Summary of Workshop on Shellfish Seed Transfer Regulations
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Prior to the Northeast Aquaculture Conference and Exposition (NACE) held on January 14-16, 2015 in Portland, ME, about 50 folks gathered for a two-day workshop on shellfish seed transfer regulations led by Ryan Carnegie and Dave Bushek. Pathologists, regulators, extension agents and industry discussed ways to simplify and harmonize regulatory approaches to seed transfers. Participants agreed that the issues are more complicated than anyone anticipated, but after hours of discussions, we reached common ground on an array of ideas that could simplify things significantly.

One idea was to establish a set of protocols to allow for certification of hatcheries so that batch pathogen testing could be replaced by periodic sampling. Small seed and larvae held in filtered / treated waters in certified hatcheries could theoretically travel between certain zones without batch inspection. A committee was formed to develop the details on how this would work.

There was broad recognition that the risk of introducing an exotic pathogen is negligible if the pathogen is already established. Since there are broad areas of the U.S. where the known pathogens are already firmly established, it was reasoned that lightly infected seed movements within areas where the pathogen is endemic might not rise to a level of regulatory concern. We will also attempt to create a centralized database to collect the results of pathogen tests from up and down the coast so the distribution and spread can be tracked.

Obviously, zones where pathogens are not established still need to be protected from introductions. In general, however, we hope to help regulators move away from a zero tolerance policy when pathogens are already present in receiving waters by providing them with the best available science. A panel of experts has been established so that regulators can request an advisory opinion on risk potential for transfers in grey areas. Hopefully this will help regulators faced with low-risk transfers to consider the hard “yes” instead of the easy “no.”