

# Marine Fisheries Administration Monthly Report

*February 2021*

## **Marine Fisheries Administration Staff:**

Joseph Cimino, Administrator- MFA

Russell Babb, Chief - BSF

Jeffrey Brust, Chief - BMF

Heather Corbett, Supervising Biologist

Jeffrey Normant, Supervising Biologist

Michael Celestino, Research Scientist I

Colleen Brust, Research Scientist III

Kira Dacanay, Principal Biologist

Maryellen Gordon, Principal Biologist

Gregory Hinks, Principal Biologist

Craig Tomlin, Principal Biologist

Linda Barry, Senior Biologist

Peter Clarke, Senior Biologist

Brian Neilan, Senior Biologist

Jen Pyle, Senior Biologist

Jenny Tomko, Senior Biologist

Michael Auriemma, Assistant Biologist

Tim Daniels, Assistant Biologist

Jamie Darrow, Assistant Biologist

Conor Davis, Assistant Biologist

Amber Francis, Assistant Biologist

Brendan Harrison, Assistant Biologist

Andrew Hassall, Assistant Biologist

Matt Heyl, Assistant Biologist

Elizabeth Lange, Assistant Biologist

Lloyd Lomelino, Assistant Biologist

Samantha MacQuesten, Assistant Biologist

Chad Power, Assistant Biologist

Scott Stueber, Assistant Biologist

Stacy VanMorter, Assistant Biologist

Alissa Wilson, Assistant Biologist

Jessica Daher, Program Specialist

Kelly O'Neill, Program Specialist

Megan Kelly, Environmental Specialist II

Anthony Mazzarella, Technician I

William Maxwell, Technician I

Shana Fehring, Senior Wildlife Worker

Les Frie, Senior Wildlife Worker

Chuck Karr, Senior Wildlife Worker

Jonathan Klotz, Senior Wildlife Worker

William Barker, Wildlife Worker

Paul Bechtel, Wildlife Worker

Brielle Colledge, Wildlife Worker

Richard DiVaccaro, Wildlife Worker

Andrew Santiago, Wildlife Worker

Laura Versaggi, ACCSP Fisheries Specialist

Karen Bates, Agency Service Representative 3

Trish Mahoney, Agency Service Representative 3

# Marine Fisheries Administration Monthly Report

## **\*\*MARINE FISHERIES\*\***

### **ASMFC/MAFMC/COOP/NOAA**

- The 2020 Atlantic sturgeon tagging data was submitted to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to be incorporated into the Coastwide Sturgeon Tagging Database. Additionally, data collected on sturgeon takes, salvages, and interaction reports was shared with ENSP to be submitted to Biotics and included in the next version of the Species Occurrence Area file.

### **MEETING SUMMARIES**

- **Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission-ASMFC (TC, SAS, Boards)**
  - Administration staff served as a reviewer on the Northeast Regional Coordinating Council's (NRCC) Assessment Oversight Panel (AOP). The AOP reviewed stock assessment plans for golden tilefish, summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, bluefish, and Atlantic mackerel. The AOP recommended the lowest level of review (direct delivery to SSC) for summer flounder, bluefish, and black sea bass as these assessments proposed no substantive model changes and were simply adding one additional year of data to the model. The AOP recommended an expedited review (1-2 hour peer review) of the golden tilefish, scup, and Atlantic mackerel assessments as these involved incorporation of calibrated MRIP data (mackerel), likely adjustments to terminal year estimates due to retrospective patterning (scup), or the addition of multiple years of new data with possible changes to selectivity (golden tilefish). The peer review for these species is scheduled for June 2021.
  - Staff participated in two conference calls of the Circle Hook Ad Hoc Committee (Committee) to address and provide recommendations to the Striped Bass Management Board (Board) regarding issues with the implementation of the circle hook mandate. The Committee was tasked to develop a standard definition of bait and methods of fishing that would require the use of circle hooks and to discuss how to handle incidental catch. The Committee reached consensus regarding the definition of bait and methods of fishing and recommends the following language:  
*Circle hooks are required when fishing for striped bass with bait, which is defined as any marine or aquatic organism live or dead, whole or parts thereof. This shall not apply to any artificial lure with bait attached.*

The Committee could not reach consensus regarding incidental catch. The Committee noted this is a policy decision and will provide a memo to the Board outlining the two contrasting perspectives. The Board will meet to discuss the recommendations during a special meeting on March 16, 2021
  - The ASMFC Adaptive Resource Management (ARM) Subcommittee (SC) met via webinar February 24-26 to review progress on the ARM model revisions and updates. The ARM SC agreed to a clarifying addition to the end of the ARM Objective statement to spell out its focus on the recovery of the red knot population. The full statement reads: "Manage harvest of horseshoe crabs in the Delaware Bay to maximize harvest but also to maintain ecosystem integrity, provide adequate stopover habitat for migrating shorebirds, and ensure that the abundance of horseshoe crabs is not limiting the red knot stopover population or slowing recovery." Results from a preliminary survival analysis for red knots showing higher survival for underweight birds will be further reviewed using a number of methods to investigate the seeming discrepancy. A sensitivity run of the full model with only the Virginia Tech Horseshoe Crab Trawl survey data for estimating horseshoe crab abundance will be performed to evaluate the influence of non-HSC surveys on model results. Other issues discussed included concerns over horseshoe crab egg densities on Delaware Bay beaches, and factors affecting red knot recruitment and their possible integration into the ARM model. With the additional work required, the ARM SC requested a 2-month postponement for the peer review, with the final presentation to the ASMFC Management Board to be made at the October ASMFC meeting.

## **Marine Fisheries Administration Monthly Report**

- Staff presented to the Shad and River Herring Board at the ASMFC Winter Meeting. Topics that were presented on were several states' updated American Shad Habitat Plans, the TC's recommendations on improvements and changes to Amendments 2 & 3 to the Shad and River Herring FMP, and the TC's recommendations to the Board on ways to improve shad stocks going forward based on the results of the 2020 stock assessment. The Board approved all of the submitted Habitat Plans and TC recommendations on the Amendments 2 & 3 and tasked the TC with developing a working group that will address the issues with mixed stock fisheries and out of basin commercial harvest of American shad.
- **Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council-MAFMC**
  - The Butterfish Research Track Working Group met via webinar on February 16<sup>th</sup> to review biological data from NEFSC surveys, follow-up on weight at age, and get updates on slippage, spatial distribution of catch, Canadian data to inform stock distribution as well as industry perspectives and outreach.
  - The Illex Research Track Working Group met via webinar on February 23<sup>rd</sup> to review the SBRM Discard Data, identify illex pulses, and present the conventional Leslie Depletion Model for comparison to other depletion models. There was also discussion on how the Falklands and Argentine Illex fisheries influence our fishery and the models we run.
  - The Assessment Oversight Panel met on February 25<sup>th</sup> to review the Atlantic Mackerel stock assessment plans for the June 2021 Management Track process and recommend the level of peer review necessary. A level 2 recommendation was proposed and accepted due to the rationale of three additional years of data, revised MRIP data, and that multiple projections may be required.
- **Miscellaneous**
  - Staff participated in a call of the Delaware River Coop's Shad Sustainable Fishery Management Plan subgroup. This is a standing monthly meeting in order to update the Coop's American Shad FMP which needs to be submitted to the Shad and River Herring TC by the end of the year. Topics of discussion included outcomes from the Board meeting last week and which ones will impact the Coop's shad management and exploring new methods for developing indices and benchmarks that better capture the trends in shad abundance than the ones currently in use.

### **INDEPENDENT FISHERIES**

- **Delaware Bay Tagging**
  - A supplemental COVID-19 protocol was approved by the Administration 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 will be taken on the survey in order to ensure the safest working conditions regarding COVID-19. Crew members held a meeting to review the protocol. In addition, the vessel and gear were prepared for the survey to start in the first week of March.
- **Delaware River Seine Survey**
  - A letter was sent to PSEG on February 17 notifying them that there is no data to submit for 2020: due to the COVID-19 pandemic and safety restrictions, Marine Fisheries was unable to perform the 2020 Delaware River Striped Bass Recruitment Survey.
  - Staff compiled and submitted survey data for two data requests: finalized species catch totals for 2019 were sent to Brian Woolman (ECSI, Delaware) and catch totals for 1988-2019 were sent to Keith Hansen (NOAA).
- **Eel Surveys**
  - Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and safety restrictions, Marine Fisheries will not be conducting the 2021 glass eel survey, which was scheduled to begin on February 1.

# Marine Fisheries Administration Monthly Report

- **Sturgeon Receivers**

- Staff submitted purchase orders for new acoustic receivers and batteries in preparation for the start of receiver deployment and sampling scheduled to start in March.

## **DEPENDENT FISHERIES**

- **Access Point Angler Intercept Survey-APAIS**

- The new amendment and budget for CY2021 were signed and submitted to the ASMFC on February 18.
- All APAIS sampling staff have completed the mandatory Non-Disclosure Agreement forms for 2021 sampling, these forms were validated and passed on to ACCSP. All site, vessel and headboat pressure updates for Wave 2 were completed and March's assignment draw was released on February 11<sup>th</sup>. All 59 Site Assignments were scheduled and released to the sampling staff. Headboat sampling will still be on hold as the safety of conducting these assignments is evaluated.

- **For-Hire Telephone Survey-FHTS**

- Staff went through a list of 146 draft vessels. These vessels were missing required information, keeping them off the list of eligible vessels for the FHTS. Staff was able to complete info for just over 50 of these vessels which were later added to the eligible pool of vessels.
- Staff completed vessel directory edits and finalized the initial list for NOAA to draw from for wave 2.
- Staff printed and compiled all material needed for the weekly mailings through wave 2.
- Staff sent out the first mailing of the year to the first weekly draw which was 25 vessels. Those vessels will be contacted starting in March.

- **NJ Saltwater Recreational Registry Program-NJSRRP/Volunteer Angler Survey-VAS**

- As of February 26, 2021, there were 21,131 individuals and 229 for-hire vessels registered for 2021 with the New Jersey Saltwater Recreational Registry Program (NJSRRP). (Last month: January 31, 2021, there were 14,971 individuals and 177 for-hire vessels registered for 2021)

- **Striped Bass Bonus Program-SBBP**

- 2020 SBBP data is currently being entered and proofed. Preparation for the 2021 SBBP is underway.

## **OUTREACH**

- The first draft of the 2021 Marine Digest was received on February 2. Staff reviewed the document and made comments and edits which were submitted to the editor on February 16.
- The second draft of the Digest was received on February 26. Comments from staff are due to the editor on March 3. The current timeline puts production over one month ahead of the 2020 schedule.

## **ADMINISTRATION/MISCELLANEOUS**

- **Regulatory/Legislative**

- Notice of Administrative Changes (NOAC):
  - Two separate NOACs were drafted to amend cobia regulations, which presented the two provision options for NJ, in an effort to submit the NOAC to the OLA in a timely manner following Council approval. The Council will vote in favor of an option at their March 4, 2021, meeting.
- Rule Proposals
  - The Menhaden Multi-Species Rule Proposal was filed with the Office of Administrative Law on January 21, 2021, and published in the March 1, 2021, New Jersey Register, initiating a 60-day public comment period. MFA worked with the OLA, DOIT and DEP Press Office to achieve additional notice requirements, including: posting additional notice, the published rule

## Marine Fisheries Administration Monthly Report

proposal and electronic submission information on the DEP website and DFW website; issuance of additional notice to the Statehouse Rule Group, Press Rule Group, and Department-maintained and DFW Listservs.

- MFA rule team continues to develop a new multispecies rule proposal amending N.J.A.C. 7:25-18.5A Artificial reefs, along with other subchapters and sections pertaining to marine fisheries.
- Legislative Action
  - S3230, a bill that appropriates \$30.387 million from constitutionally dedicated CBT revenues to DEP for State land acquisition purposed for recreation and conservation, was signed by the Governor on February 4, 2021, and became Public Law 2021, c.8
- Congressional Action
  - S. 140, (Sen. Whitehouse, D-Rhode Island), a bill to improve data collection and monitoring of the Great Lakes, oceans, bays, estuaries, and coasts, and for other purposes. Introduced on January 28, 2021, and referred to the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation.
  - H.R. 519, (Rep. Cheney, R-Wyoming), a bill to provide that an order or other action by the President, Secretary of the Interior, or Department of the Interior official imposing a moratorium on Federal oil and gas leasing or permitting shall not take effect unless a joint resolution of approval is enacted, and for other purposes. Introduced on January 28, 2021 and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
  - H.R. 219, the “Earth Act”, (Rep. Doggett, D-Texas), a bill to amend the Trade Act of 1974 to exclude from eligibility for the generalized system of preferences any country that fails to effectively enforce its environmental laws or meet its international environmental obligations, and for other purposes. Introduced on January 6, 2021 and referred to the House Ways and Means Committee.
  - H.R. 270, the “Genetically Engineered Salmon Labeling Act”, (Rep. Young, R-Alaska), a bill to amend the market name of genetically altered salmon in the United States, and for other purposes. Introduced on January 11, 2021, and referred to the House Energy and Commerce Committee.
  - H.R. 273, the “Prevention of Escapement of Genetically Altered Salmon in the United States Act”, (Rep. Young, R-Alaska), a bill to prevent the escapement of genetically altered salmon in the United States, and for other purposes. Introduced on January 11, 2021 and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
  - H.R. 1325, (Rep. Brady, R-Texas), a bill to direct the Secretary of the Interior to issue an oil and gas leasing program under section 18 of the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act, and for other purposes. Introduced on February 25, 2021, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
  - H.R. 866, (Rep. Calvert, R-California), a bill to amend the Endangered Species Act of 1973 to vest in the Secretary of the Interior functions under that Act with respect to species of fish that spawn in fresh or estuarine waters and migrate to ocean waters, and species of fish that spawn in ocean waters and migrate to fresh waters. Introduced on February 5, 2021, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
  - H.R. 749, the “Remote Seafood Employee Meals Tax Parity Act”, (Rep. DelBene, D-Washington), a bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide that the 50 percent limitation on the deduction for meal expenses does not apply to meals provided on certain fishing boats or at certain fish processing facilities. Introduced on February 3, and referred to the House Ways and Means Committee.

## **Marine Fisheries Administration Monthly Report**

- H.R. 660, the “Shovel-Ready Restoration Grants for Coastlines and Fisheries Act of 2021”, (Rep. Plaskett, D-Virgin Islands), a bill to require the Secretary of Commerce to establish a grant program to benefit coastal habitats, resiliency, and the economy, and for other purposes. Introduced on February 1, 2021, and referred to the House Natural Resources, and the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.
- H.R. 628, the “Shellfish Aquaculture Improvement Act of 2021”, (Rep. Young, R-Alaska), a bill to amend title 46, United States Code, to exclude certain aquaculture workers from treatment as seamen for the purpose of liability in the event of injury or death, and for other purposes. Introduced on January 28, 2021, and referred to the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, and in addition to the House Judiciary Committee, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned.
- 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.
- **Scientific Collection Permits**
  - Seventeen scientific collecting permits have been issued in 2021. An additional five have been reviewed and are being processed.

### **\*\*SHELLFISHERIES\*\***

#### **Offshore Wind Development**

- On February 3, staff provided comments to the Office of Permitting and Project Navigation (OPPN) regarding the American Littoral Society’s Protecting Offshore Fish Habitats publication. That paper described some concerns with consistency in the permitting review process. Staff then considered ways to improve the accessibility of data and consistency of review for Prime Fishing Areas in waterfront development permitting. Shore-based fishing sites were identified by intercept points of the Access Point Angler Intercept Survey and used to produce a GIS layer. This layer is still in review.
- Staff continued to assist the Division of Science and Research (DSR) with the Offshore Wind Research and Monitoring Plan.
- Staff continued to review applications for the 2020 Offshore Wind Renewable Energy Credits (ORECs). On February 24, staff met with Levitan, the Board of Public Utilities contractor for OREC review, to assist in identifying potential issues in the submittals.
- Staff, along with the DSR, assisted COS Jane Rosenblatt and the OPPN, with reviewing the contract between the Board of Public Utilities and the Rutgers University Ocean Observing Lab to do research and stakeholder engagement for offshore wind. A meeting was held with the BPU on February 12 to revise the draft contract to better reflect the research priorities for the Department related to offshore wind.
- Staff attended a public webinar hosted by the New York State Energy Research & Development Authority on offshore wind development on February 10.
- Staff attended the biweekly permitting meeting with Atlantic Shores Offshore Wind (ASOW) on February 11. Staff has been assisting ASOW in their fisheries monitoring by providing information from our surveys.
- Staff continued to participate in the OSW weekly check-in meeting with COS Jane Rosenblatt and Megan Brunatti and Katie Nolan from OPPN.
- Staff attended the NYSERDA Fisheries Technical Working Group meeting on February 18. NYSERDA staff, including Morgan Brunbauer, the Offshore Wind Marine Fisheries Project Manager, presented

# **Marine Fisheries Administration Monthly Report**

ongoing and upcoming research. A hot topic at the meeting was a press release from a study contractor, in violation with their contract with NYSEDA, that mischaracterized the enthusiasm of members of the commercial fishing industry for new employment opportunities from offshore wind.

- Staff learned from OPPN that the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management is considering reopening the NY Bight Call Areas for comment prior to finalizing new Wind Energy Areas. In response, staff reviewed fisheries use data from the Mid Atlantic Data Portal to determine whether another comment from the Department was warranted. There has been no new information on the WEAs from BOEM, so we continue to look for information that was not available for our first review in 2018 that may indicate the relative value of different areas within the Call Areas.
- Staff met with the Lead for the US Coast Guard NJ Port Access Route Study to assist with identifying contacts to provide information about recreational fishing, and how transit of those vessels might be affected by offshore wind development. AC Ray Bukowski was on that call and assisted staff with providing a list of contacts to the USCG.
- On February 26, staff participated in the monthly Interstate Fisheries Call. One topic of conversation was the progress of the Responsible Offshore Science Alliance on providing an Offshore Wind Fisheries Monitoring Plan Framework Document. MFA staff reviewed previous drafts of that document.

## **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.

## **Meetings, Conferences, and Seminars**

- Staff attended an ASMFC primer seminar lead by MFA staff. The seminar is internal and intended to familiarize staff with the process of how the State's state and federal species are managed. There are four, one-hour seminars across four weeks.

## **Nantuxent Creek Dredging Project**

- **Updates:**
  - The Division of Land Use Regulation permit application was distributed to DEP staff for review, including MFA staff. Bureau staff submitted comments on 2/15/21. Bureau staff received notification of a public notice distributed by the Army Corps of Engineers for the permit application for which comments are due 3/26/21.
  - Staff has been working on an access agreement that The Nature Conservancy drafted for the Bureau and DOT to obtain permission to use their properties for this project. TNC supports the project but was advised to make an agreement before providing a permission letter.
- **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.

## **Marine Fisheries Administration Monthly Report**

- 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**

- **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.
- **Delaware Bay Leasing Committee**
  - On February 22nd, 2021, staff hosted a Delaware Bay Leasing Committee meeting. Due to Social distancing and work-from-home measures the Committee had not met since February 2020. Therefore, staff used this meeting to re-evaluate the Committee structure since multiple Shellfish Council members were on the Committee which resulted in a quorum. In addition, the Committee discussed potential meeting topics and made recommendations of language for statements on lease area expansion and permission to work. The next Committee meeting will be held on March 23<sup>rd</sup>.
- **Atlantic Coast Leasing Committee**
  - On February 8th, 2021, staff hosted an Atlantic Coast Leasing Policy Committee meeting. Due to Social distancing and work-from-home measures the Committee had not met since March 2020. Therefore, staff used this meeting to re-evaluate the Committee structure since multiple Shellfisheries Council members were on the Committee which resulted in quorum. In addition, the Committee discussed potential meeting topics and made recommendations of language for statements on lease area expansion and permission to work.
  - On February 22nd, 2021, staff hosted an Atlantic Coast Leasing Policy Committee meeting. Members reviewed the Committee charge and discussed potential meeting topics which included lease allocation, transferability, and utilization. In addition, the Committee made recommendations of language for statements on lease area expansion and permission to work. The next Committee meeting will be held on March 18th.

### **Surveys/Laboratory**

- Bureau staff scheduled dates for the 2021 Delaware Bay Office field season for the monthly sampling events. Field work is being scheduled in anticipation that field work will be allowed to resume. Many of the project were not conducted and only a couple were partially conducted during 2020 due to the pandemic.
- Bureau staff took inventory of all equipment and supplies for the sturgeon acoustic receiver project anticipated to be started in March 2021 if field work is allowed to resume.

### **Waterfront Development, Permit, and Environmental Reviews**

- Waterfront Development - MFA staff submitted comments on the Captain's Cove Marina dredging project.

### **Restoration, Enhancement, and Mitigation**



# Marine Fisheries Administration Monthly Report

- **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 drafted the Shell Recycling Program Annual Report for 2020. The report outlines the operations involved in the Shell Recycling Program, the economic and potential ecological benefits, logistical tasks, partners, and challenges faced. The report will be finalized in the coming weeks.
- Staff met with the partners of the Shell Recycling Program to discuss plans for 2021 collection and planting efforts.
- Staff began obtaining quotes for the rental of a deck barge for the planting of shell on the Mullica River oyster reefs this upcoming June/July. Staff is in the process of evaluating quotes and will be beginning the purchase process in the coming weeks.

- **Living Shorelines and Beneficial Use**

- Staff attended a virtual meeting held by the American Littoral Society (ALS) that discussed their living shoreline project taking place at Forked River Beach. The call focused on the results from the pilot study they performed to evaluate the most suitable materials to implement in the proposed full-scale project. The results of the pilot project were encouraging, and staff will continue to communicate with ALS as the project comes to fruition.
- 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.

- **BioSonics MX Habitat Echosounder**

- Staff coordinated with BioSonics staff to finalize the purchase of the BioSonics MX Habitat Echosounder. This equipment will help to identify and map existing submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) throughout the State. Staff is now working on survey plans for the equipment for this upcoming Spring and will be working with BioSonics to establish training opportunities for staff to learn how to properly use the equipment and accurately post process collected data.
- Staff met virtually with staff from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA region III) to discuss the BioSonics unit. EPA staff has experience in using the equipment to map SAV in the Delaware River. EPA staff provided helpful information on how to best use the equipment and offered assistance as we get started on surveys. Staff will continue to communicate with EPA staff as surveys begin in the upcoming months.

- **Barnegat Bay Partnership – Shellfish Working Group (SWG)**

- Staff attended a SWG meeting held by the Barnegat Bay Partnership. The SWG is comprised of non-government, state agencies, industry members and academia. Discussions centered around projects worked on in 2020, impacts of COVID-19 and plans for 2021. Staff gave a brief update on the Shell Recycling Program.

- **Delaware Bay 2021 Shell Planting**

- Bureau staff has been working with the shell contractor and the NJ Shellfisheries Council to have shell set aside for the 2021 shell planting program. Staff plans to have shell stockpiled as it becomes available and billed as necessary to ensure it is in stock for the industry to conduct this year's enhancement activities.

- **NFWF 2021 Delaware River Program: Delaware Watershed Conservation Fund**

- NFWF has a grant program with which the NJ MFA plans to submit applications for funding for three projects. The Bureau will be reapplying for a shell planting project to occur on and adjacent

## **Marine Fisheries Administration Monthly Report**

to oyster tonging areas with a dermo disease monitoring component. Staff are using NFWF comments from the 2020 application to update this year's application and better the chances of being awarded the grant.

- The grants require a 1:1 match, and the total costs of the projects are estimated to be just under \$213,000 for the project. Staff is requesting \$101,250 from NFWF to purchase shell, and the Bureau will have more than a 1:1 match including donated services from Rutgers University who would be a partner on the project.

### **Commercial Fisheries/Quota Management**

- **Atlantic Coast Section of the NJ Shellfish Council Meeting**
  - On February 8th, 2021 the Atlantic Coast section of the Shellfisheries Council met to discuss items which included an update on the Leasing Committee, hard clam management plan, the Aquaculture Development Plan (ADP), and an update on the 2020 Mullica River Oyster Seed Bed conditions. The next Council meeting will be held on March 15th, 2021.
- **23<sup>rd</sup> Delaware Bay Oyster Stock Assessment Workshop (SAW) 2021**
  - The SAW occurred February 9-10, 2021. The review committee (SARC) reviewed the science for the oyster population in Delaware Bay, and made quota recommendations to the Delaware Bay Section of the NJ Shellfisheries Council.
  - **The quota recommendations were to start at 89,816 bushels of oysters.**
  - An intermediate transplant was recommended for a total of 23,833 bushels of oysters to be moved from the Medium and Low Mortality Transplant regions to the market beds.
  - There were 1,480 bushels recommended to be moved from the Very Low Mortality region to go to the Medium Mortality Transplant region to ensure some resource survives in case another large mortality event from persistent rainfall and fresh water influx occurs as it did in recent years.
  - **The quota has the potential to be increased to 114,669 bushels of oysters if a transplant is completed.**
  - The Council will use the SARC recommendations to vote on a quota and plan the intermediate transplant at their March 2, 2021 meeting.
- **Delaware Bay Oyster Tonging Industry**
  - The Delaware Bay Office sold approximately 300 tongers bushel tags during the 2020-2021 season. About 6 tongers have been harvesting so far this season. Most of the 107-bushel harvest was in 2020 and came from the Nantuxent tonging area.

### **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.
- The Bureau's DPA was approved for the purchase of a \$250,000 landing craft. Bureau staff are currently working on finalizing the proposal and vessel details.

### **Administrative/Miscellaneous**

- **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 \$1,154.00 in February 2021.