

Marine Resources Administration Monthly Report

APRIL 2025

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

Jessica Gorzo, Research Scientist II

Peter Clarke, Principal Biologist

Maryellen Gordon, Principal Biologist

Gregory Hinks, Principal Biologist

Brian Neilan, Principal Biologist

Scott Stueber, 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

Stacy VanMorter, Senior Biologist

Alissa Wilson, Senior Biologist

Michael Auriemma, Assistant Biologist

Nina Colagiovanni, Assistant Biologist

Conor Davis, Assistant Biologist

Danielle Dyson, Assistant Biologist

Les Frie, Assistant Biologist

Tyler Harris, Assistant Biologist

Megan Swain, Environmental Specialist II

Richard DiVaccaro, Environmental Specialist I

Anya Phelps, Environmental Services Trainee

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****

MEETING SUMMARIES

- **Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program-ACCSP**
 - Staff attended the Spring Operations and Advisors joint call. The main goal was to review and approve the RFP for FY2026, which will be announced in early May.
 - Staff attended the open sessions of the inaugural NOAA-sponsored Consensus Study on a Peer Review of the Marine Recreational Information Program Data Standards.
- **Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission-ASMFC**
 - Administration staff participated in a call of the ERP working group. The goal of the call was to establish base runs for each model under consideration and to choose a preferred (vs supporting) model if possible. Progress on each of three models was reviewed, but additional work is needed for each before base runs can be selected. The group generally supported the status quo model (NWACS-MICE) as the primary model, but the waters were muddled a bit by a proposal to, pending peer review panel input, change models after the benchmark. The group talked about logistics related to this proposal. The group is scheduled to address some issues through email and meet again in late April to review progress. The peer review is scheduled for August.
 - Administration staff participated in a conference call of the ecological reference points working group (ERP-WG). The goal of the meeting was to review model updates from all models, and recommend a preferred and supporting models. Modelling is a little farther behind than expected, and one modeler was unable to attend the call; but the group is confident the assessment will come together as planned. The group will march onwards compressing the future timeline to accommodate these circumstances. The review is scheduled for August 2025 and will be presented to the Board at their annual meeting.
 - The Striped Bass Plan Development Team (PDT) met on April 3 to continue work on Draft Addendum III. The PDT reviewed input from the Law Enforcement Committee (LEC) and Technical Committee (TC). Based off the TC projections, the PDT will develop a suite of options over the next two weeks to meet a 7-10% reduction which are estimated to have >60% probability of rebuilding spawning stock biomass by 2029. Status quo measures are estimated to achieve a 50% probability of rebuilding by 2029. The PDT finalized the spreadsheet which will be used to explore seasonal closure options for the recreational fishery.
 - The Striped Bass Plan Development Team (PDT) met several additional times this month to finalize work on Draft Addendum III. The PDT developed a suite of seasonal closure options (including no-harvest & no-target options) to achieve reductions between 7% to 11%. The PDT removed all options that considered a separate southern region (DE-NC) due to low levels of data, high PSEs, and equity concerns. The PDT added dual-wave closure options that split a closure between two waves to address seasonality differences and equity issues in the large mid-Atlantic/southern region (RI-NC or CT-NC). At the May ASMFC meeting, the Board will consider approving Draft Addendum III for public comment.
 - Administration staff on the TC/SAS for weakfish participated in a call on April 13 to review the results of the 2025 stock assessment update. Jessica Gorzo represents NJ on the TC. The model inputs were discussed, especially the change to the species guild used to calculate the discard ratio. One of the next steps proposed was to recalculate the most recent regulatory period's discard ratios using the prior guild, to better understand agreement between trends using different guilds. The

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updated model runs were delayed by a software incompatibility issue, so the current analysis code needs to be updated to the latest version of MATLAB.

- Administration staff on the SAS for tautog of ASMFC met on April 21 to discuss preliminary analysis of the 2021-2023 age-length data, ahead of the 2024 data deadline. New York provided 2024 shortly after the required data timespan, and thus this data was available to explore in the time series as well. The SAS and has been provided with 2024 tautog data for NJ directly from the ageing lab, ahead of its submission to ASMFC. SAS members compared ages assessed by different structures per region, with an emphasis on analyzing paired data when available.
- **Miscellaneous**
 - Staff attended the RFP Meeting for the third generation NJ Electronic Licensing System. The live date for the new ELS would be January 2028.

INDEPENDENT FISHERIES

- **Delaware Bay Tagging**
 - Striped bass tagging on the Delaware Bay has concluded for 2025. In 13 trips, staff tagged 221 striped bass. This ranks 6 highest in the last 15 years for total number of striped bass tagged. On April 23, staff tagged and released a 41" striped bass weighing 39 lbs., which was the largest fish of the season. Lengths, weights, and scale samples were taken from all tagged striped bass.
- **Delaware River Seine Survey**
 - A summary of the 2024 Delaware River Seine Survey was posted on the Fish and Wildlife website: <https://dep.nj.gov/njfw/fishing/marine/delaware-river-striped-bass-recruitment-seine-survey/>
- **Eel Surveys**
 - The 2025 Glass Eel Survey wrapped up on April 10 when the artificial collector and fyke net were pulled from the waters of Nacote and Patcong Creeks. Data is currently being entered and validated.
 - The 2025 Yellow Eel Pot Survey started on April 14. Just like previous years, strings of pots are being set at random locations in Great Bay each week. The survey is expected to run until mid-June.
- **Raritan-Sandy Hook Bay Complex Inventory Project**
 - The Raritan Inventory Project began on April 2, 2025, and was completed in 6 days throughout the month. All 16 otter trawl stations, 16 seine stations and 8 gillnet stations were completed.
 - Gillnet sampling consisted of only Atlantic menhaden (n = 23), spider crabs (n = 30), and striped bass (n = 9). Other species collected consisted of horseshoe crabs, weakfish, and one Atlantic sturgeon.
 - Otter trawl sampling consisted of primarily bay anchovy (n = 38) and Atlantic herring (n = 33). Other species collected consisted of spotted hake, spider crabs, blue crab, black sea bass, pollock, and little skate.
 - Seine sampling consisted of Atlantic silversides (n = 185), striped killifish (n = 34), and bay anchovy (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.
 - Staff also deployed 8 out of the 9 receivers planned on navigation buoys (with the approval from the Coast Guard) in March. Staff retrieved data from five of the eight deployed so far.

DEPENDENT FISHERIES

- **Access Point Angler Intercept Survey-AP AIS**
 - The fishdump for March was reviewed and comments were submitted to ACCSP.
 - The draw for April consisted of 91 site assignments and 3 head boat assignments that yielded a total of 331 intercepts (176 SH, 3 CH, 134 PR, 18 HB).

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- 1 site assignment was cancelled due to Jone Rd. Wildfire – site was unsafe to access due to location and air quality.
- 1 headboat assignment was cancelled – due to vessel not sailing in April.
- Staff continue to make updates to the Vessel Directory and Site Register in preparation for Wave 4.
- April mileage is being validated and submitted for reimbursement; March mileage reimbursements have been received.
- Wave 2 sampling ended with a total of 401 intercepts (214 SH, 3 CH, 151 PR, 33 HB).
- **For-Hire Telephone Survey-FHTS**
 - Weeks 13-17 were sampled in April. 65 vessels were drawn with 20 responding, resulting in a 30.7% response rate.
 - Staff continue to send out weekly mailings to randomly drawn vessels.
 - Staff continue to work in the NOAA vessel directory updating vessels as needed and in the imports inbox making changes as they come in.
- **NJ Saltwater Recreational Registry Program-NJSRRP/Volunteer Angler Survey-VAS**
 - As of April 30, 2025, there were 54,311 individual and 728 for-hire vessel registrations obtained with the New Jersey Saltwater Recreational Registry Program (NJSRRP) for 2025. (Last month: As of March 27, 2025, there were 35,611 individual and 521 for-hire vessel registrations obtained with the 2025 New Jersey Saltwater Recreational Registry Program).
- **Striped Bass Bonus Program-SBBP**
 - The application period for the Striped Bass Bonus Program opened on April 10. Staff have issued permits to 95 for-hire vessels and 5,752 individual anglers. The SBBP season opens May 15.
- **Tournament Sampling**
 - Staff began preparations for 2025 tournament sampling which will begin in May.

OUTREACH

- The final draft of the 2025 Marine Digest was sent to staff on April 4. Final comments and edit suggestions were provided to the editor the same day. Staff reviewed the print proof on April 9 and signed off for printing. The expected shelf date is May 9 with the hopes that the digital copy will be available online sooner.
- Staff participated in an interview with Tom P of Rack N Fin Radio to discuss the Delaware Bay Striped Bass Tagging survey. Topics discussed were recent tagging results, how the data is used, and what to do if an angler catches a tagged fish.

ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS (Marine Resources Administration)

- **Wind Energy**
 - New Jersey Research and Monitoring Initiative (RMI)
 - More than 50 of the 60 proposals that were submitted for the Request for Proposals issued by NJ Sea Grant on behalf of the RMI last July passed the first stage of review, which was conducted by a group of more than 100 subject matter experts, including DEP and RMI staff. Staff have also been working with NJ Sea Grant to identify facilitate these reviews and prepare for the next stage of technical review. Two Technical Review Panels were assembled, and review sessions were planned for May and June.
 - Staff participated in sea turtle tagging for the RMI project. Having worked on identifying the research need, finding a science team to take on the work, and designing the study to fit the goals and priorities of the RMI, this was an excellent opportunity to observe and assist in the field efforts. Seven loggerhead turtles were caught off Hatteras, NC. Each turtle was measured, weighed, sampled for skin, blood, and cloacal lavage, and both acoustic and

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satellite tags were applied. This remains the only sea turtle study funded by offshore wind research money.

- Staff have continued to work with Chief of Staff Megan Brunatti and the Empire team to understand and provide recommendations on the fisheries economic analysis and draft compensation plan for Empire I offshore wind project. The analysis was performed by Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute. Revisions were received in late April. Empire is required to have a compensation plan in place for the project by the end of May, however it's unknown how the stop work order on this project, issued by the federal government on April 16, will affect continued development.

ADMINISTRATIVE/MISCELLANEOUS (Marine Resources Administration)

• Regulatory/Legislative

- Notice of Administrative Change (NOAC)
 - A NOAC modifying the recreational cobia management measures was published in the 4/7/2025 NJ Register.
- 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
 - A5578 (Katz, D8) Exempts small-scale renewable energy projects from State land-use permit requirements, under certain conditions. Proposed for introduction on 4/10/2025.
 - A4006 (Calabrese, D36; Karabinchak, D18) Permits partnerships and joint ventures to bid on certain public works and prevailing wage contracts if each party to partnership or joint venture is independently registered. Introduced and referred to Assembly State and Local Government Committee on 3/7/2025. Reported out of committee with committee amendments, 2nd reading in Assembly on 4/10/2025.
 - A5601 (Bailey, D3; Simmons, D3) Requires State entities to offer optional service for businesses to receive certain notices electronically. Proposed for introduction on 4/10/2025.
 - A5557 (Myhre, R9; Rumpf, R9) Clarifies child support obligation notice and certification requirements for applicants for State licenses. Introduced and referred to Assembly Regulated Professions Committee on 4/10/2025.
- Legislative Activity – Federal
 - H.R. 2294 (Rep. Ezell, R-Mississippi) a bill to reauthorize the Integrated Coastal and Ocean Observation System Act of 2009. Introduced on March 24, 2025, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee, and to the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee.
 - H.R. 2316 (Rep. Hurd, R-CO) Wetlands Conservation and Access Improvement Act of 2025: a bill to amend the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act to provide that interest on obligations held in the Federal aid to wildlife restoration fund shall become available for apportionment at the beginning of fiscal year 2033. Introduced on March 25, 2025, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
 - H.R. 2375 (Rep. Magaziner, D-RI)/S. 1152 (Sen. Reed, D-Rhode Island) a bill to amend the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act to add Rhode Island to the

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Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council. Introduced in House on March 26, 2025, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee. Introduced in Senate on March 26, 2025, and referred to the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee.

- S. 881 (Sen. Ricketts, R-NE) Renewable Fuel for Ocean-Going Vessels Act: To amend the Clean Air Act to include fuel for ocean-going vessels as additional renewable fuel for which credits may be generated under the renewable fuel program. Read twice and referred to the Committee on Environment and Public Works on 3/6/2025.
- S. 1292 (Rep. Murkowski, R-AK) To permanently authorize the exemption of aliens working as fish processors from the numerical limitation on H-2B nonimmigrant visas. Read twice and referred to the Committee on the Judiciary on 4/3/2025.
- H.R. 2293 (Rep. Enzell, R-MS) Cormorant Relief Act of 2025-To require the Secretary of the Interior to reissue certain regulations relating to the taking of double-crested cormorants at aquaculture facilities. Introduced in House and referred to House Committee on Natural Resources on 3/24/2025. Referred to the Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries on 4/1/2025. Subcommittee hearing held on 4/8/2025.
- H.R. 2786 (Rep. Levin, D-CA) Resilient Coasts and Estuaries Act of 2025: To allow the Secretary of Commerce to establish a Coastal and Estuarine Resilience and Restoration Program, and for other purposes. Introduced and referred to the House Committee on Natural Resources on 4/9/2025.
- H.R. 2881(Rep. Pallone, D-NJ) To amend the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act to permanently prohibit the conduct of offshore drilling on the outer Continental Shelf in the Mid-Atlantic, South Atlantic, North Atlantic, and Straits of Florida planning areas. Introduced and referred to the House Committee on Natural Resources on 4/10/2025.
- H.R. 2886 (Rep. Ross, D-NC) To amend the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act to withdraw the outer Continental Shelf in the Mid-Atlantic Planning Area from disposition, and for other purposes. The Secretary may not issue a lease for the exploration, development, or production of oil or gas on the outer Continental Shelf in the Mid-Atlantic Planning Area, as such planning area is depicted in the 2024–2029 National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Proposed Final Program (September 2023). Introduced and referred to the House Committee on Natural Resources on April 10, 2025.
- H.R. 2925 (Rep. Bean, R-FL) To amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to extend the exemption from the excise tax on alternative motorboat fuels sold as supplies for vessels or aircraft to include certain vessels serving only one coast. Introduced in House and referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means on 4/17/2025.
- H.Res. 346 (Rep. Beyer, D-VA) Expressing the need for protecting and conserving at least 50 percent of the land, freshwater, and ocean ecosystems in the United States and encouraging diplomatic community efforts to achieve this goal worldwide. Referred to the Committee on Natural Resources and the Committee on Foreign Affairs on 4/24/2025.
- S216 (Sen. Sullivan R-AK) 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. Placed on Senate Legislative Calendar under General Orders on 4/8/2025. Calendar No. 40.
- Introduced on March 3, 2025, and referred to the House Energy and Commerce Committee, and in addition to the House Foreign Affairs Committee, the House Natural Resources Committee, the House Ways and Means Committee, the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, the House Agriculture Committee, the House Armed Services

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- H.R. 1781 (Rep. Castor, D-FL) a bill to repeal certain executive orders, including: Executive Order entitled “Temporary Withdrawal of All Areas on the Outer Continental Shelf from Offshore Wind Leasing and Review of the Federal Government’s Leasing and Permitting Practices for Wind Projects” issued January 20, 2025. Committee, the House Financial Services Committee, and the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
 - H.R. 1808 (Rep. Pingree, D-ME) “Keep America’s Waterfronts Working Act of 2025” a bill to amend the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972 to establish a working waterfronts Task Force and working waterfronts grant and loan programs, and for other purposes. Introduced on March 3, 2025, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
 - H.R. 1832, (Rep. Magaziner, D-RI) a bill to establish "Golden Sea Bream" as an acceptable market name for *Stenotomus chrysops* (scup or porgy). Introduced on March 4, 2025, and referred to the House Energy and Commerce Committee.
 - S. 843 (Sen. Markey, D-MA) “Sea Turtle Rescue Assistance and Rehabilitation Act of 2025” a bill to require the Secretary of Commerce to establish the Sea Turtle Rescue Assistance Grant Program. Introduced on March 4, 2025, and referred to the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee.
 - H.R. 1874 (Rep. Kiley, R-CA) a bill to amend the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972 to establish a conclusive presumption that a State concurs to certain activities, and for other purposes. Introduced on March 5, 2025, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
 - H.R. 1897 (Rep. Westerman, R-Arkansas) a bill to amend the Endangered Species Act of 1973 to optimize conservation through resource prioritization, incentivize wildlife conservation on private lands, provide for greater incentives to recover listed species, create greater transparency and accountability in recovering listed species, streamline the permitting process, eliminate barriers to conservation, and restore congressional intent. Introduced on March 6, 2025, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee. On March 25, 2025, the House Natural Resources Committee’s Water, Wildlife and Fisheries Subcommittee held a legislative hearing.
 - H.R. 1904 (Rep. Brownley, D-CA) a bill to amend the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 to establish the Climate Scientific Research Advisory Committee and the Rural Climate Alliance Network, and for other purposes. (Note: This legislation includes a definition of “agricultural producer” to mean “an individual who is engaged in farming, ranching, forestry, aquaculture, or another occupation relating to agriculture.”) Introduced on March 6, 2025, and referred to the House Agriculture Committee.
 - H.R. 2294 (Rep. Ezell, R-Mississippi) a bill to reauthorize the Integrated Coastal and Ocean Observation System Act of 2009. Introduced on March 24, 2025, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee, and to the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee.
- **Scientific Collection Permits**
 - Eighty three scientific collecting permits have been issued for 2025.

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

April highlights will be included with May highlights, next month.