

Marine Fisheries Administration Monthly Report

April 2021

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****MARINE FISHERIES****

ASMFC/MAFMC/COOP/NOAA

- Administration staff completed and submitted NJ's bluefish compliance report for the 2020 fishing year. Highlights include: despite covid, NJ was able to meet its biological collection target (100 age samples), NJ harvested just under 60% of its 2020 commercial quota (accounting for transfers to other states), NJ's recreational harvest in 2020 was the lowest in MRIP history by number and 2nd lowest in terms of weight; total catch was the 3rd lowest in the timeseries.
- ASMFC Ageing Subcommittee Tautog Age exchange completed. This age exchange is to potentially validate the use of spines as an alternative age structure for Tautog (*Totaua onitis*). This structure will allow states to still obtain age data from fish sold in a live fish market.
- Worked with ASMFC staff to prepare presentations for the Shad and River Herring Board meeting on May 5th. Staff will be presenting on various subjects to the Board including fish passage, state American shad Habitat Plans, and the status of work being done by the TC's mixed stock fishery subgroup.
- Staff reviewed the Shad Habitat Plans from several states that were submitted to the TC for recommended approval to the Board at the May meeting. All plans that were reviewed were satisfactory and staff recommended they be approved by the Board.

MEETING SUMMARIES

- **Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission-ASMFC (TC, SAS, Boards)**
 - Staff attended a ALWTRT meeting on April 1st to discuss the 2018 ALWTRT Entanglement Report. The meeting also discussed documented serious injury events within the Report period.
 - Staff attended an American lobster TC meeting on April 12th. The purpose of the call was for the TC to discuss options for a trigger mechanism and management measures for Draft Addendum XXVII on the GOM/GBK resiliency, as tasked by the Board.
 - Staff attended an ALWTRT meeting on April 15th. The meeting is an update to monitoring efforts on the northern eastern United States Right Whale population.
 - Staff attended a ALWTRT meeting on April 21st via Zoom. The meeting was intended for State and Federal Resources Managers to begin familiarizing themselves with the Decision Support Tool and potential risk reduction ideas for gillnet and other trap / pot fisheries.
 - A joint meeting of the ASMFC Tautog Technical Committee (TC) and Stock Assessment Subcommittee (SAS) was held via webinar on April 23, 2021. The TC provided 2020 data availability and status for use in the update stock assessment. The SAS provided updates for all regions on the assessment model performance with data through 2019. Sarah Murray from ASMFC provided an overview of the new Risk and Uncertainty Decision Tool which will be integrated into the ongoing stock assessment. Follow-up calls for both the TC and SAS will be scheduled within the next few weeks.
- **Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council-MAFMC**
 - Administration staff participated in a MAFMC bluefish FMAT meeting to review public comment from public hearings held to solicit input on a reallocation and rebuilding amendment. The FMAT was able to reach consensus recommendations on a number of issues, though for several issues chose to defer to the Council and Management Board for policy decision. The amendment will be brought before the Council and Board in June for final action.
 - The Butterfish Research Track Working Group met on April 12th to give an update on combining state surveys by combining NEAMAP age length keys since the annual age length keys were all over the place as well as the spatial distribution of catch focusing on discards and to discuss unaccounted catch.

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- The Butterfish Research Track Working Group met again on April 27th to review what was done for historic catch in SAW 58, update tables and figures from SAW 58, and focus on what is new since SAW 58 in regard to the directed fishery and commercial ages.
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- **Marine Fisheries Council/Advisory Committees**
 - The NJ Marine Fisheries Council's Recreational Summer Flounder Advisory Committee was contacted twice during March to adjust commercial summer flounder trip limits. After increasing the weekly trip limits early in march, after two weeks of harvest, Staff recognized that effort increase three fold due to the trip limit increase which drove landings up to a point where the season would close prematurely if left at that high level. As such, staff recommended to advisors that the trip limit be reduced to allow harvest to occur over the full season avoiding an early closure.
- **Public Hearings**
 - A public hearing was held via webinar on April 22nd, 2021 to discuss potential changes to New Jersey's commercial bluefish regulations (institute trip limits, change allocation system). Four industry members attended and provided comment. Given the wide scope of issues under consideration and the non-imminent nature of the change, the meeting was an information gathering session. Written comment is also currently being accepted, and summaries of both (hearing and written comment) will be presented to the Marine Fisheries Council at their next meeting for consideration of next steps.
- **Miscellaneous**
 - Administration staff participated a series of workshops hosted by South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council (SAFMC) related to development of an angling citizen science app. The goal of the workshop series was to gather input from a variety of stakeholder perspectives and work though app features that would be useful and used. Based on information gathered through the town hall meetings, stakeholders' wishes focused on describing 6 broad areas: fish that are caught and kept, fish that are caught and released, fishing effort or trips, fish distribution and movement, fish life history, and fisheries social/economic information.
 - SAFMC has funding to implement a version of this app this year (2021), so they will synthesize all of the information gathered from this workshop series and keep participants updated on their progress.
 - Staff responded to a lobster possession bill being introduced to the State Senate for approval. The current bill as written would allow anyone to possess lobsters less than the state minimum 3 3/8 inches. Staff drafted an alternative substitute bill which will effectively create a Lobster Dealers Exemption License if approved and closes the loophole of undersize lobster possession by harvesters which would cause NJ to be out-of-compliance with the ASMFC if not corrected.
 - Staff received the grant award letter from ACCSP for the proposal titled "Continual Validation and Development of Conversion Factors for Priority Fish and Crustacean Species".
 - Staff received the grant award letter from ACCSP for the proposal titled "Electronic Reporting and Biological Characterization of New Jersey Commercial Fisheries".
 - The NOAA ICCAT Advisory Panel met to discuss the major topics of the 2020 winter ICCAT meeting that took place remotely over 3 months.
 - Shortfin mako – While several countries led by Canada are pushing strongly for a no retention recommendation, the United States has suggested an alternative policy of total allowable catch by country with adherence to the currently active size limits. The argument states that the US manages its fishery sustainably, concurrent with previous ICCAT recommendations, and would unnecessarily suffer from a moratorium.

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- Western bluefin tuna – Although a stock assessment was completed in 2020, new important data, mostly specific to recruitment, has been made available that could potentially change the outcome of the 2020 assessment (no overfishing/rebuilding status unknown). The United States has recommended a new, full assessment in 2021 to incorporate this data.
- Swordfish – The planned 2021 stock assessment has been delayed until 2022 to allow for further development of the data and methods.

INDEPENDENT FISHERIES

- **Delaware Bay Tagging**
 - During 15 trips in March & April 2021, 138 striped bass, 3 American shad, and 3 Atlantic sturgeon were tagged and released. Scale samples were taken from all striped bass and genetic samples were taken from the American shad and Atlantic sturgeon. Otoliths and biological samples were collected from 6 additional striped bass.
- **Delaware River Seine Survey**
 - Due to COVID, 2020 sampling was not conducted. Therefore, PSEG funding for the 2020 sampling season was not utilized. Each year, PSEG funds a portion of the seine survey (June-July sampling). The 2020 PSEG funds have been rolled over for use during the 2021 sampling season. PSEG will not be providing a new check for this survey during the 2021 sampling year.
 - Staff completed a presentation about the seine survey, and it was placed in the shared folder.
- **Eel Surveys**
 - Due to COVID-related staff limitations, the Yellow American Eel Pot Survey will not be sampling during Spring 2021.
- **Herring Surveys**
 - Staff have scouted several locations for a possible remote installation of the Smith-Root fish counter. Multiple tributaries to the Great Egg Harbor River were investigated but a location of suitable depth and ease of access has not yet been found.
- **Ocean Trawl**
 - Stonybrook University is developing post-COVID protocols that would allow research vessel operations to continue as usual under less strict safety protocols. The protocols that would allow the ocean trawl survey to resume are entirely dependent upon knowledge of crew-members' COVID-19 vaccination status. Current guidance suggests staff are not permitted to solicit for this information and voluntary communication of such information cannot be used to allow or disallow staff from participating in activities. These restrictions do not allow for safe conduct of the ocean trawl survey.
- **Sturgeon Receivers**
 - Staff hauled and reset the acoustic receivers deployed in March for the first time of 2021 in order to download the detections from over the previous month. All receivers, save one, were found and the data successfully downloaded. Staff attempted to find the missing receiver using the dredge hook but were unsuccessful after several attempts. A replacement will be deployed next month when during the next data retrieval. So far this year there has been a total of 641 detections. 66 detections from 5 individual Atlantic Sturgeon, 13 detections from 2 individual striped bass, and 562 detections from 15 unknown tags.
 - Staff participated via webinar in a meeting of the Atlantic Coast Telemetry Network on Tuesday the 13th through Thursday the 15th. The first day consisted of members of the ACT network presenting results and updates from their recent and ongoing telemetry projects along the coast. The following two days consisted of seminars related to sorting and manipulating tag/receiver data and creating reports, charts, graphs, etc using R.

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- Staff participated in a call with a reporter from NJ Spotlight News in regards to the sturgeon receiver project. Topics covered included sturgeon life history, the endangered species status, historical sturgeon fisheries, general background and logistics of the sturgeon project, and the current status of sturgeon populations in the Delaware River and coastwide.

DEPENDENT FISHERIES

• Access Point Angler Intercept Survey-AP AIS

- The draw for April consisted of 76 site assignments that yielded a total of 143 intercepts (90 SH, 7 CH, 46 PR). Headboat sampling is still suspended at this time.
- Staff continue to make updates to the Vessel Directory and Site Register in preparation for Wave 4.
- Wave 2 sampling ended with a total of 177 intercepts (119 SH, 7 CH, 51 PR).
- April mileage is being validated and submitted for reimbursement; March mileage reimbursements have been received.
- Fishdump data from April were reviewed.

• Artificial Reef

- Artificial Reef Staff has been moving repurposed granite monuments and concrete rubble from southern New Jersey to our Aids to Navigation dock in Forked River. Approximately 20 tons of material will be deployed on the Barnegat Inlet Reef in May.
- Staff inspected the 140 foot bunker boat, CARTERS CREEK being prepared for deployment on the Manasquan Inlet Reef during the week of May 16-22.
- Staff completed the spring leg of the ventless trap survey for 2021. The next leg of sampling will begin the five-week period in the summer after the fourth of July holiday weekend.
- Staff presented NJ Artificial Reef information during a Rack and Fin radio interview as well as a newspaper interview. Subject matter included for the Rack and Fin interview was a 5 reef summary which aired in April and an additional 3 reef characterization airing in May.

• Biological

- Staff collected Tautog samples from charter/ party boat fishery. Fish are processed and hard parts are collected for ageing.
- Staff created new American eel age sample (otolith) target numbers for current length bins. In addition, targets for the number of sex and parasite samples were added. These targets will encompass commercial sampling and the yellow eel pot survey. The check list will be kept in the Wet Lab so that staff from both surveys will have access to it.

• Commercial Fisheries/Quota Management

- Quota Monitoring
 - Menhaden- The Directed Atlantic menhaden “other gears” fishery reopened on Sunday, March 28th. Current harvest is 1,219,751 pounds of the 2,316,183-pound quota (53%).
 - Bluefish- The 2021 commercial fishing season began with a quota of 264,935 pounds. To date, 13,424 pounds have been harvested (5%).
 - Black Sea Bass- The commercial directed Season 2 fishery ended on April 30th. Preliminary harvest is 272,528 pounds of the 293,239-pound directed quota (93%).
 - Summer flounder- The commercial directed Season 2 fishery closed on April 16th. Harvest during the directed opening was 334,772 pounds of the 331,395-pound quota. The bycatch fishery remained open through April 30th. In all, 96% of the total Season 2 quota was harvested.
 - Scup- The federally managed commercial Winter I season ended on April 30th. Preliminary harvest is 5,351,353 pounds of the 9,247,904-pound quota. New Jersey accounts for 34% of the harvest with 1,827,313 pounds.

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- **Spiny dogfish-** The 2020/2021 commercial fishery ended on April 30th. Preliminary harvest for New Jersey is 1,913,285 pounds. This is roughly 92% of the adjusted state quota of 2,073,165 pounds.
- A courtesy letter mailing was sent on October 30, 2020, to commercial blue crab fishermen, for non-receipt of commercial harvest report. 42 letters were sent to commercial crab license holders informing them of their missing reports. This was the first mailing of 2020 and no offenses were issued.
- Eight first offenses were issued Wednesday 1/13/2021 for non-receipt of monthly commercial blue crab harvest. This was the first round of offenses issued since moving to an at home work environment. Six courtesy calls were made Tuesday 01/26/2021 to retrieve missing information on their harvest reports.
- An Offense and Calls database was created to record blue crab noncompliance of commercial harvest offense related information. The database can be used from home and is focused entirely on blue crab commercial license offense records. The previous database could not be managed from home and incorporated additional information not pertinent to maintaining commercial blue crab licenses offense records.
- Staff completed updated to the commercial fishing harvester trip report and created detailed reporting instructions to be in compliance with the new American lobster reporting requirements. Reporting packets were mailed out to affected lobster permit stakeholders.
- Staff updated the commercial fishing online trip reporting packet. The packet is for commercial harvesters that prefer to report online instead of sending in a monthly trip report.
- Staff received several data request including for the tautog and blue crab commercial fishery. Request are used for the upcoming stock assessment for tautog and the Delaware Bay fishery for blue crab.
- **For-Hire Telephone Survey-FHTS**
 - April draw (wave 2) had roughly 20 vessels drawn each week. Staff contacted and completed surveys as normal.
 - Wave 3 mailing forms were finalized by ACCSP. Staff printed the forms for all weekly mailings in Wave 3.
 - Staff continue their weekly deadline tasks including phone interviews, mailings, data edits and vessel directory updates.
- **NJ Saltwater Recreational Registry Program-NJSRRP/Volunteer Angler Survey-VAS**
 - As of April 30, 2021, there were 64,897 individuals and 521 for-hire vessels registered for 2021 with the New Jersey Saltwater Recreational Registry Program (NJSRRP). (Last month: March 31, 2021, there were 41,163 individuals and 352 for-hire vessels for 2021)
- **Striped Bass Bonus Program-SBBP**
 - The 2021 Striped Bass Bonus Program will open on May 15, 2021. The Division has received over 5,859 applications from individual anglers. Staff have processed and mailed 4,000 permits. The new application process has reduced staff time and effort greatly. 103 party/charter boats have been enrolled in the SBBP. The same “curbside pick-up” protocol used in 2020 for party/charter boats to pick up permits from the Nacote Creek office will be used in 2021. The first “curbside pickup” day took place on Monday, April 26.

OUTREACH

- The final pass of the Digest was received on April 1. This was a courtesy draft from the publisher so that staff could see the final product before printing.

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- The 2021 Marine Digest is now available on the Division website! Print versions are expected to hit the shelves the first week of May.
- Planning is underway for the 2022 digest. Assignments will be delegated by June, with a due date of October.

ADMINISTRATION/MISCELLANEOUS

• Regulatory/Legislative

- Notice of Administrative Changes (NOAC):
 - A NOAC to amend 2021 recreational cobia season, size limit and vessel limit was submitted to the Office of Legal Affairs on March 5, 2021. The Commissioner has not yet reviewed the draft NOAC as of May 5, 2021.
- Rule Proposals
 - Menhaden Multispecies Rulemaking comment period ended on April 30, 2021. MFA Rule Team is reviewing comments and a draft response/adoption document and launch memo is underway.
 - 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. Marine Fisheries-related rules will be reorganized under N.J.A.C. 7:25B.
 - In addition to the Reef Multispecies proposal, a new striped bass circle hook requirement proposal is being drafted to meet ASMFC compliance criteria.
- Legislative Activity
 - A5531 – Provides free admission to State Parks, forests, and beaches for certain veterans and military personnel. In Senate Military & Veterans' Affairs Committee 4/26/2021.
 - A1581 – Establishes the Invasive Species Task Force. Reported out of Assembly Committee 3/15/2021; no Senate version.
 - MFA drafted an internal memo which includes a proposed substitute bill and new license to replace S1931, a bill clarifying lobster size limits would apply only to lobsters taken from the marine waters of the State.
- Congressional Activity
 - S381 – National Ocean Exploration Act: A bill to establish the National Ocean Mapping, Exploration, and Characterization Council, and revises several programs at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) that support ocean and coastal mapping, hydrographic surveys, and spatial data collection. Introduced 2/23/2021. Read twice and referred to Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation 4/28/2021.
 - S1160/HR2811 – A bill to prohibit the sale of shark fins, and for other purposes. Introduced in Senate; Read twice and referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation 4/13/2021/Introduced in the House, referred to the Committee on Natural Resources 4/22/2021.
 - S907 – Rhode Island Fishermen's Fairness Act of 2021. This bill adds Rhode Island to the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and increases council membership from 21 to 23 members. Introduced in Senate, read twice and referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation 3/23/2021.
 - S497 – A bill to establish the American Fisheries Advisory Committee to assist in the awarding of fisheries research and development grants, and for other purposes. Introduced in Senate, read twice and referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation 3/1/2021.
 - HR2533 – To provide for a study by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine examining the impact of ocean acidification and other stressors in estuarine

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environments. Introduced in House, referred to the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, and in addition to the Committee on Natural Resources 4/14/2021

- HR2872/S1420 – To establish an integrated national approach to respond to ongoing and expected effects of extreme weather and climate change by protecting, managing, and conserving the fish, wildlife, and plants of the United States, and to maximize Government efficiency and reduce costs, in cooperation with State, local, and Tribal Governments and other entities, and for other purposes. Introduced in House, referred to the House Committee on Natural Resources 4/28/2021.
- HR2872/S1420 To require the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to establish a Climate Change Education Program, and for other purposes. Introduced in House, referred to the House Committee on Natural Resources 4/28/2021.
- HR2310 – To require the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to establish a Climate Change Education Program, and for other purposes. Referred to the Committee on Energy and Commerce, and in addition to the Committee on Education and Labor 4/1/2021.
- S1127 – A bill to require the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to make certain operational models available to the public, and for other purposes. Read twice and referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation 4/14/2021.
- S1372 – A bill to amend and enhance the High Seas Driftnet Fishing Moratorium Protection Act to improve the conservation of sharks, and for other purposes. Read twice and referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation 4/27/2021.
- S1484 – A bill to improve the management of forage fish. Read twice and referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation 4/29/2021.
- HR2773 – To amend the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act to make supplemental funds available for management of fish and wildlife species of greatest conservation need as determined by State fish and wildlife agencies, and for other purposes. Introduced in House, referred to the House Committee on Natural Resources 4/22/2021.
- HR628 – Shellfish Aquaculture Improvement Act of 2021: To amend Title 46, U.S. 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 in House 1/28/2021; Referred to the Subcommittee on Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties 3/22/2021.

- **Scientific Collection Permits**

- Forty three scientific collecting permits have been issued in 2021.

****SHELLFISHERIES****

Offshore Wind Development

- Staff continued to participate in permitting coordination meetings with developers. Biweekly calls with Orsted and Atlantic Shores were held on Thursdays. Staff met with EnBW North America on April 8 to discuss early steps for the developer to begin to understand the existing resources in areas that may become available for leasing, including marine mammals, turtles, fish, and fisheries. As a follow-up to this meeting, staff sent contact information to EnBW for recreational fishing stakeholders on April 19.
- Staff participated in weekly check-in calls on offshore wind with COS Jane Rosenblatt, Megan Brunatti, and Katie Nolan on April 1, 8, and 22.

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- Staff continued to collaborate on the Research and Monitoring Initiative, led by Gary Buchanan. We met with the BPU to discuss a draft deliberative workplan on April 1, 15, and 21. On April 21, staff provided a revised deliberative draft of the Research and Monitoring Initiative work plan.
- Staff reviewed Levitan's report on the applications for NJ Solicitation 2 for offshore wind on April 1. Awards are due to be announced in June.
- Staff provided information about offshore wind webinars and other learning opportunities to Department and BPU staff. Staff continued to participate in learning opportunities, including attending the US Offshore Wind: The Road to 30 GW on Apr 20 and a ROSA Monitoring Framework and Guidance Webinar on April 9.
- In April, Wind Energy Team staff continued their work understanding potential impacts to marine resources and potential avenues for mitigation. The WET had a full meeting on April 9 and several topic-specific meetings throughout the month. The Team worked on accessing and understanding fisheries-dependent data with internal team including meetings on Apr 12, 20 and 22. Staff reviewed a permit modification for an offshore wind transmission cable around Sandy Hook. The permit modification application is still deficient. We identified shellfish habitat, threatened and endangered species, and fish and fisheries in the project area. Staff continued to collaborate with the Office of Information Systems to develop a new Prime Fishing Areas layer for New Jersey. These maps, which are unique to New Jersey, have been critical for ocean planning, including offshore wind. The new layer represents shore-based fishing locations to better inform decision-making about cable landings.
- Met with the NYSEDA Fisheries lead on April 12 and 15 to discuss collaborating on offshore wind presentations at the American Fisheries Society meeting in November.
- Following the announcement that federal permitting would begin for the Ocean Wind project, staff attended virtual Public Scoping meetings on April 13, 15, and 20
- Staff participated in the BOEM New York Bight Virtual Task Force meetings on April 14 and 16. Several internal meetings were held in advance of the Task Force meeting and staff collaborated with NOAA Fisheries on our response to NY/NJ Bight Wind Energy Areas in a call on April 6
- Staff provided updates on offshore wind development to the Atlantic Coast Shellfisheries Council Meeting on Apr 19.
- Staff provided comments on a draft of the USCG Seacoast of New Jersey - USCG-2020-0172 Routing Proposals. We reiterated previous comments about the need for adequate transit space between the Atlantic Shores and Ocean Wind leases in the response sent on April 20.
- Staff coordinated and held a meeting to understand the most pressing needs for information to mitigate potential impacts to the surf clam industry. This meeting included NOAA, Rutgers, and the surf clam industry on April 29. One high priority research need is better understanding the spatial requirements to safely operate surf clam dredges in different weather and traffic conditions. This information would be very valuable in planning so we can better understand the likelihood of continued fishing within wind farms.
- Staff met internally to discuss potential impacts to horseshoe crabs from offshore wind development within the Carl N Shuster Horseshoe Crab Reserve. with the Maryland DNR, MD Energy Association, and BPU on April 30.
- Staff attended the spring NJ Environmental Resources Working Group Meeting on April 29. The meeting provided updates to working group members, including presentations from Ocean Wind staff and a question and answer period.
- Staff continued to assist with NJPACT and provided comments on NJPACT drafts.

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.

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- **MFA Communications Committee**

- The MFA Communications Committee met and discussed various tasks to complete. The first priorities are to create a photo library and to continue to work on social media and listserv content. The MFA outreach coordinator has been collaborating with MFA and I.E. staff on these topics..

- **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, wholesale distributors, delivery/pick-up businesses and restaurants who sell seafood that has been landed, grown or harvested in New Jersey. Staff created and printed flyers about the NJ Seafood Finder app which will be included in the upcoming Governor's Surf Fishing Tournament registration packets.

Nantuxent Creek Dredging Project

- **Updates:**

- The Division of Land Resource Protection permit application was approved and distributed to the Bureau on 4/1/21. The permit came with some archaeological conditions set by the Historic Preservation Office that NJDOT and their contractors will abide by while dredging.
- The DLRP permit will be transferred to the NJDOT Office of Maritime Resources since they will be conducting the dredging activities.
- The Department of the Army permit comment period ended 3/26/21 with no comments submitted and the permit for NAP-2020-00403-95 was authorized on 5/10/21.
- The Army Corps permit was transferred to the NJDOT Office of Maritime Resources since they will be conducting the dredging activities and will also need the permit in the future for maintenance dredging.
- Staff was removed from the access agreement that The Nature Conservancy drafted for the Bureau and NJDOT to obtain permission to use their properties for this project. Since the dredging activities will be conducted by NJDOT who will also hold the permits once transferred, NJDOT will sign the agreement with TNC.

- **Next Steps:**

- NJDOT put the dredging project out for contractor bids in early May 2021.
- The bids are expected to be received and a contractor selected before June 30, 2021.
- Dredging is expected to occur in the fall after the September 15th timing restrictions from the environmental review.
- The dredge spoils are planned to be used for beach replenishment on Nantuxent Beach.

Aquaculture and Leasing

- **Shellfish Aquaculture Working Group (SAWG)**

- Bureau staff facilitated and attended the virtual SAWG meeting on May 5, 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, 40th Year CZM Aquaculture Grant, NJ PACT and Atlantic Coast and Delaware Bay Leasing Committees updates.

- **SAWG – Commercial Shellfish Aquaculture Website Committee**

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- Bureau of Shellfisheries staff and representatives from various agencies involved in commercial shellfish aquaculture permitting, regulations, and outreach continue to work on and review the NJ Commercial Shellfish Aquaculture website design and content.
- **Aquaculture Development Zone Hazard Buoys**
 - Staff deployed four ADZ-2 hazard buoys to warn boat traffic of aquaculture gear within the offshore ADZ lease a few miles south of Thompson's Beach.
 - Four more buoys were deployed in April outside of ADZ-4 off Cape Shore/ Dennis Creek WMA to warn boat traffic of aquaculture gear.

Surveys/Laboratory

- **Delaware Bay Trawl Survey**
 - Staff sampled all 11 sites on 4/6/21 to launch the 2021 survey while utilizing COVID protocols. Staff digitized the data sheets, created the 2021 database, and entered data. The survey will run from April thru October after which the data will be processed and annual performance report written.
- Staff completed biological surveys for new shellfish lease applications in Great Sound and Ludlam Bay. The reports will be sent to the Shellfisheries Council for review at the May meeting.

Waterfront Development, Permit, and Environmental Reviews

- MFA staff have reviewed and commented on the following waterfront development permit applications:
 - Naval Weapons Station Earle – Maintenance Dredging
 - Dredging at a private property in Ventnor City
 - EO-215 Review - NJTA Newark Bay-Hudson County Extension Preliminary Design and Environmental Studies – Project 1

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 finalized the rental of a deck barge for the planting of shell on the Mullica River oyster reefs this upcoming June/July. Staff will continue to coordinate with the vendor for delivery.
 - Staff coordinated with other MFA staff a clean-up event to remove all trash in the pile of recycled shell from participating restaurants. The clean-up was done to prevent any of these materials from finding their way into the marine environment during planting activities. Staff has communicated with participating venues and it is understood that limiting trash in the recycled shell is critical to program success moving forward.
 - Staff met with staff from Pew Charitable Trusts to discuss a potential second round of purchasing by the Supporting Oyster Aquaculture and Restoration (S.O.A.R.) program of aquaculture raised oysters to be used in restoration activities. Staff expressed their willingness to help with the planting portion of the project as needed and to assist in site selection.
 - Staff began working on an outline for a Shell Recycling Program web page to be posted on the Division's website. The webpage will help to inform the public on the program as it develops. Staff will continue to work with MFA outreach coordinator to achieve the best possible content.
 - Staff began developing text for GovDelivery messages and social media posts for the Shell Recycling Program. The Program will be doing its first annual shell plant this summer and staff will be working to have GovDelivery and Social media posts ready and available for the time of the work.

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- **NFWF 2021 National Coastal Resiliency Fund**

- Staff drafted a pre-proposal for this NFWF grant for \$911,400 across 4 years which was submitted 4/7/21. The project would plant shell across existing oyster reefs within Delaware Bay, NJ waters and within the Atlantic Coast Mullica River-Great Bay (MRGB) Estuary to provide more habitat for spat settlement and enhance the oyster beds. The State will surpass the 1:1 match requirement with approximately \$943,000 over 4 years.

Commercial Fisheries/Quota Management

- **Atlantic Coast Section of the NJ Shellfish Council Meeting**

- On April 19, 2021 staff attended the Atlantic Coast Section of the NJ Shellfisheries Council meeting during which the Council held a brief meeting to perform housekeeping duties.

- **The Delaware Bay Section of the New Jersey Shellfisheries Council – Oyster Dredge Boat Licenses Consolidation Committee**

- The Consolidation Committee met on April 27, 2021. The Bureau reviewed potential changes the Committee compiled and discussed how those scenarios would work. The committee is currently looking for more participants to make this process more inclusive of all facets of the fishery. The Committee asked the council to send a letter reporting the updates of the Committee as well as requesting more participants. The committee will continue to update the Council of its findings.

- **Oyster Industry Science Steering Committee**

- The OISSC met on April 29, 2021. The Committee discussed the replacement for outgoing Stock Assessment Review Committee member Matt Hare. The OISSC made recommendations that included individuals from the academic world. The Committee also discussed the restart of many science investigations that were put on hold do to the COVID 19 pandemic.

Buildings, Grounds, Vessels, and Vehicles

- **Boat Maintenance**

- Bureau staff continue to maintain the R/V James W. Joseph and the R/V Zephyrus by performing regular maintenance, repairs, and equipment upgrades as necessary.
- The Bureau had finalized the repairs of the R/V Zephyrus' hydraulic system. With the repairs completed, staff anticipates transporting the vessel to Raritan Bay during the first week of May and begin the hard clam inventory shortly after.

- The Bureau has completed the RFP for a 25' Catamaran landing craft. The proposal will be posted for bid starting in May 2021.

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 \$45,925.00 in April 2021. Oyster dredge boat bushel tag sales made up about 90% of sales.