

Marine Resources Administration Monthly Report

FEBRUARY 2024

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

ASMFC/MAFMC/COOP/NOAA/ACCSP

- Staff submitted New Jersey's implementation plan for Addendum II to Amendment 7 to the Interstate Fisheries Management Plan for striped bass to ASMFC on February 28th. New Jersey plans to implement all required measures of Addendum II. The required recreational fishery measures of 1 fish at 28" to 31" have already been implemented and staff are drafting a NOAC to reduce the Striped Bass Bonus Program quota by 7% and to clarify requirements of the Special Fillet Permit. The Board will review and consider approval of state implementation plans on March 26th.
- Staff attended ASMFC's Intermediate Stock Assessment Training Part III in Arlington, VA from February 20th to 23rd. Part III consisted of a mock assessment workshop, with a focus on statistical catch-at-age models, to help advance participants overall ability to understand, review, and contribute to the data preparation and stock assessment modeling activities performed during a stock assessment.
- Staff have volunteered to draft the introduction and background sections of the upcoming cobia draft amendment.

MEETING SUMMARIES

- **Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission-ASMFC**
 - Administration staff participated in two meetings of the MAFMC/ASMFC Recreational Measures Setting FMAT/PDT's F-based approaches to fisheries management. The subgroup revisited two preliminary proposals that were developed. The subgroup will continue to develop these and other alternatives and will present their preliminary results to the full RMS group in early April 2024.
 - Administration staff participated in the NEFSC's assessment oversight panel to review work and assessment plans for 8 fish stocks. In short, Atlantic herring and surfclams assessment updates will be delivered directly to management bodies (MAFMC), while black sea bass and butterfish will undergo 1-2 hour peer reviews. The recently reviewed Atlantic cod stocks (Eastern and Western Gulf of Maine, Georges Bank, and Southern New England) will undergo 1-2 hour and ½-full day reviews. New cod stock definitions were established as part of the 2023 research track assessment, and so the management track assessments this summer will establish stock status, and start the transition process from managing 2 stocks, to the newly defined 4 stocks.
 - Staff participated in a conference call of the Ecological Reference Points Working Group (WG). The main topic of discussion involved finalization of predator and prey groups for inclusion in models. The group reasoned that data are very sparse for smooth dogfish, and that they are not important predators of AM, relative to existing predators. The WG elected to attempt to include bluefin tuna in the model, for now, pending subsequent analyses and data availability. Tuna are important menhaden predators, but their transatlantic migrations may prove to be too much for model inclusion. The review for this benchmark assessment is scheduled for 2025 and its main output will be reference points for menhaden that account for its role as a forage fish.
 - A public hearing was held on February 20 to gather public input on Draft Addendum VII to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for American Eel. Draft Addendum VII considers management measures to reduce the commercial yellow eel coastwide harvest cap in response to the 2023 benchmark stock assessment, which found the stock remains depleted. The Draft Addendum also considers options to modify monitoring requirements based on recommendations from the stock assessment and Technical Committee. Public comment will be accepted until 11:59 PM (EST) on

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March 24, 2024. Anyone unable to attend New Jersey's hearing on February 20, was invited to participate in any of the virtual or hybrid hearings for other states.

- The ASMFC Horseshoe Crab Stock Assessment Subcommittee (SAS) met via webinar on February 28 to review the results of sex ratio analysis, the final tagging model run with its estimates of survival and natural mortality (M) rates, and a catch multiple survey analysis run with the revised M. The stock assessment update report will be finalized and sent to SAS members for review and editing before being released to the Technical Committee for its review in mid-March. Considering the current media focus on horseshoe crabs, the SAS agreed to move up the timeline for completion to enable presentation of the final update assessment to the Management Board at its spring meeting.
- **Miscellaneous**
 - Staff attended an American shad ageing workshop as part of the Delaware River Basin Cooperative's American shad technical committee. The workshop took place at the New Paltz Regional Field Office of the NYDEC from February 28th to the 29th. The purpose of the workshop was to establish protocols for ageing American shad otoliths in support of developing yearly mortality estimates as part of the COOP's American Shad FMP. Staff was involved in spot checking otolith ages from previous years, reading paired otolith/scale samples, and production ageing of the 2022 samples. The 2023 otolith samples will be circulated for COOP member ageing throughout the summer months.

INDEPENDENT FISHERIES

- **Delaware Bay Tagging**
 - The 2024 Delaware Bay Striped Bass Tagging Survey began on February 1st. During eight trips in February, 351 striped bass and two American shad were tagged. Lengths, weights, and scale samples were taken from all tagged striped bass. On February 12th, 122 striped bass were tagged, which ranks as the highest number of striped bass tagged in a single trip since 2011.
- **Eel Surveys**
 - The 2024 Glass Eel Survey began on February 1. An alternative collector was set in Nacote Creek (Port Republic) on February 1 and the fyke net was set in Patcong Creek (Linwood) on February 6. Despite a few weather delays, the net was fishing for three weeks during the month of February. Glass eels were caught in both the collector and the fyke net, but preliminary catch data has not yet been calculated.
 - Data from the 2023 Yellow Eel Great Bay Pot Survey was finalized and submitted to the commercial data group. Data collected from the pot survey supplements commercial sampling for yellow stage American eels and includes lengths, weights, otoliths, swim bladder parasite presence/absence, sex and tag information (released or recaptured).
- **Sturgeon Receivers**
 - Staff met with grant coordination staff from the Office of Business Administration to discuss the Sturgeon Acoustic Telemetry project's budget and to prepare the application for submitting a 3-year extension to the FWS grant to continue to fund the project through FY '27.
 - Staff purchased bulk supplies for setting the individual receivers within the array which is scheduled to be deployed on the 19 of March.

DEPENDENT FISHERIES

- **Access Point Angler Intercept Survey-AP AIS**
 - Staff have completed mandatory trainings for Fish Identification and Procedure updates. Six staff attended the training held by ACCSP in Providence, RI on February 13-14. All other staff completed training held in-state on February 17-18.

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- All active APAIS staff signed Non-Disclosure Agreement forms for 2024 which were submitted to ACCSP.
- All site, vessel and headboat pressure updates for Wave 2 were completed and March's assignment draw was released on February 8. All 60 site assignments and 3 headboat assignments were scheduled and released to the sampling staff.
- **For-Hire Telephone Survey-FHTS**
 - Staff completed all vessel updates ahead of Wave 2, including all new 2024 imports inbox for-hire HMS permit submissions. The Wave 2 draw took place on February 15.
 - Staff reviewed necessary files for the first print run of mailings. The first round of letters was packed and mailed Friday, February 23. All letters will be sent out 10 days before the sampling week starts to ensure all vessel representatives are notified in a timely matter.
- **NJ Saltwater Recreational Registry Program-NJSRRP/Volunteer Angler Survey-VAS**
 - As of February 28, 2024, there were 27,521 individuals and 441 for-hire vessels registered with the New Jersey Saltwater Recreational Registry Program (NJSRRP) for 2024. (Last month: As of January 29, 2024, there were 20,800 individuals and 327 for-hire vessels registered for 2024 in the NJFW ELS).
- **Striped Bass Bonus Program-SBBP**
 - Staff have continued to work on finalizing the 2023 logbook and harvest data. The 2023 data is expected to be finalized by the end of March. Preparations for the 2024 SBBP began. The 2024 SBBP will open May 15 and staff expect to open the application period in April.

OUTREACH

- Comments and edits for the second draft of the 2024 Marine Digest were submitted to the editor on February 7. The third pass was received from the publisher on February 16. Comments and edits are due to the editor on March 5.
- Staff met via Teams with personnel from NJ Department of Human Services on February 12 to give them a demo of what the Marine Resources Administration (MRA) has built so far within the Microsoft Azure Synapse platform to house research survey data. DHS is interested in utilizing Azure Synapse to house their data in a central location in much the same way as MRA is utilizing this platform. The demo included data ingestion, creation of data flows and pipelines, and setting up external files for read access from data reporting/analysis software such as PowerBI and Tableau.

ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS (Marine Resources Administration)

- **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 benthic study, marine mammal aerial survey, surfclam fishery enhancement, recreational fisheries socioeconomics, acoustic telemetry, and eDNA.
 - External reviewer comments were received, summarized, and shared with RMI staff.
 - Staff attended a presentation by the BPU's Eagleton Fellow regarding her literature review on research priorities for offshore wind and wildlife.
 - 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.
 - Permitting support

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- Staff continued biweekly meetings with the permitting staff of ASOW1.
- Staff began reviewing documents for the state permitting of the ASOW S project and continued to coordinate with the DLUR regarding the Federal Consistency Review. Several issues are outstanding, and meetings are planned in March to discuss internally and work with the applicant. Those issues include the export cable that passes between two artificial reefs, mitigation for the NJ Ocean Trawl, surfclam surveys.
- Staff continued to use data from the Greater Atlantic Fisheries Office to parse out landings and revenue data for ASOW S from ASOW N for use in compensation analyses.
- Staff met with DSR, Leading Light Wind, one of the awardees of Solicitation 3, and NOAA Fisheries to discuss joining a Cooperative Research and Development Agreement (CRADA) with NOAA.
- Staff attended a monthly meeting with Community Offshore Wind to discuss fisheries engagement and mitigation.
- Staff spoke with Kevin Wark regarding monitoring planned for ASOW.
- BOEM Engagement
 - Staff attended the in person public stakeholder meeting for the NY Bight Programmatic Draft Environmental Impact Statement (PDEIS) and had discussions with BOEM staff.
 - Staff met with the NY Department of State to discuss the NY Bight PDEIS and topics of mutual interest to present in our comments.
 - Staff provided comments on the NY Bight PDEIS to the OPPN. BOEM then extended the comment period, so our comments are being reconsidered after reading the comments submitted by NOAA Fisheries and the USFWS.
- 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 participated in the second of three Facilitation Corps training sessions to improve skills in engagement, meeting planning, and conflict resolution. A capstone study was assigned; staff will propose planning a stakeholder webinar for the Department focused on offshore wind and the RMI.
 - Staff met with DSR and Deputy Chief of Staff Megan Brunatti to discuss making changes to our approach to stakeholdering for offshore wind, including focusing more on the RMI project and reducing opportunities for anti-wind groups to distract from productive engagement.
- 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. Staff requested information from VA regarding fisheries compensation for the CVOW project.
 - Staff attended the Regional Wildlife Science Consortium Science Plan Release Webinar.
 - Staff attended the RWSC Sea Turtle subcommittee meeting.
 - Staff attended the RWSC Acoustic Telemetry Workshop. Staff were pleased to hear the RMI acoustic telemetry project is being used as an example of regional coordination of offshore wind research.
 - Staff hosted the monthly NJ Surfclam Research Needs meeting.

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- Staff watched the presentations on offshore wind made at the Mid Atlantic Fishery Management Council February meeting. One of those presentations was from Vineyard Wind about their fisheries compensation and how industry members can apply for eligibility.
- Staff attended the NOAA Cooperative Research Summit, which was focused on working with the commercial fishing industry on research. Staff spoke with a sea scallop scientist from VIMS and made plans to have a meeting regarding research needs for offshore wind.
- Staff attended the workshop that the Responsible Offshore Science Alliance held to engage the fishing industry on offshore wind project specific monitoring. Staff had a follow up call with one of the fishermen who attended to discuss sea scallop research.
- Staff attended a webinar hosted by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine called Climate Conversations: Offshore Wind. The speakers were Josh Kohut from the Rutgers University Coastal Ocean Observation Leadership program and Tricia Jedelee from the Nature Conservancy. Ms. Jedelee's presentation on the challenges and benefits of offshore wind development were articulated clearly and convincingly and suggested that she would be a valuable contact and possible addition to our stakeholdering group.

ADMINISTRATIVE/MISCELLANEOUS (Marine Resources Administration)

• Licensing Operations

- Staff issued 115 commercial and recreational marine and shellfisheries licenses, totaling \$9,634.12 in revenue. There was a total of 7 new Atlantic Coast shellfisheries lease ground applications processed as well as 2 lease ground transfers completed.
- Staff collated and mailed out the modified season 2 directed black seabass and summer flounder trip limits notification letter to all respective permit holders and dealers.
- Staff wrapped up the 2024 commercial crab pot and Delaware Bay Crab Dredge transfer lottery application period, which closed February 29. A total of 22 Commercial Crab Pot and 4 Delaware Bay Crab Dredge applications were received at either the DBO and Nacote Creek offices. Both the Licensing and Commercial Unit will work together to collate applications to determine eligibility and the next steps in lottery transfer process, which should wrap up by end of March.
- Staff coordinated to edit and update all Marine and Shellfisheries applications with the most up to date information. The new applications should be available and posted to the DFW website by end of March.

• 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 is currently under review with OLA and DOL.
- 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 DOL.
 - 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

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- A3376, Webber (R26); Requires State agencies to periodically review administrative rules and regulations to ensure continued efficacy. Introduced on 2/1/2024 and referred to Asm State & Local Government.
- A3406, Fantasia (R24); Establishes Government Efficiency and Regulatory Review Commission. Introduced on 2/1/2024 and referred to Asm State & Local Government.
- A3484, Murphy (D7); Prohibits dumping dredge spoils on and around islands without municipal approval. Proposed for introduction on 2/1/2024.
- ACR125, Fantasia (R24), Inganamort (R24) Proposes constitutional amendment to preserve right of people to fish, hunt, trap and harvest fish and wildlife. Introduced and referred to Assembly Commerce, Economic Development and Agriculture Committee on 2/22/2024.
- Legislative Activity – Federal
 - S.3786 (Sen. Cruz, R-TX) A bill to provide for the standardization, publication, and accessibility of data relating to public outdoor recreational use of Federal waterways, and for other purposes. Read twice and referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation on 2/8/2024.
 - H.R.7408 (Rep. Westerman) To amend the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act to make supplemental funds available for management of fish and wildlife species of greatest conservation need as determined by State fish and wildlife agencies, and for other purposes. Introduced in House and referred to the Committee on Natural Resources, and in addition to the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology on 2/20/2024.
 - H.R. 7145 (Rep. Schiff, D-CA) SWIMS Act of 2024: 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 in House and referred to the Committee on Natural Resources, and in addition to the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology on 1/30/2024.
 - H.R.7106 (Rep. Beyer, D-VA) "National Oceans and Coastal Security Improvements Act of 2024." To amend the National Oceans and Coastal Security Act to make improvements to that Act, and for other purposes. Introduced in House and referred to the Committee on Natural Resources, and in addition to the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology on 1/29/2024.
 - H. R. 7203, the “Beaches Environmental Assessment and Coastal Health Act of 2024” or the “BEACH Act of 2024”, (Rep. Joyce, R-Ohio), a bill to amend the Federal Water Pollution Control Act relating to grants for beach monitoring, and for other purposes. Introduced on February 1, 2024, and referred to the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.
 - S. 3786, the “Modernizing Access to Our Public Oceans Act”, (Sen. Cruz, R-Texas), a bill to provide for the standardization, publication, and accessibility of data relating to public outdoor recreational use of Federal waterways, and for other purposes. Introduced on February 8, 2024, and referred to the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee.
 - H. R. 7408, the “America’s Wildlife Habitat Conservation Act”, (Rep. Westerman, R-Arkansas), a bill to amend the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act to make supplemental funds available for management of fish and wildlife species of greatest conservation need as determined by State fish and wildlife agencies, and for other purposes. Introduced on February 20, 2024, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee, and in addition to the House Agriculture Committee, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned.

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- H.R. 7459, the “Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act and Dingell-Johnson Sport Fish Restoration Act District of Columbia Equality Act of 2024”, (Rep. Norton, D-DC), a bill to amend the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act and the Dingell-Johnson Sport Fish Restoration Act to treat the District of Columbia the same as a State for purposes of such Acts, and for other purposes. Introduced on February 26, 2024, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
- H.R. 4051, the “Supporting the Health of Aquatic systems through Research Knowledge and Enhanced Dialogue Act” or the “SHARKED Act”, (Rep. Wittman, R-Virginia), a bill to direct the Secretary of Commerce to establish a task force regarding shark depredation, and for other purposes. On February 5, 2024, the full House of Representatives passed as amended by voice vote.
- H.R. 6784, the “ESA Flexibility Act” (Rep. Stauber, R-Minnesota), a bill to amend the Endangered Species Act of 1973 to provide for protective regulations when a species is listed as an endangered species. On Wednesday, February 14, 2024, the House Natural Resources Committee’s Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries held a legislative hearing.
- **Scientific Collection Permits**
 - Sixty-five scientific collecting permits have been issued in 2024. One additional application has been reviewed and will be processed upon receipt of all required materials.

****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.
 - Mauricetown Crossway Firebreak Heislerville LMR
 - MRA received and reviewed a proposed project to create a firebreak located within Mauricetown.
 - Dock Installation Forked River LMR
 - MRA provided comments relating to an in-kind replacement of docks located in Forked River.
 - Boat Ramp and Bulkhead Replacement Leonardo LMR
 - MRA provided comments for an in-kind ramp replacement located at Leonardo marina. This marina is commonly used for surveys for both the Bureau of Marine Fisheries and the Bureau of Marine Habitat & Shellfisheries. Contacts were provided for both survey leads.
- MRA staff provided responses on several timing restriction requests and worked with DLRP staff on several mapping interpretations.
- Action Watersports Field Investigation
 - On February 12, 2024, the Bureau performed a field investigation in response to a request by DLRP staff to determine if a site was still considered shellfish habitat.
- Waterfront Development Guidance Manual
 - Staff continued to draft an updated version of the MRA’s Waterfront Development Guidance Manual to be used for DLRP staff as well as a “Quick Start Guide.” The manual is anticipated to be completed and made available for DLRP staff in late March/early April.

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- **Shell Recycling Program**

- Staff continue to coordinate with Shell Recycling Program participants for weekly shell collection and investigate additional venues.
- Staff collected 265 bushels of recycled shell in the month of February.
- Staff continues 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 worked with Viking Yacht Company to finalize a partnership on the Shell Recycling Program. Viking has agreed to provide a storage area at their facility for the MRA barge when not in use, along with providing space for shell storage and assistance with some collection efforts/purchases. Staff will continue to work with Viking staff to coordinate areas of partnership.
- 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 met with the Vice-President of the Professional Chefs Association of South Jersey (PCASJ) to discuss the Shell Recycling Program. The PCASJ requested staff attend a meeting in May to discuss the Program and educate chefs on the advantages of recycling shell. Additionally, the PCASJ offered assistance to reach new restaurants involved in the Shell Recycling Program. This directly led to a contact at Harrah's Casino, one of the few casinos in Atlantic City that have not joined the program.
- Staff reached out to Harrah's Casino to discuss the potential of recycling shell. Harrah's quickly joined the program and the first collection from Harrah's will take place the first week of March. This addition is expected to add significant volume to the amount of shell collected and leaves only three remaining casinos in Atlantic City that have not joined to date. Staff will continue efforts to add these venues as well.
- Staff met with American Littoral Society (ALS) Staff to discuss education/outreach programs, and shell recycling. ALS has an established education program that reaches students in underserved coastal communities. Discussions centered around areas for potential partnership. Staff will continue to work with ALS staff.

- **Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV)**

- Staff continued planning fieldwork for the Spring/Summer of 2024, which will include using the BioSonics MX echosounder to map submerged aquatic vegetation in NJ'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 began working with contracting staff on an upcoming imagery desktop analysis project for 2024.

Aquaculture and Shellfish Leases

- **Lease Utilization and Inspection Database**

- Staff continue 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 continue utilizing ArcGIS Pro to estimate the percentage of open water vs lease lot coverage in all bays along the Atlantic Coast of New Jersey.

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- Staff completed entering 'lease activity' data collected from the 2023 lease renewal to identify and visualize lease utilization along the Atlantic Coast.
 - Staff will implement this data in a leasing reference database and out a report for easy access to the data,
- **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.

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.
- **Direct Market Harvest Program – 2024 – Delaware Bay Oyster Dredge Fishery**
 - Quotes to purchase tags were obtained from three vendors. Tags for the 2024 DMH season were ordered from Dickey Manufacturing Company on 2/1/24 and delivered on 2/22/24.
 - 10,000 Single/red and 4,000 cage/neon yellow
 - Season opens April 1 – Nov 22, 2024
 - Oyster Dredge Boat License Holder sign-up begin March 11 – March 22, 2024
 - The starting quota was approved at the March 39,237 bu., with the potential to increase to approximately 61,000 bu.
- **Intermediate Transplant Program – 2024**
 - The 2024 Program is expected to transplant over 60,000 bushels of oysters, which is higher than usual due to the stock status improving in the transplant regions. Transplants ranged from 15,350 bu. to 41,000 bu, with an average of just over 30,000 bu. over the last ten years.
 - Staff started inquiring about the procurement process in February to allow time for paperwork to be completed before the Program is expected to start at the end of April.
 - The Program is expected to take longer at around three weeks to complete, compared to two weeks for a typical year.
- **Oyster Tonging Fishery – 2023-2024 Season**
 - Staff started selling tonging tags in October 2023
 - Tonging season opened November 1 through April 30
 - Two harvesters have reported harvest

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○ Season Tag Sales and Harvest Highlights:

	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Total
Single (\$2)	100	200	200	150	150			800
Revenue	\$200	\$400	\$400	\$300	\$300			\$1,600
Harvest (bu)	N/A	76	161	112	117			466

● Delaware Bay Section of the NJ Shellfisheries Council Meeting

- The meeting was held Tuesday, March 5th, 2024 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
- Agenda Items
 - 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 Extension Status
 - Red Knot Stakeholder Committee Update
 - Vessel and Oyster Dredge Boat License Transaction
 - Oyster Tonging Fishery Update
 - Atlantic Horseshoe Crab (*Limulus polyphemus*) Listing Petition
 - 2024 Stock Assessment Workshop, S.A. Review Committee members selected for Council and Industry
 - Discussion for upcoming Aquaculture opportunities and programs
 - Discussion for increasing spatfall timing data for future reference
 - Review of the 26th Stock Assessment Workshop Findings
 - Setting of the 2024 Direct Market Program Quota and Season Dates
 - Setting of the 2024 Intermediate Transplant Parameters

● Atlantic Coast Shellfish Council Meeting

- A hybrid council meeting was held in person (and online) at the Stafford Twp Firehouse on 2/12/2024.
 - 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 \$2, 766.46
 - Shellfisheries Law Enforcement Fund \$602.00
- Presentation of January 8, 2024 minutes for approval.
- Application for decision:
 - Sloop Point Oyster, LLC (Thomas Burke)*. Lot 2274. Sec B. Dry Bay
 - Mackenzie Kurten. Lot 2290.1. Sec B. Dry Bay
 - Both were in previously in attendance
- Approved application for transfer:
 - William Flockhart & William E. Flockhart. Lot 2330, Dry Bay to William E. Flockhart
 - William Flockhart & William E. Flockhart. Lot 2323, Dry Bay to William E. Flockhart
 - William Flockhart & William E. Flockhart. Lot 2322, Dry Bay to William E. Flockhart

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- Paul Seyler. Lot 2727, Shelter Island to Raymond Seyler
- Paul Seyler. Lot 2530, Scull Bay to Raymond Seyler
- Susan Foose. Lot 234, Ludlum Bay to Luke Williams
- Philip Naylor & Edward Smith. Lot 2745, GB – Great Thorofare to Philip Naylor
- John Capasso. Lot 1006, Great Sound to Michael Whiteside
- D. Christina Hartnett. Lot 1109, Great Sound to Michael Whiteside
- Topics of note included:
- Old Business
 - Leasing Summary
 - Structural Aquaculture Committee
 - Regulatory Committee
- New Business
 - Petition to List Atlantic Horseshoe Crab
- **2024 Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference**
 - Staff attended a virtual planning meeting hosted by the NJ Bureau of Marine Water Monitoring for the 2024 ISSC. The ISSC is to be held in October and hosted in Cape May, NJ.

Surveys & Laboratory Work

- **Delaware Bay Trawl Survey**
 - Staff completed data entry and proofing from the 2023 Delaware Bay Juvenile Finfish Trawl Survey. Staff analyzed the data and updated the annual report which was submitted before the March 8, 2024 deadline. The 2024 survey observed its eighth highest total catch of 19,730 individuals of the survey's 33 years, which was aided by the third highest catch (fourth highest abundance index) of 17,094 individuals for bay anchovy (*Anchoa mitchilli*).
- **Alternative Substrate for Oyster Beds**
 - Bureau Staff attended an Alternative Oyster Substrate symposium February 26th-28th 2024 where industry members and academics from around the nation discussed alternative substrate materials instead of the standard oyster shell as the shell resource is declining across the nation.
 - From this symposium Bureau staff on the Atlantic Coast and Delaware Bay began looking into the viability and logistics of using alternative materials for “shell planting” if the shell resource were to deplete.
 - Bureau staff researched alternative cultch prices and received quotes for limestone aggregate.
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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, improve sound deadening the winch and engine box, and perform hydraulic work on the vessel.
 - Bureau staff are using the winter months between survey seasons to work on updating Delaware Bay Office's Privateer; a new console, switch board, battery cluster, and deck hatch were purchased and installed along with upgrades to the wiring harness for the vessel. Staff continue to work on the vessel in preparation for the upcoming survey months.
 - Bureau staff continue to maintain state vehicles with routine and scheduled service.
- **Building Maintenance**

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- Bureau staff worked with plumbing vendors to get plumbing work including a new urinal and hose bib installed.
- **Equipment Maintenance**
 - Bureau staff began developing a YSI SOP for maintenance and started to work to create a proper cleaning and maintenance schedule.
 - Staff placed worn out hinges on the doors on the Shell Recycling Program's dump trailer.

Administrative/Miscellaneous

- **Regulation**
 - The Bureau continues to work on updating shellfish regulations.
- **License Sales**
 - Revenue collected from the Delaware Bay Office totaled \$5,318.00 for February 2024

License Type	Total	License Type	Total
Nets	\$2,588.00	Tonging Tags	\$300.00
Commercial Crab Pot	\$800.00	Application Fee	\$78.00
Menhaden	\$772.00	Commercial SF	\$50.00
Crab Dredges	\$700.00	Recreational SF	\$30.00

- **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 monthly meetings including the NJ Bay Islands, Wetland Seminar Series, and CHARRM Workgroup.
- **MRA Outreach, Communications and Education Program**
 - Staff provided training on Adobe Illustrator software to be used for future outreach-related graphics, including infographics, posters, and more.
 - Staff participated in a training session on Canva software which can be used for the development of MRA communication products.
 - Staff assisted in the creation of an updated outreach poster highlighting both the Bureau of Marine Fisheries and the Bureau of Marine Habitat & Shellfisheries surveys. The posters will be used for future outreach events.
 - Staff continue to enhance the MRA photo and video library.
- **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 an 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.