N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries
Shellfish Lease & Aquaculture Program

Pamlico County Shellfish Lease Hearing

Public Hearing Minutes

Date: November 5, 2026

Location: Pamlico County Courthouse, 202 Main St., Bayboro, NC 28515

Format: In person and via Webex

Hearing Officer: Casey Silva, Program Coordinator

Attendance

DMF Staff — In Person

- Casey Silva, Program Coordinator
- Mitch Melkonian, Administrative Specialist

DMF Staff — Webex

- Stephen Johnson, Mapping Biologist
- Scottie Tripp, Environmental Technician
- Marla Chuffo, Administrative Officer
- Zach Harrison, Habitat & Enhancement Section Chief
- Elizabeth McCormick, Administrative Specialist

Applicant

- Adam Brinson

Public — In Person

- Laveita Brinson
- Ben Brinson

Public — Webex

- Sor

Transcript Conventions

Timestamps indicate elapsed time from the beginning of the recording. Each speaker is identified by full name when known. Statements are transcribed verbatim to the extent audible, preserving the speaker's original wording. If included, bracketed annotations identify portions of the recording that are unclear or document relevant nonverbal events. These annotations are not spoken statements.

Verbatim Transcript

[00:00] Casey Silva — Hearing Officer:
Alrighty, guys, so it is six o'clock, and I call the Pamlico County shellfish lease public hearing to order. I am Casey Silva, the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries' Shellfish Lease & Aquaculture Program coordinator and tonight's hearing officer.

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 conducted the necessary biological investigations and found this lease generally compliant.
The purpose of tonight's hearing is to receive public comment on the proposed shellfish lease in Pamlico County.

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

This hearing is being recorded and is a public record. All verbal and written communication between members of the public body and division staff regarding the proposed Pamlico County lease are deemed public record.
This hearing is a formal process in which we accept public comment only on the proposed shellfish lease that was noticed in The Pamlico Daily News on October 14 and October 21, 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 toward me. Any discussion or discourse should be held until after the hearing concludes. Written comments on this proposed shellfish lease can be submitted to the Division by 5pm tomorrow, November 6.

If you wish to speak tonight and are not already on the public comment sign-in sheet, you will get a chance to speak after we have gone through all registered speakers.

Now, we will do a roll call of the participants joining virtually. Please be advised, all participants will be recorded. Stephen has been taking attendance as people have joined the meeting. He will now finalize that and go over instructions on how to participate.

Stephen, you there?

[02:08] Stephen Johnson — DMF Staff:
Yeah, I'm here, sorry.

[02:12] Casey Silva — Hearing Officer:
No, you're good.

[02:13] Stephen Johnson — DMF Staff:
There's one person that I don't know on the list. It's just a phone number. Let me ask them. Well, there's two now. There's a person calling with a phone number that ends with 29. I'm going to unmute you, I just want to ask you if you would like to make a comment tonight. Apparently, I can't unmute from this configuration.

[03:28] Marla Chuffo — DMF Staff:
No, thank you.

[03:31] Stephen Johnson — DMF Staff:
Okay. And there's another person. The name shows up as S-O-R. You can unmute yourself and let me know if you'd like to comment. Okay, now you can unmute yourself. I unlocked it. I'm not hearing anything. I guess we'll come back later and see if they would like to comment.

[04:47] Casey Silva — Hearing Officer:
Sounds good. Alrighty, so before we begin the public hearing, I will provide a brief overview of the shellfish leasing process and the role of public comments.

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.

Shellfish leasing is governed by North Carolina law, primarily outlined in North Carolina General Statute 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.

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.

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 (SAV) and natural shellfish populations using patent tongs to capture both surface and subsurface samples—which did not happen on this because it's just a water column; and then 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.

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 comments may be submitted in three ways. Tonight during this hearing, online through the Division's website, and by letter until the public comment period closes tomorrow at five o'clock.

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.

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; This 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.

We will now begin the public comment portion of the hearing. Here's how it will proceed. First, I will present information on the proposed shellfish lease. Next, I will invite members of the public who signed up to speak. Finally, I will give the lease applicant an opportunity to make a statement.

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

The proposed shellfish lease receiving public comment at this hearing is listed here. As a reminder for all speakers this evening, please be courteous and respectful. If you are discourteous or disruptive, I will ask you to leave.

Tonight's lease application is for a 1.66-acre shellfish water column lease, applied for on June 8, 2026, by Adam T. Brinson, located in Bay River.

The management plan indicates the use of oyster seed on bottom and water column with bottom cages and floating bags for the commercial production of oysters.

Division staff conducted site investigations on July 21 and August 18. This was a limited biological investigation as the proposed water column footprint is on top of already existing bottom lease with the lease number being 23-017BL.

Now, I will call on the public for comments on the proposed shellfish lease. When I call your name, please come to the podium, state your name, if you are representing an organization, where you are from, and the lease or leases you are commenting on, and 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. Mitch will signal when you have one minute remaining by raising one finger and will raise his hand when your time expires.

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

So, we don't have anybody signed up to speak.

Stephen, would you like to double check with those on Webex?

[10:23] Stephen Johnson — DMF Staff:
Sure. I still have the same attendance as earlier. The person with the name S-O-R, if you'd like to respond as to whether you'd like to speak or not.

[10:44] Sor — Public Speaker, Webex:
I don't have anything at the moment.

[10:48] Stephen Johnson — DMF Staff:
Okay. So, that's the only one.

[10:54] Casey Silva — Hearing Officer:
Okay, awesome. So, now I will call on the applicant and give him an opportunity if he wishes to speak on this proposed shellfish lease, and it is not a requirement of the applicant. Adam, do you have anything you'd like to say?

[11:08] Adam Brinson — Applicant, In Person:

Yeah, just that I know what y'all are looking for is potential conflicts with users and since I've been operating the lease, I've had a lot of interaction with the public and by in large, I mean not by in large, it's been totally positive. People seem to be curious, they come up and talk to me about it, and I'm happy to talk to them. I understand I might be the only oyster farmer a lot of these people meet, so I want to be a good representative of the industry, and I'll continue to do that if granted the water column lease.

[11:50] Casey Silva — Hearing Officer:

Great, thank you. Is there anybody else that would like to comment? Alrighty, so if nobody else wishes to speak, I will close this public hearing. I would like to thank you all for your time and participation in this process. Time of closure is 6:12 PM.

Transcript Verification

Transcribed By: Mitch Melkonian

Reviewed Against Recording By:

Verification Date: November 13, 2026