

ADF&G to remove invasive sea squirt from Sitka harbor

Ed Ronco, KCAW, Sitka, Alaska

SITKA, ALASKA (2011-08-10) The State of Alaska plans to remove an invasive species of sea squirt from Sitka's Whiting Harbor. The Alaska Department of Fish & Game will slip bags over nearly 100 nets that are part of an oyster farm in Whiting Harbor. The nets have been taken over by the invasive animal. The bags, with the nets inside, will be hoisted out of the water and disposed of.

Charlie Swanton is the director of Sport Fish for ADF&G. He briefed the Assembly on the plans Tuesday evening.

"We are certainly hoping to have this done within the next two to three weeks, depending upon availability of those divers," he said. "We're in the process, as of today, to line up those divers."

Fish & Game will then look at securing the structures around the harbor and removing them for destruction. Swanton says that won't be cheap.

"It's likely just the superstructure alone is going to be an exercise that's probably going to cost well over \$100,000 when you start thinking of the docks that are in there, and all of the other material that's in there," he said. "That doesn't say anything for where they're going to be disposed of, and subsequent to that, what the best method is for removal of that which is actually on the rocks and the substrate in Whiting Harbor."

Swanton says it's his belief that the oyster farm in Whiting Harbor has been put out of business by the invasive tunicate, known as *Didemnum vexillum*, or *D.vex*. The small animal, which lives in colonies, coats everything in its path, choking out the ability for plants and mussels to feed or grow. Other areas, including Puget Sound in Washington, have spent thousands attempting to dispose of the small animals.

They were first discovered in Sitka's Whiting Harbor last year.

Raven Radio Foundation, Inc., August 8, 2011.