

Marine Resources Administration Monthly Report

JANUARY 2025

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

MEETING SUMMARIES

• Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission-ASMFC

- The Striped Bass Technical Committee (TC) and Stock Assessment Subcommittee (SAS) met jointly to discuss the 2027 Benchmark Stock Assessment timeline, the benefits and challenges of a 2026 Assessment Update, and initial Draft Addendum III projections and analyses. The TC-SAS recommends that the Board does not schedule an assessment update for 2026 since it would take time and effort away from the benchmark and the results of each would likely be available within 6 months of one another. The TC-SAS had detailed discussions regarding the projections and analyses for the addendum but will seek more guidance from the Board at its February meeting regarding the scope of options they'd like to see.
- Administration staff participated in a meeting of the Striped Bass Technical Committee and Stock Assessment Subcommittee. Main topics of discussion included a review of the 2027 benchmark assessment timeline (scheduled for completion in spring 2028), solicitation of opinions on conducting an update assessment in 2026 (roundly rejected by all due to illogical timing), and solicitation of opinions on details related Addendum III projections and analyses (some issues resolved, others required more thought). The management board meets in early February.
- The Striped Bass Plan Development Team (PDT) was formed to begin work for Draft Addendum III which will consider 2026 management measures. The PDT drafted a memo to the Board seeking guidance on the scope of management measures the Board would like to consider.
- Administration staff participated in a meeting of the Ecological Reference Points Working Group. Major topics of discussion included an update on the single species menhaden estimate of natural mortality (it sounds like an updated value is likely), review of preliminary diet analyses (that includes NJ ocean trawl data!), updates to a multispecies statistical catch at age model with bottom-up effects focused on how changes in striped bass length at age cascade through striped bass natural mortality, and a review of the timeline that culminates in a peer review of the ERP assessment in August 2025.
- Staff attended a public hearing for the ASMFC/MAFMC recreational measures setting process. This action will guide how recreational measures are set for some of NJ's most popular species (e.g., summer flounder), but does not dictate what those measures will be. Commission staff gave an overview of the action, solicited comments, and directed participants on how to make written comments. ASMFC and MAFMC will vote on a final alternative at their joint April meeting held in Galloway NJ!
- Staff met via webinar on January 8, with other members of the ASMFC's Shad and River Herring Technical Committee. The purpose of the meeting was to review the Delaware River COOP's proposed response (status quo) to one of their sustainable fishery adult benchmarks index triggering in 2023.
- Staff met via webinar on January 15, with other members of the ASMFC's Shad and River Herring Plan Review Team (PRT). The PRT reviewed the compliance reports from states in regards to shad and river herring to ensure that all requirements from Amendments 2 & 3 from the FMP were met. While there were some minor issues with sample collection and data reporting from a few states, nothing rose to the level of being an FMP compliance issue. New Jersey met all compliance

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requirements in order to have the American shad fishery in the Delaware Bay remain open in its current form.

- **Miscellaneous**

- Staff attended a training session on January 30 for a community-based glass eel monitoring project organized by the Jacques Cousteau National Estuarine Research Reserve in Tuckerton, NJ. The training session was designed to teach community volunteers about American eels, how to tend a fyke net and artificial eel collectors properly, and why the data is important. Eel monitoring is expected to begin in March.
- A proposed consent decree between EPA and Delaware Riverkeeper Network was released for public review and comment in the Federal Register. If finalized as proposed, the CD would commit EPA to signing a final rule to update the aquatic life designated use and associated DO criteria within Zones 3, 4 and Upper 5 of the Delaware estuary by June 30, 2025. The Delaware Riverkeeper Network is seeking to have the aquatic life designated used designations for these zones upgraded from “maintenance” to “propagation” in support of sturgeon and other anadromous fishes spawning requirements.

INDEPENDENT FISHERIES

- **Delaware Bay Tagging**

- Staff completed preparations for the 2025 Delaware Bay Striped Bass Tagging survey and plan to begin field work in February. Preparations included improvements and maintenance to the survey vessel, gear, and nets.

- **Eel Surveys**

- Preparation began for the 2025 glass eel fyke net survey which begins in February. Field gear and lab equipment were organized and repaired as needed. A presentation about survey methodology was sent to all field staff, who were encouraged to watch as a reminder of survey protocols.

DEPENDENT FISHERIES

- **Access Point Angler Intercept Survey-APAIS**

- Since the completion of 2024 APAIS on December 31, staff have been working on an overhaul of the MRIP Site Register and Vessel Directory in preparation for the 2025 sampling season.
- Updates to site and vessel information, as well as pressures for both, were submitted and activated before February 1 to ensure all changes would be in effect for the March assignment draw and Wave 2 vessel lists.

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

- Staff attended the 2025 FHTS training which was held virtually and conducted by ACCSP staff.
- Week 52 was included in January sampling. 29 vessels were drawn for the month: 12 responded, resulting in a response rate of 41.3%.
- Staff began reviewing 2024 data to see where improvements can be made for 2025.
- Staff worked in the NOAA Vessel Directory making final changes for 2024 before moving to changes for 2025.

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

- As of January 31, 2025, there were 17,841 individual and 263 for-hire vessel registrations obtained with the New Jersey Saltwater Recreational Registry Program (NJSRRP) for 2025. (Last month: As of December 30, 2024, there were 117,809 individual and 1,264 for-hire vessels registered for 2024 in the NJFW ELS).

- **Striped Bass Bonus Program-SBBP**

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- 2024 SBBP participants were emailed a reminder to submit their fishing logs by the January 15 deadline. Staff continue to process individual logs and party/charter boat reports. The preliminary 2024 bonus harvest is 50,620 lbs. from 7,118 fish, which represents 25% of the quota. Individual anglers harvested 1,124 fish and party/charter boats harvested 5,994 fish. Currently, the 2024 bonus harvest (in numbers of fish) ranks 2nd highest in the time series with 2023 ranking the highest. The 2024 bonus harvest will likely increase as staff continue to enter reports and finalize the data over the next few weeks.

OUTREACH

- Staff chose a shelf date of May 9 for the 2025 Marine Digest and the publisher is working to create a full schedule for edits based on that date. All submissions were submitted in December 2024 and the MRA coordinator worked with the editor to create and edit the first draft of the 2025 Digest. The second draft (first full layout) was received on January 27 and sent to all authors and contributors for editing. Edits and comments are due on February 13. The next draft will be sent to all Marine Fisheries staff for edits/comments, likely mid to late February.
- Staff attended the Wildwood Fishing and Boating Show, January 10-12. Tables were shared with NJFW Marine Law Enforcement. Marine Fisheries' surveys were highlighted, along with a focus on barotrauma and ethical fish handling education/awareness.

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 published in the 1/21/2025 NJ Register.
 - A NOAC modifying the recreational cobia management measures was submitted to the Office of Legal Affairs (OLA) for review and Commissioner approval.
 - 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 with OLA and DOL.
 - 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
 - S3943 (Vitale, D19, Diegnan, D18)/A5121 (Katz, D8, Egan, D17, Collazos-Gill, D27, Vitale, D19, Diegnan, D18) Appropriates \$49.5 million from constitutionally dedicated CBT revenues to DEP for State acquisition of lands for recreation and conservation purposes, including Blue Acres projects, and Green Acres Program administrative costs. Introduced and referred to Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee on 12/5/2024, reported out of committee on 12/9/2024, substituted by A5121 on 12/19/2024. A5121 passed Senate and sent to Governor 38-0 on 12/19/2024. Signed by Governor P.L.2025, c.16.
 - A5121 (Katz, D8; Egan, D17; Collazos-Gill, D27; Vitale, D19; Deignan, D18) Appropriates \$49.5 million from constitutionally dedicated CBT revenues to DEP for State acquisition of lands for recreation and conservation purposes, including Blue Acres projects, and Green Acres Program administrative costs. Signed by the Governor P.L.2025, c.16 on 1/30/2025.

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- A5230 (Barlas, R40; DePhillips, R40) Requires automatic voter registration to be available when applying for certain licenses and permits. Introduced and referred to Assembly State and Local Government Committee on 1/27/2025
- A5248 (Auth, R39; Myhre, R9; Rumpf, R9) Requires automatic voter registration process at agency or office providing hunting, fishing, or trapping license. Introduced and referred to Assembly State and Local Government Committee on 1/30/2025.
- Legislative Activity – Federal
 - S. 283, the “Illegal Red Snapper and Tuna Enforcement Act”, (Sen. Cruz, R-Texas), a bill to require the Under Secretary of Commerce for Standards and Technology and the Administrator of National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to develop a standard methodology for identifying the country of origin of seafood to support enforcement against illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, and for other purposes. Introduced on January 8, 2025, and referred to the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee.
 - S. 216, the “Save our Seas 2.0”, (Sen. Sullivan, R-Alaska), a bill to amend the Save Our Seas 2.0 Act to improve the administration of the Marine Debris Foundation, to amend the Marine Debris Act to improve the administration of the Marine Debris Program of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and for other purposes. Introduced on January 23, 2025, and referred to the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee.
 - H.R. 556, (Rep. Wittman, R-Virginia), a bill to prohibit the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture from prohibiting the use of lead ammunition or tackle on certain Federal land or water under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture, and for other purposes. Introduced on January 16, 2025, and referred to the House Natural Resources, and in addition to the House Agriculture Committee, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned.
 - H.R. 513, (Rep. Higgins, R-Louisiana), a bill to nullify certain Presidential withdrawals of unleased offshore land, amend the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act to establish limits on the authority of the President to withdraw unleased offshore land, and for other purposes. Introduced on January 16, 2025, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee, and in addition to the House Rules Committee, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned.
 - H.R. 408, (Rep. Arrington, R-Texas), a bill to nullify the Presidential memoranda on the withdrawal of certain areas of the outer Continental Shelf from oil or natural gas leasing. Introduced on January 15, 2025, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
 - H.R. 644, (Rep. Bonamici, D-Oregon), a bill to amend the Harmful Algal Bloom and Hypoxia Research and Control Act of 1998 to address harmful algal blooms, and for other purposes. Introduced on January 23, 2025, and referred to the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee, and in addition to the House Natural Resources Committee, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned.
 - S. 93, the “Harmful Algal Blooms and Hypoxia Research and Control Act”, (Sen. Sullivan, R-Alaska), a bill to amend the Harmful Algal Blooms and Hypoxia Research and Control Act of 1998 to address harmful algal blooms, and for other purposes. Introduced on January 14, 2025, and referred to the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee.

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- H.R. 360, (Rep. Ocasio-Cortez, D-New York), a bill to direct the Secretary of Commerce to establish the Oyster Reef Restoration and Conservation Program. Introduced on January 13, 2025, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
 - H.R. 302, (Rep. Maloy, R-Utah), a bill to prohibit the conditioning of any permit, lease, or other use agreement on the transfer of any water right to the United States by the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture, and for other purposes. Introduced on January 9, 2025, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee, and in addition to the House Agriculture Committee, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned.
 - H.R. 65, (Rep. Biggs, R-Arizona), a bill to amend the Endangered Species Act of 1973 to further restrict the Secretary of the Interior from designating certain lands used for national defense-related purposes as critical habitat for any species under that Act and to broaden exclusions and exemptions from that Act for such defense-related purposes. Introduced on January 3, 2025, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
 - H.R. 102, the “American Sovereignty and Species Protection Act of 2025”, (Rep. Biggs, R-Arizona), a bill to amend the Endangered Species Act of 1973 to prevent a species that is not native to the United States from being listed as an endangered species or a threatened species, to prohibit certain types of financial assistance, and for other purposes. Introduced on January 3, 2025, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
 - H.R. 106, the “Less Imprecision in Species Treatment Act of 2025” or the “LIST Act of 2025”, (Rep. Biggs, R-Arizona), a bill to amend the Endangered Species Act of 1973 to provide for improved precision in the listing, delisting, and downlisting of endangered species and potentially endangered species. Introduced on January 3, 2025, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
 - H.R. 180, (Rep McClintock, R-California), a bill to amend the Endangered Species Act of 1973 to require publication on the internet of the basis for determinations that species are endangered species or threatened species, and for other purposes. Introduced on January 3, 2025, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee
 - H.R. 207, the “Supporting the Health of Aquatic systems through Research Knowledge and Enhanced Dialogue Act of 2025” or the “SHARKED Act of 2025”, (Rep. Wittman, R-Virginia), a bill direct the Secretary of Commerce to establish a task force regarding shark depredation, and for other purposes. Introduced on January 3, 2025, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee. On January 21, 2025, the bill passed the House of Representatives under suspension of the rules.
 - H.R. 347, (Rep. Keating, D-Massachusetts), a bill to require the Secretary of Commerce to establish the Sea Turtle Rescue Assistance Grant Program. Introduced on January 13, 2025, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
- **Scientific Collection Permits**
 - Forty scientific collecting permits have been issued for 2025. Eight additional applications have been reviewed and will be processed upon receipt of all required materials.

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

January highlights will be included in February’s report.