

Marine Fisheries Administration Monthly Report

May 2021

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****MARINE FISHERIES****

ASMFC/MAFMC/COOP/NOAA

- The annual compliance report for tautog was submitted to ASMFC on May 1. Commercial landings totaled 1,941 pounds in 2020, the lowest annual total in the time series extending back to 1950. Recreational harvest (A+B1) totaled just over 1 million pounds, in line with the average annual harvest since the implementation of current regulations in 2018.
- Striped Bass Circle Hook Requirement Outreach Campaign: Another round of social media and listserv messages were sent out to increase awareness and compliance with the new circle hook requirement during the peak striped bass fishing months of May and June. In addition, 10,000 flyers have been distributed since fall 2020.
- Staff have begun preparation for the 2022 bluefish research track assessment by working with NEFSC staff to select candidate working group members and draft timelines. The previous peer reviewed assessment, conducted in 2015, showed that the stock was not overfished and overfishing was not occurring. Stock status changed in 2018 with incorporation of calibrated MRIP data. If approved for management, the 2022 review will form the basis of management on the east coast of the US.
- Staff started drafting the shad and river herring compliance reports for the 2020 fishing year. The annual compliance reports for these species is due on July 1.

MEETING SUMMARIES

- **Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission-ASMFC (TC, SAS, Boards)**
 - The Red Drum Stock Assessment Subcommittee (SAS) and Technical Committee (TC) met via webinar on May 12th so that the SAS could get feedback from the TC about what quantities to pull from each model (both simulation and estimation) to compare performance evaluation.
 - The Striped Bass Plan Development Team (PDT) met on May 27, 2021 to discuss the development of Draft Amendment 7. Four issues will be addressed in the Draft Amendment including: Conservation Equivalency, Management Triggers, Recreational Release Mortality, and Measures to Protect the 2015 Year Class. PDT members discussed possible options that could be included in the Draft Amendment including suggested options provided by the Striped Bass Board and from input received from public comment.
 - Administration staff participated in a call of ASMFC's Assessment Science Committee. Major highlights from the call included updates on ongoing assessments and issues encountered therein as well as an update on the stock assessment schedule for 2021-2024.
 - Staff presented to the ASMFC Shad and River Herring Board on May 5th in regards to a host of issues including updated state shad habitat plans for several states that the TC reviewed for Board approval, a guidance document that the TC drafted as tasked by the Board at a previous meeting for implementing requirements to Amendments 2 & 3 of the Shad Plan, and presented a letter for Board approval to be sent to regulatory agencies with jurisdiction over fish passage at hydro energy facilities, which the Board approved. The Board tasked the TC with developing a list of dams/impediments along the coast that would benefit the most from removal or requiring fish passage efficiency targets to be required for operation.
 - Staff participated in a conference call on May 14th with the working group tasked by the Shad and RH board with developing Potential Methods for Evaluating Mixed-Stock Fishery Bycatch and ways to mitigate any impacts that out a basin might have on river specific stocks. This was the first call for this group where we went over the available data submitted by states with mixed stock fisheries and/or relevant data for this task and brain stormed ideas on how to use this data for modeling efforts and informing management. Staff will be conducting a literature review to look at whether or not

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other mixed stock fisheries have been successfully evaluated and if those methods will be applicable to the current task.

- Staff participated in a conference call on May 21 with ASMFC staff and the vice chair of the Shad and River Herring TC to start work on the task assigned to the TC from the last Board meeting. The task is for the TC to prioritize rivers and impoundments along the coast that will benefit from improved shad passage efficiency. We chose to make a database of FERC regulated hydropower dams on shad rivers with upcoming FERC license renewals between now and the next 10 years. This list has been finalized and will be sent out to TC members from all the states to select which rivers/hydropower facilities should be prioritized for fish passage efficiency evaluation and improvement.
- **Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council-MAFMC**
 - The Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish (MSB) Monitoring Committee met on May 19th to develop recommendations on Butterfish, Longfin squid and Illex squid fisheries. It was decided that no changes will be recommended to the SSC for Butterfish, Longfin Squid or Illex Squid for 2022.
- **Miscellaneous**
 - Staff was tasked with scoring Delaware Watershed Conservation Fund grant proposals for funding in FY2022. After scoring was complete staff participated in a webinar on May 25 with the grant administering staff to go over the scored proposals and rank the middle of the road proposals to see which ones should be funded and which ones should not be. The winning grants should receive their funding sometime in late summer/early fall.

INDEPENDENT FISHERIES

- **Delaware Bay Tagging**
 - The Delaware Bay Tagging Survey has completed fieldwork for 2021. During 15 trips in March & April, 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. One striped bass was recaptured and reported to the US Fish & Wildlife Service. The boat was pulled from the water on May 6th.
- **Delaware River Seine Survey**
 - The Delaware River seine survey will not start on time this year due to COVID 19 restrictions and concerns. A safety protocol to begin the survey on August 1 will be submitted for consideration in June.
- **Herring Surveys**
 - Staff continue to research possible candidate streams for remotely deploying the electronic fish counter in 2022.
 - Quotes have been received from Chestnut Neck Marina for some work to be done on the new herring skiff in order to make it ready for future field work including moving cleats around and mountings the transducer and gimbal for the fishfinder/GPS.
 - Staff reviewed the Threats and Actions section of the Northeast Regional Species of Greatest Conservation Need Plan for river herring and both sturgeon species. Submitted comments and suggestions to improve the table and the information contained within it.
- **Sturgeon Receivers**
 - Staff successfully hauled and deployed all of the sturgeon receivers on May 18th. So far this year there have been a total of 7076 tag detections representing a total of 49 individual Atlantic sturgeons, 1 sand tiger shark, 6 striped striped bass, and 98 unidentified tags.

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- Staff drafted and submitted new funding proposal for the sturgeon receiver project as the previous grant that funded these activities was not awarded to the MFA for FY2022

DEPENDENT FISHERIES

- **Access Point Angler Intercept Survey-AP AIS**
 - The draw for May consisted of 151 site assignments, 28 of which are add on assignments for 2021. These site based assignments yielded a total of 524 intercepts (214 SH, 77 CH, 233 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.
 - May mileage is being validated and submitted for reimbursement.
 - New Hire paperwork has been completed and submitted for seven new hourly field technicians.
 - Fishdump data from May were reviewed.
- **For-Hire Telephone Survey-FHTS**
 - May draw included 310 vessels, 184 of which were interviewed. This resulted in a response rate of 59% which is higher than the 51% response rate for May 2020.
 - Each vessel had an average call amount of 3.5, resulting in staff conducting 1,085 phone calls for the month of May.
 - The vessel directory continues to be updated as new information is gathered from the captains.
 - Staff attended a webinar hosted by ACCSP going over new vessel directory update procedures.
- **NJ Saltwater Recreational Registry Program-NJSRRP/Volunteer Angler Survey-VAS**
 - As of May 28, 2021, there were 86,676 individuals and 604 for-hire vessels registered for 2021 with the New Jersey Saltwater Recreational Registry Program (NJSRRP). (Last month: April 30, 2021, there were 64,897 individuals and 521 for-hire vessels for 2021).
- **Striped Bass Bonus Program-SBBP**
 - The 2021 Striped Bass Bonus Program opened on May 15, 2021. A listserv message was sent and the webpage was updated. Staff have issued 7,576 permits and received over 7,664 applications from individual anglers. 118 party/charter boats are enrolled in the SBBP. The current 2021 bonus harvest is 1,615 lbs. from 227 fish. Party/charter boats have harvested 128 fish and individual anglers have harvested 99 fish.
- **Tournament Sampling**
 - Staff resumed sampling at fishing tournaments in accordance with the Division's Return-To-Field COVID protocols. During two sampling days in May, 8 striped bass were measured and weighed. Scales were taken from all striped bass. Many fishing tournaments continue to be cancelled or postponed due to COVID-19.

OUTREACH

- Staff submitted a narrated presentation on horseshoe crabs to the Green Eggs and Sand Virtual Workshop conducted by NJ Fish and Wildlife from May 7th through June 3rd. This workshop series is designed to inform middle school and high school educators about issues concerning horseshoe crabs, migratory shorebirds and their inter-relationships.
- The 2021 Marine Digest is now available in stores and on the Division website:
<https://www.njfishandwildlife.com/digmar.htm>

ADMINISTRATION/MISCELLANEOUS

- **Regulatory/Legislative**

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- 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 reviewed the draft NOAC, and it's currently under review at the Governor's Office as of June 4, 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. The adoption document will include non-substantial, technical changes to the proposed striped bass circle hook requirement, specifically, the ASMFC revised definition of "natural bait."
 - 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
 - S3501 – Exempts certain commercial fishermen from coverage under "unemployment compensation law." Referred to Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee on 5/6/2021.
 - Senate voted to approve Shawn M. LaTourette to replace Catherine McCabe as Commissioner of the DEP on 6/3/2021.
- Congressional Activity
 - S497/HR3128 – A bill to establish the American Fisheries Advisory Committee to assist in the awarding of fisheries research and development grants, and for other purposes. Ordered to reported out of Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation on 5/12/2021.
 - 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 environments. Passed House on 5/18/2021, received in Senate and referred to Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation on 5/19/2021.
 - HR3075 – To address seafood slavery and combat illegal, unreported, or unregulated fishing, and for other purposes. Introduced and referred to Committee on Natural Resources on 5/11/2021. Referred to Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation on 5/12/2021.
 - HR3360 – A bill to amend and enhance the High Seas Driftnet Fishing Moratorium Protection Act to improve the conservation of sharks. Introduced in House and referred to Committee on Natural Resources on 5/19/2021.
- **Scientific Collection Permits**

Fifty-two scientific collecting permits have been issued in 2021. One additional application is currently incomplete and will be processed upon receipt of all required documentation.

****SHELLFISHERIES****

Offshore Wind Development

- Staff attended the Third Annual Mid-Atlantic Ocean Forum May 3-6. The virtual event featured expert panel discussions on ocean planning issues including offshore wind energy in the Mid-Atlantic, climate-induced ocean changes, ocean justice, and emerging technologies for monitoring the ocean.
- Staff presented offshore wind updates to the Delaware Bay Shellfisheries Council at their May 4 meeting and the NJ Marine Fisheries Council at the May 13 meeting.

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- At the request of COS Rosenblatt, a team was assembled to draft an Offshore Wind Policy document for the Department, led by the Office of Land Resource Protection and including staff from the MFA. That team met on May 13 and began discussing content to include in the Policy. Staff prepared an outline of the role and responsibilities of the MFA, resources that may be impacted by offshore wind, a description of those impacts, and applicable rules.
- Staff participated in the New York Fisheries Technical Working Group meeting on May 13. Mitigation and compensation for fisheries was discussed, along with the need for better communication to stakeholders and coordination of compensation. This topic was discussed further with Morgan Brunbauer, the Fisheries lead for NYSERDA on May 20, and communicated to the Commissioner's Office.
- Staff participated in the monthly Department Internal Offshore Wind meeting on May 12. Topics discussed are covered in these highlights.
- Staff continued to work on the NJ Offshore Wind Research and Monitoring Initiative. The Department has partnered with the Board of Public Utilities to plan this Initiative, which is intended to address knowledge gaps in effects on fish, wildlife, and fisheries, and is funded through the OREC Solicitation 2. Meetings were held on May 5 and 25. Staff provided the group with a draft decision tree for identification of Resources of Concern, and a draft list of Resources of Concern. The option of using a contractor to do the bulk of this work was discussed.
- Staff continued to participate in early meetings with potential applicants for the Offshore Wind Transmission Study Comparison of Options. Meetings were held with PSEG on May 6 and Don Brickner on May 18.
- Staff continued to participate in permitting coordination meetings with Orsted and Atlantic Shores Offshore Wind (ASOW). Regarding ASOW, staff learned that the Site Assessment Plan was approved by BOEM in April, and that ASOW is planning open houses for the first week in July, is working with the USCG to better understand navigational risks, and continues to work with Daphne Munroe (Rutgers) on a research study for surfclam. On May 11, staff participated in a meeting between Ocean Wind and the Department regarding the Island Beach State Park cable crossing. Minimizing impacts to visitors resulting from a road closure was discussed. AC Bukowski was present.
- Staff participated in weekly check-in calls on offshore wind with the Commissioner's Office.
- Staff continued to participate in monthly Offshore Wind Interstate Fisheries calls. On May 7, the group discussed the New York Bight Intergovernmental task force meeting and the letter from the Responsible Offshore Development Alliance and their refusal to attend, South Fork wind updates, and state updates.
- The MFA Wind Energy Team met on May 10. Staff continued their work understanding potential impacts to marine resources and potential avenues for mitigation. Topics discussed at this meeting included the Federal Consistency review for Ocean Wind, the new Prime Fishing Area layer for shore-based fishing, and scoping the problem for adapting our Ocean Trawl for construction and post-construction of windfarms.
- Staff supported the Office of Permitting and Project Navigation regarding a request from a scientist from Montclair University to discuss the Department collaborating on a recreational fisheries study for offshore wind. Staff reviewed a very general research proposal and met with the PI on May 17 and internally on May 18.
- Staff attended the New York Environmental Technical Working Group's State of the Science Culmination webinar on May 21. Subgroups reported on their progress identifying research priorities for Stratification, Fishes and Aquatic Invertebrates, Benthos, Sea Turtles, Bats, Birds, and Marine Mammals.
- Staff spoke with Kevin Wark regarding offshore wind on May 24.
- Following up on the initial April 29 meeting, staff established a working group and monthly meetings for surfclam research needs and progress.

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- The group was assembled to inform coordination with developers, the Responsible Offshore Science Alliance, and our NJ Offshore Wind Research and Monitoring Initiative.
- Members of the group include staff from MFA, Division of Land Resources, the Office of Permitting and Project Navigation, Land Resource Protection, the Division of Science and Research, NOAA Greater Atlantic Fisheries Office, NYSERDA Fisheries Technical Working Group, Rutgers Department of Marine and Coastal Sciences, and Tom Dameron, Board member of RODA and surfclam and ocean quahog advisor to the Mid Atlantic Fisheries Management Council.
- Staff met with Daphne Munroe in advance of the group meeting on May 28. The abundance and distribution of surfclam in the lease areas was identified as a high-priority research need.
- Staff communicated with the Division of Science and Research and the Commissioner's Office to discuss funding construction of a novel surfclam dredge to survey lease areas for both recruiting stock and fishable stock. Staff also met with the NYSERDA Fisheries lead May 20 to discuss funding this project.

MFA Outreach, Education, and Communications

- **MFA Website Committee**
 - The MFA Website Committee met to discuss the DFW website draft wireframe. Committee members continue to work on updating and creating content for various MFA webpages.
- **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.

Nantuxent Creek Dredging Project

- The Division of Land Resource Protection permit 0604-21-0001.1 LUP210001 and the Department of the Army permit NAP-2020-00403-95 were both transferred to NJDOT Office of Maritime Resources in May 2021.
- NJDOT put the dredging project out for contractor bids in early May 2021 and expect them to be received by 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

- **Atlantic Coast Lease Policy Committee Meeting**
 - On May 13, 2021, staff hosted an Atlantic Coast Leasing Policy Committee meeting. Committee members were tasked to submit ideas on how to address lease utilization, allocation, and transferability prior to the meeting for open discussion. The next Lease Policy Committee meeting is to be determined.
- **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 and review the NJ Commercial Shellfish Aquaculture website design and content.
- **Aquaculture Development Zone Hazard Buoys**

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- Staff is undergoing the procurement process for maintaining the buoys demarcating the ADZs.
- **GIS-Based Tool for Spatial Planning and Management of Shellfish Aquaculture in NJ: Shellfish Aquaculture Technical Advisory Group (TAG)**
 - Bureau staff attended the Shellfish Aquaculture Technical Advisory Group (TAG) meeting on May 24, 2021 remotely through a video conference call. With support from the National Sea Grant program, a team of Rutgers University researchers, in partnership with the Marine Fisheries Administration, is using geospatial tools to weigh and analyze data about conditions affecting shellfish production to develop an interactive tool that can identify areas of suitability for shellfish aquaculture in New Jersey. The TAG is comprised of members including scientists, data hosts, and analytical experts that will advise Rutgers and NJDEP on the use of science, data and analytical methods. Rutgers staff presented the current status of the GIS tool and took comments from TAG members on potential data layers that could support this tool.

Surveys/Laboratory

- **Estuarine Inventory – Hard Clam Stock Assessment of Sandy Hook Bay**
 - Staff completed the Estuarine Inventory (Hard Clam Stock Assessment) of Sandy Hook Bay. The survey took 11 days to complete over a 4-week timeframe.
 - The survey focuses on the density and relative distribution of hard clams within Sandy Hook Bay proper, which is considered to be from the east side of the pier at Naval Weapons Stations Earle to the inside of the Sandy Hook peninsula.
 - The Navy granted special permission to sample within the pier's security zone. The Leonardo State Marina provided dock access.
 - Sediment samples conducted during the survey will be processed for grain size, which is used with density data to help understand habitat suitability. The data will be analyzed and a report will be generated that includes results such as total stock, size class/length frequency distribution, and relative density distribution of the resource throughout the bay.
- **Delaware Bay Trawl Survey**
 - Staff sampled all 11 sites on 5/7 and 5/13 for the 2021 survey while utilizing COVID protocols. Staff digitized the data sheets to be entered into the 2021 database.
- **BioSonics MX Habitat Echosounder**
 - Staff coordinated with BioSonics staff to host an online training for Bureau staff on the recently purchased BioSonics unit. The training was recorded and can be reviewed by staff at any time.
 - Staff test ran the BioSonics unit. The unit performed well, and it will be used specifically to map SAV beds in the coming months. Staff was able to fine tune settings and go over collected data with BioSonics technical support staff.
- **Dermo Disease Monitoring**
 - Staff successfully sampled oysters from the Delaware Bay seed beds to monitor the oyster disease dermo on 5/17. Staff worked with Rutgers Haskin Lab staff and utilized COVID safety protocols.
- **Shell Plant and Intermediate Transplant Site Monitoring**
 - Staff monitored enhancement sites from projects conducted by the Bureau from this year and the previous two years on 5/25. These sites include the Intermediate Transplant Program and the Shell Plant Program. Sampling will be conducted again towards the end of June. Staff worked with Rutgers Haskin Lab staff and utilized COVID safety protocols.

Waterfront Development, Permit, and Environmental Reviews

- MFA staff have reviewed and commented on the following waterfront development permit applications:
 - NJDOT maintenance dredging of Big Thorofare Channel

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- Maurice River Holdings – proposed marine service facility
- NJDOT maintenance dredging of Manasquan River

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 work 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 finalized text for GovDelivery messages, banners, 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.
- Staff reached out to Shell Recycling Program participating venues, and program partners on shell planting plans for this upcoming June. A finalized schedule will be established in the coming weeks.
- Staff coordinated with MFA outreach coordinator and Bureau of Information and Education staff on the production of a video and drone footage for the Shell Recycling Program collection process and planting process. Staff will have I&E staff join MFA staff for shell collection and planting in June.

• Living Shorelines

- Staff attended a virtual meeting on the American Littoral Society's Forked River Beach living shoreline project. Staff will continue to communicate with ALS staff as plans further develop.
- Staff gave a presentation to Division of Land Resource Protection on living shoreline projects as a part of MFA's Waterfront development guidance manual training.
- Staff provided comments to Office of Environmental Review staff on a proposed beach restoration project at Parkertown Beach in Little Egg Harbor Township. Staff requested that leaseholders within the project vicinity be notified of the proposed work.

Commercial Fisheries/Quota Management

• Atlantic Coast Section of the NJ Shellfish Council Meeting

- On May 17, 2021 the Atlantic Coast section of the Shellfisheries Council met to discuss items which included lease applications for consideration and transfer, an update on the Lease Policy Committee, hard clam management plan, the Aquaculture Development Plan (ADP), and membership on the Aquaculture Advisory Council (AAC). The next Council meeting will be held on July 19, 2021.

• Delaware Bay Section of the NJ Shellfish Council Meeting

- The Delaware Bay Section met on May 4, 2021 to discuss items which included lease ground transactions, and updates on the fisheries, Red Knot Stakeholder Committee, Nantuxent Channel dredging, Leasing Committee, Consolidation Committee, offshore wind energy, Intermediate Transplant Program, Aquaculture Advisory Council, and the Aquaculture Development Plan.

• Intermediate Transplant Program (ITP)

- Staff conducted and monitored the ITP from 5/3 to 5/14/2021 moving a total of 24,150 bushels of culled oysters and material.

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- There were 5,400 bushels moved from the Arnolds seed bed to the Shell Rock seed bed, and 18,750 bushels moved from Upper Middle, Middle, and Sea Breeze seed beds to the Nantuxent and Bennies seed beds.
- The ITP resulted in exploitation rate increases and transplant bushel additions to the quota totaling 26,501 bushels for a total final quota of 116,317 bushels.
- **Direct Market Harvest Program**
 - As of 6/3/21, the Direct Market Harvest Program had just over 45,000 bushels (~39%) harvested of the 116,320 bushel (bu.) quota.
 - Approximately 31,000 bu. (~69%) were harvested from the High mortality region, of which about 22,800 bu. (~74%) were harvested from the Nantuxent oyster bed.
 - Approximately 14,000 bu. (~31%) were harvested from the Shell Rock region.

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 completed the RFP for the new vessel to be purchased, and the RFP was posted for bid 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 \$48,724.00 in May 2021. Oyster dredge boat bushel tag sales made up about 98% of sales.