

Marine Resources Administration Monthly Report

JANUARY 2024

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****MARINE FISHERIES/MRA****

ASMFC/MAFMC/COOP/NOAA/ACCSP

- Staff resubmitted a striped bass Conservation Equivalency (CE) proposal to ASMFC after receiving feedback from the Plan Review Team (PRT). The proposal was submitted preemptively to ensure the continuation of the Striped Bass Bonus Program (SBBP) in 2024 and the following four years since proposed management changes were being considered under Addendum II. This proactive submission will likely prevent any delays in opening the SBBP by May 15th. The proposal that was resubmitted addressed PRT concerns and comments. The Striped Bass Management Board approved the CE proposal at their winter meeting so the SBBP will continue in 2024 with 1 fish @ 24" to less than 28" per permit and a 7% reduced quota (200,298 lbs).

MEETING SUMMARIES

- **Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program-ACCSP**
 - ACCSP committee leadership staff attended the For-hire Logbook Methodology Consultant's review and were provided an opportunity for questions, and input on next steps was solicited.
- **Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission-ASMFC**
 - The Striped Bass Management Board approved Addendum II to Amendment 7 which implements a 1 fish @ 28" to 31" slot limit for the ocean recreational fishery and reduces commercial quotas (and NJ's SBBP quota) by 7% to reduce fishing mortality in 2024. Addendum II also establishes an expedited response process to upcoming stock assessments and addresses requirements for recreational filleting.
 - The American Eel Plan Development Team met via conference call on January 3. The PDT agreed to include two options in Addendum VII (yellow eels): one of status quo to commercial reporting requirements and one where states would no longer be required to mandate that harvesters or dealers report trip-level CPUE data (i.e., soak time, number of units of gear fished, and pounds landed by life stage). If a state wishes to maintain this reporting requirement it may do so voluntarily. All states must continue to report commercial catch of American eel on a trip-level basis by life stage. All Board questions and requests regarding the catch cap options in the draft Addendum, were addressed by the PDT. Addendum VII will also include options on whether states will continue to collect biological data (individual lengths, weights and pigmentation stages) from glass eels collected in the YOY surveys (no trends = not used in assessments). If given the choice, New Jersey will continue to collect this data twice a week because the data is routinely used for in-state analysis.
 - Administration staff met with a subgroup of the MAFMC/ASMFC recreational measures setting FMAT/PDT – the goal of the subgroup meeting was to evaluate methods for development of fleet-specific reference points (e.g., recreational sector specific Fmsy). This approach is being pursued as a means to incorporate fishing mortality into harvest control rules under consideration for black sea bass, summer flounder, and scup. Work is ongoing.
 - Staff attended via webinar a meeting of the ASMFC's Shad and River Herring Technical Committee on Monday January, 8th. The purpose of the meeting was to review an updated River Herring Fishery Management Plan and request to open a river herring fishery from the state of New Hampshire. New Hampshire had closed their river herring fishery in 2019 due to river herring returns below their current benchmark which triggered management action in the state. After adjusting counting methods in the State's FMP to account for fish ladder efficiency changes and dam removals, New Hampshire based their request to reopen their river herring fishery as a result of three

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years in a row river herring returns above their benchmark target. The TC recommended that the Board not approve this request as the recently approved Amendment 2 & 3 Guidance document recommends that at least 5 consecutive years of above benchmark targets before a fishery can be considered to be reopened.

- Staff attended via webinar a meeting of the ASFMC's Cobia Technical Committee. The purpose of the meeting was to finalize recommended terms of reference and assessment roadmap for the upcoming benchmark stock assessment. Most of the terms of reference were similar to the previous SEDAR assessment with the addition of reviewing new tagging and genetic data that might support regional stock redefining. The draft terms of reference and assessment road map will be presented to the ASFMC Coastal Pelagics Board at the end of the month for final review and approval.
- Staff attended via webinar a meeting of the ASFMC's Cobia Plan Development Team on Monday January, 8th. The purpose of the meeting was to begin scoping the recreational cobia reallocation Draft Addendum, develop questions for Board clarification at their January meeting, and review the timeline for this action. The PDT reviewed the current recreational measures and quota allocation and discussed possible ways to better allocate and manage the fishery as cobia range expands northward. A timeline for completion and clarifications questions to be answered by the Board was developed to be included in the Winter Meeting's Supplemental Materials.
- **Miscellaneous**
 - Staff attended a 2.5-day NEAMAP/SEAMAP Trawl Vessel and Gear Workshop webinar. The workshop reviewed experiences in other state/agencies with dealing with survey vessel and gear changes, vessel outages, and development of calibrations for the same. Discussion covered best practices related to changing vessels, gear, vessel and gear operation, and calibration experiments.

INDEPENDENT FISHERIES

- **Delaware Bay Tagging**
 - Staff completed preparations on the Delaware Bay Tagging survey gear and vessel. The survey will begin on February 1st.
- **Eel Surveys**
 - Preparation was completed for the 2024 glass eel survey. New mop-style artificial collectors were created to replace all of the older, well used collectors. A refresher training on how to complete the survey was presented to staff. A collector will be set in Nacote Creek on February 1 and the fyke net will be set in Patcong Creek on February 5.
 - Data from the 2023 yellow eel pot survey was finalized. Results show that over two eight-week periods (Spring and Fall), strings of pots (four pots each) were set and tended 84 times in Great Bay. The total number of yellow stage American eels caught was 398, averaging 4 eels per string. A total of 223 eels were tagged and released and there were 7 recaptures. Additionally, 79 otolith samples were collected to supplement the commercial fishery sampling program, 73 were examined for swim bladder parasite presence (1 present) and 61 were examined for sex (39 male, 6 female and 16 undetermined). A total of 223 conger eels were caught as bycatch during the survey. The annual yellow eel CPUE (geometric mean) was 2.83 which is higher than the survey average of 0.99.
- **Ocean Trawl**
 - The January Ocean Trawl Survey began January 24th and was completed February 1st. Two days were lost to inclement weather. Catches were relatively light and typical for a January survey--dominated by winter skates and little skates. One small Atlantic sturgeon was caught and tagged near Point Pleasant on the last day.

DEPENDENT FISHERIES

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- **Access Point Angler Intercept Survey-APAIS**
 - Staff have been working on an overhaul of the MRIP Site Register and Vessel Directory in preparation for the 2024 sampling season.
 - Updates to site and vessel information, as well as pressures for both, were submitted and activated before February 1 to ensure updates would be in effect for the March assignment draw and Wave 2 vessel lists.
 - Data for the December Fishdump were reviewed and necessary edits were submitted.
 - The 2024 APAIS budget and Amendment were submitted for signature.
- **For-Hire Telephone Survey-FHTS**
 - Staff completed all data and error reviews for the 2023 sampling year. The vessel update list was revisited and reviewed to ensure all updates were completed for 2023. For-hire business websites and social media pages were reviewed and checked against the vessel directory for any necessary edits going into 2024.
 - Four staff virtually attended the annual FHTS training hosted by ACCSP.
- **NJ Saltwater Recreational Registry Program-NJSRRP/Volunteer Angler Survey-VAS**
 - As of January 29, 2024, there were 20,800 individuals and 327 for-hire vessels registered with the New Jersey Saltwater Recreational Registry Program (NJSRRP) for 2024. (Last month: As of December 15, 2023, there were 141,216 individuals and 677 for-hire vessels registered for 2023. As of December 29, 2023, there were 11,044 individuals and 173 for-hire vessels registered for 2024 in the NJFW ELS).
- **Striped Bass Bonus Program-SBBP**
 - Staff continue to enter and proof data from 2023 individual logs and party/charter boat reports.

OUTREACH

- The first draft of the 2024 Marine Digest was provided to staff for comments and edits, which were submitted to the editor on January 18. The second draft was provided to staff for review on January 26. All comments and edits are due on February 5.
- Staff attended the Wildwood Fishing & Boating Expo on January 6-7, in partnership with NJFW Marine Law Enforcement. The NJ Saltwater Registry and ethical fish handling/barotrauma were the highlighted outreach topics.

ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS (Marine Resources Administration)

- **Environmental Reviews/Technical Assistance**
 - Staff have been working on updating the Marine Fisheries Guidance Manual at the request of the Department of Land Use Regulation. DLUR has asked that MRA streamline the document to make it easier to use and navigate. MRA has suggested developing a quick reference guide for easier rule based TOYRs (Time Of Year Restriction), while keeping the Manual in its current state to use when additional justification for TOYRs is requested or required.
- **Wind Energy**
 - New Jersey Research and Monitoring Initiative (RMI).
 - Staff participated in weekly Department internal RMI meetings and weekly meetings with DSR for project planning.
 - Additional meetings were held to discuss projects and concepts in development including the archival PAM large whale study, acoustic telemetry, and eDNA.
 - External reviewers were identified and sent the RMI draft proposal for surfclam fishery enhancement.
 - Staff reviewed a quarterly report for the RMI and project reporting.

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- Staff continued editing a draft request for proposals for research related to mitigation of offshore wind impacts on fisheries through technological development, non-extractive techniques, socio-economic assessment, novel fishing methods, and benthic studies.
- Staff reviewed the RMI Framework document and made recommendations for revisions.
- Permitting support
 - Staff continued biweekly meetings with the permitting staff of ASOW1.
 - Staff continued drafting comments for the DLRP for the Federal Consistency determination for ASOW S and sent a list of potential requests to the developer and BOEM for additional mitigation needs, including extending the ASOW 1 surfclam survey and mitigation of impacts to the NJ Ocean Trawl. Discussion within the Department is ongoing regarding the best permitting mechanism to negotiate these mitigations.
 - Staff summarized fishery landings and revenue data for the ASOW 1 project for use in compensation.
- Board of Public Utilities
 - Staff continued to work on the Environmental Protection and Advanced Research Analysis portion of the Strategic Plan 2.
- Stakeholder Support
 - Staff provided information about open comment periods for the NY Bight and the Central Atlantic to the Offshore Wind Committee of the Marine Fisheries Council.
 - Staff attended a webinar on the topic “Should fishers be paid to fish less?” to better understand opportunities to support fisheries that are impacted by offshore wind.
 - Staff attended a one-hour training from the Employee Advisory Service called How to Work More Collaboratively with Your Team.
 - Staff attended the first full day training session for the Department’s Facilitator Corp.
- Intra Department coordination
 - Staff attended the Internal Quarterly Offshore Wind meeting.
- Regional coordination
 - Staff hosted the monthly meeting of the Central Atlantic Offshore Wind and Fisheries group. The Public Sale Notice and Draft Environmental Assessment for leasing were discussed. in November and December.
 - Staff attended the kickoff meeting of the Regional Wildlife Science Consortium Data Governance Subcommittee.
 - Staff participated in the Project WOW External Advisory Board.
 - Staff submitted an abstract about large scale ecological research for a presentation at the July State of the Science for Offshore Wind meeting. Staff will also be supporting a side meeting (if the proposal is accepted) for workshopping a surfclam fishery enhancement enterprise and meet with the Executive Director of ROSA to discuss.
 - Staff hosted the monthly NJ Surfclam Research Needs meeting.
 - Staff met with a colleague from the NY Department of State to coordinate comments on the NY Bight Programmatic Draft Environmental Impact Statement, which are due in February.

ADMINISTRATIVE/MISCELLANEOUS (Marine Resources Administration)

• Licensing Operations

- Staff issued 210 commercial and recreational marine licenses as well as 30 commercial and recreational shellfish licenses, totaling \$17,946.00 in sales.
- There were a total of 7 new Atlantic Coast shellfisheries lease ground applications processed as well as 6 lease ground transfers completed. All 2024 new lease agreements and lease extensions were

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signed and executed by the Administration and copies sent out to all corporations and individual lease holders.

- Staff continued to work on updating all commercial and recreational marine and shellfisheries license and lease applications, as well as other pertinent NJFW forms, which should be ready by early February for release and posting on the website.

- **Regulatory/Legislative**

- Notices of Administrative Changes (NOACs)
 - A NOAC requiring approved vessel tracking devices to be installed and functioning by February 29, 2024, for all federally-permitted lobster fishing vessels was approved by the NJ Marine Fisheries Council at the January 4, 2024 meeting.
- Rulemakings
 - MRA 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. The first draft proposal is currently under review.
 - A rulemaking proposal to expand the Commissioner's authority to modify rules via NOAC to expeditiously comply with any management requirement established under an approved fishery management plan. The proposal is currently under review with OLA and DAG.
 - An additional multispecies rulemaking is underway and will incorporate a reorganization of all Marine Fisheries-related rules under N.J.A.C. 7:25B.
- Legislative Activity – State
 - A131, Guardian (R2)/S1884, Amato (R9); Authorizes free hunting, fishing, and trapping licenses and free admission to State parks and forests for disabled veterans and individuals with certain types of military service. Introduced on 1/9/2024 and referred to Assembly Commerce Economic Development and Agriculture Committee and Senate Environment and Energy Committee.
 - A2612, Webber (R26); Exempts State residents 65 years of age and older from certain hunting, trapping, and fishing fees and license requirements. Introduced and referred to Assembly Aging and Human Services Committee on 1/9/2024.
 - A1727, Rumpf (R9), Matsikoudis (R21); Authorizes free hunting, fishing, and trapping licenses and free admission to State parks and forests for individuals with certain types of military service. Introduced and referred to Assembly Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee on 1/9/2024.
 - A201, Inganamort (R24), Fantasia (24)/S1838, Space (R24); Provides for no net loss of DEP lands for fishing, hunting, and trapping purposes. Introduced on 1/9/2024 and referred to Assembly Environment, Natural Resources and Solid Waste Committee and Senate Economic Growth Committee.
 - A206, Inganamort (R24), Fantasia (R24); Prohibits harassment of farmers engaged in farming operations. Introduced and referred to Assembly Commerce. Economic Development and Agriculture Committee on 1/9/2024.
 - A191, Inganamort (R24), Fantasia (R24); Bans foreign ownership of agricultural or horticultural land and agricultural woodlands in State. Introduced and referred to Assembly Commerce. Economic Development and Agriculture Committee on 1/9/2024.
 - A225, Inganamort (R24), Fantasia (24); Reduces residency requirement for resident hunting licenses from six months to 60 days. Introduced and referred to Assembly Environment, Natural Resources and Solid Waste Committee on 1/9/2024.

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- A335, Swift (R2)/S149, Polistina (R2); Eliminates shellfish license fee for veterans and active-duty service members. Introduced and referred to Assembly Environment, Natural Resources and Solid Waste Committee on 1/9/2024.
- A628, Kean, S (R30); Requires DEP to establish artificial reef plan for commercial and recreational fishing. Introduced and referred to Assembly Environment, Natural Resources and Solid Waste Committee on 1/9/2024.
- A630, Kean, S (R30); Establishes restrictions and requirements for use of fishing gear and conch, fishing, and lobster pots on artificial reefs. Introduced and referred to Assembly Environment, Natural Resources and Solid Waste Committee on 1/9/2024.
- A831, McGuckin (R10), Kanitra (R10)/S517; Prohibits imposition of civil penalties on State agencies by State agencies. Introduced on 1/9/2024 and referred to Assembly State and Local Government Committee and Senate State Government, Wagering, Tourism and Historic Preservation Committee.
- A1054, McGuckin (R10), Kanitra (R10)/S470, Holzapfel (R10); Changes law regulating size limits of lobsters. Introduced and referred to Assembly Environment, Natural Resources and Solid Waste Committee on 1/9/2024.
- A1245, McGuckin (R10), Kanitra (R10); Requires cultural competency training for certain State, county, or municipal public employees who routinely interact with public. Introduced on 1/9/2024 and referred to Assembly State and Local Government Committee and Senate Environment and Energy Committee.
- A1478, Karabinchack (D8), Guardian (R2)/S1612, Zwicker (D16); Requires study of ocean energy potential; directs BPU to establish wave and tidal energy generation goals and take other action to establish NJ as nationwide leader in ocean energy. Introduced on 1/9/2024 and referred to Assembly Telecommunications and Utilities Committee and Senate Environment and Energy Committee.
- A1502, Scharfenberger (R13); Revises law establishing individual transferable quota system for menhaden purse seine fishery. Introduced and referred to Assembly Environment, Natural Resources and Solid Waste Committee on 1/9/2024.
- A1652, Lampitt (D6), Verrelli (D15), Simonsen (R1)/S229, Smith (D17); Appropriates \$450,000 for Hooked on Fishing-Not on Drugs Program. Introduced on 1/9/2024 and referred to Assembly Environment, Natural Resources and Solid Waste Committee and Senate Environment and Energy Committee.
- A2154, Moen (D5), Danielsens (D17)/S2415, Beach (D6); Prohibits open public records requests for commercial purposes. Introduced and referred to Assembly Oversight, Reform and Federal Relations Committee on 1/9/2024.
- A2404, Simonsen (R1), DiMaio (R23); Allows use of fish pumps to remove menhaden from purse seines in certain circumstances. Introduced and referred to Assembly Environment, Natural Resources and Solid Waste Committee on 1/9/2024. Introduced and referred to Senate State Government, Wagering, Tourism and Historic Preservation Committee on 1/29/2024.
- A1734, Rumpf (R9), Provides for payment to small municipalities, in certain cases, of certain penalty moneys assessed for violations of fish and game laws. Introduced and referred to Assembly Environment, Natural Resources and Solid Waste Committee 1/9/2024.
- A1817, Conaway (D7), Calabrese (D36); Prohibits certain actions relative to endangered and threatened plant species; directs DEP commissioner to take certain actions to protect

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endangered and threatened plant species. Introduced and referred to Assembly Environment, Natural Resources and Solid Waste Committee on 1/9/2024.

- A3034, Calabrese (D36)/S216, Smith (D17), Greenstein (D14); Directs Department of Agriculture to advertise and promote State aquaculture products through Jersey Fresh Program; establishes annual \$100,000 appropriation; appropriates \$100,000. Introduced on 1/9/2024 and referred to Assembly Commerce. Economic Development and Agriculture Committee and Senate Environment and Energy Committee.
- AR57, Scharfenberger (R13), Flynn (R13)/SR49, O'Scanlon (R13); Urges immediate moratorium on sonar testing and wind turbine mapping due to recent unexplained deaths of marine life off the coast of New Jersey.
Introduced and referred to Assembly Environment, Natural Resources and Solid Waste Committee on 1/9/2024.
- SJR63, Space (R24); Designates fourth Saturday of September each year as "New Jersey Hunting and Fishing Day." Introduced and referred to Senate Economic Growth Committee on 1/9/2024.

○ Legislative Activity – Federal

- S. 3672, (Sen. Blumenthal, D-Connecticut), a bill to support healthy fisheries in dynamic ocean conditions, and for other purposes. Introduced on January 25, 2024, and referred to the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee.
- S. 3694, (Sen. Wyden, D-Oregon)/ H.R. 7145, (Rep. Schiff, D-California), a bill to amend the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 and the Animal Welfare Act to prohibit the taking, importation, exportation, and breeding of certain cetaceans for public display, and for other purposes. Introduced on January 30, 2024, and referred to the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee. Introduced on January 30, 2024, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee and the House Agriculture Committee.
- H.R. 2950, the “Coastal Habitat Conservation Act of 2023”, (Rep. Huffman, D-California), a bill to authorize the Secretary of the Interior, through the Coastal Program of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, to work with willing partners and provide support to efforts to assess, protect, restore, and enhance important coastal landscapes that provide fish and wildlife habitat on which certain Federal trust species depend, and for other purposes was ordered to be reported on Wednesday, January 17, 2024, by the House Natural Resources Committee by unanimous consent.
- Hearings
 - A hearing was held by the House Natural Resources Committee’s Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries on January 18, 2024 on H.R. 3925, the “Youth Coastal Fishing Program Act of 2023”, (Rep. Salazar, R-Florida), a bill to direct the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to establish a grant program to fund youth fishing projects.
 - A hearing was held by the House Natural Resources Committee’s Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries on January 18, 2024 on H.R. 6235, the “Harmful Algal Bloom and Hypoxia Research and Control Amendments Act of 2023”, (Rep. Bonamici, D-Oregon), a bill to amend the Harmful Algal Blooms and Hypoxia Research and Control Act of 1998 to address harmful algal blooms, and for other purposes.

• Scientific Collection Permits

- Forty-six scientific collecting permits have been issued in 2024. An additional 11 applications have been reviewed and will be processed upon receipt of all required materials.

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****MARINE HABITAT & SHELLFISHERIES/MRA****

Offshore Wind, Restoration, Enhancement, Mitigation, and Habitat

• Environmental Review/ Waterfront Development

- Staff reviewed and provided comments to the Office of Environmental Review on several pre-applications, Land Management Reviews, and Waterfront Development permit applications.
 - LOI NJ NOAA Climate Resilience
 - MRA provided feedback and support for The Nature Conservancy's project entitled "Engaging Communities in Regional Sediment Management for Community Resilience and Ecological Restoration in the Atlantic Back Bays of NJ."
- Federal Consistency Review – Turtle Cove
 - MRA provided comments for a habitat restoration project at Turtle Cove located at the Forsythe Wildlife Refuge.
- MRA staff reached out to the Environmental Review Group (ERG) and DLRP staff for constructive feedback on the current version of the waterfront development Guidance Manual for DLRP staff use in reviewing permit applications.
 - MRA is currently drafting an updated version of this document as well as a "Quick Start Guide" with plans to have a final version completed in the Spring.
- MRA staff provided responses on several timing restriction requests.

• Ocean Acidification Team (OA Team)

- Staff attended the OA Team's monthly meeting.
- Staff drafted research notes on the relationship between seagrasses and ocean acidification.
 - Staff continue to research this topic and provide information for draft documents.

• Shell Recycling Program

- Staff continue to coordinate with Shell Recycling Program participants for weekly shell collection and investigate additional venues.
- Staff collected **343** bushels of recycled shell in the month of January.
- Staff continue to work with budgetary staff on the purchase of a barge for the shell planting efforts in the Mullica River.
 - Staff anticipates the barge to be purchased and used for this coming summer's shell planting.
- Staff continue to work with Viking Yacht Company to develop a partnership on the Shell Recycling Program. Viking has displayed a strong interest in the program. Staff and Viking staff are working to find areas where Viking can provide meaningful assistance in the program.
- Staff collected samples from the 2023 shell plant site within the Mullica River.
 - The site contained a very encouraging, 562 live spat per bushel. This correlates to an estimated 3.3 million oysters added to this location.
 - This is considerably different than non-planted areas within the same reef. In the Bureau's annual qualitative survey of the Mullica River oyster reefs, the Moss Point Reef, in non-planted areas, averaged 38 live spat per bushel.
 - This reflects nearly a 1400% increase of spat recruited to the shell planted area vs natural recruitment. Staff looks to continue to expand the program over the next several years to allow for increased volumes of shell to be planted annually.
- Staff met with staff from the Galveston Bay Foundation Shell Recycling Program to provide updates on each program as well as exchange ideas.

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- Galveston bay has had a successful program for many years and was one of the groups staff has coordinated with since the inception of the Shell recycling Program.
- Staff are working with other Bureau staff to secure additional shell from vendors to be used for the 2024 shell plant, which is intended to result in significantly more shell planted this year.
 - Staff will coordinate with vendors to ensure timely delivery of shell.
- Staff conducted interviews as part of the Princeton University Intern program. The selected intern will work with the Shell Recycling Program for 10 weeks during the summer, and assist, when possible, with other field projects.
 - Staff extended an offer through the program and will hear back on the candidate's decision in early February.
- **Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV)**
 - Staff began planning fieldwork for the Spring/Summer of 2024, which will include using the BioSonics MX echosounder to map seagrass in New Jersey's northern coastal rivers.
 - Staff continued planning the next full mapping survey for northern coastal rivers, which is anticipated for the Spring/Summer of 2025.
 - Staff met to discuss plans for a satellite imagery desktop analysis project for 2024.
 - Staff met with representatives from EPA Region 2 and New York DEC to discuss plans and efforts being conducted in both states.
 - Staff provided updates to the Natural Working Lands Strategy document for Aquatic Habitats.

Aquaculture and Shellfish Leases

- **2024 Lease Renewal**
 - Atlantic Coast Leasing Stats:
 - 170 Active Lessee
 - 940 leases
 - 2,416.56 ac
 - 25,966.74 linear ft
 - 5 vacated lots were reapplied following the January Shellfisheries Council meeting.
 - 4 lease lots were not eligible to be applied for after being vacated as per council policy and navigation issues the lots presented.
 - 67/68 Leases w/ structure compliant with insurance
 - 100% provided GP-30 notifications (26/26 growers)
 - Delaware Bay:
 - Staff assisted 73 of 78 shellfish Lessees with their lease renewal and signed agreement over the 2-month period.
 - 4 Shellfish Lessees were non-renewals but were granted a 30-day extension at the January Delaware Bay Section Council meeting. These renewals were completed during January and are awaiting the upcoming Council meeting for approval.
 - 1 Shellfish Lessee in Section A was a non-renewal and was vacated by choice. The lease had since been applied for and is awaiting upcoming Council meetings to be approved.
- **Lease Utilization and Inspection Database**
 - Staff have begun working on compiling information into a single leasing database in hopes of generating users a report rapidly and efficiently with all relevant information about a given lease lot.
 - Staff have been utilizing ArcGIS Pro to estimate the percentage of open water vs lease lot coverage in all bays along the Atlantic Coast of New Jersey.
 - Staff have begun entering 'lease activity' data collected from the 2023 lease renewal to identify and visualize lease utilization along the Atlantic Coast.

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- **Aquaculture Development Zone Buoys**

- Staff have had to reschedule the retrieval of the buoys marking ADZ 4 along the cape shore seaward of the Dennis Creek WMA due to the tides and weather being uncooperative for staff to be able to conduct the retrieval for annual buoy maintenance. Staff require a low tide during daylight hours which have been elusive so far this year, but staff are monitoring for the first available opportunity to retrieve the buoys.

- **Shellfish Lease Database Development**

- Staff continue working with the Bureau of GIS to allow GIS to input data directly into the NJEMS system and to manage the leasing database.
- Staff meet with staff from the Bureau of GIS to begin training in database editing and management of the leasing database.

State Fisheries and Quota Management

- **26th Annual Stock Assessment Workshop – Delaware Bay Oyster Dredge Fishery**

- Bureau staff participated in the 26th SAW on February 1-2. This assessment brings together industry members, academia, managers, and DEP staff over the course of two days. The group reviews the data collected from the previous sampling season, trends, environmental factors, and fisheries statistics to inform the DEP and the Shellfisheries Council on appropriate harvest levels.
- This year at the stock assessment a significant mortality event was observed in some portions of the Delaware Bay causing a dip in the total number of market sized oysters. While the committee did not formally tie the population drop to elevated disease rates, it is our staff's opinion that the drop is more than likely related to the increased disease.
- The DEP, in consultation with the Shellfisheries Council, sets the season's harvest parameters every year including, opening and closing date, times, area closures and the total allowable catch (TAC). The TAC that was approved at the stock assessment would equate to approximately 61,000 bushels and would be the lowest in twenty years (2006).
- This year's quota could be a reduction of over 35% from the 2023 season (95,799 bu.) and over 40% reduction from 2022 season.
- Staff will be closely monitoring the health of the stocks this year. While the Bureau believes there is no cause for immediate management actions, we made senior staff aware of the expected reduction.

- **Oyster Tonging Fishery – 2023-2024 Season**

- Staff started selling tonging tags in October 2023.
- The tonging season opened in November and will run through April.
- Six harvesters have reported harvest so far this season.
- Season Tag Sales and Harvest Highlights:

	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Total
Single (\$2)	100	200	200	150				650
Revenue	\$200	\$400	\$400	\$300				\$1,300
Harvest (bu)	N/A	76	161	112				349

- **Delaware Bay Section of the NJ Shellfisheries Council Meeting**

- Meeting held January 9th, 2024
- Held in person at the Rutgers Haskin Shellfish Research Lab and by webinar/conference call on MS Teams. Log in instructions posted to NJ Fish & Wildlife webpage <https://dep.nj.gov/njfw/councils-and-committees/shellfisheries-council/meetings/>
- Notice letter sent to Secretary of State, agenda drafted, posted to NJFW webpage

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- Election of Council Chairman (Councilman Warren “Barney” Hollinger) and Vice Chairman (Steve Fleetwood)
- Review of Council meeting minutes
- Oyster Resource Development Account printouts reviewed
- Delaware Bay Office revenue totals reviewed
- Lease Ground Transfers for Council approval
- Updated 2024 Lease Renewal status
- Red Knot Stakeholder committee update
- 2023 Direct Market Harvest Program update
- Oyster Tonging Fishery Update
- Update from Maurice River Dredging project
- 2024 Stock Assessment Workshop, S.A. Review Committee members selected for Council and Industry
- Discussions to be proactive with misleading information in the media pertaining to Vibrio and shellfish.
- Discussion for upcoming Aquaculture opportunities and programs
- Discussion for increasing spatfall timing data for future reference
- **Atlantic Coast Shellfish Council Meeting**
 - A hybrid council meeting was held in person (and online) at the Atlantic County Library - Galloway Twp Branch on 1/8/2024.
 - Various Dep reps were in attendance, along with the Atlantic coast council members in addition to the public.
 - Revenue Totals for each month
 - Total Revenue for November 2023 \$11,312.11
 - Shellfisheries Law Enforcement Fund \$3,406.00
 - Total Revenue for December 2023 \$18,523.37
 - Shellfisheries Law Enforcement Fund \$5,800.00
 - Annual Election of Atlantic Coast Chair and Vice-Chair
 - Mr. Walter Johnson was elected Chair
 - Mr. George Mathis was elected Vice-Chair
 - Lease Ground Transfers and lease ground applications up for decision attached for council approval.
 - Presentation of November 13, 2023 minutes for approval.
 - Agenda Items
 - Leases Vacated by Lessee
 - Leases Vacated by Lessee – Relay
 - Leases Vacated – Non-Payment
 - Approved application for consideration:
 - Sloop Point Oyster, LLC (Thomas Burke). Lot 2274 Dry Bay
 - Mackenzie Kurten. Lot 2290.1 Dry Bay
 - Approved application for decision:
 - Robert Torre. Lot 409.1 Graveling Pt
 - Susan Torre. Lot 410 Graveling Pt
 - Both were in previously in attendance
 - Approved application for transfer:
 - Stephen Gorman. Lot 2755, GB-Great Thorofare to Blue Republic Shellfish, LLC (Constantine Andrae)
 - William Barnish & John Walls. Lot 2101, Sand Thorofare to William Barnish

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- Donna Whiteside. Lot 1110, Great Sound to Parsons Michael Whiteside
- Robert Whiteside. Lot 1111, Great Sound to Parsons Michael Whiteside
- Topics of note included:
- Old Business
 - 2024 Council Meeting Schedule
 - Legislative Report
 - Committees
 - Structural Aquaculture
 - Regulatory
- New Business
 - Suspension of 2024 Hard Clam Relay Program
 - 2023 Mullica River Seed Bed Condition Monitoring

Surveys & Laboratory Work

- **Delaware Bay Trawl Survey**
 - Staff completed data entry and proofing from the 2023 Delaware Bay Juvenile Finfish Trawl Survey. Staff will begin analyzing the data to have a final report available due March 1, 2024.
- **Maurice River Cove Tongers Area – 2023 Shell Plant Sampling**
 - Bureau staff conducted a short site survey for the shell plant that occurred in July 2023 on a Tongers Area within Maurice River Cove.
 - Staff conducted three tows and took a subsample from each tow to make a composite bushel sample. Staff then sorted and recorded the number of oysters, boxes, and clutch, as well as sorting all planted shell with or without spat set.
 - Staff brought the shell with and without spat to the lab to measure and count all spat on shell, take volumes of shell with spat and volumes of shell without spat.
 - Staff used this data to calculate how many spat per bushel the sample yielded and extrapolated this data to the number of bushels of shell planted.
 - The Bureau planted 12,239 bushels of crushed clam shell in July 2023. The January survey resulted in 386.70 spat/bushel of planted shell which provided an estimate of over 4.7 million spat recruited to the oyster reef.
- **Mullica River Sampling**
 - Staff continue to use the Biosonics MX Habitat Echosounder to help further characterize the Mullica River oyster reefs. This equipment produces accurate bathymetry maps, as well as sediment typing.
 - Staff will continue to use the equipment over the next few months in combination with bottom grabs to ground truth. This will help to develop a more quantitative assessment of this resource and inform future shell planting efforts.
 - Staff continue to post-process data collected from the BioSonics MX Habitat Echosounder to help further characterize the Mullica River oyster seed beds.
 - Staff continues to ground truth remote sensing data. The samples taken will be overlaid in the remote sensing imagery to help further characterize the reefs.
 - Staff worked to develop a water monitoring program over two oyster beds in the Mullica River to monitor physical water chemistries. Staff collaborated with the Bureau of Marine Water Monitoring to learn about the best equipment and techniques for this type of monitoring. Staff received quotes from YSI for data loggers.
- **Raritan Bay Sediment Sample Collection**
 - Staff finished processing sediment samples on grain size analysis collected from the Raritan Bay as a part of the hard clam stock assessment.
- **Inventory of New Jersey's Estuarine Shellfish – Raritan and Sandy Hook Bays**

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- Staff drafted and submitted a Semi-Annual Performance Report for the Inventory of New Jersey's Estuarine Shellfish- Raritan and Sandy Hook Bays. The report covered June- December of 2023 and outlined the work done during that period which primarily consisted of data and sample processing.

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.
- The R/V James W. Joseph was pulled to dry-dock for the winter on January 11th. During the dry-dock period staff are working with contract vendors to replace the main work winch and perform hydraulic work on the vessel.
- Bureau staff are using the winter months between field sampling seasons to work on updating Delaware bay offices privateer's electrical, and trailer components.
- Bureau staff continue to maintain state vehicles with routine and scheduled service.

• Building Maintenance

- Bureau staff worked with plumbing vendors to get a quote for building plumbing work including a new urinal and hose bib.

Administrative/Miscellaneous

• Regulation

- The Bureau continues to work on updating shellfish regulations.

• License Sales

- Revenue collected from the Delaware Bay Office totaled \$12,861.00 for January 2024

License Type	Total	License Type	Total
Lease Fees	\$1,298.00	Dredge Boat Renewal	\$92.00
Assigned Fees	\$3,000.00	Menhaden	\$488.00
Nets	\$3,607.00	Tonging Tags	\$300.00
AC & DB Dredge	\$1,400.00	Application Fees	\$108.00
Commercial Crab Pot	\$1,200.00	Dealer/Shucker	\$100.00
Commercial SF	\$650.00	Recreational SF	\$10.00
Otter Trawl	\$204.00	Possession in Excess	\$200.00
Survey Fees	\$120.00	Area 2&3	\$84.00

• E-Library

- Staff continued work on an e-library (Zotero) to store literature for reference. Once complete, the e-library will provide easy access for Bureau staff to all literature. It will also enable staff to add future literature as needed.

• Monthly Meetings

- Staff attended several monthly meetings including NJ Bay Islands, East Coast SAV Collaborative, Blue Carbon Natural Working Group, and CHARRM Workgroup.

• Computer Inventory

- Bureau staff completed and submitted a request for a list of current employees and the computers currently assigned to them. Staff also used this to review upcoming Bureau computer needs based off warranty expirations and made plans for computer purchases by fiscal year from the current FY24 through FY27. Staff will coordinate with the Program's Leadership Technology Coordinator who will assist in facilitating IT purchase requests.

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- **Field Schedule**

- Staff began developing a field schedule for the upcoming 2024 field season. The schedule outlines all field plans for the year, as well as vessels used and the locations of the work. The schedule was added to a shared calendar for all bureau staff to access.
- Additionally, staff worked with other Bureau staff to plan and develop a oyster habitat survey for this coming year. The survey will involve identifying suitable oyster habitat/existing areas on the Atlantic Coast where oysters have the greatest likelihood for successful recruitment.