Department of Marine Resources

Notice from Commissioner Keliher to Elver Industry - 2020 Season Postponed

Dear Elver Industry Members,

This message is to follow up on my earlier notice regarding the delay in the opening of Maine's 2020 elver season.

The Coronavirus pandemic continues to impact Maines fisheries in ways we could not have imagined. As of today, COVID-19 has been found in eight of Maines 16 counties, with nearly half of the 52 cases reported in Cumberland County. All Mainers have been asked to follow social distancing recommendations, including maintaining 6 feet from other people to reduce the spread of this disease. Following this recommendation is critically important to avoid overwhelming our health care system.

With the elver season slated to begin on March 22nd, it has become clear that the typical crowded conditions both on the rivers and in the shops could not only allow transmission, but also speed the spread of the disease throughout the state as fishermen traveled along the coast to harvest and sell elvers, and then return to their homes.

For these reasons, we made the difficult decision to close the coastal waters of the state to fishing for or taking elvers, until further notice. This closure is for a minimum of two weeks, at which point the threat to public health will be reassessed. To be clear, this regulation also prohibits the setting of gear during this time.

In making this decision, I communicated with tribal leadership, as well as leaders within the industry, to express that the safety of our communities is our primary concern.

I know that this is devasting news to individuals who rely on this fishery. I hope that we will be able to allow fishing to resume later this season, and that fishermen will have the opportunity to catch the quota they have been allocated. During the period of the closure, we will work with the industry toward developing a plan to try to allow fishing to occur in a safe manner. We will keep you informed as we know more.

Sincerely,

Patrick Keliher

Commissioner, Maine Department of Marine Resources

Credits

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