

5. Old Business:

Route 72 Bridge Project-Shellfish Mitigation

Ms. Dacanay provided Council with an update on the Route 72 Bridge Project with regard to shellfish and submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) mitigation. The shellfish mitigation requirement will be conducted by the Bureau to perform shellfish enhancement in the vicinity of the bridge and SAV mitigation will be conducted by a contractor through NJ Department of Transportation.

Hurricane Sandy Impacts to Shellfish Industry

Mr. Maxwell inquired on an update regarding the shellfish industry questionnaire that was mailed out to all commercial shellfish license holders and dealers in an effort to assess damage as a direct result of Superstorm Sandy. Mr. Normant stated he had received approximately 160 returns out of 1,300 mailings. Mr. Normant added that the Bureau had to conduct a second mailing to a group of license holders that mistakenly did not receive the survey during the initial mailing. Mr. Normant also stated that he had begun to summarize the information and should have some results soon. This information is important in the event relief or disaster aid becomes available. Mr. Normant added that the Commissioner views the marine fish and shellfish industries as a top priority

Little Egg Harbor Bay Shellfish Closure

Mr. Michael McCarthy inquired to Mr. Schuster regarding the on-going shellfish harvest closure in the southern portion Little Egg Harbor Bay, which has kept those waters closed to shellfish harvesting since Superstorm Sandy. Mr. Schuster stated that it appeared that coliphage levels seemed to be coming down. The Bureau of Marine Water Monitoring will continue to sample. He opined that if the weather would break and start to warm the water, it would speed up the process of the clams purging themselves. Mr. Schuster stated that the extent of the closure was a result of very unusual circumstances. Immediately following the passage of Superstorm Sandy, water temperatures had plummeted quickly and the clams had not been able to purge themselves, even though the water quality had returned to acceptable levels suitable to shellfish harvest.

6. New Business:

2013 Vibrio Management Plan

Mr. Maxwell stated that the Vibrio Management Plan mainly focused on Delaware Bay without addressing issues on the Atlantic Coast. The draft Vibrio Management Plan was presented to the industry representatives for discussion at a meeting with the Bureau of Marine Water Monitoring on March 13th. Mr. Maxwell inquired if there were any clam concerns with Vibrio. Mr. Schuster stated that Vibrio was mostly an issue with oysters. Mr. Schuster stated that testing procedures would remain the same as previous years with some modifications. He stated that some of the results from the testing showed that Vibrio wasn't an issue directly from the water column, but from post-harvest handling.

Mr. Schuster explained that the 2013 Vibrio Management Plan was developed due to an outbreak resulting from three confirmed illnesses. The Center for Disease Control estimates that for every case reported, there are approximately 156 cases not reported. At present, there would be an 8 hour harvest window in June, a 6 ½ hour window in July and a 7 hour window in August. The intertidal harvest times would be different. Delaware Bay had previously an eight hour window of harvest to refrigeration. Because of the outbreak, the Vibrio Management Plan had to be modified using a risk calculator to keep the beds open.

Mr. Maxwell inquired on oyster harvest in sub-tidal and inter-tidal waters on the Atlantic Coast. Mr. Schuster stated that at the March 13th meeting with industry, Mr. Maxwell and Parsons were invited to provide input for the Atlantic Coast. The upcoming meeting on March 26th in Bivalve will be a follow up meeting for suggested changes.

Mr. Maxwell inquired on whether having refrigeration onboard was a viable option to harvesters. Mr. Schuster stated those options were being explored.

Mullica River-Blood Ditch

Mr. Normant stated that he had discussed a while ago with Mr. Maxwell concerning the widening of the cuts at Blood Ditch on the Mullica River, which has altered the salinity regime up river by allowing the incoming tide flow straight up the river, bypassing the natural meander of the river. This issue was discussed at a meeting regarding "Living Shorelines", which is an alternative approach to shoreline protection. Mr. Normant was exploring the possibility of trying to have the cut through closed to re-establish the natural tidal/river flow. The higher salinities may be contributing to negative impacts on the natural oyster seed beds up the river.

The meeting was adjourned on a motion by Mr. Hughes and a second by Mr. Maxwell.

7. Date, time and place of next meeting:

DATE: April 15, 2013
TIME: 7 PM
LOCATION: Law Enforcement Office
360 New York Rd. Rt. 9
Port Republic, NJ 08241