

Marine Fisheries Administration Monthly Report

JUNE 2021

Marine Fisheries Administration Staff:

Joseph Cimino, Administrator- MFA

Russell Babb, Chief - BSF

Jeffrey Brust, Chief - BMF

Heather Corbett, Supervising Biologist

Jeffrey Normant, Supervising Biologist

Michael Celestino, Research Scientist I

Colleen Brust, Research Scientist III

Kira Dacanay, Principal Biologist

Maryellen Gordon, Principal Biologist

Gregory Hinks, Principal Biologist

Craig Tomlin, Principal Biologist

Linda Barry, Senior Biologist

Peter Clarke, Senior Biologist

Brian Neilan, Senior Biologist

Jen Pyle, Senior Biologist

Jenny Tomko, Senior Biologist

Michael Auriemma, Assistant Biologist

Tim Daniels, Assistant Biologist

Jamie Darrow, Assistant Biologist

Conor Davis, Assistant Biologist

Amber Francis, Assistant Biologist

Brendan Harrison, Assistant Biologist

Andrew Hassall, Assistant Biologist

Matt Heyl, Assistant Biologist

Elizabeth Lange, Assistant Biologist

Lloyd Lomelino, Assistant Biologist

Samantha MacQuesten, Assistant Biologist

Chad Power, Assistant Biologist

Scott Stueber, Assistant Biologist

Stacy VanMorter, Assistant Biologist

Alissa Wilson, Assistant Biologist

Jessica Daher, Program Specialist

Kelly O'Neill, Program Specialist

Megan Kelly, Environmental Specialist II

Anthony Mazzarella, Technician I

William Maxwell, Technician I

Shana Fehring, Senior Wildlife Worker

Les Frie, Senior Wildlife Worker

Chuck Karr, Senior Wildlife Worker

Jonathan Klotz, Senior Wildlife Worker

William Barker, Wildlife Worker

Paul Bechtel, Wildlife Worker

Brielle Colledge, Wildlife Worker

Richard DiVaccaro, Wildlife Worker

Andrew Santiago, Wildlife Worker

Laura Versaggi, ACCSP Fisheries Specialist

Karen Bates, Agency Service Representative 3

Trish Mahoney, Agency Service Representative 3

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****MARINE FISHERIES****

ASMFC/MAFMC/COOP/NOAA

- Staff submitted the spiny dogfish compliance report to ASMFC. The report showed and increased in commercial landings from the prior fishing year as well as an increase in recreational harvest/discards. Regulations within the report were updated as well.
- Staff submitted the annual Striped Bass Compliance Report for the 2020 fishing year to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC). Some highlights from the report include the following: Despite being suspended on March 17th due to COVID-19, the Delaware Bay Tagging Survey tagged 97 striped bass, the second highest number of striped bass tagged since 2016. The 2020 Striped Bass Bonus Program harvest ranked 2nd highest by numbers of fish and 6th highest by weight in the overall time series. 2020 MRIP recreational landings were estimated to have increased by 26% in numbers of fish and decreased by 1.3% in weight compared to 2019 estimates. Total recreational releases were estimated to have increased by 22.3% compared to 2019. Lastly, 130 summonses were issued for striped bass violations in 2020.
- Staff submitted the Shad and River Herring Atlantic Coastal Compliance Report to the ASMFC head of the July 1st deadline. The Delaware River Basin Compliance Report will be submitted
- The Delaware COOPs Shad SFP sub-group met this week to discuss a variety of issues in regards to the update to the Shad Sustainable Fishery Management Plan due at the end of the year. This meeting focused on deciding what methodologies to use for developing management benchmarks and deciding on triggers for management action in benchmarks are exceeded. The group was exploring moving to a Traffic Light Approach for developing management benchmarks and triggers. This idea was abandoned in favor of sticking with the index benchmarks from the previous 2017 SFP. The 2017 benchmark framework is essentially a TLA without all the pretty colors, given its tiered management approach based on how many triggers are tripped and how severely the benchmarks are exceeded. The group did agree to alter the triggers used to require management if benchmarks are exceeded. Given the outcome of the 2020 stock assessment which found shad to be depleted coastwide and experiencing unsustainable adult mortality in the Delaware Basin the group felt more conservative triggers were required to reach sustainability goals. Instead of requiring three consecutive years in a row in exceedance of the first 25th percentile of the index benchmarks the TC is recommending an exceedance of 50% of the benchmark value in 3 out of 5 years would require management actions. The severity of management action will be based on how many benchmarks are tripped and to what degree. Speaking of benchmarks, we will be adding a new one this SFP round for a grand total of six which makes us the grand champion on the east coast in terms of most benchmarks in a single FMP. The new benchmark will be a mortality benchmark incorporated from the stock assessment which has been made a requirement for us by the Board. Similar to the last SFP, I expect the mixed stock fishery benchmark to become another sticking point (DE & NJ v. NY & PA) before this new iteration is approved by the PC.

MEETING SUMMARIES

- **Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission-ASMFC (TC, SAS, Boards)**
 - Staff attended a Jonah Crab Commercial Data Webinar on June 3rd. The purpose of the meeting was to review commercial landings and biological sampling data available along the Atlantic coast for a potential future stock assessment. A report is being drafted, and is expected to be submitted to the ASMFC Jonah crab Board in August of 2021.
 - Staff attended a Jonah Crab TC webinar on June 29th. The purpose of the meeting was to finalize research priorities to be included in the Committee's Pre-Stock Assessment Report. The report is being drafted and is expected to be submitted to the ASMFC Jonah crab Board in August of 2021.
 - Staff attended ALWTRT meetings on June 28th and July 1st. The purpose of the meeting was to finalize parameters to be analyzed using the Decision Support Tool developed by the NEFSC. A

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suite of options were recommended by the Team, including reduced soak times and line breaking strength within the commercial gillnet and pot/trap fleets.

- The Striped Bass Technical Committee (TC) met to discuss tasks to support the PDT in the development of Draft Amendment 7. The TC discussed alternative options for the recruitment trigger, measures to protect the 2015-year class, and approaches for retrospective analysis of the performance of new proposed triggers and the performance of conservation equivalency (CE) vs. coastwide measures. Work groups were created to work on each topic.
- The Striped Bass Plan Development Team (PDT) met to discuss the continued development of Draft Amendment 7. Staff presented draft options under development to address recreational release mortality. The suite of measures include effort controls, gear restrictions, fish handling best practices, and education/outreach options. Alternative management triggers for fishing mortality and spawning stock biomass were also discussed on the call. The PDT identified questions for the Board to discuss at the August meeting to help the PDT continue to develop Draft Amendment 7.
- The American Eel Technical Committee reviewed Maine's American eel aquaculture proposal for 2022 and provided comments to the FMP coordinator. No changes were made to the plan from previous years so Board approval is expected.
- Administration staff participated in several recreational reform FMAT/PDT meetings. Early meetings have focused on reviewing various alternative strategies to allow for a flexible recreational management that are designed to bring stability to the fishery. The group will meet biweekly through the end of the year to assess the suitability of various strategies to be used in management in 2022.
- Staff participated in a conference call of ASMFC's Bluefish Plan Review Team. The most notable topic of discussion centered on whether or not NC exceeded its state commercial quota. NC acknowledges that it did, but the current GARFO accounting system does not recognize the overage. The PRT made a recommendation to resolve this discrepancy. This issue aside, the PRT determined that all states met the intent of the bluefish FMP in 2020.
- The ASMFC Tautog stock assessment subcommittee (SAS) met via webinar on June 3rd to discuss data availability and gaps for 2020, progress on assessment model runs with data through 2019, the format for the update assessment report, and the timeline for completing the assessment by October 2021. The SAS will meet again on July 1 to review model runs using data through 2020 and to explore terminal year options.
- The ASMFC Tautog fisheries management plan (FMP) review team (PRT) met via conference call on June 25th to review state compliance report submissions and the draft FMP review report. The PRT found that all states were compliant with the intent of the tautog FMP for 2020. Suggested edits to the draft review report were approved including modification of the commercial tagging results table to include the biological metric used for initial tag allocations by the states.
- As chair, staff participated in a conference call of the ASMFC's Shad and River Herring TC's Mixed Stock Fishery Working Group. Staff presented a short update on a literature review in regards to management methods used to mitigate out of basin harvest in fisheries that have been used by other management organization in the past. ASMFC staff presented their initial findings on using the MARRS modeling methodology as a way to possibly delineate the effects of mixed stock harvest in the lower Delaware Bay. Due to the lack in quantity and quality of data available to achieve the task given to the working group, ASMFC staff explained that the MARRS method would probably have limited utility in delivering results that are adequate for management use. The most likely deliverable to the Board from this task group is a white paper explaining the current state of data available to assess the impacts of mixed stock harvest on out of basin stocks, the modeling and management methods that can be used to achieve this goal, and what data is necessary to be collected in order to use these methods going forward.

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- Staff participated in a conference call of the ASFMC's Sturgeon TC's ageing subgroup. This was an initial call to talk about the potential of conducting an ageing workshop to develop protocols for ageing Atlantic sturgeon. Topics of the call included identifying preferred structures for ageing, preferences for in-person vs virtual ageing workshops, available samples for conducting an age exchange, and defining objectives for the group as a whole. ASMFC staff will be contacting NMFS/USFWS to get an idea of the feasibility of passing around endangered species parts for ageing. Sub-group members have been tasked with doing an inventory of available hard parts from their state for ageing.
- The ACCSP Recreational Technical Committee met on June 14. A presentation was given by NOAA/NMFS staff addressing some of the concerns over the MRIP: Recreational Fishing Survey and Data Standards. RI staff also presented progress Voice-to-Text Pilot Project for APAIS Application.
- **Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council-MAFMC**
 - The Illex Research Track Working Group met on June 15th where it was announced that the peer review is going to be pushed back until early March. The purpose of the WebEx meeting was to review survey data; LPUE and industry insights between harvesters and processors as well as the creation of a data visualization app which is a tool for exploring spatio-temporal patterns in LPUE across VTR, Study Fleet, and Observer datasets (password protected due to confidential data); and a size monitoring pilot project for shortfin squid that would use electronic technology at Illex processors to sample individual Illex size and weight throughout the fishing season to produce a standardized data stream to better understand the Illex fishery and population structure.
 - The Butterfish Research Track Working Group met on June 16th where it was also announced that the peer review is going to be delayed until early March. Discussed were data refinements and preliminary assessment runs; outreach; research recommendations; spatial distribution and ecosystem; and consumptive removals.
 - A peer review panel met on June 29th to review the June 2021 Management Track Assessments for Atlantic Mackerel scheduled for peer review. It was recommended by the Research Track Working Group that the Atlantic Mackerel stock is currently overfished (23.7% of SSB msy proxy) with overfishing occurring (208% of Fmsy proxy).
- **Marine Fisheries Council/Advisory Committees**
 - The NJ Marine Fisheries Council's Recreational Summer Flounder Advisory Committee met June 28, 2021 to discuss future management approaches for the New Jersey recreational summer flounder fishery. After conducting the first of a series of three such meetings, council and advisors opted to move forward three options to consider for future NJ recreational summer flounder management. These included 1). A continuous minimum size, season, and bag; 2). A slot size limit of two fish with one trophy fish and a continuous season; and 3). An early season small size limit coupled with a larger minimum size limit later in the year, both with a 3 fish bag limit. Staff provided the committee with 8 options meeting the criteria listed. Staff will advance the methodology used to create these options to the ASMFC technical committee in July for vetting.
- **Miscellaneous**
 - Staff met with ACCSP staff to discuss issues with the updated commercial data entry system. Topics discussed included a data download to make editing reports easier, an issue with conversions of soak times from SAFIS to Data Warehouse, and the usage of a cell phone/ tablet application.
 - Staff submitted a grant proposal to ACCSP to fund at sea observers in the American shad gill net fishery in the Delaware Bay to collect DNA and by-catch data from that fishery.

INDEPENDENT FISHERIES

- **Delaware River Seine Survey**

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- A proposal to begin the survey on August 1 was submitted for consideration.
- The forage fish index for the seine survey was updated to include data through 2019. Unfortunately, a downward trend has continued into recent years. The index is one of the many environmental trends highlighted on the DEP's Division of Science and Research webpage.
- **Eel Surveys**
 - Sampling protocols for the artificial collector portion of the glass eel survey was updated to include the collection of biological data (length, weight and pigmentation stage) from up to 60 eels each day. This additional sampling is scheduled to begin during the glass eel survey in 2022.
- **Horseshoe Crab Survey**
 - The Division was unable to sample Fortescue Beach again in 2021, however most other beaches in New Jersey and Delaware were sampled. Once compiled, the data sheets will be sent in for Division staff to enter.
- **Ocean Trawl**
 - Widespread COVID vaccinations have prompted Stonybrook University (operator of the R/V Seawolf) to consider relaxed restrictions for crew conducting scientific operations from the vessel. Early indicators seem, once approved, a new policy would allow business to continue "as usual" for vaccinated staff, but unvaccinated staff would continue to be required to abide by the current COVID safety measures (2 COVID tests with self-isolation and quarantine following each and no allowance to return to the vessel upon departure). The vessel is currently being maintained and is expected be fit to return to operation in time for the October 2021 survey.
- **Sturgeon Receivers**
 - The sturgeon receiver data download for the month of June took place on Tuesday the 15th. All receivers were successfully located, and data downloaded. So far this year there have been a total of 22,556 detections representing 71 individual sturgeon, 13 sand tiger sharks, 2 sandbar sharks, 7 striped bass, and 187 unidentified tags.
 - Staff salvaged two Atlantic sturgeon in the month of June and completed and submitted the appropriate forms to NMFS. One sturgeon was found by ENSP staff on the beach at Island Beach State Park and another was salvaged by BMF staff based on information received through the online sturgeon reporting form from a member of the public.

DEPENDENT FISHERIES

- **Access Point Angler Intercept Survey-AP AIS**
 - The draw for June consisted of 150 site assignments, 28 of which are add on assignments for 2021. These site based assignments yielded a total of 777 intercepts (205 SH, 59 CH, 513 PR). Headboat sampling will resume July 1.
 - Seven new hourly field technicians started June 5th, all necessary testing and shadowing was completed June 8th and 9th.
 - Staff continue to make updates to the Vessel Directory and Site Register in preparation for Wave 5.
 - June mileage is being validated and submitted for reimbursement.
 - Fishdump data from June 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 have been deployed on the Barnegat Inlet Reef in during May and June.
 - Staff is coordinating with Aids to Navigation the deployment of reef balls after construction by - volunteers at several NJ fishing clubs. Clubs interested in building these reefs include Forked River Tuna Club and the Beach Haven Charter Boat Association.

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- Staff inspected a 300-foot barge that is being donated to the Manasquan Inlet reef site by a New Jersey barge company. Preparation has commenced deploy the barge sometime during the summer.
- **Biological**
 - Staff began to process commercial menhaden samples. Samples came from the purse seine fishery. Length, weight and scale samples were taken from all fish.
- **Commercial Fisheries/Quota Management**
 - Staff met to discuss spiny dogfish regulations. After much discussion staff agreed that New Jersey's regulations were sufficient enough to cover the FMP requirements and will not be found out of compliance. Staff agreed though that an update to regulations would be beneficial.
 - Staff was contacted by grant staff to supply additional information in regard to the ACCSP grant. The grant the additional information was submitted to NOAA.
 - Staff put forth a procedural change for commercial reporting. Changes are in response to the upcoming requirement from NMFS that all vessels/ permits need to submit reports electronically. The two changes involve tautog tagging program and harvesters with state licenses that only fish on federally permitted vessels.
 - Staff received and processed numerous data request. Staff provided commercial data landings/discard for technical reports for cobia, striped bass, American shad, hickory shad, river herring and Atlantic sturgeon.
 - Quota Summaries
 - Menhaden- Current harvest for the “other Gears” fishery is 1,328,182 pounds, 57% of the allocated quota. Current harvest for the purse seine fishery remains low at roughly 2,457,500 pounds, 5% of the allocated quota.
 - Bluefish- The 2021 commercial fishing season began with a quota of 264,935 pounds. To date, 39,563 pounds have been harvested (15%).
 - Black Sea Bass- The commercial directed Season 3 fishery ended on June 30th. Preliminary harvest is 165,140 pounds (77% of season quota).
 - Summer flounder- The commercial directed Season 3 fishery ended on June 30th. Preliminary harvest is 181,694 pounds (88% of season quota).
 - Scup- The state managed Summer Season Began on May 1st. Landings remain low at 15,861 pounds.
 - Spiny dogfish- The 2021/2022 commercial fishery began on May 1st. Harvest remains low at 28,679 pounds.
- **For-Hire Telephone Survey-FHTS**
 - Staff conducted calls for all drawn vessels in June. 496 vessels were drawn and 312 responded resulting in a response rate of 62.9%, up from 54.87% in June of 2020. Roughly 2,285 calls were made in total for the entire month.
 - Staff attended the ACCSP wave meeting webinar which covered various topics regarding the survey.
 - Staff continues to update the NOAA vessel directory as permit information is renewed and new information is gathered from the captains.
 - Groundfish permit only boats will now be excluded from the survey as their VTR are sufficient. Boats with a groundfish permit AND HMS permit with Charter/headboat designation will still have to be drawn in compliance with HMS reporting.
- **NJ Saltwater Recreational Registry Program-NJSRRP/Volunteer Angler Survey-VAS**
 - As of June 30, 2021, there were 106,379 individuals and 661 for-hire vessels registered for 2021 with the New Jersey Saltwater Recreational Registry Program (NJSRRP). (Last month: May 28, 2021, there were 86,676 individuals and 604 for-hire vessels for 2021).
- **Striped Bass Bonus Program-SBBP**

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- The 2021 Striped Bass Bonus Program opened on May 15, 2021. Staff have issued 8,639 permits to individual anglers. Additionally, 121 party/charter boats have been issued permits. The current 2021 bonus harvest is 3,363 lbs. from 474 fish. Party/charter boats have harvested 312 fish and individual anglers have harvested 162 fish. Additional circle hook flyers have been printed and will continue to be distributed via the SBBP to increase awareness and compliance of the striped bass circle hook requirement.

OUTREACH

- Staff created a seafood availability chart that shows consumer the time of year that locally harvested, locally sold seafood is available. The next step before publication is to send the chart to commercial dealers for comment.
- Staff participated in a question & answer session about horseshoe crabs with attendees of the Green Eggs and Sand Virtual Workshop conducted by NJ Fish and Wildlife on 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.

ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS

- **Climate Change**
 -
- **Coastal Resiliency**
 -
- **Environmental Reviews/Technical Assistance**
 -
- **Wind Energy**
 -

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 reviewed the draft NOAC, and it is currently still under review at the Governor's Office.
 - Rule Proposals
 - Menhaden Multispecies Rulemaking comment period ended on April 30, 2021. MFA rule team has drafted a Rule Adoption document to be reviewed by the Office of Legal Affairs and Commissioner. The Rule Adoption Launch meeting is scheduled for July 9, 2021. The target date for filing the Rule Adoption with the Office of Administrative Law is September 10, 2021, for publication in the NJ Register on October 4, 2021.
 - 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
 - Senate voted to approve Shawn M. LaTourette to replace Catherine McCabe as Commissioner of the DEP on 6/3/2021. Commissioner LaTourette was sworn in as Commissioner of DEP on 6/14/2021.
 - A5531; S3501 – Exempts certain commercial fishermen from coverage under "unemployment compensation law." Passed in Senate 40-0, in Assembly Appropriations Committee 6/24/2021.

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- A4810 – Establishes Government Efficiency and Regulatory Review Commission. Governor's (absolute) veto received in Assembly 5/5/2021.
- S955 – Authorizes counties to reduce greenhead fly populations; appropriates \$50,000. Passed Senate 6/3/2021, In Assembly Environment and Solid Waste Committee 6/9/2021.
- A2117; S2010 – Establishes State to oversee application for and receipt of federal funds Ombudsman by State agencies. In Senate State Gov't, Wagering, Tourism, & Historic Preservation Committee 4/26/2021.
- S3864; A985 – Prohibits certain actions relative to endangered and threatened plant species; directs DEP Commissioner to take certain actions to protect endangered and threatened plant species. Introduced and referred to Senate Environment and Energy Committee 6/3/2021.
- A5553 – Prohibits intentional release of balloons or other floating devices outdoors. In Assembly Environment and Solid Waste Committee 5/5/2021.
- Congressional Activity
 - HR3764 – Ocean-Based Climate Solutions Act of 2021: To direct the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to provide for ocean-based climate solutions to reduce carbon emissions and global warming; to make coastal communities more resilient; and to provide for the conservation and restoration of ocean and coastal habitats, biodiversity, and marine mammal and fish populations; and for other purposes. In House Committee on Natural Resources 6/8/2021, Committee hearings held 6/22/2021.
 - HR3892 – To direct the Secretary of Commerce, acting through the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, to provide for ocean-based climate solutions to reduce carbon emissions and global warming; to make coastal communities more resilient; and to provide for the conservation and restoration of ocean and coastal habitats, biodiversity, and marine mammal and fish populations; and for other purposes. In House Committee on Natural Resources 6/17/2021, Committee hearings held 6/22/2021.
 - HRes465 – Recognizing World Oceans Day and the necessity to protect, conserve, maintain, and rebuild our ocean and its resources. Introduced in House and referred to Committee on Natural Resources 6/8/2021.
 - HR3702 – To amend the Dingell-Johnson Sport fish Restoration Act with respect to Sport fish restoration and recreational boating safety, and for other purposes. In House Natural Resources Committee 6/4/2021.
 - S2184/HR4092 – A bill to authorize the Secretary of the Interior, through the USFWS to work with willing partners and provide support to efforts to assess, protect, restore, and enhance important coastal areas that provide fish and wildlife habitat on which Federal trust species depend, and for other purposes.
 - S1894 – Regional Ocean Partnership Act: To designate Regional Ocean Partnership of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and for other purposes. Reported with an amendment in the nature of a substitute 6/16/2021.
 - HR3864 – Chesapeake Bay Oyster Research Act: To require the Secretary of the Commerce, acting through the Administrator of NOAA to provide grants supporting research on the conservation, restoration, or management of oysters in estuarine ecosystems, and for other purposes. In House Committee on Natural Resources, Committee hearings held 6/22/2021.
 - HR3952 – To strengthen the role of the Chief Scientist of NOAA in order to promote scientific integrity and advance the Administration's world-class research and development portfolio. In Committee on Natural Resources and Committee on Science, Space, and Technology 6/16/2021.

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- HR3748 – Blue Globe Act: To improve data collection and monitoring of the Great Lakes, oceans, bays, estuaries, and coasts, and for other purposes. In House Committee on Natural Resources, Committee hearings held 6/22/2021.
- HR3160 – Keep America's Waterfronts Working Act: The bill directs the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to establish a Working Waterfront Task Force. NOAA must establish a working Waterfront Grant Program. NOAA may award grants to coastal states with approved working waterfront plans in place to preserve and expand access to coastal waters for people engaged in fishing, aquaculture, boat building, and other water-dependent businesses. In House Committee on Natural Resources, Committee hearings held 6/22/2021.
- HR660 – Shovel-ready Restoration Grants for Coastlines and Fisheries Act of 2021: To require the Secretary of Commerce to establish a grant program to benefit coastal habitats, resiliency, and the economy, and for other purposes. *Priority grant projects include projects that employ fishermen who have been negatively impacted by COVID-19 pandemic or compensate fishermen for use of a fishing vessel. In House Committee on Natural Resources, Committee hearings held 6/22/2021.
- HR3817 – Regional Ocean Partnership Act: To allow coastal States to participate in regional ocean partnerships with one or more other coastal States that share a common ocean or coastal area with the coastal State to conserve living resources, expand and protect valuable habitats, enhance coastal resilience, and address such other issues related to the shared ocean or coastal area as are determined to be a shared, regional priority by those States. In House Committee on Natural Resources, Committee hearings held 6/22/2021.
- HR3692 – Marine Mammal Climate Change Protection Act: To amend the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 to direct the Secretary of Commerce to establish a climate impact management plan for the conservation of certain marine mammal species, and for other purposes. In House Committee on Natural Resources, Committee hearings held 6/22/2021.
- S1747 – Fluke Fairness Act of 2021: To provide equitable management of summer flounder based on geographic, scientific, and economic data, and for other purposes. In Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation. Ordered to be reported with an amendment 6/16/2021.
- HR3228 – National Coastal Resilience Data and Services Act: to direct the Secretary of Commerce, acting through the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, to improve science, data, and services that enable sound decision making in response to coastal flood risk, including impacts of sea level rise, storm events, changing Great Lakes water levels, and land subsidence. In House Committee on Natural Resources, Committee hearings held 6/22/2021.
- **Scientific Collection Permits**
 - Fifty-six scientific collecting permits have been issued in 2021 and one for 2022.

****SHELLFISHERIES****

Offshore Wind Development

- Staff worked with the Commissioner's office and the NYSERDA Fisheries lead to facilitate a multi-state approach to regional monitoring and offshore wind fisheries compensation, including meetings June 1 and June 4.

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- Staff has been working closely with the Division of Science and Research on the NJ Offshore Wind Research and Monitoring Initiative. Members of the RMI team summarized existing regional science entities, regional monitoring, and made progress in identifying the most critical knowledge gaps as a step towards preparing a Request for Proposals for regional wildlife and fisheries studies. Meetings were held June 1, 2, 16, 17, 21, 23, 29, and 30.
- Staff continued to work with other states and experts in the field of turtle and marine mammal science to better understand species of concern and potential impacts of offshore wind. We identified and reached out to experts in the field and regional research entities who are working on offshore wind.
 - June 2-3 staff attended a two-day workshop on passive acoustic monitoring (PAM) and on June 9 a seminar on digital aerial surveys of cetaceans, two technologies used for monitoring.
 - Staff met with Catherine McCall and Dr. Cindy Driscoll from Maryland DNR to learn about studies MD is involved in.
 - Staff met internally on June 7, 24, and 30.
 - Staff met with Pat Fields, CBI, as a follow-up to the PAM meeting, and learned that Mr. Field will be spearheading an interstate marine mammal meeting specific to offshore wind knowledge gaps.
 - Staff met with Jackie Toth Sullivan, Stockton University, an expert on marine mammals in the region, on June 30.
 - Our current understanding is that there are **8 mammalian species of concern**, and more information is needed on how those species use the waters off of New Jersey. More information is also needed about whether turtles may be nesting on New Jersey beaches.
- On June 7, staff met with Keith Hanson, NOAA Habitat Office, regarding the importance of sand wave features in the marine environment, and whether altering those habitats with offshore wind structures would have an impact on marine fisheries.
- Chief of Staff Jane Rosenblatt tasked Jenn Moriarity with preparing a policy document of offshore wind for the Department. Staff provided Jenn with several documents and summaries of potential impacts to the marine ecosystem and fisheries resources.
- Staff attended the Mid Atlantic Fisheries Management Council update on offshore wind on June 9.
- On June 14, staff attended the Mid-Atlantic Navigation Coordination meeting hosted by the USCG. We have been working with the USCG for over a year to provide contacts and information about how New Jersey's fisheries use the continental shelf. Specifically, we have requested that the USCG consider how fishing vessels transit through, around, and between wind energy areas so they can access fishing grounds. Our request for a transit lane between Ocean Wind and Atlantic Shores was addressed by the USCG in a letter to BOEM suggesting a no-build area between adjacent leases.
- Staff continued to collaborate on the Offshore Wind GeoHub, specifically updating the layers.
- Staff continued to participate in early meetings with potential applicants for the Offshore Wind Transmission Study Comparison of Options. A meeting was held with Next Era Energy on June 7.
- Staff continued to participate in permitting coordination meetings with Atlantic Shores Offshore Wind (ASOW) and Orsted/Ocean Wind. Atlantic Shores informed the Department that they are anticipating a Notice of Intent, which kicks off federal environmental review of their project, by September 30. They also provided their surfclam study plan, which is currently being reviewed. Ocean Wind presented their draft Fisheries Monitoring Plan to the Department on June 15. The FMP was contracted out to Rutgers University and Monmouth University, and includes a benthic trawl survey, a structured habitat survey, a clam survey, a pelagic fish survey, telemetry measures of species sensitive to EMF, eDNA, and oceanography. The goal of their study is to establish a baseline for understanding how fish and fisheries respond to offshore wind development in the Ocean Wind I project area and will last at least 5 years. Staff are currently preparing questions and comments.

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- Staff participated in weekly check-in calls on offshore wind with the Commissioner's Office and continued to collaborate on Montclair University's proposal to use the Saltwater Fishing Registry to conduct research on offshore wind and recreational fishing.
- Staff continued to participate in monthly Offshore Wind Interstate Fisheries calls. On June 25, the group continued to discuss collaboration on fisheries compensation for offshore wind.
- Staff attended two Bureau of Ocean Energy Management Assessment and Advancement of Science workshops on June 22 and 24. Federal agencies made presentations about how they establish research priorities and what offshore wind-related studies they are engaged in.
- Staff met internally on June 23 to continue to work on adapting the NJ Ocean Trawl to offshore wind development. It remains unclear whether the R/V Sea Wolf can trawl within a windfarm.
- Staff attended a Rutgers seminar on Ecology and Fisheries Use of Sand Features off New Jersey and New York, by Dr. Thomas Grothues, on June 28. Dr. Grothues presented results from his study, funded by BOEM, to identify correlations in the literature and existing data between habitat features and fish. Because we'd recently met with the NOAA Habitat Office regarding mitigating loss of sand ridges in offshore wind development, this presentation provided critical information on the relative value of various marine benthic habitats with regard to offshore development. A follow-up meeting with Dr. Grothues was scheduled for July.
- Staff attended the summer meeting of the NYSEDA Environmental Technical Working Group on June 29. This TWG is tasked with environmental and wildlife management and offshore wind. Presentations were made by various workgroups, which in some cases we made up of a large number of experts in the field (e.g. marine mammals, birds, bats). The workgroups defined research priorities which will be used to inform the Department's Research and Monitoring Initiative.
- Staff continued to support the surfclam industry by forwarding a request for funding to build a dredge that will sample a larger distribution of sizes and may be able to fish within a windfarm. Staff spoke with Daphne Munroe, Rutgers on June 11. This dredge must be calibrated against the vessel used in the federal surfclam survey, and an opportunity to do that calibration will come this August. We were not able to identify a source of funding that would be available that quickly.
- BOEM issued a Notice of Intent to prepare and Environmental Impact Statement for the Empire Wind project in the NY/NJ Bight. We had been working with Equinor on this project until they received a power purchase agreement from NY. BOEM held the first of three Public Scoping Meetings on the project on June 30. One representative from the surfclam industry, David Wallace, made a statement about potential impacts to the fishery. Empire submitted a Federal Consistency Certification to New Jersey, so we will be reviewing the project for consistency with our Coastal Zone Management Rules.

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

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- NJDOT put the dredging project out for contractor bids in early May 2021 and received bids in June 2021. NJDOT was working through the process toward awarding the contract in June.
- Dredging is expected to occur in the fall after the September 15th timing restrictions from the environmental review.
- The dredged materials are planned to be used for beach replenishment on Nantuxent Beach in coordination with a Blue Acres project.

Aquaculture and Leasing

- **Shellfish Aquaculture Working Group – Commercial Shellfish Aquaculture Website Committee**
 - Bureau of Shellfisheries staff and representatives from various agencies involved in commercial shellfish aquaculture permitting, regulations, and outreach continue to work on finalizing the NJ Commercial Shellfish Aquaculture website design and content.
- **Aquaculture Development Zone Hazard Buoys**
 - Staff maintained buoys encompassing the ADZ by the cape shore.

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 6/1 and 6/2 for the June 2021 survey while utilizing COVID protocols. Staff digitized the data sheets to be entered into the 2021 database.
- **Dermo Disease Monitoring**
 - Staff successfully sampled oysters from the Delaware Bay seed beds to monitor the oyster disease dermo on 6/23. 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 6/28. 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.

Meetings

- **Upcoming: NJ Shorebird Workshop**
 - Staff was invited to participate in a planning workgroup for the NJ Shorebird Workshop that is tentatively planned for the end of August. It appears the initiative started with AC Nick Anagnone's office (climate and flood resilience) who had attended something similar previously in Rhode Island. The workshop is being held by Coastal States Organization, a group that helps "states to maintain their leadership role in the development and implementation of national coastal

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and ocean policy is among CSO's most important functions. CSO works with Congress to shape legislation and arrange for state testimony and works with Federal Agencies to comment on proposed regulations."

- One of the topics for discussion at the workshop will be reducing conflicts with marine habitats (SAV/EFH, shellfish, etc.).

Waterfront Development, Permit, and Environmental Reviews

- MFA staff commented on the following Waterfront Development permit applications:
 - Brigantine Marina and Paddle Club – reconstruction/renovation of existing Bayside Marina
 - USACE Maintenance dredging of Newark Bay

Restoration, Enhancement, and Mitigation

- **Shell Recycling Program**
 - Staff planned and executed the first annual shell plant in the Mullica River oyster reefs. Staff planted a total of 70 tons of shell over a 2-acre parcel. Of the planted shell, 55 tons came from the MFA shell recycling program in Atlantic City. Being the first year for this program, many MFA staff assisted and were involved over the course of three weeks of shell planting. The site will be monitored for spat settlement to assess shell planting success.
 - 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. I&E staff joined MFA staff for the shell collection and planting in June.
 - Staff also invited the DEP Commissioner's Office, supervisory staff, and project partners. Staff from the Commissioner's Office and the NHR Assistant Commissioner were in attendance, as well as some of the partners including the Jetty Rock Foundation, the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino, Stockton University, and Rutgers University.
 - Staff continues to coordinate with Shell Recycling Program participants for weekly shell pickups.

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.
- **Direct Market Harvest Program**
 - As of 7/6/21, the Direct Market Harvest Program had just over 64,000 bushels (~55%) harvested of the 116,320 bushel (bu.) quota.
 - Approximately 35,200 bu. (~55% of total harvest) were harvested from the High Mortality region, of which about 26,100 bu. (~73% of HM region) were harvested from the Nantuxent oyster bed.
 - Approximately 28,900 bu. (~45% of total harvest) were harvested from the Shell Rock region.
- **2022 Surf Clam Licenses**
 - All 2022 license renewal process was successfully completed before 6/30/21.

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.

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- The Bureau's RFP for the new vessel received bids and is in the process towards awarding the contract as of June 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 \$48,474.00 in June 2021. Oyster dredge boat bushel tag sales made up about 93% of sales.