**Frenchman Bay Mussel Harvesters and MDI Bio Lab Agree on Eelgrass Restoration Plans**

The Mount Desert Island Biological Laboratory (MDIBL) hosted a meeting and dinner for mussel harvesters from the Maine Mussel Harvester Association on January 31, 2013 at Gordon’s Wharf in Sullivan, ME. The gathering had a dual purpose: to appreciate the mussel harvesters for their collaboration on eelgrass restoration projects in the past, and to garner their input on proposed eelgrass restoration areas for the future. The mussel harvesters who attended either drag for “wild mussels” or they harvest “seed mussels” for aquaculture lease sites in Frenchman Bay. “The group here represents one hundred percent of bottom-dredge mussel processors in Maine,” said Ralph Smith, of Moosabec Mussels, “you’ve got Eastern Maine Mussels, Acadia Aqua Farms, Moosabec Mussels, and Atlantic Shellfish.”

In recognition of the role that mussel harvesters have played in the success of eelgrass restoration in Frenchman Bay, MDIBL sent a letter to the Department of Marine Resources Commissioner Patrick Keliher appreciating and commending the collaborative spirit in which mussel harvesters have refrained from dragging in marked eelgrass restoration areas over the past six years.

Jane Disney, of the Community Environmental Health Laboratory at MDIBL, gave a presentation on MDIBL’s history with eelgrass restoration from 2007 to present. She spoke about the dramatic decline in eelgrass habitat in Frenchman Bay between 1996 and 2008. Among other threats like pollution, shoreline erosion, and invasive species, “The time of the greatest decline,” Jane said, “was probably during that awful red tide in 2005 when most of the coast of Maine was closed to harvesting. We had guys from all over the state coming to drag for mussels in Frenchman Bay because it was the only place open.” A lot of eelgrass may have been disrupted at this time.

The first major outcome from the meeting was the agreement that designated eelgrass donor sites are necessary if eelgrass restoration is to expand in Frenchman Bay. These sites, totaling 39 acres, are located immediately to the west of Hadley Point and along the Lamoine shoreline. Eelgrass transplants will be harvested from these areas for restoration projects. The second outcome was agreement about the location of eelgrass restoration areas. These sites, totaling 228 acres, include areas at Hadley Point and around Thomas Island in Bar Harbor, in Goose Cove in Trenton, and the Jordan River, and Berry Cove in Lamoine.

Bob DeForrest of Maine Coast Heritage Trust created real-time GIS maps as the harvesters made suggestions for proposed restoration areas. Harvesters and MDIBL scientists signed the map of eelgrass restoration areas and donor sites, which represents the agreement of MDIBL scientists and community partners to restrict their restoration efforts to these areas and mussel harvesters to refrain from dragging in these areas.

The positive outcomes from this meeting are a testament to the willingness of different bay users to trust each other and work together toward preserving the resources in Frenchman Bay.