

Marine Resources Administration Monthly Report

JUNE 2024

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

ASMFC/MAFMC/COOP/NOAA/ACCSP

- Staff submitted NJ's Striped Bass Compliance Report (2023 data) to ASMFC. 2023 Striped Bass Bonus Program harvest (by numbers of fish) ranked as the 1st highest in the timeseries. 2023 MRIP harvest estimates (by numbers of fish) ranked as the 9th highest in the timeseries and represents a 15% decrease from 2022 harvest. 2023 MRIP discard estimates (by numbers of fish) ranked 1st highest in the timeseries and represents a 22% increase from 2022. These changes observed in the recreational fishery from 2022 to 2023 were likely influenced by ASMFC's emergency action which reduced the slot limit on July 2, 2023. The 2023 juvenile abundance index (JAI) from the Delaware River Seine Survey was below average and ranked 38th in the 44-year time series. 2023 striped bass tagging in Delaware Bay ranked 2nd highest in numbers of fish tagged in the last 12 years, and 24th overall in the 35-year timeseries. Starting the tagging survey a month earlier in February led to a 339% increase in striped bass tagged in 2023 compared to 2022.

MEETING SUMMARIES

- **Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program-ACCSP**
 - Staff attended the coast wide ACCSP APAIS/FHTS Wave 2 meeting.
- **Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission-ASMFC**
 - The American Eel Technical Committee reviewed and approved Maine's aquaculture summary for 2024 and proposal for 2025. They are once again requesting a harvest of 200 pounds of glass eels.
 - Administration staff met with MAFMC, ASMFC, and GARFO staff in advance of the bluefish monitoring committee later this summer. Major topics of discussion involved data needs to implement the management uncertainty tool developed last year, development of any management alternatives necessary for the MC to consider, and timing constraints. The Monitoring Committee is scheduled for early August, and staff are working with NEFSC staff to complete data needs for the management uncertainty tool.
 - Staff met with the rec measures setting FMAT and the MAFMC/ASMFC working group to solicit input on their interest on F-based approaches to fisheries management. The working group seemed to support percent-change-like approaches and was much less enthused about things that diverged from that model. For example, the group seemed supportive of incorporating fishing mortality into percent-change-like approaches. Commission and Council staff will provide a more in-depth update at an August joint meeting.
- **Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council-MAFMC**
 - Administration staff dialed into a meeting of the MAFMC's SSC's review of MSE testing of recreational measure-based control rules for summer flounder. The Rec Measures Setting FMAT/PDT's normal meeting was cancelled so that members could instead dial into this review. Broadly, the MSE results suggest, under a specific set of assumptions, that management tools centered on rec harvest levels (percent change approach and RHL-based management), resulted in higher angler satisfaction metrics and poorer stock outcomes, while alternatives (biomass matrix, ref point matrix) resulted in lower angler satisfaction, but better stock outcomes. Additional work is planned to help inform stakeholders' views on a preferred management alternative.
- **Miscellaneous**
 - Staff attended the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission's IRA workshop. The Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, with support from NOAA Fisheries and other federal, regional, and state partners, hosted a workshop to identify new, feasible ways to validate the accuracy of current

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recreational fishing effort estimates. The workshop identified projects for estimating fishing effort from private recreational vessels that can be used to validate and/or replace existing approaches. IRA funding will be used to address scientific and management uncertainty in recreational catch statistics for red snapper and dozens of other species. The joint intention is to set the gold standard for validation and improvement of state and federal recreational data collection to provide better measures of catch, effort, and discards. This will benefit millions of anglers in the world's largest recreational fisheries. The workshop focused on reviewing existing approaches and methods for estimating recreational fishing effort, exploring new, non-traditional methods that could be used for effort estimation, and recommending priority research studies to validate and improve effort estimates. A draft work plan will be developed to fund projects throughout the Southeast in 2025 and 2026.

INDEPENDENT FISHERIES

- **Delaware River Seine Survey**
 - The 2024 Delaware River seine survey began on June 17. June sampling was completed on June 25. All 32 stations were sampled, catching a total of 56 striped bass, 20 of which were young-of-year (35.7%). This is lower than the total number of striped bass caught in June 2023, which was 71 fish.
- **Eel Surveys**
 - The Spring portion of the 2024 yellow eel pot survey concluded on June 14. Preliminary data shows that a total of 152 yellow eels were caught. Three of those were recaptures. Data is currently being validated and will be summarized in July's highlights
- **Horseshoe Crab Survey**
 - The HSC survey was successfully completed in five out of the six scheduled nights in June, plus one partial night due to flooding and lightning. The 2024 spawning survey concluded sampling on June 23.
- **Raritan-Sandy Hook Bay Complex Inventory Project**
 - The Raritan Inventory Project began on June 5, 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 smooth dogfish (n = 87), Atlantic menhaden (n = 29) and blue crabs (n = 21), but also caught spider crabs, butterfish and a cownose ray. Otter trawl sampling consisted of primarily bay anchovy (n = 458), spot (n = 37) and weakfish (n = 11). Other species collected consisted of juvenile Atlantic herring, Atlantic croaker, blue crab, silver perch, smallmouth flounder, spider crab, Northern sea robin and windowpane. Seine sampling consisted primarily of Atlantic menhaden (n = 18,922 with an estimated count of 12,757 in one seine haul), Atlantic silversides (n = 792), spot (n = 159), and bay anchovy (n = 155). Other species collected consisted of blue crab, summer flounder, Atlantic herring, windowpane, bluefish, horseshoe crab and winter flounder. 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-AP AIS**
 - FishDump data for May was reviewed and comments were submitted.
 - 5 new AP AIS hourlyies officially started on June 15. Mandatory training was conducted, and staff are active in the field.
 - The draw for June consisted of 176 site assignments and 12 head boat assignments that yielded a total of 1096 intercepts (406 SH, 97 CH, 481 PR, 112 HB).
 - 1 Site Assignment and 4 Heaboat Assignments were cancelled due to staffing/weather issues.

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- Staff continue to make updates to the Vessel Directory and Site Register in preparation for Wave 5.
- June mileage has been validated and submitted for reimbursement; May mileage reimbursements have been received.
- Wave 2 Summary: 489 intercepts: 185 SH, 15 CH, 243 PR, 46 HB
- Wave 3 Summary: 1873 intercepts: 744 SH, 168 CH, 801 PR, 160 HB
- **For-Hire Telephone Survey-FHTS**
 - 252 vessels were drawn for the month of June. 126 responded, resulting in a response rate of 50%. Bad weather continues to limit the number of trips while also causing Captains to have higher than normal trip cancellations.
 - Staff continue to work in the NOAA vessel directory updating vessels when new changes are needed. The imports inbox was also sorted through merging existing vessels with HMS permits and creating new vessels for newly submitted permits.
- **NJ Saltwater Recreational Registry Program-NJSRRP/Volunteer Angler Survey-VAS**
 - As of June 28, 2024, there were 86,502 individual and 1092 for-hire vessel registrations obtained with the New Jersey Saltwater Recreational Registry Program (NJSRRP) for 2024. (Last month: As of May 31, 2024, there were 72,547 individual and 996 for-hire vessels registered for 2024 in the NJFW ELS).
 - Staff met with NOAA staff to discuss changes to the monthly data upload file.
- **Striped Bass Bonus Program-SBBP**
 - Staff have issued permits to 8,841 individual anglers and 129 party/charter boats. The current 2024 bonus harvest is 2,244 pounds from 313 fish. These spring participation and harvest totals are similar to 2023.
- **Tournament Sampling**
 - During four tournaments and one party/charter boat trip, staff measured 71 summer flounder, 47 bluefish, 18 black drum, 6 white perch, and 1 striped bass. Otoliths have been collected from 45 bluefish and 7 summer flounder.

OUTREACH

- Printed copies of the 2024 Marine Digest were delivered to locations throughout the State.
- The 2024 Attention Anglers sheet was updated with new species photos and translated into Spanish and Chinese. All three versions will be posted on the F&W website.
- Staff attended Egg Harbor Township Library's summer program story hour on June 27. The theme for 2024 is Adventure Begins at Your Library, a theme of learning more about the world around you. Staff read a story called "The Bumpy, Lumpy Horseshoe Crab" which follows a horseshoe crab trying to stay safe at low tide. Through the story, hands on displays and a craft project, staff taught the children about horseshoe crabs and other coastal marine life, including limpets, barnacles, crabs and snails.

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 various meetings and providing updates, including the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority's Environmental Technical Working Group (NYSEDA E-TWG), Regional Wildlife Science Collaborative (RWSC) Sea Turtle Telemetry Working Group, Project WOW, and presenting at the Annual Mid Atlantic Ocean Forum.
 - In late May, the second annual RMI Symposium was held at Montclair University. Staff assisted the Division of Science and Research preparing and facilitating the Symposium.

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Principal Investigators for RMI-funded research presented their projects and early results and discussed how they might continue to coordinate research projects to capitalize on field efforts and data utility. The RMI research needs were also discussed. Attendees were engaged with the excellent presentations. Staff from the DSR and MRA were recognized in the Commissioner's Shoutout on June 27.

- Staff met with a professor from the New Jersey Institute of Technology to discuss his interest in obtaining RMI funding for research on modeling sediment micro-transport over offshore wind transmission cables. RMI staff did not consider this subject high priority, since the link to ecological response was not clear, and did not support investing more time in the project without additional work from the scientist.
- Staff also met with scientists from Rutgers University to discuss their ideas for facilitating the data analysis of baited remote underwater video and investigating the use of fish traps as a viable commercial fishing gear inside turbine arrays. The first may result in valuable information for facilitating a novel, non-extractive survey technique. The second may minimize economic impacts to fishers post windfarm construction. Staff gave direction to the scientists for next steps and planned a follow-up meeting.
- Board of Public Utilities Collaboration
 - Staff supported the state 4th Solicitation for offshore wind energy by participating in pre-bid meetings with developers and providing some interpretation on requirements of the fisheries and environmental protection plan requirements. One such requirement that was of particular concern to developers was our unique (among states or federal agencies) requirement for a lifetime monitoring plan for the project. Staff shared that the plan should describe decision points for continuation or discontinuation of monitoring.
- Stakeholder Support
 - In late May, staff facilitated a meeting of the New Jersey Environmental Resources Working Group for Offshore Wind (ERWG). Staff also completed the Facilitator Corps Training, for which their capstone project was planning this ERWG meeting. The main content of the meeting was briefing the ERWG members on the need to update the list of RMI research needs, review a draft, take clarification questions, and solicit responses to an upcoming survey. The meeting was well attended, and there was an improvement in keeping the comments on topic.
 - Staff worked with the OPPN and DSR to plan updates to the [Offshore Wind Website](#). The website was reviewed during two sessions. Outdated and confusing content was identified, and new content was considered. Some of the new content includes links with scientifically sound information about whale mortality, the EDA's Offshore Wind Information Hub, and RMI application guidance.
 - Staff represented the DEP at an Open House for offshore wind at NJIT in June. Attendees were generally seeking information about offshore wind, looking for opportunities to get involved, and expressing concerns about whales and fish.
- Regional coordination
 - Staff attended the peer-review for the draft Northeast Fisheries Science Center's Fisheries Survey Mitigation Plans. The presence of offshore wind structures will affect several federal surveys that are important for management of New Jersey's fisheries. New sampling strategies were considered, including some non-extractive methods that are being investigated by the RMI. Staff provided the NEFSC with information about the work the DEP has done on eDNA and acoustic telemetry.

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- Staff represented New Jersey at the State Caucus Meeting for the Regional Wildlife Science Collaborative for Offshore Wind. There was interest in how staff supported fish and wildlife management during the solicitation process, and the RWSC Engagement Coordinator requested a presentation at the next Caucus meeting.
- Staff represented New Jersey at the June meeting of the Responsible Offshore Science Alliance. Staff has worked extensively with ROSA on several topics, including setting research priorities, gathering meta data about ongoing research, surfclam fishery enhancement, and project-specific monitoring guidance. Updates on each of these topics were provided.

ADMINISTRATIVE/MISCELLANEOUS (Marine Resources Administration)

• Regulatory/Legislative

- 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
 - A4572, Donlon(D11), Sumter (D35), Drulis(D16), McKeon(D27), Space (R24); Appropriates \$101,696,535 from constitutionally dedicated CBT revenues to DEP for local government open space acquisition and park development projects; and for certain administrative expenses. Introduced and referred to Assembly Environment, Natural Resources and Solid Waste Committee on 6/13/2024. Passed in Senate and sent to Governor 39-1 on 6/28/2024.
 - S3474, Greenstein(D14), Carter(D22), Speight(D29), Wimberly(D35); Appropriates \$10,067,905 to DEP from constitutionally dedicated CBT revenues for grants to certain nonprofit entities to acquire or develop lands for recreation and conservation purposes, and for certain administrative expenses. Introduced and referred to Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee on 6/17/2024. Passed in Senate and sent to Governor 74-0-0 on 6/28/2024.
 - A4700, Pintor Marin(D29), Wimberly(D35), Sarlo(D36), Greenstein(D14); Appropriates \$56,635,803,000 in State funds and \$27,501,993,844 in federal funds for the State budget for fiscal year 2025. Introduced and referred to Assembly Budget Committee on 6/26/2024. Signed by the Governor w/line-item veto P.L.2024, c.22 on 6/28/2024.
 - S2024, Sarlo(D36), Greenstein (D14), Pintor Marin (D29); Makes FY2024 supplemental appropriations of \$37,430,000; de appropriates \$24,000,000 in existing FY2024 appropriations; adds and modifies various FY2024 language provisions. Introduced, ref to Sen Budget & Appropriations. Passed Sen 38-1. Rcvd in Asm w/o ref, 2nd rdg in Asm. Sub for A 4701. Passed Asm & sent to Governor 52 -21-1.
 - 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

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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.

o Legislative Activity – Federal

- H.R. 7925 (Rep. D'Esposito, R-New York). The “Modernizing Access to Our Public Oceans Act”, 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. On June 27, 2024, the House Natural Resources Committee’s Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries held a legislative hearing.
- H.R. 8862, (Rep. Huffman, D-California), a bill to reauthorize and amend the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, and for other purposes. Introduced on June 27, 2024, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee, and in addition to the House Agriculture Committee.
- H.R. 8788, (Rep. Peltola, D-Alaska), a bill to amend the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act to establish the Fisheries and Ecological Resilience Program and to direct the Comptroller General of the United States to submit to Congress a report on the competitiveness of domestic seafood producers in domestic and global seafood trade. Introduced on June 18, 2024, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee, and in addition to the House Ways and Means Committee.
- H. J. Res. 168, (Rep. Graves, R-Louisiana), Providing for congressional disapproval under chapter 8 of title 5, United States Code, of the rule submitted by the Council on Environmental Quality relating to "National Environmental Policy Act Implementing Regulations Revisions Phase 2". Introduced on June 14, 2024, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
- H.R. 8750, (Rep. Steube, R- Florida) a bill to designate the exclusive economic zone of the United States as the "Donald John Trump Exclusive Economic Zone of the United States". Introduced on June 14, 2024, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
- H.R. 8705, (Rep. Graves, R-Louisiana), the “Fisheries Data Modernization and Accuracy Act of 2024”, a bill to require the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to reform the Marine Recreational Information Program of the National Marine Fisheries Service, and for other purposes. Introduced on June 12, 2024, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee. On June 27, 2024, the House Natural Resources Committee’s Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries held a legislative hearing.
- H.R. 1395 (Rep. Fitzpatrick, R-Pennsylvania), “Delaware River Basin Conservation Reauthorization Act of 2023”, a bill to amend the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act to reauthorize Delaware River Basin conservation programs, and for other purposes. On June 12, 2024, the House Natural Resources Committee held a mark-up.
- H.R. 5441 (Rep. LaLota, R-New York), a bill to reauthorize Long Island Sound programs, and for other purposes. On June 12, 2024, the House Natural Resources Committee held a mark-up.
- H.R. 8704, (Rep. Carter, R-Georgia), a bill to require the Secretary of Commerce to establish a grant program to foster enhanced coexistence between ocean users and North Atlantic right whales and other large cetacean species. Introduced on June 12, 2024, and referred to the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, and in addition to the House Natural Resources Committee.

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- The House Appropriations Committee’s Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies met to consider the Fiscal Year 2025 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriation bill on 6/26/2024.
- The House Science, Space, and Technology Committee’s Environment Subcommittee held an oversight hearing for “An Overview of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Budget Proposal for Fiscal Year 2025” on 6/24/2024.
- **Scientific Collection Permits**
 - Eighty nine scientific collecting permits have been issued in 2024. Three additional applications have been reviewed and will be processed upon receipt of all required materials.
- **HOT TOPICS/Miscellaneous**
 - Staff attended an informational session on the introduction to Fish & Wildlife’s new Supervisor Portal.
 - Compliance reports for all ASMFC mandated species were compiled in a folder on the V Drive: V:\Marine Fish\COMPLIANCE REPORTS

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

MAY

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.
 - TRANSCO Offshore Sediment Study
 - MRA reviewed application materials and provided comments for a geotechnical borings and grab sample survey in the Ambrose Channel.
 - Otten’s Harbor Living Shoreline Wildwood
 - MRA reviewed a proposed living shoreline project in Wildwood from the Office of Permitting and Project Navigation and provided comments.
 - ACOE New Borrow Areas
 - MRA provided comments on a proposed project looking to investigate new borrow areas from Sandy Hook to Barnegat Inlet, and Sea Bright to Manasquan, NJ.
 - Stafford Township Mill Creek Shoreline Project
 - MRA provided comments for a living shoreline project located in Stafford Township.
 - Staff worked with DLRP staff on several mapping interpretations.
 - MRA staff attended several JPPM meetings, including Garden Pier Extension, Waretown Lighthouse Center Marsh Restoration, and Dredge Hole 61.
 - Waterfront Development Guidance Manual
 - Staff continued to draft an updated version of the MRA’s Waterfront Development Guidance Manual to be used for DLRP staff as well as a “Quick Start Guide.” The manual is anticipated to be completed and made available for DLRP staff in late fall.
- **Shell Recycling Program**
 - Staff continue to coordinate with Shell Recycling Program participants for weekly shell collection and investigate additional venues.
 - Staff added two new restaurant partners in the month of May.
 - The Deauville Inn, marking the program’s first restaurant partner in Cape May County
 - Barbera’s Seafood Market in Atlantic City.

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- Staff worked with MRA outreach staff to develop a survey to gauge interest from Atlantic and Cape May County Restaurants on if they would like to join the Shell Recycling Program.
 - The survey is designed to streamline communications with venues and will be distributed in the coming weeks.
- Staff collected 302 bushels of recycled shell in the month of May
- Bureau staff rented a skid steer to being moving shell in preparation for the 2024 annual shell plant.
- **Shell Recycling Program Grant**
 - Staff continue to work with grants staff as well as NOAA staff to prepare for the grant period to begin in August.
 - Staff requested pre-award costs from NOAA to begin expansion plans and allow for the purchase of equipment necessary for expansion. Staff hope to have funds soon.
 - Staff have been in communication with all partners on the grant since the announcement of the award to further develop scopes of work for each partner to allow the subaward processing to begin once funds are received.
- **Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV)**
 - Staff met with EPA Region 2 and Stockton University to conduct an eelgrass flowering study at a selected site in Barnegat Bay.
 - The site will be revisited throughout the month of June to assess the timing of flowering in New Jersey eelgrass meadows within the bay.
 - Staff continued planning BioSonics fieldwork for the month of June. Stations will be established throughout NJ's northern rivers and staff will use BioSonics to create new, internal maps to understand the current status of SAV in northern rivers, such as the Navesink, Shrewsbury, Shark, and Manasquan.
 - Field verification will be conducted via divers using a 1m x 1m quadrat to estimate percent coverage of seagrasses and macroalgae. The diver data will validate the data collected by the BioSonics unit.

Aquaculture and Shellfish Leases

- **Aquaculture Development Zone Buoys**
 - Staff removed a buoy that had washed up on shore at the tree line and was buried under sand, broken trees and other debris at the ADZ4 on May 2
 - Staff from Delaware Bay sent out a notification to ADZ4 lease holders that the Red Knot PBO restrictions were being lifted effective May 29
 - Staff from Delaware Bay weighted the buoys at ADZ4 so they would remain upright on May 31 and replaced a safety traffic mirror
- **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**
 - Season opened April 1 and closes Nov 22, 2024 or when quota is harvested
 - The starting quota was 491 bu. (39,237 bu.), with the potential to increase to approximately 61,000 bu.
 - A second increase occurred May 13 with additional quota of 344 bu.

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- Total quota is 835 bu.
- Tag sales area as follows:

Month	Single (\$2)	Cage (\$48)	Revenue
Mar	1,817	313	\$18,658
Apr	2,435	410	\$24,550
May	4,930	683	\$42,644
Total	9,182	1,406	\$85,852

- 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 over 11 days.
- 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.
- Three Delaware Bay Oyster Dredge boats participated in the Transplant
- The price per bushel of culled oysters transplanted was \$3.25 bu.
- Each boat planted 15,225 bu., 14,075 and 14,450 bu. totaling 43,750 bu. of oyster transplanted.
- These sites will be sampled for the remainder of the 2024 field season and over the 2025 field season.

• Delaware Bay Shellfish Council Meeting

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- The Delaware Bay Section hybrid meeting was held May 6 in person at the Rutgers Haskin Shellfish Research Lab and virtually through MS Teams.
 - Three of four Council members were present to reach a quorum, with the fifth seat for Cape May/Salem County remaining vacant.
 - Various NJDEP reps, a Dept. of Ag. Rep, and representatives from Senator Michael L. Testa Jr.'s office
- The Council started the process of forming a new Regulatory Committee, and letters were sent by the Bureau on behalf of the Council to lease holders and industry members regarding the formation of the Committee on May 21. It was asked that all interested participants submit applications by the close of business on June 7.
- Agenda items included:
 - Presentation of minutes for approval.
 - Revenue Collected for March and April 2024
 - Oyster Resource Development Account (Cultch Account) review
 - Vessel Transactions: One reconsolidation
 - Lease ground transactions: One applicant for consideration and one for decision
 - Old Business:
 - Red Knot Stakeholder Committee Update, Direct Market Update, Intermediate Transplant Program Update, Dermo Update, 2023-2024 Oyster Tonging Season Summary.
 - New Business:
 - Atlantic Coast Section Regulatory Committee, Delaware Bay Section Regulatory Committee Discussion, Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill Funding Through NOAA
- Atlantic Coast Shellfish **Council** Meeting
 - A hybrid council meeting was held in person (and online) at the Ocean City Free Public Library (1735 Simpson Ave, Ocean City NJ) on 5/20/2024.
 - 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 April 2024 \$454.00
 - Shellfisheries Law Enforcement Fund \$158.00
 - Presentation of the March 18, 2024, minutes for approval.
 - Lease Vacated - Shellfish Growing Water Classification Downgrade
 - 1 lease vacated in Ludlum Bay, 2.09 acers
 - Applications for Consideration:
 - 1 application in LEHB- Thompson Creek
 - 3 applications in Steelmans Bay (Scullville)
 - 1 application in Great Bay- Big Creek
 - 1 application in Great Sound
 - Approved application for transfer:
 - 1 transfer application in Ludlum Bay
 - 1 transfer application in Great Bay- Great Thorofare
 - Topics of note included:
 - Old Business
 - Structural Aquaculture Committee
 - Regulatory Committee

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- Shell Recycling Program Update
- New Business
 - Hydrographic Survey – Rose Cove
 - NJ Resilient Environments and Landscapes (NJ REAL)

Surveys & Laboratory Work

- **Atlantic Coast Leasing**
 - **Hydrographic Survey (Ludlum Bay)**
 - Staff completed a hydrographic survey for 18 lease lots located in Ludlum Bay, New Jersey.
 - The Ludlum Bay shellfish lease lot is now up to date with outstanding hydrographic survey applications.
- **Delaware Bay Juvenile Finfish Trawl Survey**
 - The 2024 Delaware Bay Juvenile Finfish Trawl Survey began in April and will run through October. In May, staff sampled all 11 stations for the survey. The stations are located in shallow, nearshore waters from the Cohansey River south to the Villas, NJ.
- **Mullica River Shell Planting**
 - Staff have begun preparations for the annual Mullica River Shell planting scheduled to begin in June.
 - Staff along with other Bureau staff have been working with Mid Atlantic Marine Construction to ensure timely delivery of the newly constructed barge that will be used for shell planting moving forward.
 - Staff continue communication with other contractors related to shell planting to ensure timely delivery and a successful shell planting effort. Equipment rentals have been secured and will be in place.
 - Staff intends to plant a minimum of 7,500 bushels this summer over a 2-acre parcel on the Moss Point Reefs. Planting will commence between June 15 and July 15. The plant site will be monitored monthly beginning in August.
- **Sturgeon Receiver Project**
 - The sturgeon receiver project resumed May 14.
 - 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.
- **Dermo Monitoring and Shell Plant and Transplant Site Monitoring**
 - Staff in partnership with Rutgers Haskin Shellfish Lab staff conducted oyster sampling from the Delaware Bay oyster reefs for Dermo monitoring on May 20. Staff also sampled in partnership to survey the Bureau's shellfish enhancement sites including the shell plant program and transplant program on May 28.
 - Both sampling efforts started in April and will run through to the end of November.
- **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**
 - Staff continued 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.

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- **Side Scan Sonar**

- Staff continues to create a User Manual for use of the Side Scan Sonar and its software for guidance purposes while out on the water
- Delaware Bay staff has successfully deployed the Side Scan Sonar and will continue to use it this summer

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.
- Bureau staff took R/V Maycraft to Jarvis Marine to be serviced and bottom painted.
- Staffed replaced zincs and changed oil on R/V Vadum.
- Bureau staff completed split rail fencing around the car and boat parking areas.

Administrative/Miscellaneous

- **License Sales**

Revenue collected from the Delaware Bay Office totaled \$45,473.00 for May 2024

License Type	Total	License Type	Total
Oyster Tags	\$42,644.00	AC Dredge	\$100.00
Nets	\$1,249.00	Commercial SF	\$100.00
Commercial Crab Pot	\$700.00	Application Fees	\$56.00
Menhaden	\$360.00	Recreational SF	\$10.00
Lease Fees	\$250.00	Duplicate License Fee	\$4.00

- **Monthly Meetings**

- Staff attended the following monthly meetings: NJ Bay Islands, Ocean Acidification Team (OA Team), CHARRM, and Nature Based Solutions Workgroup.

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

- Ocean Fun Day
 - Staff created outreach materials and attended Ocean Fun Day at Island Beach State Park on May 18, 2024.
 - The focus of outreach materials was on submerged aquatic vegetation species including eelgrass and widgeon grass, both of which can be found in the bay near Island Beach State Park. An interactive poster was created to inform the public about seagrass species, ecosystem services, and threats, and a brochure about SAV work as well as a coloring page were also created ahead of the event
 - Staff attended and presented information at Ocean Fun Day at the Sea Grant Consortium, Sandy Hook, NJ.
- Shell Recycling Program
 - Staff continues to work with MRA outreach, Atlantic City Aquarium, and Jetty Rock Foundation staff to develop a display highlighting the Shell Recycling Program in the Atlantic City Aquarium.

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- The Display will educate the public on the Shell Recycling Program taking place in Atlantic City, Oyster Biology, conservation and their role in environmental stewardship. The display should be installed by the end of July in preparation for the aquarium's reopening in September.
- NatureFest
 - Staff attended and presented information and a hands-on activity at the NatureFest in Galloway, NJ on May 30, 2024. Nearly 2,000 students and adults attended the event.

JUNE

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.
 - TRANSCO Offshore Sediment Study
 - MRA reviewed application materials and provided comments for a geotechnical borings and grab sample survey in the Ambrose Channel.
 - Otten's Harbor Living Shoreline Wildwood
 - MRA reviewed a proposed living shoreline project in Wildwood from the Office of Permitting and Project Navigation and provided comments.
 - ACOE New Borrow Areas
 - MRA provided comments on a proposed project looking to investigate new borrow areas from Sandy Hook to Barnegat Inlet, and Sea Bright to Manasquan, NJ.
 - Stafford Township Mill Creek Shoreline Project
 - MRA provided comments for a living shoreline project located in Stafford Township.
 - Staff worked with DLRP staff on several mapping interpretations.
 - MRA staff attended several JPPM meetings, including Garden Pier Extension, Waretown Lighthouse Center Marsh Restoration, and Dredge Hole 61.
 - Waterfront Development Guidance Manual
 - Staff continued to draft an updated version of the MRA's Waterfront Development Guidance Manual to be used for DLRP staff as well as a "Quick Start Guide." The manual is anticipated to be completed and made available for DLRP staff in late fall.
- **Shell Recycling Program**
 - Staff continue to coordinate with Shell Recycling Program participants for weekly shell collection and investigate additional venues.
 - Staff worked with Bocca in Margate to have them join the Shell Recycling Program. This brings the total number of restaurant partners to 11 and growing.
 - Staff collected 350 bushels of recycled shell in the month of June.
 - Staff worked with outreach staff to develop and distribute the Shell Recycling Program survey to restaurants. Staff worked with Cape May County Chamber of Commerce as well as Cape May County Municipal Utility Authority to distribute the survey to appropriate venues. Staff will monitor the survey results and reach out to prospective restaurants accordingly.
 - Staff presented on the Shell Recycling Program at the Rutgers Cooperative Extension's Coastal Stewardship Course.
 - Staff present annually at this class as the extension is a partner on the program.
- **Shell Recycling Program Grant**

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- Staff continue to work with grant partners and the NJDEP grant specialists to ensure that subawards arrive in a timely manner and expectations are clearly outlined.
- Staff continue to work with NOAA in attempts to secure pre-award cost funds but to date have been unable to secure them.
- **Delaware Bay Shell Plant Program**
 - Staff coordinated with procurement and contractors to prepare for the shell plant program scheduled to begin in July. Staff expect to have 6 barges of shell planted across three sites, each having about 20,000 bushels of shell each.
 - Staff surveyed potential shell plant recipient sites on June 27 and July 10 and selected 3 recipient sites on the Bennies, Shell Rock, and Cohansey oyster beds.
- **Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV)**
 - Staff met with EPA Region 2 and Stockton University to conduct an eelgrass flowering study at a selected site in Barnegat Bay. The objective of the sampling is to determine which meadows have the highest flowering density and at what time of the season the seeds are most viable for collection.
 - This is the first time this type of information was collected in New Jersey. It will be used to better understand how and where to select donor meadows for future seed-based restoration projects. EPA's sampling team visited the site weekly with the assistance of DEP staff on two survey days until the seeds were released. The results of this survey should be available to MRA staff soon.
 - Staff conducted fieldwork in northern rivers (Navesink and Shark) using the Bureau's BioSonics MX Habitat echosounder. Methods included pole-mounting the unit to the side of the Bureau's R/V Vadum. Vessel speed was set to ~3-4 knots as the unit was run. To acquire information on seagrass status (presence, absence, coverage) sonar data will be analyzed using the BioSonics Visual Acquisition software.
 - Maps will be created using ArcPro and overlaid with imagery (Nearmap) with dates selected as close as possible to the sampling dates. Water quality (temperature, salinity, pH, and dissolved oxygen) were collected at each survey station, measured with a YSI unit. A Secchi disk was used to determine water clarity.
 - To determine coverage of eelgrass, widgeon grass, and macroalgae, a visual census was completed using a 1m² quadrat haphazardly placed at each station. Coordinates were collected at the bottom left-hand side of the quadrat via a Garmin GPS, and that corner was set to face north. The percentage cover of seagrass, macroalgae, or bare sediment was estimated via in-situ by diver using a scale of 0-100 in increments of 10.
 - This data will be compared with the data collected by the BioSonics echosounder to validate the accuracy of the unit. Any unknown SAV species were brought back to Nacote Creek Research Station for identification.

Aquaculture and Shellfish Leases

- **Aquaculture Development Zone**
 - Staff went to the ADZ4 on June 18 to keep a presence and monitor the status of the area. It was discovered that Rutgers was having work done to replace the failed gabion wall which was prohibiting the lease holders from parking in their designated area. No complaints were made by anyone working on the ADZ4 and access to the leases themselves remained accessible.
- **Shellfish Biological Survey** (Graveling Point, Great Bay)

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- Staff completed 3 biological assessment surveys for 3 individual lease lots in Graveling point. A report will be generated from this survey and presented to the Shellfish Council during the June meeting.
 - The lease lots will be up for consideration, and should the lots be approved, they will be up for decision at the following 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**
 - Season opened April 1 and closes Nov 22, 2024 or when quota is harvested
 - The starting quota was 491 bu (39,237 bu.), and a second increase occurred May 13 with additional quota of 344 bu. for a final individual quota of 835 bu.
 - Tag sales area as follows:

Month	Single (\$2)	Cage (\$48)	Revenue
Mar	1,817	313	\$18,658
Apr	2,435	410	\$24,550
May	4,930	683	\$42,644
Jun	1,782	155	\$10,908
TOTALS	10,964	1,561	\$96,760

- As of 7/12/2024, 40.4% of harvest was reported from the Bennies oyster bed, which comprised 53.6% of the High Mortality management region's harvest.
- The regional quota for the High Mortality region was met and the region was closed to harvest starting July 8, 2024. The Shell Rock and Medium Mortality regions remain open until the season ends or their regional quotas are harvested.
- Harvest by bed and region as of 7/12/24 is shown below:

Bed	Region	Boat Days	Harvest	CPUE	% of Region	% of Total
Cohansey	MMM	13	1,543	118.7	14.8%	3.6%
Ship John	MMM	79	8,856	112.1	85.2%	20.4%
Shell Rock	SR	4	317	79.3	100.0%	0.7%
Bennies Sand	HMM	44	8,281	188.2	25.3%	19.1%
Bennies	HMM	106	17,521	165.3	53.6%	40.4%
Nantuxent	HMM	53	6,901	130.2	21.1%	15.9%
Region Total	MMM	92	10,399	113.0		24.0%
Region Total	SR	4	317	79.3		0.7%
Region Total	HMM	203	32,703	161.1		75.3%
Total		299	43,419	145.2		

- **Vibrio Control Plan**

Dates of harvest	Maximum hours to refrigeration	Start of harvest

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June 1 -- June 14	7	Sunrise
June 15 – July 14	6	Sunrise
July 15 – Aug 31	7	Sunrise

- **Delaware Bay Shellfish Council Meeting**
 - The next Council meeting was scheduled for July 2, 2024, and was postponed to July 9, 2024. Staff prepared for the upcoming July meeting.
- **Atlantic Coast Shellfish Council Meeting**
 - A hybrid council meeting was held in person (and online) at the Nacote Creek Research Station (360 N New York Road, Port Republic NJ) on 6/17/2024.
 - 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 May 2024 \$1,134.05
 - Shellfisheries Law Enforcement Fund \$394.00
 - Presentation of May 20, 2024 minutes for approval.
 - Application for consideration:
 - 3 applications in Great Bay- Graveling Point
 - All applicants were in attendance
 - Application for decision:
 - 1 application in LEHB- Thompson Creek
 - 3 applications in Steelmans Bay (Scullville)
 - 1 application in Great Bay- Big Creek
 - 1 application in Great Sound
 - All applicants fulfilled their requirements and attended one of two Council meetings.
 - Approved application for transfer:
 - 1 transfer application in Dry Bay
 - Topics of note included:
 - Old Business
 - NJ Real
 - New Business
 - No new business

Surveys & Laboratory Work

- **Delaware Bay Juvenile Finfish Trawl Survey**
 - The 2024 Delaware Bay Juvenile Finfish Trawl Survey started in April and will run through October. In June, staff sampled all 11 stations for the survey. The stations are located in shallow, nearshore waters from the Cohansey River south to the Villas, NJ.
- **Dermo Monitoring and Shell Plant and Transplant Site Monitoring**
 - Staff in partnership with Rutgers Haskin Shellfish Lab staff conducted oyster sampling from the Delaware Bay oyster reefs for Dermo monitoring on June 17. Staff also sampled in partnership to survey the Bureau's shellfish enhancement sites including the shell plant program and transplant program on June 24.
 - Both sampling efforts started in April and will run through to the end of November.
- **Estuarine Inventory**

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- Staff has begun preparations for the Sandy Hook Bay estuarine inventory. Staff have been working with Naval Weapons Station Earle staff to ensure proper security clearances are obtained for stations that fall within the station's security zone.
 - Staff intend for the survey to begin in mid-August.
- **Mullica River Shell Planting**
 - The annual shell planting began on June 20 and will run through the second week of July.
 - Staff coordinated with the Commissioner's office as well as Communications to plan a visit for Commissioner LaTourette to see the shell planting in early July.
 - Staff coordinated with other Bureau staff to develop and deploy bags filled with clean shell in the Mullica River. These bags are suspended in the water column and will be collected and replaced bi-weekly throughout the summer and fall. The bags will attract spat as larvae enter the system, bags will be processed and counted for the amount of spatfall. This information will help staff to better time shell planting efforts to be in unison with the oyster spawning events.
- **Side Scan Sonar**
 - Staff continues to create a User Manual for use of the Side Scan Sonar and its software for guidance purposes while out on the water. This is an ongoing living document.
 - Delaware Bay staff attempted to deploy the Side Scan Sonar on June 20 but ran into some issues with the program. Staff reached out to the manufacturer to troubleshoot the issue.
- **Spat Bag – Mullica River**
 - Staff deployed 4 Spat bags on the Mullica River near the Fitney, Moss Point, and Frenches Point oyster Beds; in addition to one spat bag deployed upriver (past the Garden State Parkway Bridge). This monitoring project will provide vital information on oyster spawning for New Jersey's Shell Recycling Program planting sites on the Mullica River for years to come.
 - The mesh bags are filled with ~dozen oyster shells and suspended halfway in the water column.
 - The bags will be swapped out weekly and spat counts on the oyster shell will be processed back at the lab through the summer.
- **Sturgeon Receiver Project**
 - The sturgeon receiver project was conducted this month on June 11.
 - 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.

Buildings, Grounds, Vessels and Vehicles

- **Boat Maintenance**
 - Bureau staff continue to maintain the R/V James W. Joseph and R/V Zephyrus by performing regular maintenance, repairs, and equipment upgrades as necessary. The Joseph had hydraulic repairs and upgrades started in June, which are scheduled to be completed in July.
 - Bureau staff continue to maintain state vehicles with routine and scheduled service.
 - Bureau staff returned the R/V Zephyrus to the water after being dry docked for the winter.

Administrative/Miscellaneous

- **License Sales**

Revenue collected from the Delaware Bay Office totaled \$16,799.00 for June 2024

License Type	Total	License Type	Total
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Oyster Tags	\$10,908.00	Commercial SF	\$150.00
Assigned Fees	\$4,000.00	Application Fees	\$58.00
Nets	\$707.00	Rec SF Resident	\$40.00
Commercial Crab Pot	\$700.00	Rec SF Non-Resident	\$20.00
Menhaden	\$208.00	Rec SF Juvenile	\$8.00

- **Monthly Meetings**
 - Staff attended the following monthly meetings: NJ Bay Islands, Ocean Acidification Team (OA Team), CHARRM, and Nature Based Solutions Workgroup.
 - 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 and presented information and a hands-on activity at the Sara the Turtle Festival in Sea Isle City, NJ on June 24, 2024.
 - Staff began drafting a script for a new video to highlight the Bureau's Delaware Bay Juvenile Finfish Trawl Survey. Filming is expected to begin in September.