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Commonwealth of Massachusetts

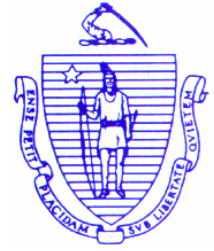
Division of Marine Fisheries

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Marine Fisheries Advisory

***Marine Fisheries* ANNOUNCES CONDITIONAL RE-OPENING OF
MERRIMACK RIVER CLAM FLATS**

The Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (*Marine Fisheries*) is pleased to announce the re-classification and re-opening of Merrimack River shellfish flats in Newburyport and Salisbury to the conditional harvest of soft-shell clams. Once considered among the top five clam producing flats in Massachusetts, bacterial contamination shut down highly productive beds in the Merrimack estuary for the past 20 years. Harvesting is set to begin on Friday, March 17, 2006 in Newburyport and Salisbury.

Water quality testing confirms the river meets moderately contaminated criteria during dry weather, for a *Conditionally Restricted* classification. Results also demonstrate rainfall causes intermittent and predictable periods of gross bacterial pollution. The resultant runoff from rain produces a sharp increase in bacteria above threshold levels.

Consequently, only specially licensed Master and Subordinate diggers may harvest soft-shell clams for depuration (purification) at *Marine Fisheries*' Shellfish Purification Plant at Plum Island Point, Newburyport. At the Shellfish Plant clams are purged of bacteria in clean seawater in a controlled, strictly monitored process for two to three days until safe to eat. No recreational harvesting will be allowed.

The Shellfish Purification Plant has been in operation since 1930 and now processes an average of 15,000 bushels of soft-shell clams annually. The plant was built and run by the City of Newburyport to purify clams from the Merrimack River which was closed to all clamming in 1925. In 1960, the City turned over operation of the plant to *Marine Fisheries*.

Marine Fisheries Master and Subordinate digger permits will be required and may be obtained in our Boston office at 251 Causeway Street. In addition, a local town shellfish license will be required in Salisbury, please contact the Salisbury Shellfish Constable Ray Pike at 978-499-0740 for more information.

For further information please visit our website at www.mass.gov/marinefisheries or contact Dave Roach in our Gloucester office at 978-282-0308 x158 or Jeff Kennedy in Newburyport at 978-465-3553.