

Permit issues delay fish hatchery

By Tom White
Times Staff Writer

A unique salt-water fish hatchery operation in western Stone County is currently being delayed because of permit issues with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality.

Former Louisiana state senator Walter Boasso began work on the hatchery operation on his property near Old Highway 26 earlier this year.

Boasso said he has named the business "AquaGreen," adding that it is "aquaculture the green way."

The goal, he said last month, was to eventually have 10 hatchery buildings in place and produce more than 10 million pounds of fish for commercial clients.

The initial plans were for four hatchery buildings on the almost 1,000 acre ranch, Boasso said.

However, wetlands mitigation issues with the Corps have arisen, and Boasso said last week that he was told that it would take up to six months to be permitted.

Boasso invited county and state officials to tour the operation Oct. 17, with members of the Board of Supervisors, state Sen. Ezell Lee and Corky Perrette of the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources.

He said he had tried to get representatives of the Corps and MDEQ there the previous week, but "no one

showed up."

Steve Abernathy, a partner in the operation with Boasso, said the unique "aquaculture" approach to producing salt-water fish inland "would set the standard for a green operation."

"People are becoming more conscious about what they're eating," said Boasso, adding that his facilities would utilize a recirculatory process to remove impediments from the water in the tanks with no external discharge.

Boasso added that he wanted his facility to serve as an educational resource for students at Mississippi State University or the University of Southern Mississippi.

"I want someone to shake the tree and get USM and Mississippi State involved," he said.

Kenneth Riley and David Cerino, former employees of the U.S. Department of Agriculture who are working with Boasso, discussed the recirculating system and its ability to maintain an economically friendly environment while also lowering energy costs.

"We've got fish in the tank and we're growing and we hope to have a product soon," said Riley. "We're taking all these pieces of the puzzle and putting them together."

He added that the green aquaculture concept can "adapt marine fish that can be grown in mid-America," saying that "pompano can be spawned in captivity and on a continuous basis, on a

production circle of nine to 12 months. People can't wait two and a half years to have a product."

The aquaculture production, Boasso said, is not in competition with the state's catfish industry.

"Locally produced fish is huge here," Sen. Lee said, "and I think people would rather have it than fish from Vietnam."

"If you can't trust the Chinese with your toys, how can you trust them with your food," Abernathy said, adding that the green aquaculture process "doesn't use hormones or antibiotics and it's as green as you're going to get."

Boasso said he hopes to work with a corrections facility to operate a processing plant, as he is now doing in Colorado.

"We're not going to have prisoners working here," he said of his property. "This would be something we'd work out with the sheriff or with a corrections facility somewhere."

"I think this is a great thing," Sen. Lee told The Times. "I don't understand why it would take so long to get a permit."

He added that the aquaculture plan proposed by Boasso is something that the Legislature should take a closer look at, and also urged supervisors to pursue whatever economic development means necessary to assist Boasso.

SHS 'Pride' qualifies for State Competition



TIMES PHOTOS/ROBERT JACKSON



Stone High School's marching band, "The Pride of Stone High," was one of 15 high school bands to participate in the 2008 Gold Medal Classic competition hosted by Mississippi Gulf Coast CC last Saturday. There were 13 bands from coastal Mississippi along with a band from Alabama and one from Louisiana. The marching band competition was the final event for Stone's band before it gets ready for the MHSAA Class 4A state championships. The 16-band state championship event will be held Saturday at Pearl High School. SHS qualified for the state competition by winning a regional marching band festival held earlier this month in Gulfport.



David Cerino, left, discusses water recirculating system at the Aqua Green hatchery.



Corky Perrette of the state Department of Marine Resources, left, and Supervisor Wendell Patton look on as Walter Boasso shows a pompano fish from a tank.



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