

Marine Resources Administration Monthly Report

MARCH 2024

Marine Resources Administration Staff:

Joseph Cimino, Administrator- MRA

Russell Babb, Chief - BMHS

Jeffrey Brust, Chief - BMF

Heather Corbett, Supervising Biologist

Jeffrey Normant, Supervising Biologist

Craig Tomlin, Supervising Biologist

Michael Celestino, Research Scientist I

Colleen Brust, Research Scientist II

Linda Barry, Research Scientist III

Peter Clarke, Principal Biologist

Maryellen Gordon, Principal Biologist

Gregory Hinks, Principal Biologist

Brian Neilan, Principal Biologist

Jenny Tomko, Principal Biologist

Jamie Darrow, Senior Biologist

Brendan Harrison, Senior Biologist

Andrew Hassall, Senior Biologist

Matt Heyl, Senior Biologist

Amber Johnson, Senior Biologist

Chad Power, Senior Biologist

Jen Pyle, Senior Biologist

Scott Stueber, Senior Biologist

Alissa Wilson, Senior Biologist

Megan Swain, Environmental Specialist II

Richard DiVaccaro, Environmental Specialist I

Nina Colagiovanni, Assistant Biologist

Conor Davis, Assistant Biologist

Danielle Dyson, Assistant Biologist

Les Frie, Assistant Biologist

Tyler Harris, Assistant Biologist

Samantha MacQuesten, Assistant Biologist

Stacy VanMorter, Assistant Biologist

Jessica Daher, Program Specialist

William Maxwell, Technician I

Shana Fehring, Technician II

Chuck Karr, Technician II

Jonathan Klotz, Technician II

William Barker, Senior Wildlife Worker

Lia Carpenter, Senior Wildlife Worker

Michael Linder, Senior Wildlife Worker

Brielle Colledge, Wildlife Worker

Michael Swist, Wildlife Worker

Lauren Strazzeri, Permit Coordination Officer I

Karen Bates, Technical Assistant II

Kathryn Ford, Agency Services Rep I

Natalie Dragos, Agency Services Rep Trainee

Ryan Alianell, ASMFC Fisheries Technician

Sharon Otto, ASMFC Fisheries Technician

Joseph Shehata, ASMFC Fisheries Technician

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MARINE FISHERIES/MRA

MEETING SUMMARIES

- **Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program-ACCSP**
 - Staff attended the annual Commercial Technical Committee webinar. Major points of discussion included an accountability workgroup update, electronic monitoring standards, and attribute workgroup update.
 - Staff attended the annual Information System webinar. A major point of discussion included software project updates. Software updates included accomplishments from 2023, 2024-2025 project prioritization, eDR redesign, and registration tracking updates.
 - March 20 and 21 staff attended the 2024 ACCSP Recreational Technical Committee meeting in Arlington, VA. During this meeting the discard subcommittee presented the updated pilot project proposal that is being prepared for submission this spring to the entirety of the technical committee. NOAA presented an overview of the APAIS sample design, provided a review of how catch and effort estimates are generated and discussed potential revisions to APAIS field procedures.
- **Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission-ASMFC**
 - The Striped Bass Technical Committee (TC) and Stock Assessment Subcommittee (SAS) met jointly to review proposed Addendum II area-specific recreational measures by NY, PA, and DE. The TC/SAS provided feedback and specifically requested PA to follow up with an updated analysis. The TC/SAS also reviewed the 2024 stock assessment update timeline and data needs. Lastly, the TC/SAS created a workgroup to consider improving future size-bag-season analyses and consider what types of short & long-term projections to provide to the Board to better inform future management action.
 - The Striped Bass Plan Review Team (PRT) met to review Addendum II implementation plans. The PRT noted some states do not specify or plan to implement the recreational filleting requirement of limiting possession to no more than two fillets per legal fish. Furthermore, the PRT noted Maryland, Virginia, and Potomac River Fisheries Commission (PRFC) have not implemented the 7% reduction in Chesapeake Bay commercial quota because the commercial tags have already been distributed for 2024. Maryland and PRFC noted that if an overage occurs in 2024, that overage will be deducted from their 2026 quota because the 2025 quota will have already been distributed to permit holders, which is inconsistent with Addendum II which states overages should be paid back the following year.
 - Administration staff participated in a conference call of the recreational measures setting (RMS) FMAT subgroup focused on fishing mortality-based management. The goal of the call was to further explore a proposal from an adjunct member of the group that essentially looks to match stock assessment model predicted length frequencies with recreational demand model (RDM) length frequencies. The RDM is currently used to ensure state fishing regulations are expected to produce requisite total removals from fish populations. Work is ongoing as is work from staff related to portioning total stock reference points into sector-specific reference points.
 - The ASMFC Horseshoe Crab Adaptive Resource Management (ARM) Subcommittee (SC) met via webinar March 1 to review the draft response to Dr. Kevin Shoemaker's report, submitted to the ASMFC Horseshoe Crab Management Board at the October 2023 meeting, criticizing the 2022 ARM Framework revision. Dr. Shoemaker raised 6 areas of concern, and the Board had tasked the ARM SC to craft an official response addressing each of these areas. The ARM SC made several

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editorial suggestions to strengthen the response document with the final report to be presented to the Board at its spring meeting in May.

- Staff attended via webinar meetings of the ASMCF's Cobia Plan Development Team on March 7 and March 18. The purpose of the meetings was to continue working on the draft Addendum for reallocating the recreational cobia quota. The PDT plans to have a draft for Board review at the spring meeting.
- Staff attended via webinar a meeting of the ASMFC's Sturgeon Ageing Sub-committee on Monday, March 11. The purpose of the meeting was to re-initiate an ageing workshop and exchange to determine standard protocols and preferred ageing structures for Atlantic sturgeon. The key decision from that call was that the ageing exchange should take place after the in-person workshop. Our next steps going forward will be: (1) a longer pre-workshop webinar in June; (2) an in-person workshop later in the year; (3) the hard part exchange; (4) final webinar to review exchange results and revise/finalize the ageing protocols
- **Miscellaneous**
 - Staff attended via webinar the quarterly meeting of the Delaware River Cooperative's Technical Committee on Tuesday, March 5. Topics on the agenda included preliminary findings from American eel outmigration studies on the Delaware and Susquehanna Rivers, progress updates on the proposed Delaware River Creel Survey and recent American Shad Ageing Workshop, and a round table of agency spring sampling updates and plans for 2024.

INDEPENDENT FISHERIES

- **Delaware Bay Tagging**
 - Since February 1, 495 striped bass and three American shad have been tagged in 12 trips. So far 2024 ranks as the highest since 2011 in numbers of striped bass tagged. Lengths, weights, and scale samples have been taken from the tagged striped bass. Paired age-samples have been taken from three additional striped bass.
- **Delaware River Seine Survey**
 - Data from the 2023 Delaware River seine survey was finalized. During the survey, 192 seine hauls were performed, catching 124 striped bass. Of those, 95 were age zero (YOY), producing a whole river geometric mean CPUE index of 0.26. This ranks as the 38th highest index in the 43-year time-series and is below both the time-series average (1.09). Young-of year (yoy) striped bass occurred in 40 out of the 192 hauls (21%) with individual catches ranging from 0 to 36 bass.
 - Several data requests from MRA biologists and partner agencies were completed. The full database was submitted to PSEG as required by their funding grant on March 20. A summary of survey data was submitted to Delaware's Division of Fish and Wildlife as part of their scientific collection permit requirements.
- **Eel Surveys**
 - The 2024 glass eel survey completed six weeks of sampling during the month of March. As of March 31, the fyke net (Patcong Creek) has been tended 23 times catching a total of 16,806 glass eels (average of 730 glass eels per haul) and 29 green eels. The preliminary glass eel index for 2024 is 467.9, which ranks eighth highest in the 21-year timeseries and is above the timeseries average (174.8). In addition, individual biological data was collected from 577 glass eels. The average length was 58.50mm, the average weight was 0.183g and the average pigmentation stage was 1.5. Finally, the alternative eel collector (Nacote Creek) has been tended 32 times catching a total of 2,342 glass eels (average of 73 eels per haul). The survey is expected to run until April 12.

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- Fifty (50) glass eels collected in the fyke net were provided to Fish and Wildlife's pathologist, Joe Groff on March 14. Joe is looking to create a baseline for fish health from as many F&W surveys as possible. An additional 50 glass eels will be provided before the end of the 2024 survey.
- Preparation has begun for the Spring portion of the 2024 yellow eel pot survey which takes place in Great Bay. The survey is expected to begin on April 15 and run through mid-June.
- **Herring Surveys**
 - The adult gillnet portion of the herring survey was initiated for 2024 on March 11. Herring catches have been consistently steady through the month of March, signaling a relatively early and strong spawning run so far this year.
- **Horseshoe Crab Survey**
 - Staff visited Fortescue to address the changing beaches. The sampling areas have changed significantly, and the 2024 spawning survey will begin on Sunday, May 5.
- **Raritan-Sandy Hook Bay Complex Inventory Project**
 - The Raritan Inventory Project began its third year of sampling on March 1, 2024, and was completed in 6 days. All 16 otter trawl stations, 16 seine stations and 12 gillnet stations were completed. Gillnet sampling consisted primarily of Atlantic menhaden, alewife, horseshoe crab, and a 24.5-inch weakfish. Otter trawl sampling consisted of primarily Atlantic silversides and larval Clupeid species. Other species collected consisted of bay anchovy, blue crab, spotted hake, Northern pipefish and Atlantic menhaden. Seine sampling consisted primarily of Atlantic silversides. Other species collected consisted of larval Clupeid species, Atlantic menhaden, bay anchovy, and mummichog. Sixteen eDNA water samples were collected and filtered from otter trawl stations and nine eDNA water samples were collected and filtered from seine stations.
- **Sturgeon Receivers**
 - Staff met with grant coordinators from the Office of Business Administration to discuss the budget for the 2021-2024 sturgeon grant and plans to spend the remaining funds before the end of the grant period. Plans were also finalized for submitting a grant proposal for a new grant to fund the sturgeon project for the next 3 years.
 - All 19 acoustic receivers were in Delaware bay without issue on Wednesday, March 27. The deployment was later than usual this year due to weather delays.
- **Ventless Trap Survey**
 - Ventless trap survey commenced its 9th year of sampling. Traps were placed on Little Egg and Atlantic City Reefs in the Southern Region and Sea Girt and Manasquan Reefs in the northern region. For the first time, the VTS data will be used in the current American lobster stock assessment. Preliminary data comparisons between the VTS and mobile gear surveys in the Mid-Atlantic region show significant differences between the Catch per unit effort of lobster as well as several other structure associated species. Currently, the NJ VTS survey is the only type of fixed gear survey existing in this region.
 - Blue Crab Survey staff is designing a new blue crab survey to investigate blue crab trap interaction with diamond back terrapins. Generally, we are looking at setting gear from May 1-October sampling one week per month at 2 sites and fishing three various turtle excluder devices.

DEPENDENT FISHERIES

- **Access Point Angler Intercept Survey-APAIS**
 - March ended with a total of 91 intercepts that were collected over 60 site assignments and 1 completed headboat assignment. 65 intercepts were collected from shore anglers, 5 from private/rental boat anglers and 21 from a trip on the Golden Eagle. Two headboat assignments were

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unable to be completed due to the vessels delaying the start of their fishing season to the very end of March for the holiday weekend.

- March mileage is being collected and submitted for reimbursement.

• **Artificial Reef**

- Staff deployed the second of a scheduled 10 deployments for 2024. The first series of reef balls were deployed on Little Egg Inlet reef site during February. Staff sunk the 90-foot Carrabasset in March. This vessel was previously owned by the Carlos Rafael, aka, the Cod Father. Rafael was sentenced to 46 months in prison in September 2017 after pleading guilty to 28 offenses, including conspiracy, false labeling of fish, bulk cash smuggling, tax evasion and falsifying federal records. In addition, he was forced to liquidate all assets pertaining to fishing and is prohibited from participating in anything related to fishing in the future.

• **Commercial Fisheries/Quota Management**

- A summary of the 2023 Miniature Fyke Net License fishery was submitted for inclusion in the Semi-Annual Performance Report for the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Program. All 114 license holders were required to submit the mandatory forms monthly even if the license holder did not fish. According to these reports, 332 individual trips yielded a preliminary harvest of 54,203 pounds of eels.
- Summer flounder: The commercial 2024 Directed Season 2 began on March 1. Directed harvest is at 55% of the seasonal quota.
- Black Sea Bass: The commercial 2024 Directed Season 2 began on March 1. Directed harvest is at 50% of the seasonal quota.
- Bluefish: The commercial bluefish season began on January 1. The current harvest is at 533 pounds which is less than 1% of the quota.
- Scup: The Winter I season started on January 1 and ends April 30. The current coastwide harvest is 5,943,897 pounds or 63% of the seasonal quota, with NJ landing 2,589,714 pounds, accounting for 43% of coastal landings.
- Spiny dogfish: The 2023/24 commercial season began on May 1, 2023. The current harvest is 697,376 pounds or 76% of the quota.
- Staff entered and verified all 2023 commercial harvester trip reports and submitted data to ACCSP before the March 11 deadline. Data from all partners is scheduled to be released on April 15.
- Staff received and approved 4 applications for confidential commercial data. Requests were from federal partners renewing their confidential access.
- Staff submitted the Atlantic Coastal grant semi-annual project report.
- Staff received commercial data request for American lobster and coastal sharks.

• **For-Hire Telephone Survey-FHTS**

- Staff began conducting the FHTS for the 2024 sampling year. 48 vessels were drawn for the month. 14 of those vessels responded resulting in a 29.1% response rate.
- Staff continued to work in the NOAA vessel directory updating vessels for the upcoming year. All HMS permit merges were successfully conducted within the imports inbox of the vessel directory.

• **NJ Saltwater Recreational Registry Program-NJSRRP/Volunteer Angler Survey-VAS**

- As of March 28, 2024, there were 39,553 individuals and 600 for-hire vessels registered with the New Jersey Saltwater Recreational Registry Program (NJSRRP) for 2024. (Last month: As of February 28, 2024, there were 27,521 individuals and 441 for-hire vessels registered for 2024 in the NJFW ELS).
- Staff met with Parks staff to discuss Registry outreach, specifically for the Mobile Sportfish Permit holders.

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- Staff attended the RFP for Electronic Licensing System Kick-Off meeting, representing the Saltwater Registry.
- **Striped Bass Bonus Program-SBBP**
 - Staff continued to finalize data from the individual 2023 SBBP and prepare for the 2024 SBBP which will open May 15.
 - The 2023 Party/Charter Boat data has been finalized.

OUTREACH

- Comments and edits for the third draft of the 2024 Marine Digest were submitted to the editor on March 5. The fourth pass was received from the publisher on March 18 and comments/edits were submitted to the editor on March 26. The final draft is expected during the first week of April, keeping everything on track for a May 10 shelf date.

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.
 - On two occasions, staff met with researchers and commercial fishers to discuss research needs to support the sea scallop fishery during offshore wind development. The first meeting was with an economist and a fisher and member of the New England Fisheries Management Council Sea Scallop Advisory Panel. The second meeting was similar, but with a sea scallop expert from Coonamessett Farms and a second Advisory Panel member. Staff intend to develop an RMI project or request for proposals.
 - Additional meetings were held to discuss projects and concepts in development including the benthic study, surfclam fishery enhancement, recreational fisheries socioeconomics, and sea turtle tagging. Field work for the sea turtle study commenced in March. The RMI Steering Committee will vote on approving funding for the surfclam study in early April. Staff met with the PIs of the Slocum glider project to discuss the next stage of research.
 - Staff continued work on 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 met with the Executive Director of the Consortium to discuss how to collaborate and coordinate through our contracts and RFPs.
 - Staff met with DSR to work on updating the research priorities.
 - Permitting support
 - Staff continued biweekly meetings with the permitting staff of ASOW1.
 - Staff continued the environmental review of state permitting of the ASOW S project and continued to coordinate with the DLUR regarding the Federal Consistency Review. Mitigation of impacts to artificial reefs and the NJ Ocean Trawl are outstanding.
 - 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.
 - Along with other Department colleagues, staff met with Leading Light Wind and Attentive Energy to coordinate plans for regional and project-specific research and monitoring.
 - Staff met with Mr. Ben Galuardi from NOAA's Greater Atlantic Fisheries Office to clarify some details in the data that were sent to MRA for assessing potential economic impacts from ASOW S.

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- Staff met to discuss mitigation of impacts to the NJ Ocean Trawl as ASOW is constructed in the trawl area.
- BOEM Engagement
 - Staff provided revised comments on the NY Bight PDEIS to the OPPN following an extension of the comment period.
- Stakeholder Support
 - Staff provided a briefing on offshore wind development to the Atlantic Coast Shellfisheries Council.
 - Staff met with Kevin Wark and Brady Lybarger, two commercial fishermen, to discuss research needs to support fisheries.
 - Staff met with DSR and Deputy Chief of Staff Megan Brunatti to plan the next Environmental Resources Working Group meeting.
- Regional coordination
 - Staff hosted the monthly meeting of the Central Atlantic Offshore Wind and Fisheries group. Staff learned that Maryland requested to BOEM that the Central Atlantic planning area be extended northwards off the coast of New Jersey.
 - Staff participated in a Project Advisor Committee meeting for a surfclam fishery enhancement project that is funded by NY.
 - Staff attended the Regional Wildlife Science Consortium State Caucus meeting, Protected Species Subcommittee meeting, and Habitat & Ecosystem Subcommittee meeting.
 - Staff hosted the monthly NJ Surfclam Research Needs meeting.
 - Staff met with the Executive Director of the Responsible Offshore Science Alliance (ROSA) to continue to coordinate project-specific and regional research and monitoring needs.
 - Staff participated in the ROSA Advisory Council meeting.
 - Staff participated in the NYSERDA Fisheries Technical Working Group meeting.

ADMINISTRATIVE/MISCELLANEOUS (Marine Resources Administration)

• Licensing Operations

- Front office licensing staff issued 170 commercial and recreational marine and shellfisheries licenses, totaling \$8,152.00 in revenue.
- There were a total of 2 Atlantic Coast Aquaculture lease ground transfers processed.
- Staff prepared and mailed out certified letters to all crab pot and Delaware bay crab dredge lottery transfer applicants, informing them of approval as well as deadline to purchase.
- Staff attended virtual training regarding the DPP procurement process, offered by the Department of Treasury.
- Staff revamped the outdated record retention schedule for all agency related documentation, which is pending approval through the Office of Records Access at their April meeting.

• Regulatory/Legislative

- Notices of Administrative Changes (NOACs)
 - A NOAC requiring all federally-permitted lobster fishing vessels to install approved vessel tracking devices became effective on March 8, 2024, when the notice was filed with the OAL. The notice was published in the April 1, 2024, NJ Register.
 - A NOAC modifying the Atlantic striped bass fillet possession limits and the Striped Bass Bonus Program quota became effective on March 22, 2024, when the notice was filed with the OAL. The notice will appear in the May 6, 2024, NJ Register.

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- A NOAC modifying the recreational scup season and the recreational summer flounder season and size limit became effective on March 22, 2024, when the notice was filed with the OAL. The notice will appear in the May 6, 2024, NJ Register.
- 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
 - A4014, Katz (D8); Permits DEP officers to use drones. Introduced and referred to Assembly Environment, Natural Resources and Solid Waste Committee on 3/7/2024.
 - A4045/S2930, Danielsen (D17), Flynn (R13)/Sarlo (D36); Makes various changes to process for access to government records; appropriates \$8 million. Introduced and referred to Assembly State and Local Government Committee on 3/4/2024. Reported out of committee with committee amendments, referred to Assembly Appropriations Committee on 3/11/2024. Reported out of committee with committee amendments, 2nd reading in Senate on 3/11/2024.
 - S2840, Singer (R30); Directs DEP to lift conservation restrictions imposed as condition of CAFRA permit under certain conditions. Introduced and referred to Senate Environment and Energy Committee on 3/4/2024.
 - A-4056 Calabrese (D-36); Changes DEP authority to allow taking of aquacultured shellfish on Sunday. 03/11/24—Introduced, ref to Asm Commerce, Econ Dev & Agriculture.
 - S-2958 Bucco (R-25); Sarlo (D-36); Establishes Government Efficiency and Regulatory Review Commission. (2024:A-3406; 2022:A-4161) 03/11/24—Proposed for introduction.
 - SR-83 Bucco (R-25); Sarlo (D-36); Creates Senate Task Force on Government Efficiency and Regulatory Review. (2022:SR-16; 2020:SR-18) 03/11/24—Proposed for introduction.
 - A-4025 Sumter (D-35); Modifies use of cooperative purchasing agreements by certain public contracting units for construction services; prohibits time-and-materials contracts in certain circumstances; allows indefinite delivery, indefinite quantity public contracts in certain c (2024:S-1442; 2022:S-4057) 03/07/24—Introduced, ref to Asm State & Local Govt.
 - A-4029 Sumter (D-35); Requires employer or contractor engaged in work for public body to register with and submit payroll records to DOLWD. (2024:S-1403; 2022:S-1439) 03/07/24—Introduced, ref to Asm Labor.
 - S-2879 Greenstein (D-14); Creates Office of Sustainability. (2024:A-2149; 2022:A-2891) 03/04/24—Introduced, ref to Sen Environment & Energy.
 - A-2196 Drulis (D-16); Requires outdoor lighting fixtures installed or replaced by, or on behalf of State, or at projects receiving State funds, to meet certain criteria. (2024:S-1610;

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- 2022:A-3080; 2020:A-2633) 01/09/24—Introduced, ref to Asm Env, Nat Res & Solid Waste. 03/04/24—Reported, ref to Asm State & Local Govt.
- A-4029 Sumter (D-35); Requires employer or contractor engaged in work for public body to register with and submit payroll records to DOLWD. (2024:S-1403; 2022:S-1439) 03/07/24—Introduced, ref to Asm Labor.
 - AJR-164 Fantasia (R-24); Designates fourth Saturday of September each year as "New Jersey Hunting and Fishing Day." Introduced, ref to Asm Commerce, Econ Dev & Agriculture on 4/4/2024.
 - AJR-165 Fantasia (R-24); DeAngelo (D-14); Inganamort (R-24) Designates first full week of June of each year as "New Jersey Fishing and Boating Week." Introduced, ref to Asm Tourism, Gaming & the Arts on 4/4/2024.
 - A-4162 Calabrese (D-36); Establishes various programs in DEP concerning management of publicly owned forested land; appropriates \$60 million. (2024:S-2424; 2022:S-4262) Proposed for introduction on 04/04/24.
 - A-4142 Fantasia (R-24); Requires voter registration forms be made available when applying for hunting, fishing, or trapping license. (2022:A-138; 2020:A-160) 04/04/24—Introduced, ref to Asm Commerce, Econ Dev & Agriculture.
 - A-4140 Kean, S (R-30) Prohibits disclosure of body worn camera recordings under certain circumstances. (2024:S-2900; 2022:S-4261) 04/04/24—Introduced, ref to Asm Public Safety & Preparedness.
 - A-4137 Calabrese (D-36); Conaway (D-7); Prohibits sale, distribution, import, export or propagation of certain invasive species without permit from Department of Agriculture; establishes NJ Invasive Species Council. (2024:S-1029; 2022:S-2186) 04/04/24—Introduced, ref to Asm Commerce, Econ Dev & Agriculture.
 - S-1016 Greenstein (D-14); Beach (D-6); Requires State agencies to make their websites accessible to people with disabilities and on mobile devices. (2024:A-3636; 2022:S-1621; 2020:A-1098) 01/09/24—Introduced, ref to Sen State Govt, Wagering, Tourism & Hist Preservation. 02/12/24—Reported, 2nd rdg in Sen. 03/18/24—Passed Sen 38-0. Rcvd in Asm, ref to Asm Aging & Human Svcs.
- Legislative Activity – Federal
- H.R. 7840, (Rep. Jackson Lee, D-Texas), a bill to amend the Endangered Species Act of 1973 to prohibit the taking for a trophy of any endangered or threatened species of fish or wildlife in the United States and the importation of endangered and threatened species trophies into the United States, and for other purposes. Introduced on March 29, 2024, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
 - H.R. 7795, (Rep. Jackson Lee, D-Texas), a bill to amend the Endangered Species Act of 1973 to prohibit the taking for a trophy of any endangered or threatened species of fish or wildlife in the United States and the importation of endangered and threatened species trophies into the United States, and for other purposes. Introduced on March 22, 2024, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
 - H.R. 7817, (Rep. Bergman, R-Michigan) a bill to amend the Endangered Species Act of 1973 to exclude certain populations of the lake sturgeon from the authority of such Act. Introduced on March 26, 2024, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
 - H. Res. 1082, (Rep. Hunt, R-Texas) a resolution calling upon the International Seabed Authority to adopt regulations allowing the collection of critical minerals from the international seabed area, which will enable America to regain reliable and responsible supply chains, provide high-wage jobs for United States citizens, secure supply chains away

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from the People's Republic of China's dominance of the critical mineral supply chain, and for other purposes. Introduced on March 15, 2024, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee, and in addition to the House Foreign Affairs 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.

- H.R. 7636, the “Responsible Use of Seafloor Resources Act of 2024”, (Rep. Miller, R-Wyoming), a bill to support international governance of seafloor resource exploration and responsible polymetallic nodule collection by allied partners, strengthen domestic processing and refining capabilities, and for other purposes. Introduced on March 12, 2024, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee, and in addition to the House Ways and Means Committee, and the House Foreign Affairs 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.
- S. 3889, 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 March 6, 2024, and referred to the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee.
- S. 3888, the “Transformational Artificial intelligence to Modernize the Economy against Extreme Weather Act” or the “TAME Extreme Weather Act”, (Sen. Schatz, D-Hawaii), a bill to mandate the use of artificial intelligence by Federal agencies to adapt to extreme weather, and for other purposes. Introduced on March 6, 2024, and referred to the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee.

- **Scientific Collection Permits**

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

- **HOT TOPICS/Miscellaneous**

- The application period to transfer a crab pot or Delaware Bay crab dredge to an interested party other than immediate family closed on February 29. Staff received 22 applications to transfer crab pot licenses and 4 applications to transfer Delaware Bay crab dredge licenses. Delaware Bay crab dredge license does not have a harvest requirement and allows for 5 transfers. All 4 applications were approved. Crab pot applicants do have a harvest requirement and are sorted by 2023 harvest into two categories: an active (200 bu/2,000 numbers) and not active category (less than 200 bu/2,000 numbers). The Active category allows for 20 transfers in which we had 7 applicants. All applicants were approved. The Not Active category allows for 5 transfers in which we had 15 applicants. Staff held a lottery for the 5 applicants using bingo balls. Staff, law enforcement, and members of the public attended the lottery.

****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.
 - ALS Thompson’s Beach

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- MRA reviewed the project materials and provided support until a final and full proposal is reviewed.
- Raritan to Arthur Kill Maintenance Dredging
 - MRA staff reviewed a maintenance dredging of Raritan River to Arthur Kill Cut-Off, New Jersey Federal Navigation Project, with placement of ~300,000 cubic yards of dredged material at the HARS for remediation. MRA provided comments on the project.
- ACOE NY/NJ Channels – Raritan Bay
 - MRA reviewed a project proposing to mechanically maintenance dredge 450,000 cubic yards in the federal navigation channel and provided comments.
- NJDOT Shrewsbury Complex Maintenance Dredging
 - MRA reviewed a maintenance dredging project within the State navigation channels located in the Shrewsbury Basin in Monmouth County, NJ. Staff provided comments on the project.
- MRA staff provided responses on several timing restriction requests and worked with DLRP staff on several mapping interpretations.
- MRA staff met to discuss OW projects Atlantic Shores 1 and 2 prior to review.
- 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 April/May.
- **Shell Recycling Program**
 - Staff continue to coordinate with Shell Recycling Program participants for weekly shell collection and investigate additional venues.
 - Staff collected **267** bushels of recycled shell in the month of March.
 - Harrah’s Casino officially joined the Shell Recycling Program and had its first collection. Staff will continue coordination with Harrah’s on continued collection.
 - Staff met with Cape May County Municipal Utility Authority (CMCMUA) staff to discuss shell recycling expansion potential into Cape May County. CMCMUA is willing to assist in expansion and will facilitate a meeting with the Cape May Chamber of Commerce to begin the conversation with restaurant owners, and municipalities.
- **Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV)**
 - Staff met with grant staff and partners to discuss methodology and planning for the next SAV mapping survey, which is anticipated for the Spring/Summer of 2025, located in NJ’s northern coastal rivers.
 - Staff continues to provide any grant assistance as needed.
 - Staff met with representatives from EPA Region 2 and NYDEC to discuss SAV work and plans for 2024 in NY/NJ.
 - Staff met with EPA staff and staff from Stockton University to discuss opportunities to collaborate on an eelgrass flowering study taking place along the East Coast. Staff may provide field assistance in collecting eelgrass shoots/seeds at a selected site in Barnegat Bay.
 - Staff attended Zosterapalooza 2024, which consisted of various presentations and topics relating to eelgrass (*Zostera marina*). Topics include climate change, restoration, aquaculture interactions, education/outreach, and more.

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.

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- 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.
- Staff prepare for upcoming Regulatory committee meeting and Council Meeting
- **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

- **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.
 - Tag orders were placed March 25

| | Mar | Apr | Total |
|------------|----------|-----|-------|
| Single \$2 | 1817 | | |
| Cage \$48 | 313 | | |
| Revenue | \$18,658 | | |

- **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.
 - Staff is still waiting for answers on how to proceed with the procurement process which has the potential to hold up the Program.
 - 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
 - March harvest was reported for one harvester
 - Season Tag Sales and Harvest Highlights:

| | Oct | Nov | Dec | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | Total |
|--------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|---------|
| Single (\$2) | 100 | 200 | 200 | 150 | 150 | 50 | | 850 |
| Revenue | \$200 | \$400 | \$400 | \$300 | \$300 | \$100 | | \$1,700 |
| Harvest (bu) | N/A | 76 | 161 | 112 | 117 | 84 | | 550 |

- **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.

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- 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
 - Vessel Transactions
 - Red Knot Stakeholder Committee Update
 - Dredge Boat License Consolidation A.C.O.
 - Sunday Harvest
 - Oyster Tonging Fishery Update
 - Atlantic Horseshoe Crab Listing Petition
 - Review 26 Stock Assessment Workshop 2024 Findings
 - Setting of the 2024 Direct Market Harvest 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 Batsto Village Visitor Center (31 Batsto Road, Hammonton NJ 08037) on 3/18/2024.
 - 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 February 2024 \$2,847.12
 - Shellfisheries Law Enforcement Fund \$603.00
 - Presentation of the February 12, 2024, minutes for approval.
 - Approved application for transfer:
 - Robert Mayer. Lot 101, Sec B, Great Egg Harbor Bay to William Mayer IV
 - Topics of note included:
 - Old Business
 - Offshore Wind
 - Legislative Update
 - Structural Aquaculture Committee
 - Regulatory Committee
 - New Business
 - Financial Disclosure Reminder

Surveys & Laboratory Work

- **Atlantic Coast Leasing**
 - Staff continue to prepare for the field season as the weather begins to break.
 - Staff have started the necessary steps for boat and survey gear preparation for field work in Thompson creek, next month.
- **Delaware Bay Juvenile Finfish Trawl Survey**
 - Staff scheduled field days for the start of the 2024 Delaware Bay Juvenile Finfish Trawl Survey. This survey will sample 11 stations. The stations are located in shallow, nearshore waters from the Cohansy River south to the Villas, NJ. The survey will begin in April and run through October.
- **Sturgeon Receiver Project**

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- MRA staff deployed the acoustic receiver array in Delaware Bay on 3/27/34. The receivers will be deployed through November and will be maintained and have data downloaded from the units monthly. The receivers listen for acoustically tagged species that are in the vicinity of the receiver and log data which can be used to determine what species was logged and from where it was tagged.
- **Maurice River Cove Tongers Area Survey**
 - Bureau staff used the BioSonics habitat mapping sonar tool to scan a known oyster reef in the Maurice River Cove. This data will be used with ground truthing to help staff learn how oyster reefs and other bottom types are displayed from the unit. This will enable staff to better interpret maps created from the sonar unit for future use in mapping known and unknown waterbodies.
- **Mullica River Water Quality Monitoring**
 - Staff developed and started a bi-monthly water quality monitoring plan which includes four monitoring stations in the Mullica River and Great Bay, across current oyster beds and possible shell planting expansion sites.
- **Mullica River Ground Truth Sediment Samples**
 - Staff began to process sediment samples and record grain size analysis of sediment collected in the Mullica River to further ground truth samples for the BioSonics MX echosounder unit.

Buildings, Grounds, Vessels and Vehicles

- Bureau staff completed the 2024 equipment inventory.
- **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.
 - The R/V James W. Joseph was launched on March 25 and prepped for the field season.
 - Bureau staff continue to maintain state vehicles with routine and scheduled service.
 - Bureau staff replaced zincs on the R/V Zephyrus in preparation to return the boat to the water.
- **Building Maintenance**
 - Staff power washed and cleaned the siding of the shellfisheries building.
- **Equipment Maintenance**
 - Bureau staff completed development and implemented a YSI SOP and schedule for routine maintenance and cleaning.

Administrative/Miscellaneous

- **Regulation**
 - The Bureau continues to work on updating shellfish regulations.
- **License Sales**
 - Revenue collected from the Delaware Bay Office totaled \$30,812.00 for March 2024

| License Type | Total | License Type | Total |
|--------------|-------------|--------------|----------|
| Oyster Tags | \$18,658.00 | Dealer | \$200.00 |

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| | | | |
|---------------------|------------|-----------------------|----------|
| Nets | \$3,677.00 | Application Fees | \$172.00 |
| Commercial Crab Pot | \$3,300.00 | Tonging Tags | \$100.00 |
| Dredge Boat Renewal | \$2,356.00 | Commercial SF | \$50.00 |
| Assigned Fees | \$900.00 | Recreational Dredge | \$15.00 |
| AC & DB Crab Dredge | \$700.00 | Recreational SF | \$10.00 |
| Menhaden | \$672.00 | Duplicate License Fee | \$2.00 |

- **Monthly Meetings**

- Spring Staff Meeting, Cape Shore ADZ – Thursday, March 21
 - Staff presented presentations of upcoming field projects and discussed project goals for the year.
- CPR Training, Ocean City Fire Department – Friday, March 22
 - Staff attended a First aid and CPR training course to certify staff and offer a refresher course for those who previously attended training last year.
 - Staff intend to complete these trainings annually
- Staff attended monthly meetings including the NJ Bay Islands, East Coast SAV Collaborative Steering Committee, and Nature Based Solutions Workgroup.

- **MRA Outreach, Communications and Education Program**

- MRA staff met to discuss plans for a video highlighting the Bureau’s Delaware Bay Juvenile Finfish Trawl Survey for the summer of 2024.