

Is Penn Cove pounding the final nail into Quilcene Bay?



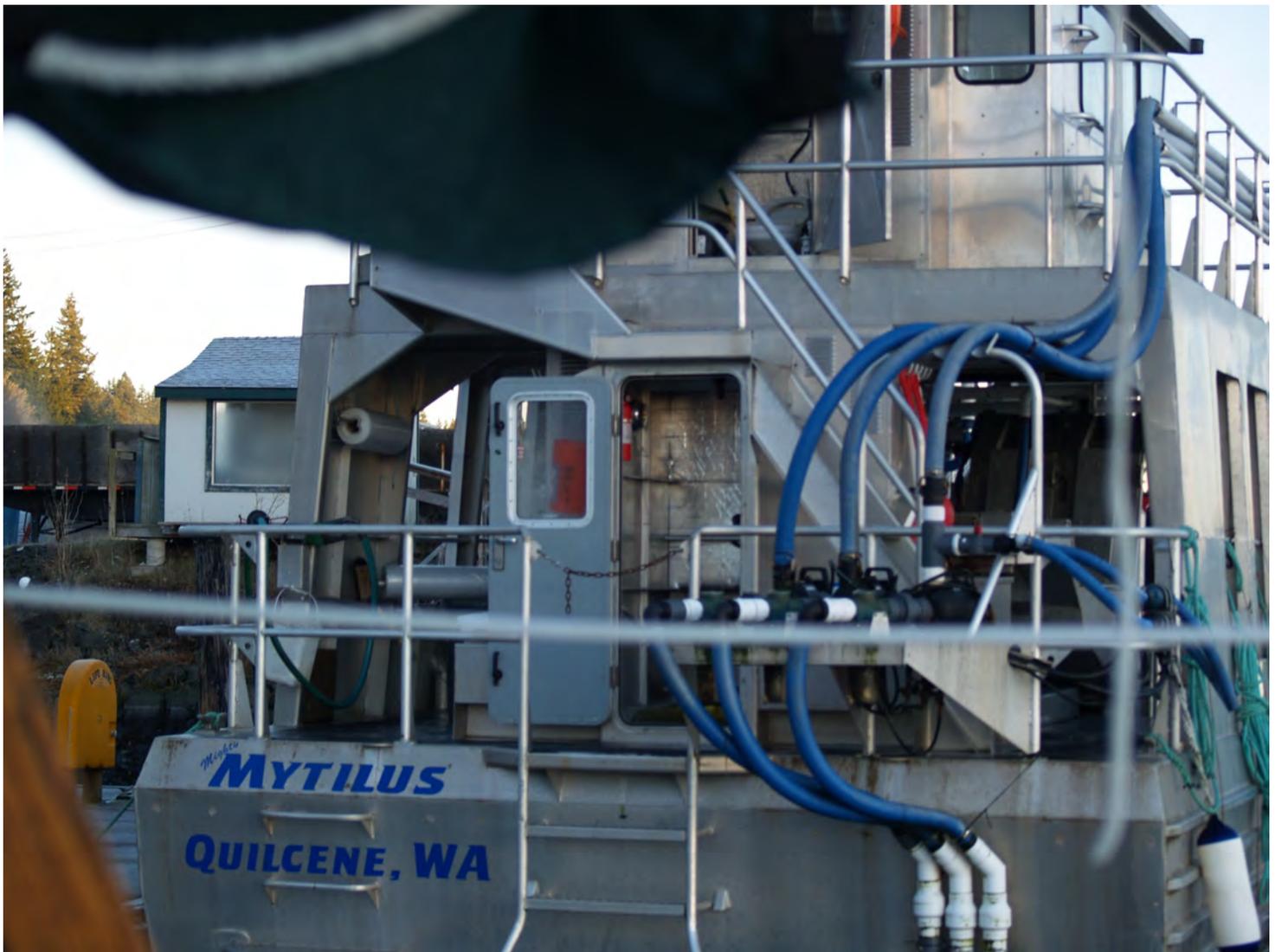
Penn Cove wants to increase its raft fleet in Quilcene Bay from 15 to 24. If it gets the approval of Ecology through Jefferson County's DCD (lead agency), WA Department Natural Resources, and the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, it will come close to doubling whatever amount of dissolved oxygen and water quality degradation they are currently causing to Quilcene Bay. I can assure you such an increase combined with the devastation that Coast Seafoods has already created to the bay will end our bay as a paradise for all animals—including humans. If you bear with me, I'll tell you how this will happen.

To be fair to Penn Cove, which is an affiliate of Pacific Seafood which is the owner of Coast Seafoods, there are a two positives to having these rafts in Quilcene Bay. 1) They employ a dozen or so people who live in Jefferson and adjacent counties and 2) the Mussels they raise do eat some the algae attracted to the bay by Coast's nitrate-loaded effluent pumped into the bay from their algae and oyster-seed tanks.



But these two positive combined do not come close to making up for the two major negatives and a bunch of smaller ones. One of these negatives involves the use of hydraulic equipment on the rafts and the ship Mytilus; and other is that the concentration of muscle fecal matter that settles under these rafts and the extreme number of muscles themselves lower the dissolved oxygen level of the bay.

The equipment on the rafts and ship leaks. It always leaks regardless how well it is maintained. Unless all the equipment has sealed bearings and is operated by electricity instead of hydraulics, the equipment needs to be constantly greased, oiled, and filled with fluid. We know they need these lubricants and fluids because these rafts and ship have containers that hold hundreds of gallons of hydraulic fluid and adequate petroleum products to keep the equipment running. And we know they leak because we've seen the film on the water around the ship and equipment rafts.



The Mytilus is truly shipshape. I cannot dispute that the skipper maintains a tidy and clean ship. But with all the equipment, I can assure you that machine oil and hydraulic fluids find their way to the deck and the sea. I have seen it and others have seen it. I, and a co-worker, saw it while working at an adjacent slip to the Mytilus—which was being hosed-down with fresh water. The oil settled on the water as a creamy and almost yellow film (probably from being mixed with the fresh water) and quickly left the marina to disperse in the bay by a fast-moving outgoing tide.

Oil and hydraulic waste from the Mytilus and the equipment rafts invariably end up in the bay and creates a film that damages the estuary's ecosystem. This film is one of the reasons all diving and pursuit birds are gone. This film not only does damage to the birds but it creates a reflective covering that makes it difficult for them to see below the surface. When you combine this film with the turbidity caused by Coast Seafoods' effluent, you have a perfect barrier to keep birds from seeing the bait fish. If they function as pursuit birds, as the loons and cormorants do, the effluent in the water damages their eyes. That is why the kingfishers, cormorants, loons, and other diving birds are no longer fishing in Quilcene Bay. As evidence for this claim, I will now show you the photos that Connie G took with her cell phone in the Quilcene marina.

COHO FRY COMPLIMENTS OF QUILCENE NATIONAL FISH HATCHERY



Where are the kingfishers, loons, cormorants, herons? Before 2012, when Coast and Penn Cove were sold to Pacific, there were dozens of birds—and always a few seals—feasting on these small salmon after being released from the Quilcene National Fish Hatchery. Now there are no predators to train these little guys how to survive in the vicious ocean. The once natural process has been upset by industry not caring how they make their profits. They can do it right, but they won't unless we force them.

NO BIRDS, NO SEALS - AND ALL THE BABY SALMON TO FEAST ON!





Much of the fecal matter coming from the tens of thousands of muscles settles on the floor of the estuary—most in the vicinity of the rafts. Although this fecal matter is eaten by bacteria, the bacteria consume the dissolved oxygen needed by bottom fish, crabs, and oysters to survive. When the bacteria forms into a mat, which it eventually will if the food keeps coming, our estuary will be as dead as some sections of lower Hood Canal. Although eating the fecal matter of fish and shellfish by the bacteria is a natural process, the amount coming from the floats forms a concentrated mass that is not natural.

That is why muscle floats, such those in Quilcene Bay, are damaging to the bay's ecosystem and that is why Jefferson County must reduce, rather than increase, the number of muscle rafts allowed in Quilcene Bay.