

Marine Resources Administration Monthly Report

MARCH 2025

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MARINE FISHERIES/MRA

ASMFC/MAFMC/COOP/NOAA/ACCSP

- After a multi-year collaborative effort between the Delaware River Basin Commission and the U.S. EPA to develop new water quality standards for the lower Delaware River and upper Delaware Estuary, the EPA is finalizing the proposed new rules to critical habitats and clean up the water in the Delaware River. Government and private entities that discharge waste water into the lower Delaware River will now be required to adhere to stricture dissolved oxygen quality standards in order to raise the water quality designated use designations from the current standard of “maintenance of resident fish and other aquatic life” to the new standard of “propagation of fish, shellfish and wildlife.”

MEETING SUMMARIES

- **Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program-ACCSP**
 - Staff attended the ACCSP Commercial Technical and Information Systems annual meeting. Major discussion points include the overhaul of the electronic dealer reporting system (eDr), evaluating conversion factors, and attribute validations for use in eTrips. Matt Heyl was elected as vice chair of the ACCSP Commercial Technical committee.
 - Recreational Technical Committee – Met on March 31, items discussed included MRIP Amendments to “Area Fished” and to the “Catch” questions of the APAIS. Updates on Wave 1 Sampling and the Discard Pilot Project were also presented. New Jersey is not currently sampling in Wave 1 or participating in the Discard Pilot.
 - Area Fished – to include a grid for anglers to select area in which they spent majority of time fishing OR caught majority of fish (TBD).
 - Catch – to include codes for both Type 2 and Type 3 catch that may have experience depredation.
 - Discards Project update – states participating in the discard pilot project will begin sampling May 1, 2025.
 - Wave 1 Sampling - was conducted in several states starting January 2025. This will be discussed further at the next in-person meeting.
- **Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission-ASMFC**
 - The Striped Bass Technical Committee & Stock Assessment Subcommittee (TC-SAS) met to finalize the Terms of Reference (TORs) for the 2027 Benchmark Stock Assessment, review the Massachusetts (MADMF) Conservation Equivalency (CE) proposal, and discuss initial projections for Draft Addendum III. MADMF is proposing to replace the current 35” minimum size limit for the commercial hook & line fishery with a slot limit (likely 35” to <45”). The TC-SAS agreed that MA should account for implementing the maximum size limit by SPR analysis which would decrease MA’s commercial quota. Initial projections suggest only a 1% reduction is needed for SSB to be at or above the rebuilding target in 2029 with a 50% probability or a 7% reduction for a 60% probability. The TC-SAS recommended running an additional projection scenario that would estimate fishing mortality (F) for 2026-2029 based off a skewed distribution to capture uncertainty in F.
 - The Striped Bass Technical Committee & Stock Assessment Subcommittee (TC-SAS) met again to continue the development of Draft Addendum III. The TC-SAS agreed on a set of primary projections which suggest only a 1% or 7% reduction is needed for spawning stock biomass to be at or above the rebuilding target in 2029 with a 50% or 60% probability, respectively. The TC will provide a memo to the Board noting small reductions less than 10% are not distinguishable from

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status quo due to numerous sources of uncertainty. The TC-SAS provided guidance to the PDT regarding questions related to the size limit and season analyses. Lastly, an additional TC-SAS meeting will be scheduled to review MD's New Baseline Proposal.

- Administration staff participated in a call of the Striped Bass Technical Committee and Stock assessment subcommittee to discuss methods proposed by MD to reset their baseline fishery regulations. The TC/SAS agreed to a set of methods. Of note, while the groups were concerned about the level of uncertainty in MD-specific data, the groups acknowledged that comparable levels of uncertainty likely exist in data for regional analyses. A memo summarizing this issue (and spelling out levels of uncertainty) and the methodological details will be provided to the plan development team and managers in advance of the May Board meeting.
- The Striped Bass Plan Development Team (PDT) met to continue the development of Draft Addendum III. The PDT discussed which states should be considered in each region for seasonal closures. The PDT will develop options that group RI with New England states and with the Mid-Atlantic region. The PDT will additionally develop options that both separate the southern states (DE -NC) from the Mid-Atlantic and group together as one region. Additional topics discussed included which assumptions to use for no-targeting closure calculations and ideas for equitable closures based on state seasons/availability. Lastly, PDT members presented available state logbook data and discussed whether it could provide additional background material for the addendum.
- The Striped Bass Plan Development Team (PDT) met to continue work on Draft Addendum III. The PDT reviewed MADMF data on total length (TL) measurements, Board input on mode-split options, the status of the Albemarle Sound/Roanoke River case study, and what data to request from state logbook programs.
- Staff participated in a call with the ASMFC Law Enforcement Committee (LEC). The purpose of the call was for the Striped Bass PDT to solicit LEC input on the options being developed for Addendum III. The LEC agreed that developing standard language to describe how to measure total length will help enforce the narrow slot limit. The LEC agreed that mode-split options overall can be challenging to enforce but different size limits by mode would be preferred over different seasons by mode.
- Staff attended the Winter Flounder Working Group meeting in preparation for the current research track assessment. The meeting centered around the terms of reference and ecosystem & climate influence on stocks. The scope of the meeting expanded to include discussion about expanding data sources necessitated by the diminishing recreational and commercial data streams for winter flounder stocks. Staff are currently working to provide additional survey data and state level statistical analysis.
- Administration staff on the TC/SAS for tautog participated in a data review call on March 18. The call was scheduled to discuss data after the submission deadline, and to review the results of the study conducted by NY Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) on commercial tag design. Current alternative tag types for tautog have been found to be unsuitable, and an effort to identify potentially effective and safe novel tag designs are ongoing.
- Administration staff participated in a meeting of the rec measures setting (RMS) plan development team (PDT) to review public comment from Addendum XXXVI that would change the way ASMFC & MAFMC set rec measures for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass. Based on public comment, MAFMC staff requested NEFSC staff perform an analysis that would help shed light on one of the alternatives. The PDT thought the analysis was compelling but was somewhat concerned with the timing of the analysis. In the end, the PDT supported the percent change approach using total removals as the catch target (supported by the NEFSC analysis). ASMFC and MAFMC will meet in Galloway, NJ in April to select a preferred alternative.

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- Administration staff attended an in-person meeting of ASMFC's Ecological Reference Point Working Group (ERP-WG). Major topics of discussion included review of evidence in support of revising non-predation-based natural mortality estimates of menhaden, updates to the menhaden single species assessment, and review of outputs and status of multispecies models. The multispecies model currently used for management has been updated, and preliminary results were available for review. Status of competing and supporting models was also reviewed. All models will be finalized and calibrated in the coming weeks followed by additional meetings to decide up on a preferred model and model run. The assessment review is scheduled for mid-August and if accepted, will form the basis for stock status determination of Atl menhaden.

INDEPENDENT FISHERIES

• Delaware Bay Tagging

- During 10 trips, staff tagged 220 striped bass. Lengths, weights, and scale samples were taken from all tagged striped bass. The survey will continue until the end of April.

• Delaware River Seine Survey

- Staff is working to summarize 2024 Delaware River seine data for the survey webpage. Fact sheets for each species caught were not moved from the old website to the updated site, so staff has been working to update those sheets for inclusion on the updated survey webpage.

• Eel Surveys

- As of March 30, the 2025 Glass Eel Survey was in its sixth week of sampling. The total number of glass eels caught in the fyke net (Patcong Creek) was 50,692 and the total number of eels caught in the collector (Nacote Creek) was 4,680. The fyke net total currently ranks 6th in the 24-year time series. The survey is expected to run until April 11.
- Several hundred glass eels were provided to Joe Groff, NJF&W's fish pathologist. He is looking to get a better idea of the prevalence (and therefore the population significance) of certain lesions/etiological agents. A large number of glass eels are required due to the small size of the fish that compromises the testing/analyses that can (or rather cannot) be performed on individual fish; therefore, fish need to be pooled for analyses such as histology, electron-microscopy, PCR, and next-generation sequencing. Results will be provided when testing is complete.
- Preparations are underway for the Spring portion of the 2025 Yellow Eel Pot Survey. Fresh bait was collected from other Spring surveys and the boat is currently at Long Key Marina for repairs. The survey is expected to begin on April 14.

• Herring Surveys

- The adult gill net portion of the River Herring Survey began during the first week of March. River herring were caught on the first sampling days for both the Great Egg Harbor and Maurice Rivers and catches have been consistent since the outset, signaling a better than average year so far compared to past years. Staff are collaborating with faculty from Monmouth University and staff from NOAA's James J. Howard Marine Sciences Laboratory at Sandy Hook to collect eDNA samples and live herring for presence/absence and tank studies. Staff from the Sandy Hook lab participated in sampling on the Maurice River and successfully transported 5 out of 7 alewife herring back to the NOAA lab to begin their tank study projects.

• Horseshoe Crab Survey

- Annual survey meeting was conducted, and survey dates and equipment were discussed.

• Ocean Trawl

- The Ocean Trawl Survey has again been postponed. Continued major repairs to the R/V Seawolf have necessitated cancelling the April survey. The June survey is scheduled to begin May 28.

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- Staff are working with DEP procurement, NJ Treasury, and the NJ Attorney General to develop the new contract for the trawl survey vessel. Attempts are being made to include language that motivates the contractor to be more proactive with maintenance by seeking reimbursement for liquidated damages caused by missed and late surveys. The scope of work has also been relaxed somewhat in order to encourage more competition from capable prospective survey vessels.
- **Raritan-Sandy Hook Bay Complex Inventory Project**
 - 8 acoustic receivers were set on Coast Guard buoys.
 - The Raritan Inventory Project began its fourth sampling season on March 10, 2025 and was completed in 6 days.
 - One major change to this sampling season was replacing our 100' multi-mesh gillnets, soaking for a minimum of one hour, with 300' multi-mesh gillnets, soaking for a minimum of 2 hours.
 - Staff also reduced the number of gillnet stations from 12 each month to 8 due to the longer soak times.
 - All 16 otter trawl stations, 16 seine stations and 8 gillnet stations were completed.
 - Gillnet sampling consisted of only Atlantic menhaden (n = 377) and tautog (n = 1).
 - Otter trawl sampling consisted of primarily Atlantic silversides (n = 10) and bay anchovy (n = 5). Other species collected consisted of spotted hake, rock crab, smallmouth flounder, summer flounder and alewife.
 - Seine sampling consisted of Atlantic silversides (n = 919), striped killifish (n = 4), and Atlantic menhaden (n = 1).
 - 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**
 - All receivers that were set for the winter have been recorded successfully. Preliminary download showed that fish were detected, but species identification cannot be completed until the next ACT data push.
- **Ventless Trap Survey**
 - MRA staff will initiate year 10 of the ventless trap survey on NJ Artificial Reefs and surrounding areas this month. We currently sample 4 reefs; Sea Girt with 22 traps, Manasquan Inlet with 6 traps, Little Egg Inlet with 22 traps, and the Atlantic City Reef with 10 traps. In addition to numerating and measuring all species collected in the traps, staff is performing eDNA sampling for collaborative work with Monmouth University, age structure collection of tautog for the marine resource administration, and specimen collection for parasitology analysis on Cunner, Red Hake, Atlantic Cod, and Ocean Pout for the Office of Fish and Wildlife Health and Forensics. The spring survey will run from March 27 through at least April 25.
 - MRA added a new vessel to the fleet. The 36 foot Calvin Beal, constructed by Taylored Boats in Maine, was delivered in December. The vessel will be loaded with traps for the spring survey.

DEPENDENT FISHERIES

- **Access Point Angler Intercept Survey-APAIS**
 - Sampling for the 2025 APAIS began March 1. The draw for March consisted of 60 site assignments and 3 headboat assignments that yielded a total of 70 intercepts (38SH, 0CH, 17PR, 15HB).
 - One weekday headboat assignment was cancelled due to eligible vessels running only weekend trips through March.
 - Staff continue to make updates to the Vessel Directory and Site Register in preparation for Wave 3.
 - March mileage is being validated and submitted for reimbursement.

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- **Artificial Reef**

- Staff partnered with a local Boy Scout Troop to support an Eagle Scout project centered on New Jersey's artificial reefs. This initiative involved the production of twelve concrete reef balls at the Nacote Creek facility over the course of 7 days. After construction, staff loaded the reef balls onto trailers for transportation to the NJ Aids to Navigation facility in Forked River. On March 3, staff successfully deployed the 12 reef balls on the Barnegat Light Reef. The project not only contributed to marine conservation efforts but also served as a valuable opportunity for public outreach, highlighting the important work and programs managed by the Bureau of Marine Fisheries.

- **Commercial Fisheries/Quota Management**

- Blue crab staff received 18 transfer applications for the blue crab transfer lottery. 12 of the 18 applications received were from harvesters in the crab pot fishery that are considered inactive. We are only allowed to transfer 5 of these licenses, so staff held a live in person lottery using a bingo ball cage. The other 6 applications were from active crab pot harvesters, and we did not need to hold lottery since we are allowed to transfer 20 applications. All transferors and transferees are notified of the outcome.
- Staff sent 2024 New Jersey commercial harvester trip data to ACCSP. Staff entered and proofed 10,043 individual trips with harvest this year. Along with 105,258 individual trips without harvest. Staff will begin entering 2025 reports shortly.
- Summer flounder: The commercial 2025 Directed Season 1 ended on February 28. 92% of the seasonal quota was harvested. The Directed Season 2 quota is currently 57% harvested, staff is reaching out to advisors and docks to inquire about trip limit changes to extend the open season.
- Black Sea Bass: The commercial 2025 Directed Season 1 ended on February 28. 86% of the seasonal quota was harvested. The Directed Season 2 quota is currently 30% harvested.
- Menhaden: The commercial menhaden season began on January 1. The pair trawl fishery began harvesting on February 22. Harvest continues to be monitored closely to prevent overutilization of the "other gears" commercial quota.
- Bluefish: The commercial season began on January 1. Harvest remains low at <1% of the quota harvested.
- Spiny dogfish: The 2024/25 commercial season began on May 1. Current harvest is 75% of the quota. Landings mirror 2023/24 harvest, which did not result so in a mid-season closure.
- A summary of the 2024 Miniature Fyke Net License fishery was submitted for inclusion in the Semi-Annual Performance Report for the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Program. All 114 license holders were required to submit the mandatory forms monthly even if the license holder did not fish. According to these reports, 187 individual trips yielded a preliminary harvest of 30,387 pounds of eels.

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

- 2025 sampling began with weeks 10-12 in March. 39 vessels were drawn with 14 responding, resulting in a 35.8% response rate.
- Staff continue to send out weekly mailings to randomly drawn vessels.
- Staff completed all vessel changes needed in the NOAA vessel directory after 2024. Efforts have now switched to vessel updates for 2025. This includes normal updates, as well as processing the imports inbox with HMS permit submissions.

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

- As of March 27, 2025, there were 35,611 individual and 521 for-hire vessel registrations obtained with the New Jersey Saltwater Recreational Registry Program (NJSRRP) for 2025. (Last month: As of February 28, 2025, there were 23,621 individual and 391 for-hire vessel registrations obtained with the 2025 New Jersey Saltwater Recreational Registry Program).

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- **Striped Bass Bonus Program-SBBP**

- Staff continued to finalize 2024 individual logs and party/charter boat reports. Staff began preparations for the 2025 SBBP which will begin accepting applications in mid-April and open May 15.

OUTREACH

- The third draft of the 2025 Marine Digest was provided to staff for review. All comments and edits were compiled and submitted to the editor on March 5. The fourth pass of the Digest was received and sent to staff for review. Comments and edits were submitted to the editor on March 25. Several cover options were provided by the publisher, and the next draft will include MRA's final choice on the cover. The next draft is expected in the first week of April.
- The 2025 Attention Anglers recreational fishing regulations summary document was finalized and translated into Chinese, Spanish and Vietnamese. All four documents have been posted to the NJF&W website and provided to the APAIS staff and Marine Enforcement for distribution to the public.

ADMINISTRATIVE/MISCELLANEOUS (Marine Resources Administration)

- **Grants**

- Staff submitted budget narratives and statements of work for the upcoming renewal of the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Program. Proposals were due by March 14, with Segment 1 of the Program set to begin September 1, 2025.

- **Regulatory/Legislative**

- Notice of Administrative Change (NOAC)
 - A NOAC modifying the recreational cobia management measures was signed by the Commissioner and filed with the Office of Administrative Law (OAL) on 3/10/2025 for publication in the 4/7/2025 NJ Register. NOACs are effective upon filing with OAL.
- 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
 - S216 (Smith, D17; Greenstein, D14; Testa, R1; Polistina, R2; Tiver, R8; Amato, R9) Directs Department of Agriculture to advertise and promote State aquaculture products through Jersey Fresh Program; establishes annual \$100,000 appropriation; appropriates \$100,000. Reported out of Senate Environment and Energy Committee with committee amendments and referred to Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee on 3/17/2025.
 - S1029 (Greenstein, D14; Smith, D17; Turner, D15; Diegnan, D18; Zwicker, D16) "Invasive Species Management Act"; prohibits sale, distribution, import, export, and propagation of certain invasive species; establishes NJ invasive Species Council. Passed Senate 39-0 and received in Assembly and referred to Assembly Commerce, Economic Development and Agriculture Committee on 3/24/2025.

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- S4158 (Gopal, D11)/A4816 (Donlon, D11; Torrissi, R8) Prohibits requirement for beach tag for access to beach below mean high tide line for recreational purposes. Introduced and referred to Senate Environment and Energy Committee on 2/25/2025.
- S4273 (Testa, R1; Amato, R9) Modifies definition of "aquaculture" throughout State law to include construction of facilities and appurtenant structures. Introduced and referred to Senate Environment and Energy Committee on 3/24/2025.
- A5461 (Freiman, D16; Peterpaul D11; Hutchinson D4; Drulis D16)/S4305 (Burzichelli, D3) Makes various changes to provisions of "Administrative Procedure Act." Introduced, Referred to Assembly Commerce, Economic Development and Agriculture Committee on 3/10/2025. Reported and Referred to Assembly State and Local Government Committee on 3/20/2025.
- A4492 (Collazos-Gill, D27; McCoy, D14; Fantasia, R24; Katz, D8; Karabinchak, D18)/S2642 (Singleton, D7) Establishes fee refund program for businesses applying for permits, licenses, or certifications in this State. Transferred to Assembly Commerce, Economic Development and Agriculture Committee and reported out of committee, referred to Assembly State and Local Government Committee on 3/20/2025.
- Legislative Activity – Federal
 - H.R. 1894 (Calvert, R-CA) FISH Act of 2025: To amend the Endangered Species Act of 1973 to vest in the Secretary of the Interior functions under that Act with respect to species of fish that spawn in fresh or estuarine waters and migrate to ocean waters and species of fish that spawn in ocean waters and migrate to fresh or estuarine waters, and for other purposes. Introduced and referred to the House Committee on Natural Resources on 3/6/2025.
 - S. 759 (Cruz, R-TX) “Modernizing Access to Our Public Oceans Act”: To provide for the standardization, publication, and accessibility of data relating to public outdoor recreational use of Federal waterways, and for other purposes. Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation. Ordered to be reported with an amendment in the nature of a substitute favorably on 3/12/2025.
- H.R. 2211 (Lofgren, D-CA) “Saving NOAA’s Workforce Act”: To institute a reduction in force moratorium at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and for other purposes. Introduced and referred to the Committee on Natural Resources, and in addition to the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, 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 on 3/18/2025.
- **Section 10**
 - Work has been conducted to get NOAA observer data compiled and subsetting to interested data in R.
- **Scientific Collection Permits**
 - Seventy-six scientific collecting permits have been issued for 2025. One additional application has been reviewed and will be processed upon receipt of all required materials.

****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.

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- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Marsh Restoration
 - MRA received and reviewed materials for a two-phase approached site restoration: Phase 1 (living shoreline with sill) and Phase 2 (marsh restoration).
 - The project would use dredged material and organic matter to fill ditches and previously damaged marsh to restore proper hydrology and increase marsh elevation.
- Sunset Harbor Dredging Project
 - MRA received a proposed project for a waterfront development permit to authorize an existing bulkhead and fill, and for
 - (1) removal of entirety of existing docking facility, (2) proposed fixed pier, (3) proposed ramp, (4) proposed “U-shaped” floating dock, and (5) proposed four mooring pilings.
 - The project additionally proposed the maintenance dredging of approximately 229 cubic yards of material to a depth of -3 mean low water datum.
 - The MRA provided comments in a timely manner.
- Sandy Hook Federal Consistency
 - The MRA received a proposed project to conduct shoreline rehabilitation activities at Sandy Hook Bay. The MRA provided comments on the proposed work.
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Pre-Draft Integrated Report and Supplemental Environmental Assessment
 - The MRA received and reviewed the updated Preliminary Draft Integrated Report and Supplemental Environmental Assessment and provided comments.
- Hereford Inlet to Cape May Inlet General Re-evaluation
 - MRA received materials for a scoping phase for an Environmental Assessment (EA) and study to evaluate offshore sand borrow sources as back up to the existing onshore sand borrow source for the Hereford Inlet to Cape May Inlet, NJ Shore Protection Study. MRA provided comments in a timely manner.
- Staff worked with DLRP on several mapping interpretations
- Staff attended monthly JPPM meetings.
- Staff continued working on an MRA Guidance Manual and Quick Start Guide. Staff sent the manual and quick start guide draft out to environmental review staff for their feedback.
- **Shellfish Enhancement**
 - **Shell Recycling Program**
 - Staff continue to coordinate with Shell Recycling Program participants for weekly shell collection and investigate additional venues.
 - Staff made contact with several potential restaurant partners including securing, Shuckers in Margate, Caesars in Atlantic City and Randalls Seafood in Pleasantville.
 - These venues will begin in early to mid-April. Randll’s Seafood provides seafood to several restaurants across Atlantic and Cumberland counties and will collect shell for the Program at venues that want to participate and store it at their facility for staff collection weekly. This development can help the Program expand significantly.
 - Staff collected 292 bushels of recycled shell in the month of **March**
 - The SRP education program -Project **S.H.E.L.L** (Strengthening Habitats through Environmental Learning & Leadership conducted its second school visit at the Pennsylvania Avenue School in Atlantic City.
 - The second lesson focused on ecosystems and estuaries and focused on the Mullica River-Great Bay Estuary.
- **Public Outreach**

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- Shell Recycling Program project ambassadors visited Cedar Creek and Absegami High Schools to give individual presentations about the Shell Recycling Program to students.
 - The presentations were in coordination with the Greater Egg Harbor Regional High School Districts STEM coordinator.
 - Staff will continue to coordinate with the STEM coordinator on other educational opportunities within the school district.
- **Public Dropoff (Shell Recycling Program)**
 - Bureau staff completed two public drop-off locations.
 - The drop-offs will be installed at the Ocean City Shelter Road Recycling Center, and the Knife & Fork Inn in early April.
 - Bureau staff began working with Bureau of Information & Education staff on the development of a short promotional video to advertise public drop-off locations
- **Mullica River Monthly Disease Monitoring**
 - Staff conducted sampling for disease monitoring on the Mullica River Oyster reefs. As a part of the shell recycling grant, disease monitoring is to be conducted three times per year on the reefs.
 - Historically, disease samples have only been collected annually in November or December.
 - Staff collected samples from four locations within the reef system and the historic Graveling Beds. Samples were taken to the Rutgers Haskin Shellfish laboratory for analysis. More consistent disease monitoring will aid in a better understanding of the resource as a whole.
- **Supporting Oyster Aquaculture and Restoration (SOAR) Program**
 - Staff met with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and Pew Charitable Trust staff to discuss the potential for another round of SOAR purchasing in New Jersey.
 - Staff assisted in delineating potential planting locations that would provide the greatest likelihood of success for the purchased product and expressed the need for the product to be diploid oysters to achieve the greatest enhancement benefit.
 - TNC/Pew Staff took site locations into consideration and would report back with their preferred plans. Staff will continue to work with these agencies to determine the best course of action for the SOAR program.
- **Shellfish Estuarine Inventory**
 - Staff finalized and submitted the budget and statement of work for the 2026-2030 IFA grant cycle for the Raritan and Sandy Hook Bay Estuarine Inventory.
 - Staff continue planning for the fifth and final survey in Raritan Bay. Sampling will begin in late August of 2025.
- **Seagrass Conservation Program**
 - Staff worked with DLRP on several mapping interpretations.
 - Staff attended the December Joint Permit Processing (JPP) meeting for a redevelopment program that would include the demolition of the existing structure and development of a new modern facility at the Wetlands Institute in Stone Harbor, NJ.
 - Staff met to discuss Environmental Review Group (ERG) previous and new roles.

Aquaculture and Shellfish Leases

- **Aquaculture Development Zone**
 - Two new leases were approved at the March 5 Delaware Bay Shellfisheries Council meeting, one at the ADZ 4 and the other at ADZ 2. Both lease holders came in and paid all the necessary fees as well as signed their lease agreements and other necessary paperwork.
 - Staff purchased material and set up the fabrication of new buoy pole mounts for two new inshore buoys at the southern and northern corners at the ADZ.

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- Staff purchased four new lights for the ADZ 4 buoys as well as a new buoy to be deployed
- Staff went to the ADZ 4 on March 19th to brush-hog the phragmites and other plant material that infringed upon the shed lots as well as installed fence for a new shed lot for the new ADZ 4 lease holder.
- Staff went to the ADZ 4 on March 26 to install two of the offshore buoys at the southern and northern most points of the ADZ as well as mark the corners for the new ADZ 4 lease.
- Staff went to the ADZ 4 on March 31st to install the northern-most inshore buoy.
- Staff continue to assist individuals interested in ADZ lease grounds in understanding the process, fees, and responsibilities.
- **Aquaculture Leasing Database**
 - Staff have completed a lease utilization layer in ArcPro that will be very beneficial for visualizing data and generating reports and graphs.
 - The Bureau has many regulatory and leasing committee meetings this year in which this data will prove to be vital.
 - This data was generated from the utilization reports submitted by the lessee during the lease renewal period.
 - It is supported by NearMap verification, annual CSAP report, and staff knowledge of known active industry members.
- **2025 Lease Field Work**
 - Staff have begun to plan out what leasing areas are top priority for Hydrographic Surveys in the 2025 field season.
 - The bureau has numerous outstanding survey applications (dating back over a decade) that will take priority this field season.
 - Areas that will be prioritized include: Middle Island, Scull Bay, and Brigantine
 - Scull Bay is the first priority to be completed in April
 - Staff have 4 outstanding Biological surveys that will be completed by May.

State Fisheries and Quota Management

- **Atlantic Coast Shellfish Council Meeting**
 - A hybrid council meeting was held in person (and online) at the Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Ocean County Auditorium (1623 Whitesville Road, Toms River NJ 08755) on 3/17/2025.
 - 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 January 2025 \$362.00
 - Shellfisheries Law Enforcement Fund \$232.00
 - Presentation of February 10, 2025 minutes for approval.
 - Notice of Leases Vacated - by Lessee
 - 4 Leases in Dry Bay
 - Application for decision:
 - There was 1 application for decision
 - Approved application for transfer:
 - There were 4 applications for transfer in Scull Bay
 - Topics of note included:
 - Old Business
 - Regulatory Committee
 - Leasing Committee
 - Hard Clam Management Committee

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- New Business
 - No New Business
- **Delaware Bay Section of the NJ Shellfisheries Council**
 - The Council meeting was held in person (and online via Microsoft TEAMS) at Rutgers Haskin Shellfish Research Lab, 6959 Miller Ave, Bivalve, NJ 08349 on Tuesday, March 4, 2025.
Topics included:
 - Agenda
 - Review of minutes for Sep & Nov 2024 & Jan 2025
 - Delaware Bay Office Revenue Collected in Jan & Feb
 - Oyster Resource Development Account
 - Lease Ground Transactions
 - (2) Lease Ground Applications for Decision
 - Old Business
 - Red Knot Stakeholder Committee Update
 - Oyster Tonging Fishery Update
 - Regulatory Committee Update
 - Vessel Tracking Device Update
 - Re-cap Rutgers Growers Aquaculture Symposium
 - New Business
 - Review of the 27th Stock Assessment Workshop Findings
 - Council Recommendations for the 2025 Direct Market Harvest Program Quota & Season Dates
 - Setting of the Intermediate Transplant program parameters
- **Oyster Tonging Fishery, 2024-2025 Season**
 - Tonging season November 1 - April 30
 - Season Tag Sales and Harvest Highlights:

	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
Single Tags (\$2)	200	250	50	150	200	850
Revenue	\$400	\$500	\$100	\$300	\$400	\$1,700.00
Wkly Harvest	105	177	93	61	54	490 bushels
Dealer Harvest	105	175	88	61	197	626 bushels

- **Direct Market Harvest Program – 2025– Delaware Bay Oyster Dredge Fishery**
 - Sign-up period: March 17 - March 28
 - Tags available March 31
 - Season opens April 7 – November 28
 - Total allocation 48,809 bushels
 - 80 dredge boat license holders signed up
 - Starting quota 610 bushels
 - 410 bushels for each license from any direct market region
 - 150 tags for each license will be caught from Ship John or Cohansey
 - 50 tags from each license from New Beds, Hog Shoal, Vexton, Beadons, Hawks Nest, Strawberry, Egg Island and Ledge
- **Intermediate Transplant Program– 2025**

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- Sign-up period: March 17 - March 28
- Four dredge boats signed up
- A series of “culled” intermediate transplants
- Transplant starting: April 28
- A transplant of 68,837 bushels of oysters from the Low Mortality Region (Arnolds, Upper Arnolds, & Round Island)
- Each Oyster Dredge Boat License will be responsible for the transplant of 600 bushels

Surveys & Laboratory Work

- **Delaware Bay Juvenile Finfish Trawl Survey**
 - The 2025 survey will begin in April.
 - Staff met throughout the month to proof and analyze data for the 2024 trawl report. The report is to be completed and submitted prior to the due date in March
- **Dermo Monitoring and Shell Plant and Transplant Site Monitoring**
 - The 2024 Dermo Monitoring and Shell Plant and Transplant Site Monitoring concluded at the end of November and will resume in April.
- **Delaware Bay Spat Bag & Water Quality Monitoring**
 - Staff continue planning to implement a spat bag monitoring program in Delaware Bay and its Tributaries for 2025.
- **Side Scan Sonar**
 - Staff continue to create a User Manual for use of the Side Scan Sonar and its software for guidance purposes while out on the water.
- **Sturgeon Receiver Project**
 - The sturgeon receiver project was conducted on March 19
 - Staff recovered all previously sunk lines and receivers that were set out over the winter months and reattached the float lines for the remainder of the year.
 - 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.
- **Mullica River/Great Bay Spat Bag & Water Quality Monitoring**
 - Staff continue planning to implement a spat bag and water quality monitoring program in the Mullica River/Great Bay to complement the SRP shell planting efforts.
- **Rutgers Ocean Methods Class**
 - Staff chartered Rutgers Staff and Students on the R/V James W. Joseph on March 28 to show students various survey techniques including oyster dredging, young of the year finfish trawl, sediment grabs and phytoplankton net tows.

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.
 - Staff launched the R/V James W. Joseph in early March ahead of the field season Bureau staff continue to maintain state vehicles with routine and scheduled service.
 - Repairs on the R/V Vadum’s ECM were completed.
 - Staff changed filter on the R/V Zephyrus water pump along with additional routine maintenance.
- **Equipment Maintenance**
 - Staff replaced one YSI and ordered and new YSI for the upcoming field season.

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- Staff updated YSI SOP and maintenance/cleaning operations to reflect new YSI models
- Staff trained other pertinent bureau staff on maintenance/cleaning operations

Administrative/Miscellaneous

- **License Sales**

Revenue collected from the Delaware Bay Office totaled \$12,150.00 for March 2025

License Type	Total	License Type	Total
Nets	\$3,541.00	Assigned Fee	\$300.00
Commercial Crab Pot	\$3,300.00	Commercial SF	\$250.00
Dredge Boat License	\$2,142.00	Dealer License	\$200.00
AC/DB Crab Dredge	\$700.00	Application Fees	\$162.00
Menhaden	\$674.00	Recreational SF	\$20.00
Lease Fees	\$441.00	Non-Res Rec SF	\$20.00
Tonging Tags	\$400.00		

- **Staff Yearly CPR Training (Refresher)**

- CPR Training was held on March 21 at Ocean City Fire Department, 550 Asbury Avenue, Ocean City, 9:00 AM-12:00 PM
- Most of the Bureau staff was in attendance