

Marine Resources Administration Monthly Report

MAY 2024

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

ASMFC/MAFMC/COOP/NOAA/ACCSP

- Staff submitted NJ's 2022 & 2023 striped bass catch-at-age workbooks and fishery independent indices to ASMFC for the 2024 stock assessment update. Results of the assessment are expected in October.
- Staff continued the implementation of the lobster tracking addendum; working with state and federal partners to assist stakeholders with the rollout of the new technology requirement.
- Staff compiled and submitted all American shad and river herring data for the Delaware River Cooperatives annual ASMFC compliance report for the Delaware River Basin. The COOP members will compile all of their state data into the required data templates and one all-encompassing compliance report to be submitted to the ASFMC by the July 1 deadline.

MEETING SUMMARIES

- **Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission-ASMFC**
 - Administration staff participated in a call of the rec measures setting (RMS) FMAT. Main topics of discussion focused on development of two harvest control rules: a very complicated matrix that includes biomass and recruitment trends, rec harvest performance, and stock status, and a very simple matrix that includes biomass trends and biomass stock status. These two approaches have not received a lot of attention in the past. The FMAT will focus future meetings on 1-2 topics to be sure all aspects of the RMS work plan are addressed.
 - Administration staff participated in an SSC-led peer review of incorporating fishing mortality based approaches into recreational reform effort. Staff and collaborators provided an overview of methods to date. Development will continue in consultation with the full FMAT/PDT and Council and Board.
 - Administration staff participated as a panelist in the NEFSC's "Adding ecosystem & socioeconomic context to scientific advice for fisheries management" workshop. Staff participated in the Northeast panel to describe experiences with the bluefish stock assessment and how lessons learned from challenges and successes could be leveraged more broadly. The expected outcome of the workshop is a NOAA technical memorandum memorializing workshop discussions and conclusions.
 - Administration staff participated in a meeting of the Rec Measures Setting FMAT. Staff and collaborators are looking to get insights from Council/Board members on their interest in F-based management approaches. ASMFC/MAFMC staff are reaching out to Council liaison group to investigate their availability for a joint meeting in early June. Development of the F-based approaches will proceed (or end) based on their Council/Board input.
 - Staff attended via webinar a meeting of the ASMFC's Shad and River Herring TC and SAS to discuss the findings of the recent benchmark stock assessment for river herring on Wednesday, May 8th. The SAS presented the results of the stock assessment in which both species of river herring were assessed as multiple regional stocks along the coast as opposed to the past when river systems were evaluated. Similar to the last two assessments in 2012 and 2017 this new benchmark assessment determined river herring stocks along the coast to be "depleted" at all time low levels due to factors including historical overfishing, impediments to spawning habitat, and spawning habitat degradation.

INDEPENDENT FISHERIES

- **Blue Crab Pot Survey**

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- Staff prepared and conducted the first month of the Blue Crab Pot Survey. The survey explores interaction between commercial crab pots and different bycatch reduction devices. The first month of the survey, 36 pots were deployed each day for two days. A total of 131 legal size crabs were caught. All crabs are measured and weighed.
- **Delaware River Seine Survey**
 - Preparation for the 2024 survey is underway, with the survey expected to start on June 17.
- **Herring Surveys**
 - The adult gillnet sampling portion of the River Herring Monitoring Survey completed on 5/21. No blueback herring were caught on either river. The preliminary alewife index value on the Great Egg Harbor River is 4.13 which represents an increase over the 2023 value (2.26) and is the highest index value in the 8 year time series (2.49 time series average). The preliminary alewife index value on the Maurice River is 1.03 which represents an increase over the 2023 value (0.78) and is the 4th highest value in the 10 year time series and is slightly above the time series average (0.96).
 - Staff met via webinar with fisheries biologists from the NMFS JJ Howard Marine Lab in Sandy Hook NJ and faculty from Monmouth University to discuss the Bureau's current river herring monitoring efforts. NMFS and Monmouth are looking to develop river herring monitoring programs throughout the state using eDNA to define run timing and general population health through tissue sampling and gonad assessments.
- **Horseshoe Crab Survey**
 - The HSC successfully completed five out of the six scheduled nights in May. One night was cancelled due to staff availability. A high volume of crabs was seen during the full moon cycle.
- **Raritan-Sandy Hook Bay Complex Inventory Project**
 - The Raritan Inventory Project began on May 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 Atlantic menhaden (n = 45), but also caught horseshoe crabs, butterfish, tautog, spider crab, hickory shad and striped bass. Otter trawl sampling consisted of primarily bay anchovy (n = 660) and juvenile Atlantic herring (n = 470). Other species collected consisted of unidentified clupeid species, blue crab, Northern pipefish, Northern sea robin, spotted hake, black sea bass, smallmouth flounder and red hake. Seine sampling consisted primarily of Atlantic silversides (n = 1059), bay anchovy (n = 73), and striped killifish (n = 43). Other species collected consisted of mummichog, juvenile Atlantic herring, blue crab, green crab, and Northern pipefish. 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 April was reviewed and comments were submitted.
 - Mandatory wave meeting was held for state staff on May 29.
 - Interviews for 5 APAIS hourlies were conducted. Offers were made and accepted. Candidates are going through the hiring process.
 - The draw for May consisted of 177 site assignments and 9 head boat assignments that yielded a total of 768 intercepts (338 SH, 71 CH, 320 PR, 39 HB).
 - 3 site assignments were cancelled due to lack of staff availability.
 - 5 headboat assignments were cancelled due to lack of staff availability and weather.
 - Staff continue to make updates to the Vessel Directory and Site Register in preparation for Wave 4.
 - May mileage is being validated and submitted for reimbursement; April mileage reimbursements have been received.

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- **Artificial Reef**
 - Staff continues to coordinate material preparation efforts at the joint venture Windport located at the Salem Generating Facility. To date roughly 20% of the 1700 pieces of concrete have been prepared and will continue to be prepared over time. Once all the pieces have been prepared by the contractor, NJEDA will coordinate with the Artificial Reef Program for timing and placement on the Delaware Bay Reef site.
- **Biological**
 - Staff have completed diet samples for 2023. In total, 1122 samples were collected and processed for contents. Collection for 2024 stomachs have been ongoing since January.
- **Commercial Fisheries/Quota Management**
 - Staff received eight data requests in regard to commercial landings from state biologists and federal partners. Species included horseshoe crab, cobia, spot, Atlantic croaker, spiny dogfish, blue crab and blueline tilefish.
 - Staff began to see the influx of commercial harvester trip reports. Reports are being entered into SAFIS.
 - Summer flounder: The commercial 2024 Directed Season 2 began on May 1. Current directed harvest is at 32% of the quota.
 - Black Sea Bass: The commercial 2024 Directed Season 2 began on May 1. Current seasonal harvest is at 41% of the seasonal quota.
 - Menhaden: The commercial menhaden season began on January 1. As anticipated, landings remain low at 3% of the annual quota harvested.
 - Bluefish: The commercial bluefish season began on January 1. Harvest also remains low at 2% of the annual quota harvested.
 - Scup: The summer scup season started on May 1. Current harvest is 27% of NJ's allocated quota.
 - Spiny dogfish: The 2023/24 commercial season ended on April 30. In total, 86% of New Jersey's annual quota was harvested.
- **For-Hire Telephone Survey-FHTS**
 - 252 vessels were drawn for the month of May. 120 responded, resulting in a response rate of 47.6%. Bad weather impacted the number of reported trips earlier in May. The number of trips reported increased as the weather cleared up towards the end of the month.
 - Staff continued to work in the NOAA vessel directory updating vessels. As usual, a high influx of HMS permit renewals came through in May, which staff addressed in the imports inbox.
- **NJ Saltwater Recreational Registry Program-NJSRRP/Volunteer Angler Survey-VAS**
 - As of May 31, 2024, there were 72,547 individual and 996 for-hire vessel registrations obtained with the New Jersey Saltwater Recreational Registry Program (NJSRRP) for 2024. (Last month: As of April 29, 2024, there were 54,910 individuals and 793 for-hire vessels registered for 2024 in the NJFW ELS).
 - On May 1, staff visited IBSP and informed park staff on Registry basics and the registration process so they could assist park visitors as needed.
- **Striped Bass Bonus Program-SBBP**
 - The 2024 Striped Bass Bonus Program opened on May 15. Staff have issued permits to about 8,133 individual anglers and 124 party/charter boats. The current 2024 bonus harvest is 753 pounds from 106 fish.
- **Tournament Sampling**
 - Staff attended two tournaments in May to start the 2024 tournament sampling season. 18 black drum were measured and weighed.

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- Staff began party/charter boat sampling on May 31 collecting bluefish racks from the party boat Queen Mary.

OUTREACH

- Printed copies of the 2024 Marine Digest were shipped behind schedule due to a software issue at the printer's office. Digests are expected to be received the first week of June.
- Staff attended an outdoor field trip for sixth grade students from the Jordan Road School in Somers Point on May 31. The purpose of the event was to teach students about the local marine environment. Staff provided an overview of the purpose of MRA and recreational fishing surveys, highlighting the APAIS. Students learned how to identify local saltwater species and collect biological data (lengths and weights). Students also learned what kind of data is collected during the APAIS, what it is used for and how they (the public) are an important part of the data collection process.

ADMINISTRATIVE/MISCELLANEOUS (Marine Resources Administration)

- **Regulatory/Legislative**

- Notices of Administrative Changes (NOACs)
 - A NOAC correcting the commercial black sea bass bycatch limit to maintain consistency throughout the black sea bass rules was published in the May 20, 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.
- S1354, Testa (R1), Gopal (D11); Concerns removal of abandoned vessels; appropriates \$25 million. Introduced and referred to Senate Law and Public Safety Committee on 1/9/2024. Committee meeting will be held on 5/16/2024.
- S2210, Ruiz (D29), Pou (D35), Gopal (D11), Turner (D15), Zwicker (D16); Requires racial and gender diversity in membership to be considered for appointments to certain boards and commissions established by statute. Introduced and referred to Senate State Government, Wagering, Tourism and Historic Preservation Committee on 1/9/2024. Committee meeting to be held on 5/16/2024.
- A4045/S2930, Daniels (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. Reported out of committee with committee amendments on 5/9/2024. Passed in Assembly and sent to Governor 42-28-1 on 5/13/2024. Signed by Governor on 6/5/2024.

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○ Legislative Activity – Federal

- H.R. 8508, (Rep. Peltola, D-Alaska), a bill to amend the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act to reauthorize the bycatch reduction engineering program and establish the Bycatch Mitigation Assistance Fund. Introduced on May 22, 2024, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
- H.R. 8507, (Rep. Peltola, D-Alaska), a bill to provide for the designation of areas within which fishing activities carried out using bottom trawls may be carried out. Introduced on May 22, 2024, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
- H. Res. 1238, (Rep. Dingell, D-Michigan), a resolution supporting the designation of May 17, 2024, as "Endangered Species Day". Introduced on May 17, 2024, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
- S. J. Res. 85, (Sen. Ricketts, R-Nebraska), a joint resolution providing for congressional disapproval under chapter 8 of title 5, United States Code, of the rule submitted by the National Marine Fisheries Service relating to "Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Listing Endangered and Threatened Species and Designating Critical Habitat". Introduced on May 15, 2024, and referred to the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee.
- S. J. Res. 81, (Sen. Sullivan, R-Alaska), a joint resolution providing for congressional disapproval under chapter 8 of title 5, United States Code, of the rule submitted by the National Marine Fisheries Service relating to "Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Regulations for Interagency Cooperation". Introduced on May 15, 2024, and referred to the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee.
- S. 618, the "United States Foundation for International Conservation Act of 2024", (Sen. Coons, D-Delaware), was reported with an amendment by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and placed on the Senate Legislative Calendar on May 7, 2024.
- H.R. 615, the "Protecting Access for Hunters and Anglers Act of 2023", (Rep. Wittman, R-Virginia), passed the House of Representatives on April 30, 2024.
- H.R. 529 (Rep. Waltz, R-Florida), the "Extending Limits of U.S. Customs Waters Act", To extend the customs waters of the United States from 12 nautical miles to 24 nautical miles from the baselines of the United States, consistent with Presidential Proclamation 7219. Passed the House of Representatives on April 30, 2024.
- S. 3791 (Sen. Carper, Thomas R. (D-Delaware), the "America's Conservation Enhancement Reauthorization Act of 2024" To reauthorize the America's Conservation Enhancement Act, and for other purposes. Passed the Senate on May 8, 2024.

• Scientific Collection Permits

- Eighty two scientific collecting permits have been issued in 2024. Three additional applications have been reviewed and will be processed upon receipt of all required materials.

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

Pending.....