



Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council

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Christopher M. Moore, Ph.D., Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

Date: September 23, 2020
To: Chris Moore, Executive Director
From: José Montañez, Staff
Subject: Pre-application meeting for Manna Fish Farms proposal

On September 21, 2020, Manna Fish Farms Inc (Manna).¹ held a pre-application meeting via webinar with staff from various agencies (e.g., NOAA Fisheries, Coast Guard, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, BOEM, NY Port Authority, MAFMC, NEFMC, ASMFC) to update interested parties on the pre-application status of a commercial finfish farm for commercial sale and research in the U.S. EEZ about 9 miles off the shore of Long Island, NY (port of Shinnecock). This aquaculture project intends to raise steelhead trout and possibly black sea bass in submerged net pens secured at 40-50 feet below the ocean's surface in water depths of approximately 145 feet. The project proposes a phased approach with approximately 100,000 pounds of steelhead in two pens in phase 1 (proof-of-concept) to a total of 18 pens in phase 5. The offshore marine aquaculture farm will occupy a total area of approximately 4 km² (1.5 mi²).

The first pre-application meeting for this project was held 5 years ago on November 16, 2015 and Manna has reported much progress since to address stakeholder's concerns. In addition, Manna has also been working with regulators to implement similar activities off Pensacola Florida, in the Gulf of Mexico. The main purpose of this webinar was to update agencies on the status of the pre-application proposal and solicit any objections to the preferred alternative site, and other issues that are under consideration.

In addition, at this meeting, NOAA's National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS) provided background information and results for a Site Suitability Analysis (Siting Analysis) conducted for this proposed aquaculture operation in New York (see NCCOS' July 2020 report). Taking into account Manna's technical production requirements, NCCOS identified four potential sites suitable for this operation (see Figure 1 below).² These potential sites were identified taking into consideration national security concerns, transportation infrastructure, fishing industry activity, recreation and cultural considerations, energy infrastructure, protected species, and EFH amongst others. One specific site with consistent depth and low slope and relatively low vessel traffic was determined to be the overall preferred site choice (Site A).

¹ <https://mannafishfarms.com/>

² Detailed background information (presentations, reports) distributed for the September 21 meeting can be found at the Council's website page for the October 5-8, 2020 Council Meeting (under Executive Committee Report; <https://www.mafmc.org/briefing/october-2020>).

The next step for this project is to conduct a Baseline Environmental Survey of the preferred site choice (Site A) in the spring of next year. The primary purpose of the survey is to collect unbiased baseline environmental data prior to implementation of the offshore marine aquaculture project (see document Baseline Environmental Survey Plan for Manna Fish Farm dated September 2020). This will allow for robust comparison of before, during, and after fish farm establishment. Once the survey is concluded, the Baseline Environmental Survey will be used to support the permitting application³ for offshore marine aquaculture permits that will be submitted to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Environmental Protection Agency. Manna also indicated that they would continue to engage stakeholders on the development of this project. Public input can also be provided during the permit application rulemaking process.

During the webinar, Manna staff asked for initial input from webinar participants regarding the feasibility of the preferred site choice (Site A). Manna's staff indicated that getting early input on the preferred site would be beneficial as the pre-application process moves forward. This input solicitation was an important emphasis for this meeting. Any red flag type, "No not that location" objections would be valuable early rather than after the survey work has occurred. Input gathering on the preferred site did not fully materialize at this meeting and further effort will be placed on seeking additional input in the near future. Manna did not provide a specific timeline for receiving this input, but they are looking to begin baseline surveys soon. However, attendees were encouraged to reach out directly to Donna Lanzetta of Manna to indicate whether they planned to provide pre-application input, and the timeframe they required.

³ Manna has removed striped bass from the proposal and only plans to include sterile steelhead trout and black sea bass as culture species in the applications.

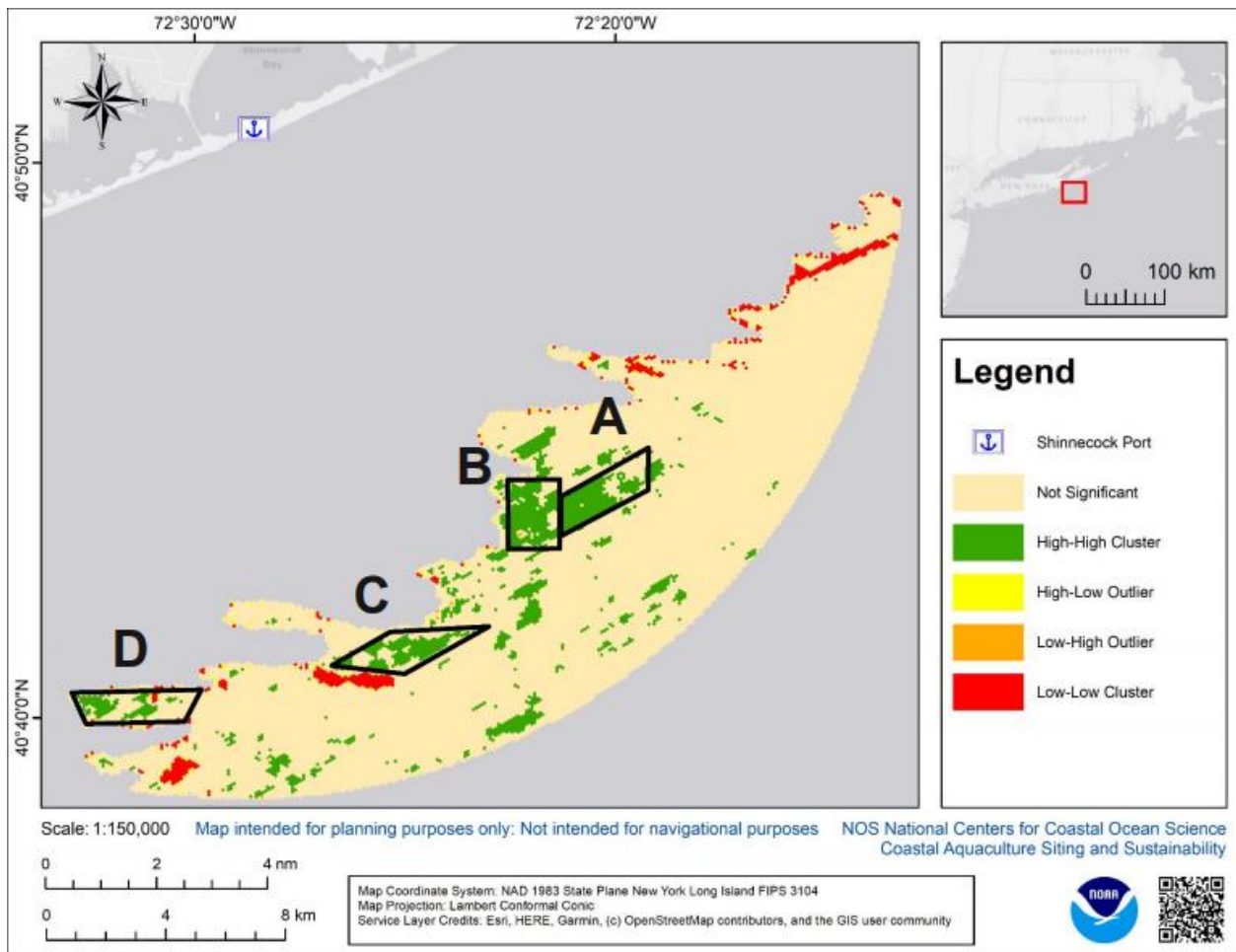


Figure 1. Map of final suitability cluster analysis of the four site locations for the proposed Manna fish farm. Source: See footnote #2.