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Intelligence

'Away from the coast': Latest Maine RAS venture chooses forest over seas

22 March 2023

By Lauren Kramer

Katahdin Salmon execs drawn to clean water, renewable hydropower and community support

If there's one land-based salmon farming proposal that's well positioned to get the green light and start producing fish in Maine, it might be the latest outfit to the scene: Katahdin Salmon.

Headed by CEO and founder Marianne Naess and Erik Heim, both former executives at Nordic Aquafarms, Portland-based Katahdin signed a lease for 45 acres in Millinocket on a landlocked site formerly occupied by the Great Northern Paper mill. The recirculating aquaculture system (RAS) will utilize a combination of well water and lake water on the site, will use 100 percent renewable hydropower and will have a filtration system that dehydrates and sanitizes waste, later selling it as compost, biofuel or bait.

Naess says the facility will produce 5,000 metric tons (MT) of salmon in its first stage of development and another 5,000 MT in the second phase, creating 80 full-time jobs. The project's estimated cost is \$120 million to \$140 million.

"When we decided to start a new company and build a new facility, we looked at what had happened in Belfast, at the industry in general and at feedback from other salmon farms that have been proposed,"



Land-based salmon farm Katahdin Salmon will be built far from the shoreline to where operational costs and conditions might lead to success sooner. Artist's rendering provided by the company.

Naess said. Nordic Aquafarms' proposal for a 33,000-ton salmon farm in Belfast has received strong resistance from local residents and is still in litigation.



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"We determined that we'd move away from the coast, build a smaller facility compared to a lot of the projects proposed over the last four-to-five years and find a site with infrastructure in place and less risk in terms of construction and permitting."

She said the renewable energy, abundance of clean, cold water on site and recyclable waste streams will make Katahdin Salmon a good impact investment with a great environmental profile: "We want to do this as responsibly as we can and move that environmental needle in the right direction."

It's a town that's very welcoming of development.

She said the company has received encouraging feedback from the local community in Millinocket and important stakeholder groups.

"Millinocket works hard to attract new businesses that will fit into the community, and they have a good economic development nonprofit that collaborates with companies to develop the town and industry. It's a town that's very welcoming of development," she said.

That creates a striking contrast with coastal towns like Belfast, she noted. "There are a lot of vacation owners on the coast, and those towns have different demography and different ambitions in terms of economic development. While city councils in those areas are working hard to attract new businesses, you also have people wanting to keep it as a tourist attraction."

Katahdin Salmon is still working through the permitting process but hopes to start construction in the second half of 2024. If everything goes according to plan, it could have salmon in the water within two years.

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