s Lee. I’m a local to Sneads Ferry, North Carolina. Business owner. Been in this area for going on about 10 years. I’m just up here to talk about a very specific lease. I am gonna say I’m a big fan of aquaculture. I’ve been watching this for about 20 years following NC State. Big fan of it. This specific, 25-029WC Josh Thompson is essentially right in front of Everett Creek, right beside a subdivision, New River Plantation. One of my issues with that location is where it sits. Where that creek is, has very shallow water. There is no channel going through it. That, so essentially there are I believe three neighborhoods that utilize that creek going into the bay to go where they need to, and that area is not dredged because of Marine Corps having fiber optics in it. So, that water is always shifting where navigation is.

So, my belief is by putting these there specifically, it’s going to be an issue for navigation. To my understanding, before North Carolina made all these crazy rules about flounder fishing, that specific shoal has always produced fantastic flounder fishing. So, I know from the recreational guys to the commercial guys like they’ve always utilized that spot. Losing real estate there just takes away from recreational fishing. One of the things I didn’t realize is some of the bird complaints stuff I’ve never heard about that from pots, but if that is the case and bird are an issue, we’re talking about a above water column lease that is neighboring to residences. And to my understanding based on looking at the map, that would be one of the first water column leases in that area in the bay. I just have issues with that.

The last thing I want to talk about with that, which is kind of funny, is to my understanding, Evertt Creek and a lot of these creeks are temporary closures for shellfish. Obviously, it’s biological. It could be anything. I don’t know what’s in the water, you guys know more than me and the biologists. The reality is it’s sitting on the mouth of the creek and if they’re producing a product that they’re selling that you guys have closed, that’s right there by the creek that you’re selling to the community, to the world. That’s a no go, right? I would think, but y’all do your water samples. Y’all know the water’s fine I guess. It just, where I stand, navigation, if birds are a thing, that that’s disgusting for those homeowners, it impedes recreational fishing. I’m a water guy all day and keep in mind, I love aquaculture. 20 years studying this stuff, tilapia, prawns, catfish, then the oysters. And there are farmers in here that I’m close to that I support all day. I just don’t think that specific lease belongs there. Cool. Is that it? Alright, thank you.”

**[35:14] Casey Silva:**

“Next, I have Holden Seismore.”

**[35:24] Holden Seismore:**

“I guess I’ll be the only woman to speak. My name is Holden Seismore and I also live in Sneads Ferry, and I am an oyster farmer. I have three leases. Josh has a lease right in front of my shop. He comes from a family of commercial fishermen and shellfish farmers. From what I can see from the water and knowing him personally, he’s a responsible steward of the water and his lines are very presentable. They’re very easy to navigate around.

We do have a dock right in front of my shop. A lot of birds land on the dock. I can look down the water and see multiple docks back to back to back with pelicans roosting on those docks. Sorry. Birds don’t just land on oyster cages. They poop on your dock anywhere. We have Riverview Landing, which is a restaurant, to our right. There’s a lot of birds everywhere. The Division of Marine Fisheries does make us have a bird mitigation program. With my two floating leases, I don’t have a problem with birds landing on my lease. I have the SEPA system, so it moves. Josh is also getting into the SEPA system. And again, you may find like a crow on one PVC pole, but they don’t roost and sit on it like

people... You pull up pictures on Google and it makes it look a lot worse. Anyways, two of his leases he's already trying to get, which is one of the ones right in front of my shop, they're already approved. They are bottom leases. They've shown that they've been responsible owners of leases. He's trying to expand the floating aspect of that.

There are boats that do fly by our dock. It has to be the right time. It has to be high tide for that to even be a possibility. At low tide, the water's not even knee deep in front of our dock. So, people flying through there, they're local. They know what they're doing and they're trying to go to their own dock. They just got off the boat ramp. So, I don't think his lease is the reason that people are speeding through that area. The channel is actually on the opposite side of that lease.

And I think that's all."

**[37:40] Casey Silva:**

"Next, I have Andrew Couey."

**[37:51] Andrew Couey:**

"Good evening, my name's Andrew with Anchored Life Oyster Farm here to support Josh Thompson and all three of his applications. As spoken about just now, there is enough distance between the lease and the shoreline for the one that's right there at the end of Evertt Lane. To see multiple boats and specifically commercial fishermen going through there at planing speeds—but again, that is only at high tide because typically at a low tide environment, I mean, you're at a less than a foot of water right there between his lease and the shoreline. Speaking of, close enough to his lease and the shoreline, I've never smelled anything there. Never smelled foul anything coming from his cages. Birds, if you go up and down New River, you see birds everywhere, not just based on equipment, not just on floating cages. So, I wouldn't see any cause for concern for bird strikes on an aircraft. Otherwise, I think the Marine Corps would be out here with a little bit more to say about that. Cause for concern over the bacteria from the birds on those cages. If you look at the research, it's actually from a very small percentage of one particular type of bird that doesn't really live in this area. So, the bacteria that may or may not grow isn't high enough to really speak about. Other than that, fully don't think he's got any of his leases in a way to impede any navigation to Everett Creek or any of the other ones. So, thank you."

**[39:30] Casey Silva:**

"Thank you. Next, I have Wesley Thompson."

**[39:40] Wesley Thompson:**

"Hey, I'm Wesley Thompson. Born and raised in Sneads Ferry my whole life. Fifth generation commercial fisherman. I've lived on Everett Lane my whole life. The lease I want to talk about is 8803. It's originally grant bottom. That's how far it goes back. Joshua's my cousin. I live there on that point. As far as the smell, there's always been a fish house located there on the end of that point. There's actually two or three other oyster guys farmers that are using that property as well. For the birds, there's always been birds up and down the coast picking shells up. In his garden, I mean, he's got nets on the bottom, so I don't see how they're picking clams up off of that bottom. But originally, that whole point was 30 some acre lease, so we're not talking about something that just happened. This property's been in my family for years, hundreds of years. That bottom was grant bottom. It was all deeded. We owned every bit of it and the state took it in the eighties. And now, it's down to less than eight-acre lease. So, you know, I've been there, I don't

have any issue with it. I mean, I live there. The smell's no different than it's always been. I mean, it's working waterfront. The whole area, the whole where we're talking, this whole area in Sneads Ferry from that point all the way around used to be a bunch of just, it was all commercial fishing, fish houses, boat docks, nothing's changed. It's actually less boat docks. As far as the boat traffic coming through there, if you come through there, it's gotta be on high tide. There's not much water. Has never been that much water through there. As far as the property on Everett Creek, that lease, where that lease is located is not in the channel. That's off to the right of where you go on that creek. I mean, there's plenty of water coming around there that's nowhere near any polluted line where that lease is located at. So, that's just my take on it."

**[41:38] Casey Silva:**

"Thank you. Last, I have Ronald Sheffield."

**[41:51] Ronald Sheffield:**

"Hello, my name is Ronald Sheffield. I own Topsail Sound Shellfish. I'm here to present an offer to these people if they get denied. I have a four-and-a-half-acre farm right there at the north end of Topsail Island and New Topsail Inlet. It's paid for. I've been there since 2008. It's a good chance that... (inaudible). It's been surveyed..."

**[42:21] Casey Silva:**

"Mr. Sheffield, I can't let it go for public comment like this, but you're more than welcome to discuss this with everybody after."

**[42:27] Ronald Sheffield:**

"They didn't know when I told them up front of what I was gonna do's just go on in there."

**[42:34] Casey Silva:**

"Thank you. Okay. So, that's everybody that I have written down in person. Mitch, do you have anybody? Oh, you're right here."

**[42:50] Mitch Melkonian:**

"First, I have Priya. Please unmute at my request and go ahead. You have three minutes..."

Alright. Next, I have a Jay. If you wish to speak, please feel free to unmute at my request and go ahead. You have three minutes...

Next, I have a Joshua Whittey. If you wish to speak, please feel free to unmute at my request and go ahead. You have three minutes...

Next, I have a David. If you wish to speak, please feel free to unmute at my request and go ahead. You have three minutes...

And lastly, I have Lilly. If you wish to speak, please feel free to unmute at my request and go ahead. You have three minutes...

That is all the participants joining on Webex. Back to you, Casey.”

**[43:57] Casey Silva:**

“Alrighty, so that concludes all registered speakers. Was there anybody I missed or anybody who has changed their mind and would like to speak? If so, please raise your hand.”

**[44:10] Member of Public:**

“I’ve got Josh Whittey on the phone right here.”

**[44:14] Joshua Whittey:**

“Yeah, I can’t unmute my phone.”

**[44:16] Casey Silva:**

“Alright, let’s hear it.”

**[44:18] Joshua Whittey:**

“It said you can’t unmute yourself. So yeah, I live in New River Plantation, and I use the water quite a bit. Like some people said, the channel is very narrow and very shallow. Yeah, you can only come in on plane when it’s high tide. I’m just concerned with there’s already a bunch of PVC pipes out there for marking the current leases and a lot of times those get broken off. I’ve actually hit one with a jet ski because it was just under the surface—Caused a lot of damage. The other concern is, you know, obviously seagrass from New River to Everett Creek. I think it’s already pretty tight in there. And the other thing that I’m concerned about is like I already go out and clam and oyster in the summer with the kids. If you put a whole lease up there, am I now denied access to that resource just because someone else wants to take it for themselves? I mean, I don’t think I can, you know, farm off a piece of land around my dock that’s only mine, right? It’s a resource for everybody. So, that’s my big concern. Is you’re taking away access from other folks. Like I already said, love, love our North Carolina oysters and shellfish. I just think there’s better areas to do it that’s not right by a neighborhood that people use on a routine basis. Thank you very much.”

**[45:41] Casey Silva:**

“Thank you. Alright, anybody else? Okay. Now, I will call on the applicants and give them an opportunity if they wish to speak on their proposed shellfish lease. This is not a requirement of the applicants. As a reminder, you will have three minutes to speak. Kristina will hold up one finger when you have one minute remaining, and her hand when you reach three minutes.

First, I would like to call on Matthew T. Miller of Old Baldy Aquaculture, to present their proposed shellfish leases...

Alright. Next, I would like to call on Alonzo Lee Davis, to present their proposed shellfish leases.”

**[46:28] Alonzo Lee Davis:**

“I chose these leases mainly because of high-water quality because that’s some of the highest water quality of any lease that there would be. I purposely made them small, I spent a lot of time out on the water and I made them small and out of everybody’s way the best way I could. I mean, I was out there today and you can get around both sides of the lease. I mean, I was out there in my kayak today. It doesn’t impede the Cow Channel. That’s well out of the way.

The Cow Channel is about 700 feet away. I know the minimum from a navigable channel is 250 feet, so I'm almost three times the distance from the Cow Channel. I know where this dock is and if you come out of the Cow Channel over there, my small lease is not in the line of getting to that dock. And I've been in my kayak, my boat, and over to over that side over this side and all around. And there were people fishing today, but they go on both sides cause you can go drive on both sides of it in low tide or any time. So, just looking at it, I don't see how it impedes anything. It doesn't impede any navigation of that little shallow bay that's back there. Again, you can go on either side. And I've been a duck hunter for 56 years and I'm off the shore enough to where you can put a decoy spread there. I went off the shore pretty good ways because there were some submerged aquatic vegetation there and I wanted to make sure I was well out of that zone. So, you can hunt and whatever I guess that marsh area over there. If anybody was worried about me running a boat out there while they were wanting to duck hunt, I'd be happy to give somebody my phone number and then call me and they said we're gonna go hunt this morning. I'll say okay, I won't go out there while you're hunting because I understand how frustrating that is if you set up and somebody's running their boat in and out of there. So anyway, I appreciate the privilege to try to grow waters in the state and I don't take the privilege lightly. But I'd be happy to cooperate with anybody in anyway I can. Thank you."

**[49:07] Casey Silva:**

"Thank you. Next, I would like to call on Shawn P. Burns of Stump Sound Oyster Company, to present their proposed shellfish lease..."

Next, I would like to call on Anthony Grant to present their proposed shellfish lease...

And lastly, I would like to call on Joshua A. Thompson to present their proposed shellfish lease."

**[49:46] Joshua Thompson:**

"Alright. As you already said, I'm Joshua Thompson. My cousin already let you know I'm a commercial fisherman. My family's been doing this for generations. As far as lease 8803 goes and the water columns on that, would just like to remind everyone that spoke on it that you do see me every day. You wave to me. Bought oysters and clams from me. You can come speak to me any time you want if you have any concerns. I think everyone that I know here will agree that I'm easy to get along with. If you have some concerns, let me know. I'll address them. As far as the Everett Creek lease goes, that is a pre-existing lease. That is not the original footprint. That was actually modified by the Division to take into account the waterway. I did not set that boundary. That was set by DMF. I'm also not planning on—despite what anybody believes—saturating the water with oyster cages. I'm actually producing more clams than I do oysters. I think right now I have 200,000 oysters in the water. I have over a million clams and hopefully by the end of this year, that'll be around three million and it is helping repopulate our river. I think any of the local clambers that worked around my lease in the past two years can attest to that. That's because they told me they've never seen so many clams in that part of the river before. So, my clams are reproducing and they're helping the river. The reason I'm applying for the water columns is so that I can move what cages I do have further off of the shoreline and so that I can put more clams out. It's not to put more cages in the water, it's just to give me more flexibility on where they can go to make room for more clams. And again, if anybody has any issues with anything that is proposed, anything I already have in the water, you can come and speak to me after this. Again, I'm not hard to get along with. I don't try to block anybody from using anything. And trust me, if anybody here could have hard feelings about anything, my family had 30 acres taken from us. Deeded bottom. Just come and talk to me. I don't mind trying to make changes to do whatever I can, but you gotta let me know. Thank you."

**[52:19] Casey Silva:**

"Thank you. Alright so, is there anybody else who would like to comment on the proposed shellfish leases?"

If no one else wishes to speak, I will close this public hearing. I would like to thank you for your time and participation in this process. The time of closure is 6:52 p.m."