

# **Marine Fisheries Administration Monthly Report**

***DECEMBER 2021***

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

### **ASMFC/MAFMC/COOP/NOAA** **MEETING SUMMARIES**

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

- The Striped Bass Technical Committee (TC) held a conference call regarding Draft Amendment 7 on December 14th. Majority of the discussion involved the results of projections to inform the Board's consideration of changing recreational size/slot limits to protect year classes. The TC feels the projection results indicate that although the changes in female spawning stock biomass (SSB) were positive, changing selectivity (regulations) does not provide a significant benefit to the stock since the percent change in overall SSB is within the confidence interval of the status quo SSB estimate. In addition, the TC reviewed rebuilding plan options drafted by the PDT and the methodology proposed to calculate the reduction in removals if the Chesapeake Bay implemented alternative bag/size limits.
- The Striped Bass Plan Development Team (PDT) held a conference call regarding Draft Amendment 7 on December 16th. Majority of the discussion involved the results of projections to inform the Board's consideration of changing recreational size/slot limits to protect year classes. The PDT agreed with the TC's takeaways from the analysis and will recommend to the Board that the options to protect strong year classes be removed from Draft Amendment 7 since the options do not significantly offer more benefit to the stock than status quo.
- The ASMFC Black Drum Technical Committee (TC) and Stock Assessment Subcommittee (SAS) met for a data workshop webinar December 7-8 to begin the next benchmark stock assessment process. TC members presented available survey and biological sampling data from each state, while ASMFC staff gave an overview of commercial and recreational landings. The data workshop concluded with assignment of tasks for the methods workshop scheduled for February 2022.
- Staff attended a meeting of the ASMFC's Shad TC's fish passage working group to discuss progress on drafting a memo to the board highlighting the TC's work on prioritizing upcoming new FERC projects to be assessed for possibly requiring fish passage performance metrics incorporated by NMFS and USFWS as part of the licensee's operating permit.
- Staff continue to work with the ASMFC's Atlantic Sturgeon Ageing Sub-committee for moving forward with an ageing workshop in the next year or so. A set of age samples from along the coast has been compiled and will be going out to participating agencies for ageing starting this month. New Jersey is scheduled to receive and age the samples in late March.

#### **• Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council-MAFMC**

- The Butterfish Research Track Working Group met via webinar on December 14<sup>th</sup> to review outreach to get the industries perspective regarding historical fishery data, the current market, and availability, as well as seabird consumption of butterfish and a writing and report status update.
- The Illex Research Track Working Group met via webinar on December 16<sup>th</sup> discuss the Falkland Islands Fisheries Approach, the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) application of "PlanBsmooth" projections, Landings Per Unit Effort (LPUE), Depletion Model Work Update, as well as Oceanographic Indicators for Northern Shortfin Squid.

#### **• Miscellaneous**

- Staff attended several webinars with ACCSP's Commercial and Recreational Technical Committees. The goal of the webinars was to discuss autofill options within SAFIS eTrips online and mobile with the hope that changes would make reporting easier.
- Staff hosted an webinar with ACCSP to discuss issues that NJDFW is seeing with the updated commercial reporting system. Issues include both the online and mobile system. Issues have been corrected.
- Staff participated via webinar in a meeting the Delaware River Cooperative's Policy Committee meeting on Wednesday, December 1<sup>st</sup>. The agenda focused of Delaware's proposed commercial options for reducing American shad harvest from the eastern half of the bay, updating the Policy Committee on the progress of the 2022 American Shad Sustainable Fishery Plan Update, and presenting the benchmark updates to the Policy Committee for review and approval. The Policy Committee approved all of the

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proposed benchmarks (now totaling 7) and management trigger updates for use in the 2022-2026 tenure of the draft American Shad Sustainable Fishery Plan.

- Staff attended the quarterly meeting of the Delaware River Cooperative via webinar on Monday, December 6<sup>th</sup>. Major topics of discussion included updates on the progress of the Cooperative's American Shad Sustainable Fishery Plan update for 2022-2026, restarting efforts to update the Cooperative's time of year restriction dredging document, and possible projects to be developed to address fishery research needs within the basin that can be submitted for funding by the Delaware River Basin Conservation Act.

## **INDEPENDENT FISHERIES**

### **• Delaware Bay Tagging**

- Staff submitted NJ's 2021 striped bass tagging data to the US Fish & Wildlife Service to be incorporated into the coastwide tagging database. During the 2021 Delaware Bay Tagging Survey, 138 striped bass were tagged during 15 trips. The highest number of striped bass (40) were tagged on March 12th. The striped bass tagged ranged in total length from 18" to 48". In addition, staff began initial preparations for 2022 fieldwork which is expected to begin March 2022.

### **• Delaware River Seine Survey**

- All striped bass scale samples collected during the 2021 seine survey were successfully aged. Of the 12 samples collected, three striped bass were YOY and nine were Age 1+.

### **• Horseshoe Crab Survey**

- All data for the 2021 Horseshoe Crab has been entered and proofed. The data has been sent to DNREC for analysis.

### **• Ocean Trawl**

- The January Ocean Trawl Survey has been postponed due to increasing COVID safety concerns. The next survey is scheduled for April 7<sup>th</sup> at which point the conditions will be reevaluated.

## **DEPENDENT FISHERIES**

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

- Fishdump data from November were reviewed.
- The draw for December consisted of 124 site assignments, 18 of which are add on assignments for 2021 and 3 headboat assignments.
- A total of 7 site assignments were canceled due to staff illness.
- December produced 267 intercepts. The site based assignments yielded a total of 238 intercepts (47 SH, 35 CH, 156 PR) and headboat sampling yielded 38 intercepts.
- Staff continue to make updates to the Vessel Directory and Site Register in preparation for 2022 sampling.
- December mileage has been validated submitted for reimbursement.
- Training dates for 2022 APAIS Field Sampling are scheduled February 23-24, 2022.

### **• Biological**

- Biological sampling concluded for Atlantic menhaden on December 22<sup>nd</sup>. In total, 1,090 samples were collected for 2021.
- Biological sampling for tautog continues through 2021. To date, 219 age structures have been processed.

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

- Staff received and processed a data request from ASMFC through ACCSP to validate New Jersey's winter flounder commercial landings for 2021.
- Staff received and processed a data request from ASMFC through ACCSP to validate multiple years of New Jersey's black drum commercial landings. Landings will be used in the upcoming stock assessment.
- Staff received and processed a data request from other state staff requested multiple years of American shad landings.
- Staff received and approved a confidential data request through ACCSP for University of Maine, USDA, and NOAA. The project would be the creation of a nation survey about seafood marketing practices.

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- Staff made comments on a change of port code for Barnegat Light and the addition on a new port called Long Beach (Township of) within ACCSP's SAFIS and Dara Warehouse. The updates were requested by NMFS through ACCSP's Standard Codes committee.
- Summer flounder: The Directed Season 6 ended on December 31<sup>st</sup>. Preliminary harvest is 476,150 pounds, 75% of the season quota. This equates to a harvest of 91.2% of the state's annual commercial quota.
- Black Sea Bass: The Directed Season 6 ended on December 31<sup>st</sup>. Preliminary harvest is 233,730 pounds, 73% of the season quota. This equates to a harvest of 91% of the state's annual commercial quota.
- Menhaden: The commercial menhaden fishery ended on December 31<sup>st</sup>. Preliminary state harvest is 98.1% of its allocated quota, with the purse seine fleet harvesting 99.7% of its allocation, and all other gear types 68%.
- Bluefish: The commercial bluefish fishery ended on December 31<sup>st</sup>. Preliminary harvest is 88% of the adjusted commercial quota of 260,409 pounds.
- Scup: Winter II harvest ended on December 31<sup>st</sup>. Preliminary harvest for the coast is 34% of the adjusted quota. NJ accounts for 16% of those landings with 364,210 pounds.
- Spiny dogfish: Current harvest is 58% of the 2021/22 commercial quota, 1,307,554 pounds landed through December. The commercial season runs through April.
- Staff issued a mailing to commercial blue crab pot/trotline and Delaware Bay license holders regarding the new transferability lottery. Calls on the regulatory update are being received by staff as they come in.
- Staff issues an email to those who are apart of the listserv on the regulatory changes that were implemented December 20, 2021. The email included links to view the regulation changes and a summary of those changes both found on the New Jersey state website.
- **For-Hire Telephone Survey-FHTS**
  - 210 vessels were drawn for the entire month. ~81 vessels were successfully contacted resulting in a response rate of ~39%. December continues to have a lower response rate due to the reporting complications that come with the holiday season.
  - Staff made an Average of 3 calls per vessel, resulting in ~630 calls for the month.
  - Staff began organizing the yearly vessel directory update list. Each vessel will be looked over for updates regarding the 2022 sampling year.
- **NJ Saltwater Recreational Registry Program-NJSRRP/Volunteer Angler Survey-VAS**
  - As of December 31, 2021, there were 143,704 individuals and 745 for-hire vessels registered for 2021 with the New Jersey Saltwater Recreational Registry Program (NJSRRP) and 2654 individuals and 29 for-hire vessels pre-registered for 2022. (Last month: November 30, 2021, there were 143,191 individuals and 739 for-hire vessels registered for 2021).
- **Striped Bass Bonus Program-SBBP**
  - The 2021 SBBP closed December 31, 2021. The public was notified via social media posts, a listserv message, and updates to the webpage. In 2021, staff issued 11,652 permits to 11,273 individual anglers. Additionally, 147 party/charter boats were issued permits. Harvest reports are still being processed however, the current 2021 bonus harvest is 35,930 lbs. from 5,542 fish, which represents 16.6% of the quota. Party/charter boats harvested 4,600 fish and individual anglers harvested 942 fish. Lastly, staff began processing logbooks that have been returned to the Division.

## OUTREACH

- The final portions of the Marine Digest which get updated annually were sent to the editor on December 2. Marine Fisheries staff is currently awaiting feedback on everything that was submitted over the past three months.
- The Delaware River seine survey website article was reorganized to fit the new website template. In addition, an article about the glass eel and yellow eel surveys was created. Both will be posted to the new Division website during 2022.

## ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS

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- **Climate Change**

- Staff participated in a meeting with the BSF on December 17 to discuss blue carbon and how oyster shell planting and SAV management might support the Department's goals for mitigating climate change.

- **Wind Energy**

- In December, staff attended a series of gear-specific stakeholder meetings held by BOEM to inform a draft Fisheries Mitigation Guidance Document December 1, 2, 6, 14).
  - This document is a response to requests from a number of cooperating states, including New Jersey for the federal government to address the need for regional collaboration on fisheries compensation.
  - Staff continue to attend as many offshore wind fishery stakeholder meetings as possible to understand the perspective of commercial and recreational fisheries and to be informed by their knowledge and experience. Industry comments were summarized for the Office of Permitting and Project Navigation to be used to prepare formal comments for BOEM.
- Staff continued to work on the New Jersey Research and Monitoring Initiative (RMI).
  - The process for the RMI to identify and fund critical research was developed. This will include an initial concept sketch, peer-review from academic, federal, and regional partners, and final proposal review prior to distribution of funds. Note that no studies have received final authorization yet. Funding decisions will be made by the RMI Steering Committee, which is composed of three members each from the Department and the BPU.
  - Studies that meet research priorities and require data pre-construction continued to be developed.
    - Two fisheries projects will be among the first to be funded, a novel surfclam dredge and a socio-economic study of recreational fisheries. Staff have been closely involved in development of these projects since the spring of 2020.
    - Several other collaborations and original research projects are at earlier stages, including membership in the Regional Wildlife Science Entity, passive acoustic monitoring for large whales, turbine-mounted ocean sensing, glider-mounted ocean sensing, a regional data housing platform, and a GIS-based tool for visualizing the spatial extent of offshore wind research and monitoring. Internal meetings and meetings with potential principal investigators were held on December 2, 8, 14, 15, 21, 22.
- Staff continued to participate in regional planning meetings for offshore wind, including:
  - Interstate OSW Fisheries call December 3.
  - A 2022 planning meeting for the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority's Environmental Technical Working Group on December 9.
  - The first meeting of the RWSE Marine Mammal Subcommittee meeting on December 10.
  - The Mid Atlantic Fisheries Management Council update on offshore wind on December 13.
  - The Responsible Offshore Science Alliance Advisory Committee meeting on December 20.
  - A planning meeting for a 2022 passive acoustic monitoring workshop on December 20.
    - A discussion with NYSERDA E-TWG and F-TWG leads on December 21 regarding a NJ/NY collaboration on our 2022 OREC solicitation requirements; the potential for including some requirement for turbine-mounted ocean sensing equipment is an opportunity we will pursue.
- Staff continued to participate in offshore wind planning within the Department, including:
  - Monthly Internal Offshore Wind Meeting on December 8
  - Environmental Resources Working Group Meeting, which was held on December 20. Staff assisted with meeting planning.

## **ADMINISTRATION/MISCELLANEOUS**

- **Regulatory/Legislative**

- Notice of Administrative Changes (NOAC):

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- A NOAC to modify commercial black sea bass and summer flounder trip limits for the 2022 fishing year was filed with the Office of Administrative Law on December 25, 2021 (DEP file no. R21-053) for publication in the February 7, 2022.
- A NOAC to modify the reporting requirements for the tautog commercial fishery was filed with the Office of Administrative Law on December 25, 2021 (DEP file no. R21-054) for publication in the February 7, 2022.
- Rulemakings
  - The Menhaden Multispecies Rulemaking Adoption was published in the NJ Register on December 20, 2021, making effective the included new rules and amendments governing Crab and Lobster Management, Marine Fisheries and Fishery Management in NJ. Notifications were handled as follows:
    - A copy of the published Adoption was posted on the Division's website.
    - All subscribers to the Division's Marine Fishing listserv received an email announcing the new rules now in effect.
    - A summary of the new commercial crab license transferability rules was posted on the Divisions website.
    - A letter explaining the commercial crab license transferability rules and lottery process was sent to all Crab Pot/Trot Line and Delaware Bay Dredge License holders.
  - The MFA rule team is drafting a new rulemaking proposal to amend N.J.A.C. 7:25-18.1(p) to include "gear types and gear restrictions" within the list of provisions authorized to be changed by notice to meet ASMFC Atlantic Coastal Sharks Board requirement to use non-offset, corrodible, non-stainless steel circle hooks when fishing for sharks recreationally in state waters, except when fishing with flies or artificial lures.
  - 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.
- Legislative Activity
  - A6096 – Eliminates prohibition against taking shellfish on Sunday for commercial shellfish aquaculture producers. Introduced and referred to Assembly Agriculture Committee on 12/2/2021, AAN Committee meeting on 12/9/2021.
  - A5531; S3501 – Exempts certain commercial fishermen from coverage under "unemployment compensation law." Passed in Assembly and sent to Governor 68-0-0 on 12/20/2021.
  - S4097; A6094 – Extends Right to Farm Act protections to certain aquaculture activities. Introduced and referred to Senate Economic Growth Committee on 11/12/2021; Introduced and referred to Assembly Agriculture Committee 12/2/2021, Reported out of Committee, 2nd reading in Assembly on 12/9/2021.
  - A6095; S4267 – Directs Department of Agriculture to advertise and promote State aquaculture products through Jersey Fresh Program; establishes annual \$100,000 appropriation; appropriates \$100,000. Introduced and referred to Assembly Agriculture Committee, reported out of committee, 2nd reading in Assembly; Introduced and referred to Senate Environment and Energy Committee on 12/9/2021.
  - A6096 – Eliminates prohibition against taking shellfish on Sunday for commercial shellfish aquaculture producers. Introduced and referred to Assembly Agriculture Committee on 12/2/2021, Reported out of committee, 2nd reading in Assembly on 12/9/2021.
  - A6147; S4085 – Exempts commercial shellfish producers from prohibition on taking shellfish on Sunday. Introduced and referred to Assembly Agriculture Committee on 12/6/2021.

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- S4148; A6212 - Appropriates \$54.5 million from constitutionally dedicated CBT revenues for recreation and conservation purposes to DEP for State capital and park development projects. Reported out of Senate Environment and Energy Committee, 2nd reading in Senate on 12/9/2021; Passed in Assembly 72-0-0 on 12/20/2021.
- S4152; A6215 – Appropriates \$14,687,510 to DEP from constitutionally dedicated CBT revenues for grants to certain nonprofit entities to acquire or develop lands for recreation and conservation purposes. Reported out of committee, 2nd reading in Senate on 12/9/2021; Passed in Assembly 69-0-0 on 12/20/2021.
- A6213; S4155 – Appropriates \$49.932 million from constitutionally dedicated CBT revenues to DEP for State acquisition of lands for recreation and conservation purposes, including Blue Acres projects, and Green Acres Program administrative costs. Passed in Assembly 72-0-0 on 12/20/2021; Reported out of committee, 2nd reading in Senate on 12/9/2021.
- A6214; S4153 – Appropriates \$80,539,578 from constitutionally dedicated CBT revenues and various Green Acres funds to DEP for local government open space acquisition and park development projects. Passed in Assembly 69-0-0; Reported out of committee, 2nd reading in Senate on 12/9/2021.
- Congressional Activity
  - S1747 – Fluke Fairness Act of 2021: To provide for an equitable management of summer flounder based on geographic, scientific, and economic data, and for other purposes. Reported out of Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation and Placed on Senate Legislative Calendar on 12/17/2021.
  - S1289; HR2848 – Marine Mammal Research and Response Act of 2021: To amend the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 to reauthorize and modify the John H. Prescott Marine Mammal Rescue Assistance Grant Program, and for other purposes. Reported out of Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation and Placed on Senate Legislative Calendar on 12/17/2021.
  - HR3128; S497 – American Fisheries Advisory Committee Act: To establish the American Fisheries Advisory Committee to assist in the awarding of fisheries research and development grants, and for other purposes. Reported without amendment by Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation and Placed on Senate Legislative Calendar on 12/17/2021.
  - HR6258 – AQUAA Act: To establish a regulatory system for sustainable offshore aquaculture in the United States exclusive economic zone, and for other purposes. Introduced on 12/14/2021, referred to the Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation on 12/15/2021.
  - HR3702; S1995 – Sport Fish Restoration and Recreational Boating Safety Act of 2021: To amend the Dingell-Johnson Sport fish Restoration Act with respect to Sport fish restoration and recreational boating safety, and for other purposes. Placed on Senate Legislative Calendar 12/17/2021.
  - S1894; HR3817 – Regional Ocean Partnership Act: This bill allows the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to designate and support Regional Ocean Partnerships between coastal states that share a common ocean or coastal area. Placed on Senate Legislative Calendar 12/17/2021.
- **Scientific Collection Permits**
  - Sixty-five scientific collecting permits have been issued for 2021 and one for 2022. The application was updated for 2022 and renewal reminders were sent to all 2021 permit holders.
- **HOT TOPICS/Miscellaneous**

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- The Marine Fisheries Administration donated \$200 to the local Community FoodBank of New Jersey. Through an anonymous triple-match donor, this donation became \$600 which will provide 1,800 meals to those in need!
- The Marine Fisheries Administration has completed acquiring equipment for eDNA filtration. This equipment will allow for the removal of DNA from water samples that can then be sent to labs for sequencing and analysis. The resulting information can indicate the presence of fish and invertebrates in an area that may not be detectable by traditional sampling methods.

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

#### **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. The committee is also identifying and reviewing all current MFA webpages and constructing a spreadsheet with suggested plans for each page (keep, file for reference, delete, archive).
- **New Jersey Seafood Finder 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.

#### **Meetings**

- Staff attended a webinar entitled “Mid-Atlantic Storm Risk Studies: Sharing SAV/Benthic Science & Data”.
- **Atlantic Coast Section of the NJ Shellfisheries Council – Special Joint Meeting of the Lease Policy and Regulatory Committees**
  - The Atlantic Coast Section of the NJ Shellfisheries Council held a special joint meeting of the Lease Policy and Regulatory Committee on December 1, 2021 (virtual meeting). Bureau of Shellfisheries staff reviewed Committee discussion questions with a main focus on lease utilization. The goal was to broaden discussion by bringing in additional industry members in the Regulatory Committee. There was general consensus among Committee members that a minimum threshold could be developed in order to be considered an “active member” of the shellfish aquaculture industry. Details of what that would include was a topic of discussion for future meetings. Bureau staff and the Committee are working to develop Committee summary report to present to Council based on these discussions.

#### **Surveys/Laboratory**

- **Mullica River Oyster Seed Bed Monitoring**
  - Staff collected oyster samples during the Bureau’s annual oyster seed bed monitoring program for the Mullica River. This monitoring program qualitatively evaluates seed bed condition by collecting information on ratios of live oysters to cultch (shell), numbers of adult oysters, numbers of oyster spat, and dead oysters. The results of the monitoring, along with a comparison of prior years, will be available soon and presented to the Atlantic Coast Shellfisheries Council at the January 2022 meeting. In addition to the data the Bureau collects, adult oysters are sent to the Rutgers University Haskin Shellfish lab for pathology analysis,

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where common shellfish diseases and parasites are identified by Rutgers staff. That report, when available, will also be provided to the Council.

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

- **Shell Recycling Program**
  - Staff continues to coordinate with Shell Recycling Program participants for weekly shell pickups.
- Staff developed a response with other MFA staff to a survey developed by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) regarding restorative Aquaculture. The survey was intended to help inform the direction of future project considerations for TNC, similar to that of Supporting Oyster Aquaculture & Restoration (SOAR). Staff will be compiling more detailed comments in January to send to TNC outside of the survey format.
- Staff along with other MFA staff developed a summary document outlining the Supporting Oyster Aquaculture & Restoration (SOAR) and NJ Sea Grant Aquaculture Exchange. The document summarizes both programs and how they operated, as well as findings upon an investigation of the plant sites one-year post-planting.
- **Living Shorelines and Habitat Projects**
  - Staff reviewed and compiled comments from MFA's Environmental Review Group on a proposed living shoreline in Lanyard lagoon in Tuckerton. The project intends to create a 145 linear foot rock barrier in an attempt to slow tidal currents and allow for renewed silt accumulation on the marsh. Staff advised that there are commercial shellfish aquaculture leases within close proximity to the project site and requested a 30-day written notice to leaseholders via certified mail prior to work beginning. Additionally, staff noted that Triton marine mattresses were proposed as a base for the rock barrier and advised that the MFA prefers to reduce the addition of plastics into the marine environment as much as possible and that the use of alternative materials are encouraged where feasible.
  - Staff reviewed and compiled comments from MFA's Environmental Review Group on the proposed Atlantic City dredging project. The project aims to dredge the navigable waterways of Atlantic City. Staff provided the necessary timing restrictions and the determinations regarding shellfish habitat.
  - Staff reviewed and compiled comments from MFA's Environmental Review Group on a proposed modification to the existing permit for groin maintenance/ replacement work in Bayhead. The project intends to replace previously installed timber groins with rock groins. Staff provided comments on fishing access being permissible post-installation and recommended using alternatives to the plastics proposed (geotextile fabric) for the base of the rock groin.
  - Staff reviewed and provided comments to DLRP staff on several waterfront development permit applications. These applications include:
    - Request from NJDOT to relax timing restrictions given on an existing permit for Manahawkin Bay Bridges. The initial permit had a timing restriction in place for Anadromous I and winter flounder. Staff provided feedback that the winter flounder restriction could be eased for this project but requested that the Anadromous I restriction remain in effect.
    - Staff provided feedback to DLRP staff regarding a map interpretation concerning oyster seed production areas in Cedar Creek/ Barnegat Bay. Staff informed DLRP that this was no longer considered habitat in the area in question. Staff will notify DLRP if this area is once again considered habitat in the future.
    - Staff provided feedback to a project lead for a boat ramp expansion project in Seaside Heights that is in the Pre-App phase. The applicant was seeking clarification regarding

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potential SAV being present in the project footprint. Staff informed the applicant that an SAV investigation will be necessary this Spring.

## Aquaculture and Shellfish Leases

- **Shellfish Aquaculture Working Group – Commercial Shellfish Aquaculture Website Committee**
  - Bureau of Shellfisheries staff and representatives from various agencies involved in commercial shellfish aquaculture permitting, regulations, and outreach continue to work on finalizing the NJ Commercial Shellfish Aquaculture website design and content.
- **2022 Shellfish Lease Renewal Period**
  - The 2022 shellfish lease renewal period started October 15th, 2021. The renewal process was being done through the mail due to the shellfish offices being closed to the public. The Bureau of Shellfisheries mailed each leaseholder their lease renewal package prior to October 15th. This package included the lease renewal document(s), application for the 2022 commercial shellfish license and other documents that must be signed for renewal.
  - Each leaseholder must mail in their complete application prior to the deadline of December 31st. The leaseholder must complete and sign the lease renewal documents along with a check for the lease fees, lessee renewal fee and commercial shellfish license fee to the respective section office.
  - All leaseholders that wanted to renew their leases had their paperwork postmarked by December 31, 2021 and were renewed.
- **NJEMS Shellfish Lease Development**
  - Staff continue to provide data, testing, and feedback on the development of incorporating the leasing database into the NJEMS program. Staff is also working with the Bureau of GIS to allow GIS to input data directly into the NJEMS system.

## State Fisheries and Quota Management

- **Direct Market Harvest Program**
  - Bureau staff proofed and reviewed the call in and weekly harvest reports, along with the dealer reports.
  - 116,194 of the 116,320 bushel (bu.) quota were harvested by the industry.
  - 27,371 bu. were harvested from the Medium Mortality region which closed on 10/1/21.
  - 42,033 bu. were harvested from the Shell Rock region which closed on 7/29/21.
  - 46,790 bu. were harvested from the High Mortality region which temporarily closed on 7/26/21 and reopened on 10/1/21 until the last day of harvest.
  - The season closed as scheduled on 11/26/21, although the last day of reported harvest was on 11/19/21.
  - 80% of the harvest occurred off three beds from the three different management regions, which were:
    - 42,033 bu. from Shell Rock at 36% of total harvest
    - 28,254 bu. from Nantuxent at 24%
    - 23,611 bu. from Ship John at 20%
- **Delaware Bay Oyster Tonging Fishery**
  - As of 12/31/21, the total reported harvest was approximately 830 bushels, with just over 700 bushels from Nantuxent Cove.
  - There were 1,200 tags sold across nine tongers, and based off harvest reports there were eight tongers actively harvesting.
- **Hard Clam Management Plan Development**
  - Supervisory staff met to begin earnest discussions on the development and path forward for the State's first ever hard clam management plan. The plan development will require contributions

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from multiple staff members. A kick-off meeting with all involved staff is planned for early January.

- Staff had previously raised the intention to the Atlantic Coast Shellfisheries Council, including a brief outline of major components of the plan. The Council has requested regular updates on the plan's development, along with inclusion of Council and/or industry stakeholder input. One Council member asked to meet with Bureau staff after the outline was presented, and that meeting took place in mid-December. The Council member expressed approval of the main plan elements, and commented on points or elements that he believed were critical and in need of emphasis. Bureau staff found the feedback helpful and look forward to a cooperative engagement with the Council.

- **GIS Development of Shellfish and SAV Data**

- Staff met with Division GIS staff to assess the status of current shellfish and SAV GIS projects and determine next steps. This has been an on-going project since 2019, and involves the development of GIS layers of historical and current data, along with new or improved methods for mapping resources with this software going forward. The data are critical elements of many internal and external programs: waterfront development permit review, aquaculture lease siting, shellfish enhancement planning (including for the shell recycling program), beneficial use of dredge materials, and others. To date, both staff and the public are reliant on paper copies (or digital scans thereof) of all data sources, which is an outdated and inefficient way of viewing the data and incorporating it into planning endeavors. The GIS based versions will significantly improve the way the Department and the public (applicants, non-profits, federal agencies) understand and use the data.

### **Buildings, Grounds, Vessels, and Vehicles**

- **Boat Maintenance**

- Bureau staff continue to maintain the R/V James W. Joseph and R/V Zephyrus by performing regular maintenance, repairs, and equipment upgrades as necessary.

### **Administrative/Miscellaneous**

- **License Sales**

- License sales for the Delaware Bay Office were \$40,169.74. in December 2021. Lease fees made up about 49% of sales between assignment and lease fees since lease renewals were being finalized. Other revenue included tonging tags and licenses and permits being renewed for 2021 and 2022.