

Marine Resources Administration Monthly Report

APRIL 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

Michael Auriemma, Assistant Biologist

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

Jake Babb, Senior Wildlife Worker

William Barker, Senior Wildlife Worker

Liia 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****

ASMFC/MAFMC/COOP/NOAA/ACCSP

- The Cobia TC completed the draft Recreational Reallocation Addendum to address changes in cobia recreational harvest and species range expansion issues. The reallocation primarily affects non de minimis states but could be relevant to NJ's fisheries interests in the future as cobia continue to be landed more frequently in NJ by both recreational and commercial fishermen.

MEETING SUMMARIES

- **Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program-ACCSP**
 - Staff attended the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program Operations/Advisory Committee Spring Webinar. The main focus was to review and approve the FY2025 Request for Proposals, which is set to go out in early May.
- **Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission-ASMFC**
 - Administration staff met with the Rec Measures Setting (RMS) FMAT/PDT to review progress made by several subgroups. Subgroups received some preliminary feedback, and further development is ongoing. The full group discussed topics for future meetings, and there is a lot left to cover in a short period of time. An updated timeline includes an October 2024 deadline for the Policy Board / MAFMC to approve the range of alternatives and draft a document for public hearings, and final action in approximately one year!
 - Administration staff participated in the first of several meetings between a subgroup of Rec Measures Setting (RMS) FMAT/PDT and a subgroup of the SSC. The meetings are SSC reviews of the work the rec reform FMAT is exploring to further the MAFMC's goals of reforming the way recreational fisheries are managed. This week's meeting provided an overview of rec reform work from 2022, SSC comments from 2022, and a broad overview of work that has transpired since. Several additional meetings of the two subgroups will take place in the coming weeks and months culminating in a review report from the SSC to the MAFMC.
 - Administration staff participated as a panelist in a call of the NRCC's Assessment Oversight Panel (AOP) to review stock assessment work plans for Golden tilefish, as well as revisions to surfclam and Georges Bank (GB) cod assessment workplans. Golden tilefish was peer reviewed earlier this year and has significant modelling challenges remaining. Preliminary surfclam modelling suggested that inclusion of time-varying growth is appropriate. And the single GB cod stock needs to be spatially partitioned into east and west subcomponents for management purposes. Peer review for all stocks will be in June.
 - Administration staff participated in a conference call of the Atlantic sturgeon stock assessment subcommittee to review a draft assessment report as well as review results from tagging model. Tagging model results were similar to the results from the 2017 benchmark (survival is high in each DPS). Report edits will continue and after additional review, results will be delivered to the Management Board at their summer 2024 meeting.
 - The ASMFC Horseshoe Crab Technical Committee (TC) and the Stock Assessment Subcommittee (SAS) met via webinar on April 8 to review the 2024 Stock Assessment Update. SAS members presented various segments of the assessment update including fishery-dependent and fishery-independent data inputs, current life history information, updated model results, stock status and

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research recommendations. The TC approved the update assessment and its report for presentation to the Horseshoe Crab Management Board at its next meeting at the end of April.

INDEPENDENT FISHERIES

- **Delaware Bay Tagging**
 - The Delaware Bay Striped Bass Tagging Survey has concluded for 2024. During 15 trips, 549 striped bass were tagged, which ranks 1st highest in the last 13 years. This represents a 79% increase compared to 2023. Scale samples were taken from all tagged striped bass. Paired-age samples were collected from seven additional striped bass. The majority of striped bass (351) were tagged in the month of February.
- **Eel Surveys**
 - The 2024 Glass Eel Survey was completed on April 8. Data is currently being entered and validated.
 - The 2024 Spring Yellow Eel Pot Survey (Great Bay) began on April 15. Fifteen yellow eels were saved on April 24 for an ASMFC/VIMS maturity workshop.
- **Herring Surveys**
 - The gillnet portion of the River Herring Survey continued through the month of April. Catches continued to be slow but steady, similar to those in March. If this continues through the end of the survey, the total catch for the spring run on both target rivers will represent a relatively average adult abundance in comparison to the time series average.
- **Ocean Trawl**
 - The April ocean trawl survey was completed in 6 uninterrupted days of sampling on April 11th. Catches were very light for a Spring survey, continuing to be dominated by spiny dogfish, winter skates, and horseshoe crabs similar to the January survey. River herring were also present although lower in abundance compared to a typical April survey. Notable catches include 3 Atlantic sturgeon, one of which was a recaptured fish tagged by another institution.
- **Raritan-Sandy Hook Bay Complex Inventory Project**
 - The Raritan Inventory Project began on April 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 of primarily striped bass (n = 7), but also caught Atlantic menhaden, blue crab, and American shad. Otter trawl sampling consisted of primarily larval/juvenile Atlantic herring (n = 415), bay anchovy (n = 184), and larval Atlantic menhaden (n = 164). Other species collected consisted of spotted hake, blue crab, horseshoe crabs, black sea bass, summer flounder, and rock crab. Seine sampling consisted primarily of Atlantic silversides (n = 807). Other species collected consisted of bay anchovy, striped killifish, mummichog, blue crab and horseshoe crab. Sixteen eDNA water samples were collected and filtered from otter trawl stations and nine eDNA water samples were collected and filtered from seine stations.

DEPENDENT FISHERIES

- **Access Point Angler Intercept Survey-APAIS**
 - FishDump data for March was reviewed and comments were submitted.
 - Met with ACCSP Rec Team to discuss the GPS/time feature in the APAIS data reports.
 - The draw for April consisted of 91 site assignments and 3 head boat assignments that yielded a total of 397 intercepts (120 SH, 15 CH, 237 PR, 25 HB).
 - Staff continue to make updates to the Vessel Directory and Site Register in preparation for Wave 4.
 - April mileage is being validated and submitted for reimbursement; March mileage reimbursements have been received.
 - Wave 2 sampling ended with a total of 489 intercepts (185 SH, 15 CH, 243 PR, 46 HB).

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- **For-Hire Telephone Survey-FHTS**

- 80 vessels were drawn for the month of April. 12 responded, resulting in a response rate of 15%. The draws for wave 2 of 2024 have included many vessels who have no history of responding to the survey. Alarmed at the low response rate, staff began researching these vessels to confirm their viability and eligibility to continue to be a part of the FHTS.
- Staff continued to work in the NOAA Vessel Directory updating vessels for the upcoming year.
- Staff began to prepare for the increase in vessel activity for the upcoming wave 3 (May-June).

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

- As of April 29, 2024, there were 54,910 individuals and 793 for-hire vessels registered with the New Jersey Saltwater Recreational Registry Program (NJSRRP) for 2024. (Last month: As of March 28, 2024, there were 39,553 individuals and 600 for-hire vessels registered for 2024 in the NJFW ELS).

- **Striped Bass Bonus Program-SBBP**

- Staff began accepting applications for the 2024 Striped Bass Bonus Program (SBBP) which will open May 15. Staff have issued permits to 5,442 individuals and 88 party/charter boats so far. The SBBP webpage was updated, and an email message was sent out to Marine Fisheries email subscribers.
- Staff completed entering and proofing 2023 SBBP data. In 2023, 9,721 bonus fish were harvested weighing 62,303 pounds, which represents 28.9% of the quota. This ranks as the 1st highest harvest (by numbers of fish) and 5th highest harvest (by pounds) in the 34-year time series. This represents a 69% increase compared to 2022 in terms of numbers of bonus fish harvested.

- **Tournament Sampling**

- Staff began preparations for the 2024 tournament & party/charter boat sampling program. Staff are scheduled to attend three tournaments in May.

OUTREACH

- The final draft of the 2024 Marine Digest was edited, with comments submitted to the editor on April 8. The printer's proof was approved on April 15. A May 10 shelf date is expected, with the online edition currently available at <https://dep.nj.gov/njfw/digests/marine/>
- Staff worked with CETRA Language Solutions to have the Attention Anglers recreational fishing regulations summary sheet translated into Spanish and Chinese.

ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS (Marine Resources Administration)

- **Wind Energy**

- New Jersey Research and Monitoring Initiative (RMI).
 - Staff continued to support the coordination of research and monitoring across the NJ/NY Bight by attending meetings of the Regional Wildlife Science Consortium, the Responsible Offshore Science Alliance, the Central Atlantic Fisheries group, the Offshore Wind and Fisheries group, Community Offshore Wind.
 - The Steering Committee approved the Surfclam Fishery Enhancement research project, which is one of several in an industry-supported effort to minimize offshore wind impacts on New Jersey's valuable surfclam fishery. The industry has been very active in offshore wind mitigation and problem solving. Staff have been supporting this industry by facilitating monthly meetings between researchers, surfclam industry members, and state and federal regulators for years. The current focus is regional planning for supporting surfclam fishery enhancement, and a workshop will be held at the State of the Science meeting in July.
 - Staff continued to work with DSR staff to refine draft Research Needs, an update on the RMI Research Priorities. An update is required to reflect the progress of multiple entities to

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identify knowledge gaps and information needs for decision making. The RMI is planning stakeholdering of the Research Needs over the next two months.

- Permitting support
 - Staff participated in a kick-off meeting for Leading Light Wind (LLW), the first official engagement following their successful bid in Solicitation 3. Other DEP attendees were the Commissioner, Chief of Staff, and staff from Permitting and Project Navigation, and the Division of Land Use. LLW introduced their project team and gave information about their project design and business ethos. Later in the month, staff met with the environmental team to begin discussions about their Fisheries Protection Plan and Environmental Protection Plan. Staff have discussed environmental monitoring with the LLW team on several occasions. They have some concerns about New Jersey unique requirement for lifetime monitoring for the Project.
- BOEM Engagement
 - Staff prepared comments for BOEM's Notice of Intent to perform an Environmental Impact analysis for Atlantic Shores North. Staff met with the NY Department of State to coordinate concerns and comments. Comments provided highlighted the importance of New Jersey's marine fisheries, recommended expansion of the economic analysis, cumulative effects analysis, mitigation of impacts to the NJ Ocean Trawl, interagency coordination of the required fisheries monitoring plan, and informed decision making on cable laying.
 - Staff attended one of the virtual public scoping meetings for the Atlantic Shores North Environmental Impact Statement. The public comments for the meeting lasted more than 4 hours. While there was some support for the Project, many commenters expressed their concerns that the Project would harm their enjoyment of the shore, business, and the environment.
 - Staff prepared comments on the Terms and Conditions of the Atlantic Shores South project, which included again requesting mitigation for impacts to the NJ Ocean Trawl and recommendations for more inclusive and informed fisheries compensation.
 - Staff participated in a meeting with BOEM to discuss a second round of leasing for the Central Atlantic Area. Maryland and North Carolina made requests to BOEM to seek more offshore wind lease areas, and BOEM is now gathering preliminary information about a draft Call Area, which includes much of the continental shelf off of New Jersey that is not currently leased. Staff brought maps showing the marine resources in that area, including Prime Fishing Areas, an artificial reef, the Horseshoe Crab Sanctuary, USCG traffic separation scheme, a North Atlantic Right Whale Seasonal Management Area, and the Mid Atlantic Scallop Management Area. BOEM anticipates opening a Comment Period on the Call Area from August to October.
- Stakeholder Support
 - Staff requested and participated in a meeting with the Economic Development Authority to provide information about opportunities to support the commercial fishing industry during offshore wind development. Staff have reached out to the EDA several times over the last few years to keep them informed of potential impacts on commercial and recreational fisheries so that the EDA might consider investment in those industries through the Wind Institute.
 - Staff participated in a mentoring panel at the Marine Technology Society's student meeting. Several students requested more information about working on offshore wind research, and a follow up meeting was planned with a lab from the New Jersey Institute of Technology.
 - Vineyard Wind opened their enrollment period for eligibility for fisheries compensation. Three million dollars has been allocated to impacted fishers from CT, NY, and NJ, combined. A

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presentation was made at the Mid Atlantic Fisheries Management Council, following which there was a heated discussion. Some stakeholders expressed their frustration with the requirements and limitations of compensation. Staff worked with GARFO and Vineyard wind to identify NJ fishers who might qualify so they can be notified. That work is ongoing.

- Regional coordination
 - Staff attended the USCG Shipping Safety Fairways Along the Atlantic Coast Public Meeting, which was held at Stockton University. The USCG provided information about proposed changes in fairways and took public comments, which were exclusively about offshore wind development. The majority of speakers were opposed to offshore wind.
 - Staff participated in meetings to get updates on three research studies that will support decision making for offshore wind. Rutgers held a webinar to solicit input on using offshore wind infrastructure as a platform for a regional observation network. This study was funded by the RMI. Staff also learned about studies that are part of the Strategic Plan update, Mitigation Opportunities and Cable Constraints assessment. Both studies are anticipated to provide valuable information for all stages of state and federal permitting.
 - Staff attended the Northeast Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies for one day to attend the offshore wind symposium. Highlights of the meeting include learning about the importance of how we communicate about resource management in the plenary session, talking to vendors about drones, acoustic tags, and vessel monitoring to support offshore wind studies, and speaking with a colleague from New England who made significant contributions to understanding the economic impacts of offshore wind on fisheries.
 - Staff took on more responsibility for the Environmental Resources Working Group (ERWG) following participation in the Facilitator Training provided by the DEP and Consensus Building Institute. Staff planned the next ERWG meeting as the required capstone project. Staff have been assisting with these stakeholder meetings since the group was formed and are now taking a more active role in improving the meeting outcome, specifically getting useful comments on research needs for offshore wind. Feedback from the professional facilitators will be shared mid-May and will be used to prepare for the May 30 ERWG meeting.

ADMINISTRATIVE/MISCELLANEOUS (Marine Resources Administration)

- **Regulatory/Legislative**
 - Notices of Administrative Changes (NOACs)
 - A NOAC requiring all federally-permitted lobster fishing vessels to install approved vessel tracking devices was published in the April 1, 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
 - A4259, Ingamort (R24); Expands scope of New Jersey Regulatory Flexibility Act dealing with economic impact of rules on small businesses. Introduced and referred to Assembly Commerce, Economic Development and Agriculture Committee on 5/2/2024.

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- AJR164, Fantasia (R24); Designates fourth Saturday of September each year as "New Jersey Hunting and Fishing Day." Introduced and referred to Assembly Commerce, Economic Development and Agriculture Committee on 4/4/2024.
- AJR165, Fantasia (R24); Designates first full week of June of each year as "New Jersey Fishing and Boating Week." Introduced and referred to Assembly Tourism, Gaming and the Arts Committee on 4/4/2024.
- SR83, Bucco (R25), Sarlo (D36); Creates Senate Task Force on Government Efficiency and Regulatory Review 3/14/2024 Introduced in the Senate, Referred to Senate State Government, Wagering, Tourism & Historic Preservation Committee.
- A4142, Fantasia (R24); Requires voter registration forms be made available when applying for hunting, fishing, or trapping license. Introduced and referred to Assembly Commerce, Economic Development and Agriculture Committee on 4/4/2024.
- A4137/S1029, Calabrese (D36), Conaway (D7), Atkins (D20)/Greenstein (D14), Smith (D17); Prohibits sale, distribution, import, export or propagation of certain invasive species without permit from Department of Agriculture; establishes NJ Invasive Species Council. Introduced and referred to Assembly Commerce, Economic Development and Agriculture Committee on 4/4/2024.
- A4045/S2930, Danielsen (D17), Flynn (R13)/Sarlo (D36), Bucco (R25); 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. Recommitted to Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee on 4/8/2024.
- A4125/S2840, Kean (R30)/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. Introduced and referred to Assembly Environment, Natural Resources and Solid Waste Committee on 4/4/2024.
- A2320/S641, Swain (D38), Sauickie (R12)/Tiver (R8); Requires Department of Agriculture to take various actions to publicize and promote community supported agriculture in New Jersey. Passed in Assembly 76-0-0 on 3/21/2024. Received in Senate and referred to Senate Economic Growth Committee on 4/11/2024.
- Legislative Activity – Federal
 - H.R. 8169, (Rep. Dean, D-Pennsylvania), a bill to require the Secretary of Agriculture to prohibit the use of lead ammunition on all lands and waters under the jurisdiction and control of the Forest Service, and for other purposes. Introduced on April 30, 2024, and referred to the House Agriculture Committee, and in addition to the House Natural Resources 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. 4117, the "Climate Change Education Act", (Sen. Markey, D-Massachusetts), a bill to require the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to establish a Climate Change Education Program, and for other purposes. Introduced on April 11, 2024, and referred to the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee.
 - S. 4113, the "State Boating Act", (Sen. Shaheen, D-New Hampshire), a bill to allow States to require payment of State fees related to boating as a condition for issuance of a vessel number and to collect such fees in conjunction with other fees related to vessel numbering. Introduced on April 11, 2024, and referred to the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee.

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- H.R. 7925, the “Modernizing Access to Our Public Oceans Act”, (Rep. D’Esposito, R-New York), 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 April 10, 2024, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
- S. 3791, the “America’s Conservation Enhancement Reauthorization Act of 2024”, (Sen. Carper, D-Delaware), a bill to reauthorize the America’s Conservation Enhancement Act, and for other purposes. Introduced on February 8, 2024, and referred to the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. (Note: this legislation would amend the National Fish Habitat Board to add a second representative of the regional fishery management councils to the Board.)
- H.R. 5087, the “Supporting Equity for Aquaculture and Seafood Act” or the “SEAS Act”, (Rep. Pallone, D-New Jersey), a bill to require the Secretary of Agriculture to submit a report to Congress on Department of Agriculture spending related to seafood purchases and grants, and for other purposes. Introduced on July 28, 2023, and referred to the House Agriculture Committee.
- S. 2211, the “Sustaining Healthy Ecosystems, Livelihoods, and Local Seafood Act”, (Sen. Whitehouse, D-Rhode Island), a bill to amend the Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994 to establish the Office of Aquaculture, and for other purposes. Introduced on June 22, 2023, and referred to the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee.
- S. 2208, the “National Seafood Supply Act of 2023”, (Sen. Sullivan, R-Alaska), a bill to require the Secretary of Agriculture to provide support for domestically harvested seafood, and for other purposes. Introduced on June 22, 2023, and referred to the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee.
- H.R. 3951, the “Sustaining Healthy Ecosystems, Livelihoods, and Local Seafood Act”, (Rep. Bonamici, D-Oregon), a bill to establish in the Department of Agriculture an Office of Aquaculture, and for other purposes. Introduced June 9, 2023, and referred to the House Agriculture Committee.
- H.R. 2734, the “Ocean Acidification Research Partnerships Act”, (Rep. Carbajal, D-California), a bill to provide for ocean acidification collaborative research grant opportunities. Introduced on April 20, 2023, and referred to the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee.
- S. 618, the “United States Foundation for International Conservation Act of 2023”, (Sen. Coons, D-Delaware), a bill to establish the United States Foundation for International Conservation to promote long-term management of protected and conserved areas, and for other purposes. Introduced on March 1, 2023, and referred to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.
- H.R. 614, the “Commercial Fishing and Seafood Business Act of 2023”, (Rep. Wittman, R-Virginia), a bill to amend the Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2005 to provide for the inclusion of certain workers in the exemption from numerical limitations on H-2B workers, and for other purposes. Introduced on January 27, 2023, and referred to the House Judiciary Committee.
- H.R. 2560, the "Sea Turtle Rescue Assistance and Rehabilitation Act of 2023", (Rep. Keating, D-Massachusetts), a bill to require the Secretary of Commerce to establish the Sea Turtle Rescue Assistance Grant Program, and for other purposes. Passed the full House of Representatives on April 11, 2024.
- Nominations
 - Shellfisheries Council

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- Edward Gaine, of Dorothy, to replace John Maxwell, currently set to expire March 24, 2025.
- Kevin Kirk, of Atlantic Highlands, to replace Walter Hughes, currently set to expire March 24, 2027.
- Marine Fisheries Council
 - Gregory Hueth, of Sea Girt, to replace Sergio Radossi, currently set to expire January 7, 2025.
 - John Tiedemann, of Lakewood, to replace James Alexis, currently set to expire January 7, 2027.
- **Scientific Collection Permits**
 - Eighty scientific collecting permits have been issued in 2024.
- **HOT TOPICS/Miscellaneous**
 - Staff completed an interview with Tom P from Rack N Fin Radio about the opening of the application period for the Striped Bass Bonus Program. Topics discussed were how to apply, requirements of the program, and a brief history.
 - Staff fulfilled a data request from Maryland DNR for lengths of striped bass caught in the Atlantic Ocean from 2023 SBBP logbooks.

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

Offshore Wind, Restoration, Enhancement, Mitigation, and Habitat

- **Environmental Review/ Waterfront Development**
 - Staff provided responses on several timing restriction requests and worked with DLRP staff on several mapping interpretations.
 - MRA staff attended several JPPM meetings, including EMR Eastern, LLC Delaware River Dredging and Nellie Bennett Marsh Restoration.
 - 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 soon.
- **Shell Recycling Program**
 - Staff continue to coordinate with Shell Recycling Program participants for weekly shell collection and investigate additional venues.
 - Staff collected 370 bushels of recycled shell in the month of April.
 - Staff received notice that the Shell Recycling Program was awarded \$1,271,506 in funding for expansion from the Coastal Zone Management Habitat Protection and Restoration Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) Competition.
 - Funding will significantly expand the existing shell recycling/ shell planting efforts, including the addition of additional restaurants, public drop-off locations, and educational programs in Atlantic City. The project is set to begin in August of 2024 and will result in 25,000 bushels of shell planted annually within the Mullica River (most planted in a single year to date as a part of this program has been 6,000 bushels).
- **Shell Recycling Program Grant**
 - In anticipation of expansion efforts, staff met with the Cape May County Municipal Utility Authority, along with the Cape May County Chamber of Commerce to discuss shell collection

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opportunities within Cape May County. Discussions are ongoing and plans to expand the program into Cape May County are progressing.

- Staff have been in communication with the Atlantic City Aquarium about featuring a small exhibit about the Shell Recycling Program.
 - Staff from the Aquarium have agreed to display the program when the Aquarium reopens this summer. Staff is coordinating with program partner Jetty to design an exhibit that highlights the program.
- Staff have been working with other Bureau staff to coordinate the purchase of surf clam and whelk shell to be used in shell planting over the next few years. Shell has been routinely delivered to the Nacote Creek Research Station and will be used to supplement recycled shell in planting efforts.
- Staff worked with Bureau of Marine Habitat & Shellfisheries staff and Bureau of Information and Education staff to develop social media announcements for the grant award announcement. Postings were made on Earth Day and well received.
- Staff drafted a document entitled “Shell Recycling Guidelines for New Jersey”, the document was drafted in collaboration with the other shell recycling programs in the State to set best management practices for recycling shell in New Jersey.
 - The document discusses curing protocols, shell storage, and permitting and will be a resource to new recycling programs, should they arise.
- **Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV)**
 - Staff met with EPA Region 2 and Stockton to discuss involvement in an upcoming eelgrass flowering study. A site was selected in Barnegat Bay and will be visited throughout the months of May and June to assess the timing of flowering in NJ eelgrass beds.
 - Staff also met with EPA Region 2 and NYDEC for a seagrass check-in to discuss efforts underway in surrounding areas.
 - Staff continued planning BioSonics fieldwork for June. Stations will be established over existing SAV data in northern rivers and staff will use BioSonics to create new internal mapping to understand the status of SAV in northern rivers, such as the Manasquan, Shark, Shrewsbury and Navesink.
 - Staff attended meetings including the East Coast SAV Collaborative’s meeting on shellfish aquaculture and SAV interactions and the State Blue Carbon Action for California, North Carolina, and New Jersey.
- **Waterfront Development**
 - Staff worked with Marine Fisheries staff to refine roles within the Marine Resources Administrations, Environmental Review Group. This group reviews waterfront development permit applications for marine resource impacts and ensures consistent, through a timely review.

Aquaculture and Shellfish Leases

- **Aquaculture Development Zone Buoys**
 - Staff deployed navigational hazard buoys around the ADZ-2 and ADZ-4 leases to warn vessels of potential hazards from aquaculture gear.
- **Shellfish Biological Survey (Steelman Bay, Scullville)**
 - Staff began preparation for a biological investigation survey that will be conducted on the 3 new leases in Steelman Bay in May.
 - Staff continue planning and preparing for upcoming survey work in Graveling point, Scull Bay, and Ludlum Bay.
- **Shellfish Lease Database Development**

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- 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**

- Season opened April 1 and closes Nov 22, 2024 or when quota is harvested
- The starting quota was 39,237 bu., with the potential to increase to approximately 61,000 bu.
- Tag sales area as follows:

Month	Single (\$2)	Cage (\$48)	Revenue
Mar	1,817	313	\$18,658
Apr	2,435	410	\$24,550
Total	4,252	723	\$43,208

- More than half the 2024 harvest so far has come from the Bennies oyster bed, which accounts for over 70% of the High Mortality management region. Harvest by bed and region is shown below:

Bed Name	Region	Boat Days	Total Bushels	CPUE
Cohansey	MMM	2	277	138.50
Ship John	MMM	37	4,219	114.03
Shell Rock	SR	2	192	96.00
Bennies	HMM	71	11,531	162.41
Nantuxent	HMM	29	4,020	138.62
Total MMM		39	4,496	115.28
Total SR		2	192	96.00
Total HMM		100	15,551	155.51
TOTAL		141	20,239	143.54

- **Intermediate Transplant Program – 2024**

- The 2024 Program started on Thursday, 4/25/2024 through Thursday, 5/9/2024.
- The Program was 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 were able to advertise the Program for bids in mid-April.
- The Program was expected to take longer at around 21 days or more to complete compared to 10 days for a typical year but was completed over 11 days.

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

- Staff started selling tonging tags in October 2023
- Tonging season opened November 1 and closed on April 30
- April 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	50	900
Revenue	\$200	\$400	\$400	\$300	\$300	\$100	\$100	\$1,800
Harvest (bu)	N/A	76	161	112	117	84	46	596

- **Atlantic Coast Shellfish Council Meeting**

- The NJ Shellfish Council Meeting in April was cancelled due to a lack of agenda items to discuss. The next meeting will be held on May 20th, 2024 at the Ocean City Public Library, NJ.

Surveys & Laboratory Work

- **Atlantic Coast Leasing**

- **Hydrographic Survey (Rose Cove)**
 - Staff completed a hydrographic survey for 6 leases located in Rose Cove, Little Egg Harbor.
 - Lessees were notified of the deployment of buoy markers and contacted to address any concerns following the survey investigation.

- **Delaware Bay Juvenile Finfish Trawl Survey**

- The 2024 Delaware Bay Juvenile Finfish Trawl Survey started in April and will run through October. Staff sampled all 11 stations for the survey in April. The stations are located in shallow, nearshore waters from the Cohansey River south to Villas, NJ.
- Staff met with I&E to begin planning a video highlighting the trawl survey. The video is anticipated to be filled in late summer/early fall.

- **Estuarine Inventory**

- Staff began planning for the 2024 Estuarine Inventory- Hard Clam Stock Assessment Survey in Sandy Hook Bay set to take place late Summer/early Fall.
- Staff contacted Naval Weapons Station Earle to receive appropriate clearance for Bureau staff to enter the security zone around the pier for surveying. Staff will complete all associated paperwork and communicate with NWSE to ensure successful survey efforts.

- **Sturgeon Receiver Project**

- The sturgeon receiver project did not go out in April. However, the project will resume in May.
 - 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.

- **Mullica River Water Quality Monitoring**

- Staff continued 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**

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- Staff continued to process sediment samples and record gain size analysis of sediment collected in the Mullica River to further ground truth samples for the BioSonics MX echosounder unit.
- **Side Scan Sonar**
 - Staff were successful in securing on-site training for the Klein 4900 side scan sonar unit. Over the course of three days, staff learned how to use the unit and the applicable software properly and effectively both in a classroom setting and via on-water practical sessions.

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.
 - Bureau staff continue to maintain state vehicles with routine and scheduled service.
 - Bureau staff painted the rudder, propeller, and transducers on R/V Zephyrus.
 - Staff coordinated with local marina to complete a bottom paint on the R/V Zephyrus.
- **Building Maintenance**
 - Staff power washed shellfish building siding.
 - The bureau coordinated with a contractor to resurface car and boat parking lots with a layer of crushed concrete topped with stone.

Administrative/Miscellaneous

- **BioSonics Training**
 - Staff provided post processing training to available Bureau staff on the BioSonics MX Aquatic Habitat Echosounder. The training included going over how to use visual aquatic post processing software, data storage, interpretation, and management. The training was recorded on Microsoft teams and is available for staff to view as needed or if unable to attend.
- **License Sales**
 - Revenue collected from the Delaware Bay Office totaled \$31,272.00 for April 2024

License Type	Total	License Type	Total
Oyster Tags	\$24,550.00	Application Fees	\$120.00
Commercial Crab Pot	\$2,600.00	Tonging Tags	\$100.00
Nets	\$2,516.00	Commercial SF	\$50.00
AC & DB Crab Dredge	\$900.00	Recreational SF	\$20.00
Menhaden	\$414.00	Duplicate License Fee	\$2.00

- **Monthly Meetings**
 - Staff attended the following monthly meetings: NJ Bay Islands, Ocean Acidification Team (OA Team), CHARRM, Nature Based Solutions Workgroup
- **MRA Outreach, Communications and Education Program**
 - Staff attended the Atlantic County Utilities Authority Annual Earth Day Festival representing the Shell Recycling Program.
 - Staff attend this event every year as it is an excellent opportunity to engage with the public on their role in environmental stewardship and look for opportunities to expand the program.

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- Staff met representatives from the Atlantic City Boys & Girls Club who are interested in partnering on educational programs for Atlantic City youth. Conversations are ongoing, but staff intends to work with the club this coming Summer and in the future.
- **Regulation**
 - The Bureau continues to work on updating shellfish regulations.