

Marine Fisheries Administration Monthly Report

January 2021

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****MARINE FISHERIES****

ASMFC/MAFMC/COOP/NOAA

- The New Jersey proposal for the 2021 summer flounder recreational fishery was submitted and accepted by both the ASMFC technical committee and the management board. As such, NJ will have two options for the 2021 fishing year. Option 1 is a status quo possibility where the season would start on May 22 and run through September 19, the same dates as last year. In 2020, the start date coincided with the Friday before Memorial Day. In 2021, Memorial Day is much later requiring a shift back in the start date if constituents wish to start the fishery on the Friday before the holiday weekend. As such, the second option is to start on May 28 and end on September 28, providing the NJ fishermen an extra 3 days of the overall season compared to 2020. Both options require a 3 fish possession limit and 18-inch size limit.

MEETING SUMMARIES

• Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission-ASMFC (TC, SAS, Boards)

- Staff attended a Red Drum Assessment Approach meeting which was held to continue discussions on assessment approaches for the simulation model for red drum and to decide who would work on them. Three assessment approaches were agreed upon: a traffic light analysis, a catch at age model, and a stock synthesis model. The next steps are to review the simulation datasets and coverage of the assessment approaches.
- An all-day Red Drum Scenario Review, Methodology, and Metrics webinar was held to finalize what scenarios would be used to simulate the red drum population for the first part of the assessment, focusing on the parameters that are going into the simulation modes, and to discuss what parameters need adjusting. A review of how the scenarios will be QA/QC'd were gone over and the usability of auxiliary data was presented and discussed, however, it will not be used in the simulation models. The output of the decided upon scenarios and parameters will be reviewed during a four-day data workshop to be held in March.
- Staff attended an Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team Public Meeting on the evening of January 7, 2021. The meeting is one of a series to discuss a proposed rule change and Draft Environmental Impact Statement to the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan, set forth by NOAA Fisheries. The rule is proposed to the "Northeast" management area. Since New Jersey falls into the "Mid Atlantic" management area, no regulation changes are expected at this time.
- Staff attended a webinar with ACCSP Commercial Technical Committee. The committee was tasked with updating American Lobster reporting requirements. The committee set and implemented state reporting requirements and has sent a letter to NMFS to request changes to federal reporting. Meeting will begin again in March.
- The ASMFC Tautog Stock Assessment Subcommittee (SAS) met via webinar on January 22, 2021. Progress on continuity runs of the Age Structured Assessment Program (ASAP) model with data through 2015 and incorporation of data from 2016 through 2019 were reviewed. All regions had completed at least the continuity model runs with no problems reported for model convergence. The SAS will continue work on the ASAP model runs and meet via webinar in late February or early March 2021 to discuss results.
- Staff sat in via webinar on a meeting of the ASMFC's Shad and River Herring Advisory Panel. The purpose of the call was to review the TC's recommendations in regards to States' responses to the findings of the benchmark stock assessment and the states' plans for moving forward which will be presented to the Board at the February meeting. The AP agreed with the TC's recommendations and echoed the sentiment that research into mixed stock and out of basin removals of American shad

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should be a high near term priority in order to better understand the impacts of these removal on system specific and coastwide mortality.

- As chair, staff, participated via webinar in a conference call of the Shad and River Herring TC to finalize a few TC recommendations to be presented to the Board at the February ASMFC meeting. The TC recommended the Board accept all the States'/Jurisdictions' responses as presented to the TC in terms of an concerns with the findings of the recent Benchmark Stock Assessment and their responses in terms of management and restoration programs going forward based on the results of the stock assessment. Additionally, the TC is recommending that the Board task the TC with examining the impacts of mixed stock and out of basin harvest on stocks with unsustainable or depleted statuses and the possible effects of these impacts on stock recovery. At one point there was consideration/discussion of recommending the Board require the closure of any mixed stock shad fisheries but luckily I was able to make a case against that. Finally, based on a discussion after a PowerPoint presentation I put together earlier in the week, the TC is recommending the stock restoration/goals should continue to be developed on a system specific basis as it is currently written in Amendment 3 to the ISFMP.
- As chair, participated via webinar in a conference call of the Shad and River Herring PRT to go over the final draft of the 2019 FMP Review. After reviewing all the states'/jurisdictions' 2019 compliances reports the PRT find no major compliance issues in terms of sampling and reporting requirements.
- **Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council-MAFMC**
 - The bluefish FMAT met to review a draft public hearing document. The document reflects all of the decisions the Council and Board have made to date. The document summarizes the alternatives and then delves into economic, social, and biological consequences of each alternative. NJ is likely to lose some fraction of its current commercial quota; the commercial sector is likely to be further impacted by reallocation of the acceptable biological catch between the commercial and recreational sector. The Council and Board will consider voting to approve the public hearing document at its February meeting; we expect public hearings on the document in March/April 2021.
- **Miscellaneous**
 - **VIMS/Virginia Sea Grant Whelk Workgroup:** Staff is participating in a multi-state workgroup focused on Atlantic coastal whelk fisheries. The workgroup's goal is to provide current, relevant information on whelk stocks within collective whelk fisheries of states from MA to GA and to initiate dialogue within and between states concerning whelk management strategies. The group hopes to share and build future stock assessment strategies, more cohesive regional regulatory measures, and fisheries monitoring programs. Virtual meetings are held weekly and will continue through mid-March.
 - Staff attended a call with ACCSP to discuss the spring participant and data uploads. The participant upload is scheduled for February 5th. The data upload is scheduled for March 5th.
 - Staff gave a presentation at the NJ Fish & Game Council's January meeting. The presentation provided information regarding the new striped bass circle hook requirement for anglers fishing for striped bass with natural bait and included a list of frequently asked questions.
 - Staff Participated via webinar in a meeting the Delaware River Cooperative's Sustainable Fishery Management Plan subgroup to continue its work on updating the SMFP. A plan update is due to the ASMFC Board for approval at the end of 2021. The subgroup will be incorporating much of the work and findings from the recent benchmark stock assessment into the updated SFP and will be exploring developing an adult mortality sustainability metric. The call focused on updating and evaluating the COOP's two young of the year fishery independent surveys which did not meet the power of trend detection required to be used in the stock assessment by the SAS. The subgroup

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agreed that there will be standing monthly SMFP meetings in order to complete the plan update by the end of the year.

INDEPENDENT FISHERIES

- **Delaware Bay Tagging**
 - Staff submitted a supplemental COVID-19 protocol to seek approval to run the survey in March and April 2021. The supplemental protocol adheres to the requirements outlined in the COVID-19 DFW Return to Field Protocol and specifically outlines what precautions would be taken on the survey in order to ensure the safest working conditions regarding COVID-19.
- **Eel Surveys**
 - Staff completed 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. Various staff members are currently reviewing/editing this SOP. The Sop for the glass eel survey was finalized and placed in a shared folder for all staff to access.
- **Sturgeon Receivers**
 - The semi-annual progress report for the “New Jersey Atlantic and Shortnose Sturgeon Research and Management” grant for report period July 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020 was submitted. During 2020, 37 sturgeon interaction reports were reported by the public to the Division. The receiver data was analyzed and indicated 97 Atlantic sturgeon, 18 sand tiger sharks, 12 striped bass, and 2 sandbar sharks were detected in 2020.

DEPENDENT FISHERIES

- **Access Point Angler Intercept Survey-APAIS**
 - All APAIS staff attended an online workshop in preparation for 2021 sampling. The workshop was held by ACCSP over two days, January 26th and 27th, during which all field staff were briefed for any/all changes in future sampling and given the opportunity to walk through the updated sampling software.
 - On January 11th and 12th APAIS staff attended an online meeting conducted at the state level. During this meeting staff were introduced to and reviewed the required list of Mid-Atlantic species.
 - Staff continue to prepare the Site Register and Vessel Directory for the upcoming 2021 sampling season.
 - The December Fishdump was reviewed. Necessary edits and comments were submitted.
 - The NMFS/NOAA has added a large sum of money to the Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (APAIS) nationally. The intention is to add assignments to the survey in the hopes of strengthening the estimates being generated. NJ currently conducts 1038 site assignments per year. The ultimate goal is to add 457 more assignments. At this time, NJ is committing to an additional 232 site assignments for CY2021. A new amendment and budget for CY2021 were drafted and submitted to reflect the changes.
- **Artificial Reef**
 - Artificial Reef Staff deployed 4 vessels on January 14 representing the first deployments for 2021. All four vessels originated from Norfolk Virginia and were towed to NJ on Wednesday, January 13. At first light Thursday morning, staff met the tow vessel on Little Egg Inlet Reef for the first three of four deployments of the day. Little Egg Reef received a 200 foot barge, a 45 foot tug boat, and a 40 foot harbor push boat. All items were sponsored by the Beach Haven Charter Fishing Association and their Junior Mates Program along with The Sportfishing Fund. On site for the sinking in addition to Artificial Reef staff was the Beach Haven Association, three State Police vessels carrying members of the club and Junior Mates, Stockton University and several private vessels including the

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Fin Chasers television show. The sinking was well attended and is a great addition to the reef. Once the Little Egg sinking was finalized, Reef Staff moved 40 miles north to the Manasquan Inlet Reef to deploy the 65 foot tug boat RANGER sponsored by the Manasquan River Marlin and Tuna Club. This was the 5th deployment on the new Manasquan Reef.

- During the January reef deployment, the starboard motor on the Parker had a catastrophic failure. To finish the second part of the deployment it was necessary to use the Steiger Craft. Initially staff believed the motor was blown, but after further inspection, it was determined the damage was contained in the lower unit. Staff cross referenced model numbers from a spare motor for parts and determined them to be compatible and will utilize the parts motor to make the repair for the vessel to be used for the upcoming ventless trap survey season.
- Artificial Reef Staff has been working on a project with the NJ DEP Blue Acres Project trying to acquire roughly 6,000 tons of concrete on the Delaware Bay currently being used as marsh stabilization material. Blue Acres is working to remediate the site so Staff is providing the Program an option to re-use the material as marine habitat at the Delaware Bay Reef.

- **Biological**

- Staff has been coordinating the multi-state/multi-agency collection of whelk samples including summary tables with sample targets and protocol for collection staff.
- Biological sampling targets for tog, black sea bass, and menhaden purse seine were met for 2020 despite the challenges faced by the commercial and recreational industries during the past year.

- **Commercial Fisheries/Quota Management**

- Commercial Advisors recommended increasing trip limits for the directed commercial summer flounder season 1 to: 2,000-pound trip limit two times per week or 4,000-trip limit one time per week. The increase will help harvest the remainder of the underutilized season quota.
- Commercial Advisors recommended increasing trip limits for the directed commercial black sea bass season 1 to: 1,500-pound trip two times per week or 3,000-pound trip one time per week. The increase will help harvest the remainder of the underutilized season quota.
- Staff has implemented the new SAFIS electronic vessel trip report platform to our commercial stakeholders. This method allows the harvester to report to all required entities both State and Federal through a single reporting form. This tool is an updated version with a greater capacity for data collection throughout multiple fisheries with more flexibility facilitating timely fisheries management.
- Staff submitted the Atlantic herring compliance report to ASMFC.
- Staff received a request from ASMFC through ACCSP to verify commercial tautog landings from 1950-2019. These landings will be used in the upcoming tautog stock assessment.
- Quota Monitoring
 - Menhaden- Preliminary 2020 harvest is 99.3% for the Purse seine fishery and 53% for the “other” gears (1.2 million unharvested)
 - Bluefish- Preliminary 2020 harvest is 53% of the state’s adjusted quota (124,531 pounds unharvested).
 - Black Sea Bass- Preliminary harvest is 96.4% harvested (40,314 pounds unharvested).
 - Summer flounder- Preliminary harvest is 99.08% harvested (17,726 pounds harvested).
 - Scup- Preliminary harvest for the Fedreally managed Winter II season was 37.1%. New Jersey contributed to 22% of those landings (306,029 pounds).
 - Spiny dogfish- The 2020/2021 commercial fishery is currently 91% harvested (163,459 pounds remaining). A Transfer is in process between NJ and the New England states to prevent any premature closing of the fishing, scheduled to end on April 30, 2021.

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- Staff is currently entering and proofing all commercial state fishery reports for inclusion into the ACCSP data warehouse.
- Staff sent 8 commercial blue crab letters, six of those 8 returned certified mailing receipts indicating that the letters were received and now await completed harvest reporting forms.
- Staff made courtesy reminder calls to harvesters also verifying working and non-working numbers.
- **For-Hire Telephone Survey-FHTS**
 - Staff concluded sampling for the year 2020. It was the first year New Jersey conducted the For-Hire Telephone Survey.
 - Yearly Review: A total of 2,353 vessel contact attempts were made with 1441 (62%) responses and only 16 (0.68%) refusals. 882 of those responses included fish trip information.
 - Staff attended the yearly training for the FHTS which was hosted by ACCSP. It was held remotely this year due to COVID where it was an in person meeting in years past.
 - Staff continued to overhaul and update the NOAA vessel directory to more accurately project the New Jersey for-hire fleet.
- **NJ Saltwater Recreational Registry Program-NJSRRP/Volunteer Angler Survey-VAS**
 - As of January 31, 2021, there were 14,971 individuals and 177 for-hire vessels registered for 2021 with the New Jersey Saltwater Recreational Registry Program (NJSRRP). (Last month: December 14, 2020, there were 162,544 individuals and 705 for-hire vessels registered for 2020. Beginning December 15, 2020, registrations for 2021 opened up. As of January 1, 2021, there were 3,580 individuals and 26 for-hire vessels registered for 2021).
 - Administration staff retrieved and cleaned volunteer angler data submitted through our website. These data have been used in management (conservation equivalency and stock assessments) in the past, and staff expect this trend to continue.
- **Striped Bass Bonus Program-SBBP**
 - The deadline for anglers to submit 2020 logbooks was January 15th. Data from the logbooks is currently being entered. Preparation for the 2021 SBBP has begun.

OUTREACH

- Staff worked with the editor to finalize articles and other informative submissions for the 2021 Marine Digest. Outstanding assignments were completed and submitted. The first draft of the digest is expected in early February.

ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS

- **Environmental Reviews/Technical Assistance**
 - Winter flounder timing restrictions requested for 3 waterfront development project permits. The proposed work plans are in regions which have been determined to be Essential Fish Habitat for all life history stages of winter flounder.

ADMINISTRATION/MISCELLANEOUS

- **Regulatory/Legislative**
 - Notice of Administrative Changes (NOAC):
 - At the January 2, 2021, NJ Marine Fisheries Council Meeting, a motion (Council) to vote on changes to cobia provisions was tabled until the March Council meeting in response to the public's request for additional public comments on the matter. The Council will be deciding two options: matching VA's recently modified cobia provisions of a season of June 15 through September 15 with a 2-fish vessel limit, and maintaining a minimum size of 40 inches, with one fish over 50 inches; or the de minimis option of a possession limit of one per person, not

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more than three per vessel, with a 40-inch minimum size, and a season of June 1 through September 30, to limiting its recreational fishery to 1 fish per vessel per trip with a minimum size of 37 inches, and no seasonal restriction. The NOAC to amend cobia vessel limit, size limits, and season was revised by separating the two provision options into two different notices, and will be presented to the Council at their March 4, 2021, meeting.

○ Rule Proposals

- Menhaden Multi-Species Rule Proposal was filed with the Office of Administrative Law (OAL) on January 21, 2021. OAL reviewed the proposal and on January 28, 2021, requested clarification before approving for publication, anticipated for March 1, 2021. MFA formally responded to OAL on February 2, 2021. As of February 5, 2021, MFA is still waiting on final approval from OAL. A 60-day public comment period will follow the publication of the rule.
- 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.

○ Congressional Action

- H.R. 59, the “Strengthening Fishing Communities and Increasing Flexibility in Fisheries Management Act” (Congressman Young, R-Alaska), a bill to authorize and amend the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, was introduced on January 4, 2021, and referred to the House Committee on Natural Resources. This legislation is similar to the legislation introduced by the Congressman Young in the 116th Congress. Congressman Huffman (D-California) circulated a “discussion draft” of a bill to reauthorize and amend the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act in December 2020.
- H.R. 59, the “Strengthening Fishing Communities and Increasing Flexibility in Fisheries Management Act”, (Rep. Young, R-Alaska), a bill to amend the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act to provide flexibility for fishery managers and stability for fishermen, and for other purposes. Introduced on January 4, 2021 and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
- H.R. 274, (Rep. Young, R-Alaska), a bill to prohibit the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Commerce from authorizing commercial finfish aquaculture operations in the Exclusive Economic Zone except in accordance with a law authorizing such action. Introduced on January 11, 2021 and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
- H.R. 404, (Rep. Lieu, D-California), a bill to improve the management of driftnet fishing. Introduced on January 21, 2021 and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
- H.R. 406, (Rep. Lieu, D-California), a bill to prohibit the sale of shark parts, and for other purposes. Introduced on January 21, 2021 and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
- S. 1069, the “Digital Coast Act”, (Sen. Baldwin, D-Wisconsin), a bill to require the Secretary of Commerce, acting through the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, to establish a constituent-driven program to provide a digital information platform capable of efficiently integrating coastal data with decision-support tools, training, and best practices and to support collection of priority coastal geospatial data to inform and improve local, State, regional, and Federal capacities to manage the coastal region, and for other purposes, was signed by the President on December 18, 2020, and became Public Law 116-221.
- H.R. 1240, the “Young Fishermen’s Development Act of 2019,” (Rep. Young, R-Alaska) a bill to preserve United States fishing heritage through a national program dedicated to training

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and assisting the next generation of commercial fishermen, was signed by the President on January 5, 2021, and became Public Law 116-289.

- H.R. 4044, the “Protect and Restore America’s Estuaries Act”, (Rep. Malinowski, D- New Jersey), a bill to amend the Federal Water Pollution Control Act to reauthorize the National Estuary Program, and for other purposes, was signed by the President on January 13, 2021, and became Public Law 116-337.
- H.R. 5126, The “Direct Enhancement of Snapper Conservation and the Economy through Novel Devices Act of 2019” or the “DESCEND Act of 2019”, (Rep. Graves, R-Louisiana), a bill to require individuals fishing for Gulf reef fish to use certain descending devices, and for other purposes, was signed by the President on January 13, 2021, and became Public Law 116-340.
- S. 906, the “Driftnet Modernization and Bycatch Reduction Act”, (Sen. Feinstein, D-California), a bill to improve the management of driftnet fishing (Note: this legislation also included a provision allowing the North Pacific Council to recommend, and the Secretary to approve, regulations to collect fees from halibut charter vessel operators for the purchase of quota for the Recreational Quota Entity program.), was vetoed by the President on January 1, 2021.

- **Scientific Collection Permits**

- Ten scientific collecting permits have been issued in 2021. An additional four have been reviewed and are being processed.

- **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

- Biweekly permitting meetings were held with Orsted (January 7 and 21) and Atlantic Shores (January 14 and 28).
- Written comments on the Draft Ocean Wind Construction and Operations Plan were provided to Megan Brunatti on January 25.
- Staff participated in a meeting with Atlantic Shores, NOAA, NYSERDA, and Rutgers regarding fisheries monitoring for ASOW on January 22. The difficult problem of continuing long-running state and local survey work in the lease area was discussed. Neither the federal survey vessel (R/V Bigelow) nor the state survey vessel (R/V Sea Wolf) will be able to use existing trawl methods between the turbines.
- The monthly Interstate Fisheries call for offshore wind was held on January 29. The group also met on January 8 for a presentation made by Tetra Tech on submarine electrical cables. Tetra Tech was commissioned to prepare an informational document on submarine cables for the NY Fisheries Technical Working Group.
- Jane Rosenblatt, Megan Brunatti, and Bureau staff held the monthly meeting with NYSERDA to coordinate how both states will direct the \$10K/MW fee for research and monitoring from OREC awardees on January 22.
- Staff have been participating in half-hour weekly check-in meetings with Jane Rosenblatt and Megan Brunatti for offshore wind since January 5. Staff began working on the Research and Monitoring Plan for the \$10K/MW funding; this effort is being led by Gary Buchanan.

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- The NJ Environmental Resources Working Group for offshore wind was held on January 13. A premeeting was held on January 11.
- Staff provided updates on offshore wind to the NJ Marine Fisheries Council on January 7, the Atlantic Coast Shellfish Council on January 11, and the Delaware Bay Shellfish Council on January 12.
- On Wednesday January 13, staff met with Responsible Offshore Science Alliance (ROSA) members to discuss state regulations related to fisheries monitoring and offshore wind. Staff provided the citation and text for Coastal Zone Management Rules 7:7-15.4 (r) viii. (3), which are use rules for energy facilities.
- Staff have been participating in NJPACT, specifically revisions to the CZM to address offshore wind.
- On January 29, staff attended a Rutgers University Energy Policy Seminar related to offshore wind called Beyond heat maps: understanding fisheries conflict and coexistence with offshore wind energy to advance a just energy transition. Members of the surfclam industry were also present.
- The American Littoral Society published a document about protecting offshore fish and habitats related to offshore development. The document identified perceived deficiencies in the state review process and made recommendations. Staff reviewed this document and subsequently provided comments to Megan Brunatti.

MFA Outreach, Education, and Communications

- **MFA Website Committee**
 - The MFA Website Committee members continue to work on updating and creating content for various MFA webpages.
- **Support NJ Seafood Story Map**
 - The 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.

Nantuxent Creek Dredging Project

- **Updates:**
 - Stockton University and the Bureau finalized required permit applications and project plans and submitted them to Div. of Land Use Regulation on 1/21/21 and US Army Corps of Engineers on 1/25/21.
- **Next Steps:**
 - If and when approved, NJDOT can use the permits to obtain bids from contractors for the dredging work, preferably to be completed before June 30, 2021.
 - The dredge spoils are planned to potentially be used for a beach replenishment on Nantuxent Beach under a separate Blue Acres Program project.
 - Dredging will most likely occur during the fall after September 15th via hydraulic dredging by DOT, with mechanical dredging in the Creek.
 - The channel path will be dredged to remove about 30,000 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

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- **Shellfish Aquaculture Working Group (SAWG)**
 - Bureau staff attended the virtual SAWG meeting on January 21, 2021. The working group members include representatives from the NJDEP: Bureau of Shellfisheries, Division of Land Resource Protection, Office of Policy and Coastal Management, Endangered and Nongame Species Program, Bureau of Marine Water Monitoring, Bureau of Tidelands as well as the Department of Agriculture, Department of Health, US Army Corps of Engineers and other agencies involved in commercial shellfish aquaculture. A few agenda items that were discussed included: development of the Commercial Shellfish Aquaculture Website, CARES Act, Rulemaking and NJ PACT.
- **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 met on February 10, 2021 to work on and review the NJ Commercial Shellfish Aquaculture website design and content.

Waterfront Development, Permit, and Environmental Reviews

- MFA staff submitted comments recommending the decommissioning and removal of two Sprint subsea cables that were installed in 1999 off of Sea Girt of Ocean County.
- Staff provided comment on the NJ Turnpike Hackensack River crossing geotechnical borings and the Route 49 over Mill Creek scour project.

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 met with other MFA staff to discuss potential grant opportunities for the Shell Recycling Program. Staff will be investigating current available opportunities and developing draft narratives in the coming months to apply for appropriate opportunities.
- **Living Shorelines and Beneficial Use**
 - Staff attended a virtual meeting held by the US Army Corps of Engineers on a proposed aquatic habitat restoration project at Mordecai Island off Beach Haven. The project intends to create a living shoreline comprised of 3,000 linear feet of rubble mound structures to protect the northwestern side of the island. The goal of the project is to address erosion and prevent further habitat loss. The project will also incorporate a fill component that will obtain sediment from maintenance dredging and beneficially reuse it to restore portions of the island. Staff will continue to provide comments and feedback on the project as the project progresses.
 - Staff had a call with NOAA Fisheries staff to discuss current living shoreline and beneficial reuse projects. Staff will continue to communicate with NOAA staff to achieve the greatest net benefit in these projects for New Jersey's coastlines.
 - Staff attended a virtual Barnegat Bay Islands Working Group. The working group is made up of Academia, non-government, and government organizations. Discussions centered around plans for a web-based planning tool and updates from the sub-committees of the group.
 - Staff attended a virtual meeting on a proposed shoreline restoration project at Cattus Island Count Park in Ocean County. This project was a part of the 319 grants and is in the early planning stages. Staff will continue to coordinate with all other involved groups as the project plans progress.

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- Staff attended a virtual presentation hosted by the Partnership for the Delaware Estuary entitled “From Data to Decisions: Pathways for Salt Marsh Conservation and Restoration”.

Commercial Fisheries/Quota Management

- **Atlantic Coast Shellfish Council**
 - As of the January 2021 Atlantic Coast Shellfish Council Meeting, the Bureau has started accepting new lease applications. Staff has been coordinating with individuals interested in applying for shellfish leases and addressing general questions on shellfish leasing.
- **Delaware Bay Shellfish Council**
 - The Council held their meeting on 1/12/2021. Topics discussed included but were not limited to:
 - annual election of chairman and vice chairman;
 - Red Knot Stakeholder Committee and their changes to Conservation Measure 13;
 - Aquaculture Development Plan and comments and concerns from the Council and industry;
 - scheduling meetings for both the Leasing and Consolidation Committees;
 - informing that the Bureau would be allowing new lease applications again as of January 2021
- **Delaware Bay Oyster Tonging Industry**
 - The Delaware Bay Office has sold approximately 300 tongers bushel tags since the season opened in November 2020. About 6 tongers have been harvesting so far this season.

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 had the R/V James W. Joseph hauled out and dry docked at Yank Marine Services LLC, and then winterized the vessel. Staff has been continuing to maintain and repair the vessel to prepare it for the 2021 field season and deployment planned for March.
- Staff continues to work on specifications for a new shellfisheries research vessel. Staff is awaiting guidance from DEP Staff on the method of procurement.

Administrative/Miscellaneous

- Staff continues in efforts 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.
- **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 2020 through present. License sales for the Delaware Bay Office were \$1,228.00 January 2021.