Marine Fisheries Administration Monthly Report

November 2020

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Marine Fisheries Administration Monthly Report

****MARINE FISHERIES****

ASMFC/MAFMC/COOP/NOAA

MEETING SUMMARIES

- **Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission-ASMFC (TC, SAS, Boards)**
  - Administration staff participated in a conference call of the Assessment Science Committee. Major topics of discussion centered on: updates to ongoing stock assessments, data issues that might relate to lapses in sampling due to covid, providing input to ACCSP and SAFMC regarding data standards for opt-in angler panels, potential adjustments to 2021 stock assessment schedule due to covid, and details related to advanced stock assessment training.
  - Administration staff participated in a meeting of the Bluefish Monitoring Committee (MC) to discuss recommendations to 2021 fishery specifications. The MC supported status quo commercial quota and recreational measures. While the MC is recommending status quo measures, the change in recreational harvest limit (RHL) between 2020 and 2021, or the expected 2021 landings compared to 2021 RHL, slight to notable reductions in harvest might have otherwise been required. The Council may want to take this into consideration when they set 2021 specifications at their December meeting.
  - Staff attended a three-and-a-half-day Red Drum Data and Methods Workshop which encompassed a thorough review of all available data. Each state representative presented their state regulations and data review, MRIP Catch and Size Composition, CPUE and Commercial Landings were reviewed for both the Northern and Southern Stocks, recent literature was reviewed, stock synthesis simulation models were discussed as well as other potential simulation approaches, the assessment history was gone over, potential assessment methods were discussed and tasks were assigned. It was decided that at least three additional follow up webinars needed to be planned before the February ASMFC meeting. Two meetings will be held in December and one in January.
  - Staff participated via webinar in a meeting of the Atlantic Coast River Herring Collaborative Forum, formerly known as the River Herring Technical Expert Working Group on November 5th. Multiple presentations on projects from up and down the Atlantic coast were viewed including "Scaling American shad habitat models for coastal application to alosines: progress and needs," "Using ARIS acoustic camera to characterize behavior of river herring during their migration," and "Genetic Stock Identification of River Herring." Staff also received the latest river herring updates from the Mid-Atlantic Council and ASMFC staff.
  - Staff participated in a meeting via webinar of the Shad and River Herring TC on 11/10. The purpose of the call was to present to the full TC the recommendations developed by a the task group charged by the Board with developing paths forwards for American shad management considering the results of the 2020 Benchmark stock assessment. As Chair of the meeting, staff developed a presentation summarizing the Task Group recommendations and guided conversation on the full TC's comments and proposed changes to the recommendation. All of the Task Group's recommendations were approved by the full TC, some with minor changes, and will be presented to the Board for approval at the 2021 Winter Board Meeting. Recommendations were made on the following topics:
    - Recreational management and for monitoring systems with low abundance and low harvest
    - Requirements for management responses in SFMPs
    - Time series for SFMP metrics
    - Management guidance for interjurisdictional waters
    - Alternative Management Plan guidance
    - Recreational harvest without an SFMP/AMP

    - Incorporating stock assessment information

  The TC also reviewed and approved New York's response to the stock assessment for the Hudson river. The rest of the states'/jurisdictions' responses will be reviewed via a conference call on December 9th.
  - Staff attended a webinar with ACCSP Commercial Technical Committee. The committee was tasked with updating American Lobster reporting requirements. The committee will meet weekly until reporting guidelines are updated.
  - Staff attended a webinar with ACCSP Commercial Technical Committee. The committee was presented findings from the Electronic monitoring working group. The committee task the working group with investigating electronic monitoring standards.
  - Staff attended the ASMFC's Jonah Crab Workshop from November 16-18, 2020. The purpose of the meeting was to evaluate data available along the Atlantic coast for a potential future stock assessment. A report from the workshop will be drafted and submitted to the ASMFC Jonah crab Board in August of 2021.
  - The Striped Bass Technical Committee (TC) met to discuss the Board task of conducting sensitivity analyses to explore the relative impact of different release mortality rate estimates on stock status. The TC decided to explore three scenarios and discussed a recommendation to the Board that the 2021 Assessment Update be postponed to 2022 due to the data uncertainties in 2020 caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - The Striped Bass Tagging Subcommittee (TSC) met to discuss the winter tagging program that typically fishes out of Virginia Beach to access the offshore waters of NC, VA, and MD during January and February. The tagging program has had difficulty finding fish in recent years and has observed the distribution of fish further north. The TSC discussed the minimum number of tagged fish sufficient for model inputs and analyses and recommended considering changing ports to Ocean City, MD, which would include fishing in the southern waters of New Jersey. The TSC also discussed additional sources of information in order to understand recent migration patterns in preparation for the survey.
  - The American Eel Technical Committee and Stock Assessment Subcommittee held a data workshop to start the benchmark stock assessment via webinar on November 30 and December 1. TC representatives each gave a presentation of their state's American eel regulation history, commercial and recreational landings, biological sampling programs and all fishery-dependent and -independent data sources. The SAS was given time to ask questions about each presentation and will continue to meet on their own from December 2-3.

- **Miscellaneous**
  - At the Mid-Atlantic Chapter-American Fisheries Society web-based meeting on November 13, 2020, staff presented the results of a study on contemporary size truncation of the Weakfish population in New Jersey and Delaware Bay. Using data from New Jersey DEP's Ocean Trawl Survey and Delaware DNREC's Delaware Bay Trawl Surveys, the study results showed significant size truncation and juvenation of the local Weakfish population over time. The period after 2006 yielded the shortest mean lengths in each time series, while the Weakfish catches for each survey exhibited an increased dominance of the smaller fish and the relative absence of larger individuals. Correlation analyses showed some significant negative correlations of mean length to average water temperature occurring since 1990, indicating possible difficulties for rebuilding Weakfish size structure with current warming trends.
  - Staff participated in a conference call of the Delaware River Cooperative's TC's American Shad Sustainable Fishery Management Plan subgroup. This was the first meeting of the subgroup in anticipation of updating the COOP's Shad SFMP which is due to expire at the end of 2021. Staff

updated all of the fishery management benchmarks from the previous plan based on the FD and FI data collected from the member state's over the past 4 years and presented the summary data. No fishery management benchmarks were tripped over the current Plan's tenure. Members discussed the current benchmarks and how they can be used going forward in relation to the 2020 benchmark stock assessment that found the Delaware River stock's adult mortality to be unsustainable. Another meeting was planned for the near future to go over the YOY indices and how to improve them for the next SFMP.

INDEPENDENT FISHERIES

- **Delaware River Seine Survey**
  - Staff completed an MOU data request from Boston University. Raw catch and length data for 1980-2019 was compiled and sent on November 2.
- **Eel Surveys**
  - Staff worked to develop the first draft of the Standard Operating Procedure for the Yellow American Eel Pot Survey. This SOP includes a history of the survey as well as current methodologies and safety protocols.
- **Ocean Trawl**
  - On Thursday, December 3rd, the manuscript detailing the environmental DNA study conducted by the Bureau of Marine Fisheries' Ocean Trawl Survey, Monmouth University, and Rockefeller University of New York was published online with the ICES Journal of Marine Science as well as a press release with EurekAlert!. The study entitled, "Trawl and eDNA assessment of marine fish diversity, seasonality, and relative abundance in coastal New Jersey" is the culmination of over a year's worth of data collection and analysis and several public presentations. This study represents the largest comparison of environmental DNA and fisheries survey data in a marine ecosystem to date.
- **Sturgeon Receivers**
  - Monthly data was downloaded from the sturgeon receivers in the Delaware Bay for the final time in 2020 on November 10th. Data is currently being analyzed. All of the receivers and gear were pulled from the water for the winter. Staff used the newly acquired side scan sonar system to attempt to find a receiver and gear that was lost last month. Staff were able to detect what appeared to have been the gear and receiver but was still unable to recover it after multiple attempts. Staff concluded that the lines may be snapped which may be the reason it has not been successfully retrieved.

DEPENDENT FISHERIES

- **Access Point Angler Intercept Survey-APAIS**
  - November's 103 site assignments yielded a total of 375 intercepts (174SH, 23CH, 178PR). Headboat assignments for 2020 remain suspended.
  - Staff continue to update the SR and online Vessel Directory in preparation for 2021 sampling.
  - Wave 2 sampling ended with the collection of 39 intercepts (24SH, 0CH, 15 PR)
  - Wave 3 sampling ended with the collection of 0 intercepts due to suspended sampling.
  - Wave 4 sampling ended with the collection of 664 intercepts (135SH, 49CH, 480PR)
  - Wave 5 sampling ended with the collection of 622 intercepts (286SH, 34CH, 302PR)
  - The October Fishdump was reviewed. Necessary edits and comments were submitted.
- **Artificial Reef**
  - Staff completed the 5-week fall sampling run of the NJ Ventless Trap Survey on the Sea Girt, Manasquan, and Little Egg Inlet reefs. Trap hauls were dominated by black sea bass, tautog, Jonah

crab, American lobster, and Atlantic rock crab. Catch per unit effort was lower than previous years for black sea bass but slightly higher for tautog and relatively constant for the dominant species.

- Staff deployed the second of two loads of concrete pads from MAHER Terminals on November, 10, 2020. The completed two load deployment consisted of 151 concrete forms 40' x 8' x 1.5' each and weighing roughly 6,000 tons for the entire deployment. These deployments all took place on the new Manasquan Inlet Reef and will serve as the third and fourth deployments on that site. Press releases, listserve messages, and website updates were made regarding these deployments.
- Staff is preparing a 4-vessel deployment leaving from Norfolk Virginia and destined for the Little Egg Inlet and Manasquan Inlet reef sites. LE will receive three of the four vessels while Manasquan will acquire the fourth vessel.
- Staff is working with the Office of Fish & Wildlife Information Systems to complete the update of the 2021 Artificial Reef Guide. The guide was last updated in 2007. Target rollout for the new guide is March 2021.

- **Commercial Fisheries/Quota Management**
  - Staff submitted the 5-year report for the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management grant.
  - Staff continued to prepare for the upcoming update to SAFIS online. Staff beta tested the new system and has been in constant communication with ACCSP regarding updates and changes.
  - Staff submitted the FY2019 Final Report to ACCSP.
  - Staff sent out a courtesy reminder letter for reporting to 42 blue crab license holders with outstanding reports for 2020. Of those 42 license holders, 33 have responded and provided their missing harvest reports.
  - Staff received a request from ACCSP to verify a change in how landings are viewed for coastal sharks regarding the FMP. ACCSP and HMS wanted to use the HMS database instead of the ACCSP database. The concern was that the HMS database included an additional 18,000 pounds of sharks harvested. Staff asked HMS staff to investigate the additional amount before approving the request and HMS staff found that the additional pounds were contributed to smooth dogfish. The request was approved.
  - <u>Commercial Landings</u>
    - <u>Menhaden-</u> The purse seine fishery is currently 99.3% harvested. Other gears are currently 53% harvested.
    - <u>Bluefish</u>- Commercial bluefish is currently 53% harvested.
    - <u>Black Sea Bass</u>- The directed season 6 began on November 1st. To date, 204,174 pounds have been harvested of the season quota (53%).
    - <u>Summer flounder</u>- The directed season 6 began on November 1st. To date, 240,745 pounds have been harvested of the season quota (52%).
    - <u>Scup</u>- The federally managed Winter II season began on October 1st. Current coast wide landings are 1,419,812 pounds, of which New Jersey accounts for 22% of (306,029 pounds).
- **For-Hire Telephone Survey-FHTS**
  - Staff called the 230 vessels that were drawn for the month of November. Staff had an approximate response rate of 67%, which is higher than the monthly average for the year.
  - A large portion of November's completed surveys included Striped Bass and Tautog trips. More success was reported off the northern part of New Jersey's coast versus the southern part of the coast.
  - Some captains/owners remain worried with the rise in COVID-19 cases. A few even winterized their boats earlier than usual due to the virus.
- **NJ Saltwater Recreational Registry Program-NJSRRP/Volunteer Angler Survey-VAS**

- As of November 30, 2020, there were 162,160 individuals and 701 for-hire vessels for 2020 (October 30, 2020, there were 159,028 individuals and 696 for-hire vessels for 2020) with the New Jersey Saltwater Recreational Registry Program (NJSRRP).

- **Striped Bass Bonus Program-SBBP**
  - A total of 8,696 individuals and 165 party/charter boats are enrolled in the 2020 Striped Bass Bonus Program (SBBP), which is the most participants since 2015. The current 2020 bonus harvest is 25,206 lbs. from 3,835 fish, which represents 11.7% of the quota. Party/charter boats have harvested 3,252 fish and individual anglers have harvested 583 fish. Emails were sent out to both individual anglers and party/charter boats to remind them of the reporting requirements to remain eligible for the 2021 SBBP.
- **Tournament Sampling**
  - Two fishing tournaments planned to be held in November were the first tournaments to be approved to be sampled at by staff since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Staff sampled at one striped bass tournament where two striped bass were measured, weighed, and scaled for ageing. The second tournament was cancelled due to weather. According to the tournament coordinator, tournament participation was significantly down this year due to the pandemic and the new striped bass regulations.
  - Bluefish samples were collected from four party/charter boat trips in order to satisfy the ASMFC biological sampling requirement. The samples are currently being processed.

OUTREACH

- Staff organized and submitted the final portions of the 2021 Marine Digest to the editor on November 20. The submissions included regulation changes, recreational survey information, saltwater registry information, a Gills to Grills submission and a few other sections.

ADMINISTRATION/MISCELLANEOUS

- **Regulatory/Legislative**
  - Notice of Administrative Changes (NOAC):
    - The NOAC to adjust the open seasons of aggregated large coastal sharks (LCS) and hammerhead species groups was filed with the Office of Administrative Law (OAL) on 12/7/2020, and will be published in the January 4, 2021, New Jersey Register. Changes to the open seasons of species belonging to the aggregated large coastal sharks (LCS) and hammerhead groups have been made to comply with the ASMFC Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Coastal Sharks. The FMP mandates a closed season for the aggregated LCS and hammerhead groups from May 15 through July 15 in all States' waters (from 0 to three miles offshore) from Virginia to New Jersey to provide protection to these species of sharks in shark pupping grounds and nursery areas.
    - The draft NOAC modifying the 2021 trip limits for black sea bass and summer flounder commercial fisheries is under review with the Governor's Office (GO). Next steps will involve the Commissioner's signature for final approval and subsequent filing with OAL. The new rules appear on track to become effective before the 2021 season start next month.
  - Rule Proposals
    - Menhaden Multi-Species Rule Proposal remains under review with the GO. MFA rule team is working with the Office of Legal Affairs to address GO mark-ups.
    - MFA rule team continues to develop a new multispecies rule proposal amending N.J.A.C. 7:25-18.5A Artificial reefs, among others, while also recodifying portions of DFW Rules.
  - NJ Shellfisheries Council Appointment

- NJ Senate voted to approve nominee, George W. Mathis to the NJ Shellfisheries Council on 10/29/2020.

- **Scientific Collection Permits**
  - Sixty-nine Scientific Collecting Permits have been issued for 2020. Processing applications has been limited while working remotely and permits have only been issued on an as-needed basis. Any additional applications received will be
  - processed upon return to the office.
- **HOT TOPICS/Miscellaneous**
  - Staff has been reviewing and processing CARES applications. Applications are reviewed and either approved, returned or an appeal notification is sent to the applicant.

SHELLFISHERIES

Offshore Wind Development

- Staff completed an environmental review for the Ocean Wind Construction and Operations Plan.
- Staff attended a presentation by Dr. Daphne Munroe, Rutgers University, on November 2, regarding her work with the surfclam industry to understand potential economic impacts of offshore wind.
- On November 3, staff spoke with Kevin Wark regarding offshore wind and perceptions of the commercial fishing community at Barnegat.
- Staff provided comments to the NJPACT team on November 5 regarding updating information on Prime Fishing Areas and feedback on Orsted's suggested interpretation of rules and rules changes.
- Staff participated in the Monthly Interstate Fisheries call for offshore wind on November 6. Information shared at these meetings is coordinated with Megan Brunatti and Jane Rosenblatt.
- Staff attended a recreational fishing webinar hosted by Orsted on November 18 and provided notes to Jane Rosenblatt. The webinar was fishing advice for offshore anglers and promoted fishing around wind turbines.
- Permitting meetings were held with Orsted (November 12), Equinor (November 19), and Atlantic Shores (November 19) to discuss progress on their work plans.
- On November 13 staff participated in a call with NYSERDA, Jane Rosenblatt, and Megan Brunatti regarding coordination on regional research and monitoring.
- On November 19, the Responsible Offshore Science Alliance hosted a meeting to describe their request for applicants as Research Advisors.
- Staff participated in a coordination meeting for offshore wind permitting within the MFA on November 24.
- Staff met with Ginger Kopkash, Joe Corleto, and Kelly Davis to discuss coordination of NEPA-related permitting requests, which will now be routed through Kelly Davis.
- Staff reviewed the Interim Fisheries Monitoring Framework from ROSA. This document is intended to standardize monitoring plans and project-specific research and was written by experts in the field. We anticipate being able to use it to work with developers to design monitoring that will provide information about effects of offshore wind on the marine environment.
- On November 23 staff discussed the scallop fishery and potential impacts related to offshore wind with Dr. Dave Rudders, Virginia Institute of Marine Science.
- New York State Energy Research & Development Authority held the State of the Science Workshop on Offshore Wind November 16-20. The Workshop was focused on assessing the state of the knowledge regarding offshore wind development's cumulative effects on populations and ecosystems and identifying

research priorities for the next 3-5 years to improve our understanding of cumulative impacts. A white paper will be produced in early 2021.

Outreach

- **MFA Outreach, Education & Communications**
  - **MFA Website Committee**
    - The MFA Website Committee members are diligently working on updating and creating content for various MFA webpages.
  - **MFA Communications Committee**
    - The MFA Communications Committee met for the first time in November. The group discussed the various goals of the committee. The first priority is to create a photo library. The MFA outreach coordinator has been collaborating with I.E. staff on this topic.
- **Support NJ Seafood Story Map**
  - NJ DEP, Division of Fish and Wildlife staff in collaboration with the NJ Department of Agriculture, Rutgers Cooperative Extension, and NJ Sea Grant Consortium representatives continue to work on expanding the story map to include more retail markets and add on wholesale distributors, delivery/pick-up businesses and restaurants who sell seafood that has been landed, grown or harvested in New Jersey.
  - Information on the Support NJ Seafood story map has been shared on social media and the DFW website.

Nantuxent Creek Dredging Project

- **Updates:**
  - Staff held a conference call on 11/24/2020 with Stockton, Shellfisheries Council reps, NJODST, and NJDOT to review the project plans Stockton developed. The final channel configuration was agreed upon, as well as the potential plans for the beneficial use site on Nantuxent Beach.
- **Next Steps:**
  - A JPP meeting will be held in December to review the project with USACE before permit applications are submitted.
  - Stockton will aid the Bureau with drafting required permit applications and project plans.
  - The sampling results along with the dredging plan will be used to apply for dredging permits, which will likely be a 5-year permit with an application for 5-year extension to ensure it is permitted for the possibility of future maintenance dredging by DOT.
  - The dredge spoils are planned to potentially be used for a beach replenishment on Nantuxent Beach, which used to have homes that were bought out and demolished by the Blue Acres Program.
  - Due to delays, dredging will most likely occur in the fall of 2021 via hydraulic dredging by DOT, and possible mechanical dredging if the sediment requires that method in certain areas.
  - The alternate channel path will be dredged to remove about 20,010 cubic yards of sediment to make the channel 9 feet below mean low water to allow the oyster dredge boats to navigate.
- This is an important project since the multimillion-dollar oyster industry uses that channel for its main port. The industry's vessels have difficulty using this shallow channel with many shoals. This limits when boats can use that channel based on tides, as well as safety concerns with getting shellfish to the dock in a timely manner to provide a safe product to consumers.

Aquaculture and Leasing

- **Shellfish Aquaculture Working Group – Commercial Shellfish Aquaculture Website Committee**

- Bureau of Shellfisheries staff and representatives from various agencies involved in commercial shellfish aquaculture permitting, regulations, and outreach continue to work on the NJ Commercial Shellfish Aquaculture website design and content.

- Due to COVID and State offices being closed to the public, lease renewals are being conducted through the mail. Bureau staff sent lease renewal packets to all current lease holders on the Atlantic Coast and Delaware Bay in September and October, respectively. The Atlantic Coast has had a fairly high rate of returns, and the Delaware Bay has had only a few returned so far. The renewal documents must be received before 12/31/3030 to renew the leases.

Surveys/Laboratory

- **Monitoring Dermo**
  - Bureau staff worked with Rutgers University's Haskin Shellfish Research Laboratory to complete the 2020 sampling of oysters to monitor the prevalence of the oyster disease Dermo on 12/3/2020. This November sampling event was rescheduled multiple times due to weather. This was only the fifth sampling event of 2020 due to the pandemic, and crew has been limited to four personnel as a precaution. This survey was one of a few projects to resume due to its importance in monitoring the oyster population for disease and its role in assistance with setting the oyster fishery's annual quota.
  - Dermo is a protozoan parasite called *Perkensus marinus* that harms oysters and their population. It is not harmful to humans. Sampling Dermo helps observe one form of natural mortality, which in turn aids in quota recommendations and management of the fishery. Sampling typically occurs April through November, but this year it's start was delayed until July due to the pandemic.

Waterfront Development, Permit, and Environmental Reviews

- **Waterfront Development Guidance Manual**
  - Staff have nearly completed the updating of a guidance manual from 2008 on how to review waterfront development permits that may affect resources and habitats managed by the Marine Fisheries Administration. The new document, *Guidance Manual for the Processing of Land Resource Protection Permits and the Protection of Marine Fish and Shellfish Resource, Habitats, and Fisheries relative to the Rules on Coastal Zone Management at N.J.A.C. 7:7* is designed for use by both Division of Land Resource Protection (DLRP) and MFA staff.
  - Currently, the document is only available to MFA staff, as a few minor additions are needed before distributing to DLRP and providing training. In addition to updated guidance on the rules, the internal review process at MFA has been redesigned. Further, channels of communication on project review into and out of the MFA have been streamlined through the Office of Environmental Review, although that workflow has not been fully executed yet.
  - The updating of the manual and the redesign of work flow should provide DLRP with stronger arguments to support their decisions on permit applications, provide clarity and consistency in reviews, and ultimately reduce the number of permit reviews conducted by MFA staff to those that are the most unique or complex projects only.
  - As a living document, the manual may be updated at any time.
- **Waterfront GIS Mapping Projects to Support Waterfront Development Review**
  - Staff have been working with the Division's GIS team to develop a comprehensive GIS layer that improves consistency in applying finfish and shellfish timing restrictions for certain eligible DLRP permits/projects. Some policy issues will need to be resolved before the layer can be used by DLRP and eventually the regulated public.
- **William Barham v NJDEP, Land Resource Protection**

- Staff provided an expert brief for the above Office of Administrative Law case regarding docks in shellfish habitat. The petitioner, Will Barham, was issued a dock permit for his property on the Shrewsbury River, under the condition that the existing dock would be removed. The property is located in mapped shellfish habitat, and per the CZM rules, only one dock is allowed per property in shellfish habitat. Petitioner wished to retain the original dock in addition to building a second one and argued that the DEP's interpretation of the rule and shellfish habitat mapping was flawed. Staff provided a certified brief outlining the history of shellfish production on the property and support for the interpretation of the rule executed by DLRP. The case is still with the ALJ for final decision.

Restoration, Enhancement, and Mitigation

- **Shell Recycling Program**
  - Staff continues to coordinate with Shell Recycling Program participants for weekly shell pickups. Some participants are still not operating at normal levels due to COVID-19 and are not in need of pickup at this time. Staff is in communication with all participants and will continue to adjust pickup schedules dependent on restaurant operations and need for pickup. Staff continues to investigate additional restaurants/ casinos joining the program.
- Staff coordinated with ACT Engineers to collect and plant shellfish that were raised in their upweller and used in educational demonstrations for Ocean City schools. As previously agreed, MFA partnered on this project and on November 9th the shellfish grown were collected by staff. Staff planted the 36,000 (8-10mm) hard clam in Great Egg Harbor Bay.
- **SOAR: Supporting Oyster Aquaculture and Restoration**
  - Staff coordinated with PEW Charitable Trusts, The Nature Conservancy-New Jersey, and other MFA staff to determine appropriate siting and scheduling for the SOAR program. The project intends to purchase 625,000 farm raised oysters that will be used for habitat restoration and enhancement. MFA agreed to partner and assist on the restoration and planting portion of the project. Purchased oysters will be planted at three predetermined sites on the Atlantic Coast and one on the Delaware Bay. These sites include the Mullica River, Maurice River Cove in Delaware Bay, the Stockton University Tuckerton Research lease and Naval Weapons Station Earle. All plantings are scheduled to be completed by Mid-December.
- **Living Shorelines**
  - **Living Shorelines Rule Changes per NJPACT**
    - Staff have been working with colleagues in the Office of Policy (Land Use Management) to update rules associated with living shorelines and habitat enhancement, restoration, or creation projects. Good progress has been made to address staff concerns that have arisen over the past few years as a result of existing project implementation.
  - **Proposal at Crabbe Point, Toms River**
    - Staff attended a site meeting to discuss the proposed living shoreline project for South Toms River at Crabbe point. The project had previously been discussed online but meeting at the site allowed for all involved to see the project area and what kind of living shoreline may be the best fit. The project looks to prevent further erosion from occurring in a highly used public area along the Toms River. Project design and details are still undetermined at this point. Staff discussed potential options in the low energy site, encouraging the use of biodegradable materials and avoiding the use of plastics if possible. Staff will continue to coordinate with the DEP project manager as the project progresses over the next year.
  - **Proposal at Camden County MUA**

        - Staff reviewed and provided appropriate comments on a proposed living shoreline project taking place in front of the Camden County Municipal Utilities Authority along the Delaware River. Staff encouraged the use of natural and biodegradable materials and incorporating existing SAV on the site into the design plans.
- **Beneficial Use**
    - Staff reviewed and provided appropriate comments on a beneficial reuse project taking place at the Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge. The project intends to beneficially reuse material taken from routine maintenance dredging to restore and raise elevation within the East Pool.

Commercial Fisheries/Quota Management

- **Delaware Bay Oyster Dredge Fishery – Direct Market Harvest Program**
    - The Direct Market season opened April 6, 2020 with an initial quota of 97,103 bushels (bu.) of oysters.
    - Since the seafood market has once again become affected by the pandemic, the harvest season was extended to November 30th to allow more time to harvest quotas.
    - The season closed on November 30th with an approximate final harvest of 95,257 bu.
    - During November, approximately 5,100 bu. were harvested. This is the first month since July that any harvest was planted onto leased grounds likely due to the seafood market sales decreasing from the pandemic.
    - All regions were opened for harvest in the beginning of the season and closed as their regional quotas are met or the harvest season ended.
        - The high mortality region was closed on 7/28/2020 as its quota of 33,903 bu. was met.
        - The Shell Rock region was closed on 10/5/2020 as its quota of 46,468 bu. was met.
        - The Medium Mortality region closed on the season's last harvest day of 11/30/2020 with a little over 1,000 bushels left to harvest.

Buildings, Grounds, Vessels, and Vehicles

- **Boat Maintenance**
    - Bureau staff continue to maintain and improve the R/V James W. Joseph and the R/V Zephyrus by performing regular maintenance, repairs, and equipment upgrades as necessary.
        - Staff continues to work with Yank Marine to complete upgrades to the R/V Zephyrus.
- Staff received new quotes for an aluminum landing craft. The quotes were forwarded to Procurement for review, and staff are awaiting guidance for the next steps forward.

Administrative/Miscellaneous

- Staff began the process to purchase the BioSonics Habitat Echosounder. This equipment will help to identify and map existing submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) throughout the State. Having detailed mapping for SAV is critical to protecting this valuable resource.
- Staff have been working on the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act Grant budget and Statement of Work.
- Staff reviewed and processed CARES Act Relief Funding Applications for shellfish industry applicants.
- **License Sales**
    - Bureau staff has been selling licenses and assisting the public with questions or concerns over the phone and through email since staff started working from home from mid-March through November 2020. License sales for the Delaware Bay Office were $13,646.74 for November 2020.