

Marine Resources Administration Monthly Report

NOVEMBER 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

Natalie Dragos, Agency Services Rep I

Kathryn Ford, Agency Services Rep I

Ryan Alianell, ASMFC Fisheries Technician

Sharon Otto, ASMFC Fisheries Technician

Joseph Shehata, ASMFC Fisheries Technician

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

ASMFC/MAFMC/COOP/NOAA/ACCSP

- The preliminary 2024 American Shad YOY index (geometric mean) is 7.12, which is much higher than the 2023 index of 1.60. The 2024 YOY index ranks 16th in the 44-year data timeseries and is above the benchmark threshold of 5.81, so no management changes are needed at this time.
- Three Atlantic sturgeon were reported as washed ashore on the beach of Spring Lake. Pictures provided by the reporters and staff salvage investigations revealed these sturgeon to be fresh dead without any signs of injury such as bites or propeller scars. This makes 6 individual Atlantic sturgeon in this area in relatively fresh dead condition without any obvious injury since June. The unusual number of reports of dead sturgeon in this area this year in fresh dead condition could possibly be indicative of commercial fishing discards. Staff should continue to monitor and investigate reports of sturgeon from this area to see if the trend continues.

MEETING SUMMARIES

- **Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission-ASMFC**
 - Administration staff participated in a call of the Striped Bass Technical Committee and Stock Assessment Subcommittee. Main topics of discussion centered on review of work that was responsive to Management Board tasks, including a series of projections under different assumptions, review of work related to seasonal closures (no harvest and no target), and review of changes to size limits. The Management Board will meet December 16 to determine whether any regulatory changes are necessary for the 2025 fishing year.
 - Administration staff participated in a meeting of the Ecological Reference Point Working Group. Main topics of discussion centered on data updates for the myriad species included in the various models, updates on model development progress, discussion of model comparison criteria (i.e., how will we compare the outputs from the various models, some of which operate in unique currencies), reference points, report writing, and timeline/next steps. Assignments were doled out. This work is scheduled for peer review in summer 2025 and if approved for management, will set reference points for menhaden that account for their role as a forage fish.
- **Miscellaneous**
 - Staff met for a meeting of the Delaware River Cooperative's Policy Committee via webinar on Wednesday, November 6. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss funding breakdowns and possible sources for the Cooperative's proposed creel survey for the Delaware River. Potential funding obligations were created by assigning percentage of contributions based on a state's river mileage with NJ being assigned 30% of the ~\$760,000 cost share. Two potential survey scopes were agreed upon. The full proposal includes a full cost DR Basin-wide, non-species specific creel survey and a half cost mainstem DR, shad specific survey. NJ's cost share obligation under both scopes would be \$217,800 and \$108,900, respectively. State representatives were asked to discuss within their agencies that potential for being able to supply these funds and have an answer before a follow up meeting scheduled to take place sometime in December.

INDEPENDENT FISHERIES

- **Delaware River Seine Survey**
 - Staff reviewed the American eel status summary within the Delaware River Basin Commission's State of the Basin report. Delaware River Seine Survey data was included in the DRBC's analysis of

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several species' indicators, not just American eel. The 2024 report changed the grade from the 2019 report, which was "Good and declining," to now be "Good and stable."

- Several Seine Survey documents were updated and are now available on the V Drive: Survey SOP, species ID guide, geometric means by year (age 0 and 1) and arithmetic means by year (age 0 and 1).
- **Eel Surveys**
 - The fall portion of the 2024 Great Bay Yellow Eel Pot Survey, which only sampled one month instead of the usual two months, concluded on November 20. Between spring and fall sampling combined, a total of 162 yellow stage American eel were caught in baited pots. In addition, three tagged eels were recaptured from previous year tagging efforts, 98 eels were tagged and released, and otoliths were collected from 25 eels. Crews also caught 76 conger eels during the 2024 survey.

DEPENDENT FISHERIES

- **Access Point Angler Intercept Survey-AP AIS**
 - FishDump data for October were reviewed and comments were submitted.
 - The draw for November consisted of 154 site assignments and 5 headboat assignments that yielded a total of 907 intercepts (273 SH, 99 CH, 489 PR, 46 HB).
 - There were 2 cancelled headboat assignments in November due to weather and limited trip schedules with drawn vessels.
 - There were 6 cancelled site assignments due to staff illness with no coverage.
 - Staff continue to make updates to the Vessel Directory and Site Register in preparation for 2025 sampling.
 - November mileage is being validated for submission to reimbursement.
 - Wave 2 Summary: 489 intercepts: 185 SH, 15 CH, 243 PR, 46 HB
 - Wave 3 Summary: 1863 intercepts: 744 SH, 168 CH, 801 PR, 150 HB
 - Wave 4 Summary: 2805 intercepts: 1028 SH, 280 CH, 1099 PR, 398 HB
 - Wave 5 Summary: 1438 intercepts: 523 SH, 141 CH, 588 PR, 186 HB
- **For-Hire Telephone Survey-FHTS**
 - The LPS add-on portion of the FHTS was successfully completed for 2024. Numerous LPS trips were cancelled or failed to be scheduled. Captains cited consistent high winds as the main cause.
 - Most HMS permit submissions through the imports inbox have been completed for 2024.
 - Staff are beginning to compile a list of directory maintenance action items and vessel issues so they can be addressed before the 2025 sampling year.
- **NJ Saltwater Recreational Registry Program-NJSRRP/Volunteer Angler Survey-VAS**
 - As of November 26, 2024, there were 116,939 individual and 1,254 for-hire vessel registrations obtained with the New Jersey Saltwater Recreational Registry Program (NJSRRP) for 2024. (Last month: As of October 30, 2024, there were 114,574 individual and 1,233 for-hire vessels registered for 2024 in the NJFW ELS).
- **Striped Bass Bonus Program-SBBP**
 - The 2024 SBBP will remain open through December 31, 2024. Staff issued permits to 11,632 individual anglers and 169 party/charter boats. The current 2024 bonus harvest is 18,316 lbs. from 2,493 fish, which represents 9.1% of the quota. The bonus harvest is currently underestimated as staff are still processing reports from November.
- **Tournament Sampling**
 - Tournament and party/charter boat sampling has finished for 2024. Data will be finalized in the coming months.

OUTREACH

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- Staff worked throughout the month to create and update all portions of the 2025 Marine Digest. Initial submissions were provided to the editor (I&E) on November 25. The first draft of the digest is expected from the publisher shortly after the new year.

ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS (Marine Resources Administration)

- **Wind Energy**
 - New Jersey Research and Monitoring Initiative (RMI)
 - The RMI RFP, administered by NJ Sea Grant, closed in October with sixty-three proposals distributed between the focus areas as follows:
 - 14, Non-extractive methods for surveying wildlife and habitat (\$500,000).
 - 6, Technological innovations in data collection, analysis, and management (\$500,000).
 - 8, Fishery sustainability and socioeconomic impacts of offshore wind activities (\$750,000).
 - 1, Identifying and reducing offshore wind noise impacts on marine wildlife (\$750,000).
 - 11, Characterization of benthic ecosystems and primary productivity (\$1,000,000)
 - 9, Assessing bird and bat abundance, migration patterns, and risk exposure associated with offshore wind (\$500,000).
 - Fourteen additional proposals addressed more than one of the research needs. Proposals will be reviewed and scored by subject matter experts, reviewed and ranked by a review panel, then the RMI Steering Committee will review funding recommendations and make final awards.
 - Board of Public Utilities Collaboration
 - Staff reviewed and made recommendations for the Board Order for Solicitation 4, including:
 - Adding text to the description of RMI to include research related to mitigation, not just impact assessment.
 - Adjusting the language related to duration of environmental and fisheries monitoring to clarify that monitoring would not be terminated without scientific justification.
 - Specifying a requirement that all environmental and fisheries commitments described in the bid are included in annual BMP Reports.
 - Staff presented at and assisted with the Information Gathering Sessions for the Strategic Plan update (OSWSP2) which were hosted by BPU, Ramboll, and Kearns and West. The Sessions were well attended by a diverse array of stakeholders, including developers, eNGOs, fisheries representatives, and academics. The intention was to consider the four components of the Environmental Protection and Advanced Research Analysis; however, stakeholders were more interested in commenting more broadly on the State's strategy for natural resource management with respect to offshore wind. Staff met with Chief of Staff Megan Brunatti to develop an outline addressing the workstreams and collaborations that the Department is engaged in. These include:
 - Working closely with developers to identify mitigation opportunities and developing Mitigation and Monitoring Plans.
 - Coordinating with other states and federal agencies.
 - Identifying opportunities to support fisheries.
 - Engaging fisheries stakeholders (ERWG, Marine Fisheries Council OSW Committee)
 - Working with the BPU on Solicitation requirements.

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- Direct Support of Fisheries
 - Staff participated in an Atlantic Surfclam Workshop, a next step in efforts to implement a fishery enhancement project. This outcome-focused workshop was coordinated with the support of the Special Initiative on Offshore Wind (SIOW) and the Consensus Building Institute (CBI) with a goal of bringing together key stakeholders, including representatives from the fishing industry, researchers, offshore wind developers, and state and federal agencies, to discuss actionable strategies for developing a large scale surfclam seeding operation off NJ to compensate for loss of access to fishing grounds. Staff proposed a pathway for funding a pilot project.
- Regional coordination
 - Staff attended (virtually) the Central Atlantic Marine Spatial Planning Data Development Workshop hosted by NOAA's National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS) in partnership with the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM). The purpose of the workshop was to focus on data development to inform marine spatial planning for the next phase of the Central Atlantic leasing. Staff learned more about how resources were represented in modeling and provided information about the NJ Ocean Trawl.
 - Staff worked with ROSA's Research Project Manager on a presentation for the Northeast Division Mid Atlantic Chapter of the American Fisheries Society meeting in New Brunswick, NJ regarding the importance of using offshore wind research dollars to directly support marine habitats and fisheries. The take home message was that rather than continuing to focus almost exclusively on identifying impacts, we should consider supporting sustainable ecosystems, fisheries, and coastal economies as a primary goal. That might look like more research on innovative fisheries mitigation, socio economics, and informing fisheries management.
- Stakeholder support
 - Staff assisted Chief of Staff Megan Brunatti in planning the November meeting of the NJ Offshore Wind Environmental Resources Working Group and facilitated that meeting. The agenda included updates from Atlantic Shores and the BPU, presentations from regional science entities, and the RMI.

ADMINISTRATIVE/MISCELLANEOUS (Marine Resources Administration)

- **Regulatory/Legislative**
 - Notice of Administrative Change (NOAC)
 - A NOAC implementing the 2025 commercial summer flounder and black sea bass trip limits was approved by the Marine Fisheries Council at its 11/7/2024 meeting and is currently awaiting the Commissioner's signature. Following Commissioner approval, the NOAC is filed with the Office of Administrative Law, upon which the new trip limits will become effective.
 - 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.

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- Legislative Activity – State
 - A5078 (Calabrese, D36)/S3914 (Cruz-Perez, D5, Steinhardt, R23), Prohibits aquaculture of any species of octopus for purpose of human consumption. Proposed for introduction on 11/14/2024.
- Nominations
 - Shellfisheries Council
 - Edward Gaine, of Dorothy, to replace John Maxwell, set to expire March 24, 2025. Considered and reported from Senate Judiciary Committee on 11/18/2024.
 - Marine Fisheries Council
 - John Tiedemann, of Lakewood, to replace James Alexis, set to expire January 7, 2027. Considered and reported from Senate Judiciary Committee on 11/18/2024.
- Legislative Activity – Federal
 - H.R. 9747 (Rep. Cole, Tom, R-OK), Continuing Appropriations and Extensions Act, 2025. This Continuing Resolution will fund federal agencies through December 20, 2024. Signed by the President (Public Law 118-83) on September 26, 2024.
 - H.R. 2950 (Rep. Huffman, Jared, D-CA) This bill provides statutory authority for the Coastal Program of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). Under the voluntary program, the FWS works with partners to provide technical and financial assistance for habitat restoration projects, habitat protection projects, and related activities in priority coastal areas. Passes Senate without amendment by Voice Vote on 11/21/2024.
- **Scientific Collection Permits**
 - Ninety-six scientific collecting permits have been issued in 2024 and one for 2025. Four additional 2025 applications have been reviewed and will be processed upon receipt of all required materials.