

Marine Resources Administration Monthly Report

AUGUST 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

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 Lindner, 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

- Lindy Barry, has retired from the Marine Resources Administration after more than 22 years of service! Lindy was an indispensable part of many coastwide stock assessments including tautog, weakfish, Atlantic croaker, black drum, and horseshoe crabs, including among the first multi-species population models implemented into management on the Atlantic coast. Staff worked with Lindy to develop transition plans to ensure continuity of operations.
- The 2024 compliance reports for weakfish and spotted seatrout were submitted to ASMFC.

MEETING SUMMARIES

- **Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission-ASMFC**
 - Staff participate in a call of ASMFC's Assessment Science Committee (ASC). Most of the call was spent discussing timelines related to a number of assessments and whether they should be modified. Additional time was spent discussing what the ASC thinks should be required for state-specific spotted seatrout assessments, including NJ. A final agenda item related to considering modifying assessment timelines in response to re-calibration of MRIP data. Most agenda items required additional work after the call (including spotted seatrout) and so no decisions were reached.
 - Administration staff participated in a call of the striped bass stock assessment subcommittee to primarily get input on update model selectivity configurations. The group came to consensus on a base run and an alternative run for discussion by the full TC and SAS in the coming weeks. Additional work is ongoing (e.g., retrospective analyses, projections, and updated reference points). The assessment will be presented to the Management Board at their October meeting. Discussion also resumed on recreational fleet dynamics model (RFDM) development, as well as some additional techniques to address any Board interest in moving slot limits.
 - Administration staff participated in a call of the rec reform PDT/FMAT. The main topics of the call centered on a recent review of the PDT/FMAT's work – the PDT/FMAT had an opportunity to interact with the chair of the SSC related to the review. The PDT/FMAT is largely constrained in what issues they can address by the time left in this action. ASMFC/MAFMC staff will present the range of alternatives being considered to managers at their August meeting. That meeting will set up the home stretch of this action before publication of a public information document for public comment and eventual adoption of a single alternative.
 - Administration staff participated in a meeting of the MAFMC Monitoring Committee (MC). Most discussion centered around a ~25% increase in allowable recreational removals in 2025, relative to 2024. Rec removals in 2025 are anticipated to be approximately 20% below the 2025 rec allowable limit. The MC recommended status quo measures in light of an uncertain year class working its way through the population, being mid-way through a 2-year specification cycle, and uncertainty related to rebuilding SSB to the target as is required under the rebuilding plan. The MC is developing liberalization options in case the MAFMC is interested.
 - At the Summer 2024 ASMFC Board Meeting the Shad and River Herring Board received a presentation on the 2024 River Herring Benchmark Stock Assessment. For this assessment blueback herring and alewife herring were split into five and three different genetic stock regions, respectively. This differed from past assessments that analyzed stocks on a river basin specific basis. The assessment found the coastwide river herring population to be depleted compared to historic levels citing historical overfishing, by-catch mortality, access to historical spawning

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grounds, and spawning habitat degradation as all contributing to the decline in both species' populations.

- At the summer 2024 ASMFC Board Meeting the Atlantic Sturgeon Board received a presentation on the 2024 Atlantic Sturgeon Update Stock Assessment. The assessment found the coastwide river Atlantic sturgeon population and all Distinct Population Segments (DPSs) along the coast to be depleted compared to historic levels citing historical overfishing, by-catch mortality, access to historical spawning grounds, and spawning habitat degradation as all contributing to the decline in both species' populations. The New York Bight DPS, which includes both the Delaware River and Hudson River Atlantic sturgeon populations was found to have a 59% probability of the terminal year index (2021) of the assessment being above the index of the reference year (1998).
- **Marine Fisheries Council/Advisory Committees**
 - A meeting of the NJ Marine Fisheries Council's Angler Survey Advisory Committee was held in person at the NJ Marine Fisheries Administrative offices the evening of August 13, 2024 to discuss the proposed Council request of exploring a recreational angler satisfaction survey for summer flounder as well as a recreational summer flounder length data collection logbook for implementation during the 2025 fishing year. Both of data collection tools will help staff and council mold options and help direct management decisions surrounding future recreational summer flounder fisheries.

INDEPENDENT FISHERIES

- **Blue Crab Pot Survey**
 - Blue crab pot project completed the fourth month of sampling. A total of 36 pots were set in Great Bay and Mullica River. Pots had 2 different bycatch reduction devices along with pots that did not contain any BRD's. Catch has yet to be calculated for the month, but the number and size of crabs has increased from previous sampling.
- **Delaware River Seine Survey**
 - The seine survey completed sampling for the month of August. The 2024 preliminary index is 0.88, which ranks #28 in the 44-year time series. This is higher than the 2023 August index of 0.213 which ranked 39 in the time series. A total of 155 striped bass were caught in August 2024 and 102 of those were age 0 (young of year). September sampling is currently in progress.
- **Eel Surveys**
 - New/replacement eel pots for the Great Bay Yellow Eel Pot Survey were ordered. Preparation for the Fall portion of the 2024 survey have begun, with an expected start date of September 16.
- **Herring Surveys**
 - After a strong start to the year in regard to young of the year river herring catches on both the Great Egg Harbor River and Maurice River, catches of young of the year river herring have tailed off through August.
- **Ocean Trawl**
 - The August ocean trawl survey was completed August 27 in 6 consecutive days of sampling. Catches were typical of summer, consisting primarily of clearnose skates and stingrays inshore and searobins offshore. Catches were predictably high inshore. Notable catches include 1 large Atlantic sturgeon, an orange filefish, a fourbeard rockling, 1 sandbar shark, and many sharpnose and angel sharks. Summer flounder catches were abnormally high coastwide throughout the survey. The survey concluded with a catch of clearnose skates off the beach near Long Branch, in excess of 10,000lbs.
- **Raritan-Sandy Hook Bay Complex Inventory Project**

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- The Raritan Inventory Project began on August 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 smooth dogfish (n = 11) and Atlantic menhaden (n = 7), but also caught blue crabs, bluefish, Atlantic croaker, butterfish and cownose ray.
 - Otter trawl sampling consisted of primarily bay anchovy (n = 1,065), spot (n = 260) and Atlantic moonfish (n = 84). Other species collected consisted of butterfish, spider crabs, hard clams, summer flounder, black sea bass, weakfish and Atlantic croaker.
 - Seine sampling consisted primarily of Atlantic menhaden (n = 3,770), Atlantic silversides (n = 2,151), white mullet (n = 231), and striped killifish (n = 59). Other species collected consisted of blue crabs, Northern kingfish, crevalle jack, winter flounder, Atlantic needlefish, striped anchovy, and bluefish.
 - Sixteen eDNA water samples were collected and filtered from otter trawl stations and nine eDNA water samples were collected and filtered from seine stations.
- **Sturgeon Receivers**
 - 5 new NexTrak R1 receivers were placed out in place of the old VR2W models. These new models will record temperature and tilt data. The five locations selected provided spatial coverage of any expected temperature changes in the Bay.

DEPENDENT FISHERIES

- **Access Point Angler Intercept Survey-AP AIS**
 - FishDump data for July was reviewed and comments were submitted.
 - The draw for August consisted of 181 site assignments and 11 head boat assignments that yielded a total of 1323 intercepts (383 SH, 161 CH, 583 PR, 196 HB).
 - There were 6 site assignments and 1 headboat assignment cancelled in August due to staff availability, sickness and lack of boat trips.
 - Staff continue to make updates to the Vessel Directory and Site Register in preparation for Wave 5 and Wave 6.
 - August mileage has been validated and submitted for reimbursement; July mileage reimbursements have yet to be 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
 - Wave 4 Summary: 2830 intercepts: 1027 SH, 282 CH, 1099 PR, 422 HB
- **Commercial Fisheries/Quota Management**
 - Summer flounder: The commercial 2024 Directed Season 4 ended on August 31. Estimated preliminary harvest is 94% of the Seasonal directed quota.
 - Black Sea Bass: The commercial 2024 Directed Season 4 ended on August 31. Estimated preliminary harvest is 78% of the Seasonal directed quota.
 - Menhaden: The commercial menhaden season began on January 1. Quota designated to the “other gears” fishery is an estimated 2.6% harvested, while quota designated to the “purse seine” fishery is an estimated 20% harvested. Low harvest associated with the “other gears” is attributed to the lack of winter trawl fishery this year.
 - Bluefish: Current harvest remains low at 4% of the adjusted quota.
 - Scup: The Summer scup season started on May 1. Current harvest is 40% of NJ’s Summer quota. Effort is expected to pick up late summer.
 - Spiny dogfish: The 2024/25 commercial season began on May 1. Current harvest is 1% of the quota.

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- Staff compiled and QC'd 2022 and 2023 NJ commercial Jonah crab and American Lobster harvest data. The data was submitted to the ASMFC's American lobster SAS Committee to be incorporated in the upcoming 2025 American lobster stock assessment.
- Marine Fisheries staff is working with 6 commercial gill netters out of Barnegat Light on weak rope / weak link study. These gill netters construct experimental gear to NMFS specifications, fish experimental gear alongside standard gear and submit reports on catch, effort, gear performance, protected species interactions. These fishermen are compensated for participation in this study. Staff has been reviewing reports and working with ASMFC to make sure participants are being paid for participating in the study.
- Staff have been busy reviewing and entering commercial harvest reports, along with making calls to verify information on commercial harvest reports. Most commercial reports are from the crab pot fishery.
- Staff supplied commercial Spanish mackerel landings to state biologist for the species compliance report
- Staff completed and sent the fall data load to ACCSP. The fall data load consists of commercial harvesters and dealers' information but does not contain data.
- Staff approved 5 requests for confidential commercial data. These requests came from stock assessment scientist from various federal, state and academic agencies.
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- **For-Hire Telephone Survey-FHTS**
 - August sampling included weeks 31-35. 345 vessels were drawn for the month of July. 170 responded, resulting in a response rate of 49.2%.
 - 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 August 30, 2024, there were 107,182 individual and 1,196 for-hire vessel registrations obtained with the New Jersey Saltwater Recreational Registry Program (NJSRRP) for 2024. (Last month: As of July 31, 2024, there were 99,694 individual and 1,159 for-hire vessels registered for 2024 in the NJFW ELS).
- **Striped Bass Bonus Program-SBBP**
 - Staff have issued permits to 9,161 individual anglers and 133 party/charter boats. The current 2024 bonus harvest is 3,257 pounds from 444 fish.
- **Tournament Sampling**
 - Staff collected bluefish and black sea bass samples from the party boat Queen Mary on August 15. During 10 tournaments and two party/charter boat trips, staff measured over 170 summer flounder, 100 bluefish, 50 black sea bass, 19 spot, 18 black drum, nine blue crab, six white perch, two oyster toadfish, one Atlantic croaker, one northern searobin, and one striped bass. Otoliths have been collected from about 100 bluefish, 50 black sea bass, and 10 summer flounder.

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. The Proposal Launch meeting is scheduled for September 11, 2024.

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- 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
 - None to report- Summer recess.
- Legislative Activity – Federal
 - H.R.9238, Rep. Barragan, Nanette Diaz (D-CA); To accelerate the commercialization of marine energy technologies, and for other purposes. No bill text available.
 - S.4948, Sen Manchin, Joe (I-WV); 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. Read twice and referred to Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation on 8/1/2024.
 - S. 3277, (Sen. Sullivan, R-Alaska)/H.R. 6781 (Rep. Bonamici, D-Oregon); a bill to amend the Marine Debris Act to reauthorize the Marine Debris Program of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation ordered to be reported favorably without amendment on 7/31/2024. Placed on Senate Legislative Calendar under General Orders on 8/1/2024.
- **Scientific Collection Permits**
 - Ninety-four scientific collecting permits have been issued in 2024. One additional application has been reviewed and will be processed upon receipt of all required materials.
- **HOT TOPICS/Miscellaneous**
 - The new MRA research vessel is nearing the end of construction. % site visits have been completed to monitor and oversee the build, the last occurring August 19. The updated completion date is in October 2024.

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

Offshore Wind, Restoration, Enhancement, Mitigation, and Habitat

- **Environmental Review/ Waterfront Development**
 - Staff reviewed and provided comments to the Office of Environmental Review on several pre-applications, Land Management Reviews, and Waterfront Development permit applications.
 - Barnegat Light Bulkhead LMR
 - MRA provided comments for a shell lot bulkhead replacement at Barnegat Lighthouse.
 - New Jersey Turnpike Authority Interchanges 1-4
 - MRA reviewed updates to the NJTA's proposed Interchanges 1 to 4 Capacity Enhancement Program in Burlington, Camden, Gloucester, and Salem Counties.
 - NMFS Proposed Amendments North Atlantic Right Whale Speed Rule
 - MRA provided comments regarding amendments to the existing North Atlantic right whale vessel speed rule to further reduce the likelihood of mortalities and serious injuries to this endangered species.
 - Staff worked with DLRP on several mapping interpretations.

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- Staff attended the following JPPM meetings: USFWS Popular Point, Otten's Harbor Living Shoreline, and the Delaware Estuary Hybrid Living Shoreline.
- Staff submitted a completed site inspection report for Clam Cove.
- **Shell Recycling Program**
 - Staff continue to coordinate with Shell Recycling Program participants for weekly shell collection and investigate additional venues.
 - Staff collected 419 bushels of recycled shell in the month of August.
 - Staff began the process of ordering additional shell recycling bins to be purchased using the recently awarded NOAA grant funds.
 - Staff has reached out to vendors and will order the bins as soon as possible to allow for the program expansion into Cape May County to continue.
- **Shell Recycling Program Grant**
 - Staff again presented at the Atlantic City Boys & Girls club about the Shell Recycling Program. The presentation is a precursor to the education program coming as a part of the shell recycling grant expansion
 - Staff finalized the display design for a Shell Recycling Program exhibit within the Atlantic City Aquarium.
 - Staff collaborated with other MRA staff, and Jetty Rock Foundation staff on the design, and the exhibit is set to be installed in September.
 - Staff worked with Bureau of Information and Education staff to develop a shell recycling video that will be featured within the Atlantic City Aquarium display.
 - The video highlights all aspects of the program and will play on a loop within the display.
- **Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV)**
 - Staff continued drafting a Seagrass Conservation Program Plan to establish set goals, timelines, and outcomes for all future submerged aquatic vegetation work including mapping projects, monitoring, enhancement/restoration, research, outreach, etc.
 - Staff continued to conduct BioSonics fieldwork at Shelter Island in Little Egg Harbor Bay. The purpose of this work is to validate the data that the BioSonics unit is collecting alongside field verification data conducted in-water via divers with a 1 m x 1 m quadrat.
 - The focus of this effort was on eelgrass (*Zostera marina*), where dense meadows are known to be present. The MRA plans to continue similar work this Fall in the northern coastal rivers of New Jersey, including the Navesink, Shrewsbury, Shark, and Manasquan.
- **Maurice River Cove Oyster Seed**
 - Staff received approximately 110,000 oyster spat on 8/30/2024 from a grower on the cape shore to deploy on the Maurice River Cove tonging area.
 - A small quantity of the oysters is being used for a growth and predation study of the area.

Aquaculture and Shellfish Leases

- **Aquaculture Development Zone**
 - Staff has continued maintaining a presence at the ADZ and keeping up relations with the growers who utilize the ADZ and the surrounding area.
 - Staff went to look at spat that one of growers was providing to us to release in the wild on Wednesday, August 28th.
- **Shellfish Biological Survey**
 - Staff completed a biological assessment survey in Graveling Point on August 14th.
 - Staff completed a biological assessment survey in Scull Bay on August 16th.

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- This assessment report will be added to the Shellfish Council agenda at the next available Council meeting and the Lessee's will be notified as their attendance is required.
- **Shellfish Lease Ground Coverage Percentage by Bay**
 - Staff continue working in ArcGIS Pro to map the shellfish lease ground to public waterway acreage. This data will create a percentage visualization between the occupied lease grounds and the available public waterways in each bay along the Atlantic Coast.
 - This data will help to identify and make informed decisions on the potential expansion of shellfish lease ground areas in New Jersey waters.

State Fisheries and Quota Management

- **Delaware Bay Section of the NJ Shellfisheries Council**
 - Staff drafted the July meeting minutes which were sent to the Council to review and began preparing for the upcoming September 10th meeting in late August.
- **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 13th 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	\$18,658.00
Apr	2,435	410	\$24,550.00
May	3,238	385	\$42,664.00
Jun	1,782	155	\$10,908.00
Jul	1,704	236	\$14,736.00
Aug	1,391	159	\$10,414.00
Total	12,367	1,658	\$121,930.00

- Staff continue to regularly proof and review harvest report data as it is received to keep the records up to date.
- As of 8/30/2024, 30.3% of harvest was reported from the Bennies oyster bed, which comprised of 53.7% of the High Mortality management region's harvest.
- Ship John oyster bed received 92.8% of the harvest from the Medium Mortality region which consists of two beds.
- 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 is shown below:

Bed	Region	Boat Days	Harvest	CPUE	% of Region	% of Total
Cohansey	MMM	19	1,856	97.7	7.2%	3.2%
Ship John	MMM	113	11,547	102.2	92.8%	19.9%
Shell Rock	SR	73	11,623	159.2	100.0%	20.1%
Bennies Sand	HMM	41	8,391	204.7	25.2%	14.5%

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Bennies	HMM	107	17,531	165.3	53.7%	30.3%
Nantuxent	HMM	53	6,901	130.2	21.1%	12%
Region Total	MMM	132	13,403	101.5		23.2%
Region Total	SR	73	11,623	159.2		20.1%
Region Total	HMM	201	32,823	163.3		56.7%
Total		406	57,849	142.5		

Surveys & Laboratory Work

- **Delaware Bay Juvenile Finfish Trawl Survey**
 - The 2024 Delaware Bay Juvenile Finfish Trawl Survey started in April-October.
 - August 6 & 7 staff went out on trawl and completed all 11 stations.
- **Sturgeon Receiver Project**
 - The sturgeon receiver project was conducted on August 13th.
 - 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 August 19th. Staff also sampled in partnership to survey the Bureau's shellfish enhancement sites including the shell plant program and transplant program on August 26th. Both sampling efforts started in April and will run through the end of November.
- **Estuarine Inventory Raritan/Sandy Hook Bay**
 - Staff transported R/V Zephyrus and R/V Vadum up to the United States Coast Guard Station at Sandy Hook to begin sampling work in Sandy Hook Bay.
 - Due to equipment issues the survey was held up after the first day of sampling
 - Staff expects equipment issues to be resolved the last week of August, with sampling resuming the first week of September.
 - Staff anticipates sampling to be completed by the third week of September
- **Mullica River Oyster Monitoring**
 - Staff completed the first round of monthly monitoring on the 2024 shell plant site, along with the shell plant sites from 2021, 2022 and 2023 within the Mullica River.
 - Initial results indicate a strong set with the 2024 shell plant site containing 7,143 spat per a 37-quart bushel.
 - Sites from 2021, 2022, and 2023 also displayed encouraging results, having 1,449, 1057, and 1484 spat per bushel respectively.
 - Monitoring efforts will continue for the remainder of the summer and into the fall to assess recruitment success and mortality
- **Mullica River Spat Bag & Water Quality Monitoring**
 - Staff continues to replace spat bags deployed at the 4 sites on the Mullica River.
 - Staff continues to analyze spat samples from the Mullica sites and recorded the number of spat and measured 50 individual specimens.
 - Spat bags will remain deployed though the fall to assess if a Fall spawning event occurs in the system.

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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 continued using the side scan sonar most recently to map a Tongers area while having Nacote Creek staff get more comfortable with the equipment.

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 September.
- Bureau staff continue to maintain state vehicles with routine and scheduled service.

Administrative/Miscellaneous

- **License Sales**

- Revenue collected from the Delaware Bay Office totaled \$11,416.00 for August 2024

License Type	Total	License Type	Total
Oyster Tags	\$10,414.00	Lease Fees	\$100.00
Commercial Crab Pot	\$500.00	Dredge Boat License	\$46.00
Nets	\$156.00	Application Fees	\$36.00
Menhaden	\$154.00	Recreational SF	\$10.00

- **Monthly Meetings**

- Ocean Acidification Team (OA Team), Barnegat & Great Bays Resilience Observing Network Focus Group

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

- Staff attended the Barnegat Light Coast Guard Open House on August 7th and presented on various MRA projects. The public showed interest in learning about local fish and shellfish, the Artificial Reef Program, and the Saltwater Registry.

- **Subaward & Contract Training**

- Staff virtually attended a training session hosted by the Office of Business Administration and the Contracts and Grants Management Unit to review the process of determining when to use a subaward (grant) or a contract when making agreements used to facilitate tasks that achieve the goals of NJDEP.