

# Marine Fisheries Administration Monthly Report

*December 2020*

## **Marine Fisheries Administration Staff:**

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## **\*\*MARINE FISHERIES\*\***

### **ASMFC/MAFMC/COOP/NOAA**

- The winter flounder compliance report was submitted on December 1, 2020, for the 2019 fishing year and 2020 management and monitoring updates.
- Effective January 1, 2021, all anglers fishing for striped bass with natural bait are required to use non-offset (inline) circle hooks. An outreach campaign has been initiated to increase awareness and compliance with the new requirement. Outreach has included a press release, listserv message, social media posts, distribution of fliers, and a creation of a webpage which includes links to educational materials such as videos and fliers.

### **MEETING SUMMARIES**

- **Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission-ASMFC (TC, SAS, Boards)**
  - Staff participated in a Red Drum Northern Stock Assessment webinar held on December 3<sup>rd</sup>. The objectives of the meeting were to finalize the surveys and fishery fleets sampling data from the simulated populations, finalize the fishery fleet selectivity periods, and finalize the selectivity values for each survey and each selectivity period for each fishery fleet. There are four selectivity periods for both red drum recreational catch and red drum commercial catch in the northern stock covering the following years: 1900-1975 (first period), 1976-1991 (second period), 1992-1998 (third period), and 1999-2030 (fourth period). For the recreational catch, comparison of external selectivity estimates across selectivity periods generally indicate relatively stable selectivity of the total catch, with the exception of the release selectivity estimates for the fourth period. For the commercial catch, there were no regulations in the first selectivity period and no external selectivity estimates. Selectivity in the first period was assumed the same as the second period based on the external selectivity estimates, but retention was assumed to peak at smaller sizes than in the second period due to the lack of a minimum size. External selectivity estimates indicate a relatively stable selectivity pattern in the fourth period and there were no changes to size limits, so the selectivity and retention patterns were assumed the same as the third period.
  - Staff participated in a Red Drum Southern Stock Assessment webinar held on December 10<sup>th</sup>. The objectives of this meeting were the same as the previous week's meeting. Unlike the northern selectivity periods, the southern selectivity periods were different for each state. South Carolina has six selectivity periods for recreational catch covering the following years: 1900-1985 (first period), 1986-1992 (second period), 1993-2000 (third period), 2001-2006 (fourth period), 2007-2017 (fifth period), and 2018-2030 (sixth period). Georgia has five selectivity periods for recreational catch covering the following years: 1900-1985 (first period), 1986-1990 (second period), 1991-2001 (third period), 2002-2006 (fourth period), and 2007-2030 (fifth period). Florida has two selectivity periods for recreational catch covering the following years: 1900-1988 (first period) and 1989-2030 (second period).
  - A meeting to discuss the winter flounder stock assessment and the recommendations by the New England Fishery Management Council is scheduled for the Technical Committee on January 6, 2021.
  - Staff attended a webinar with ACCSP Commercial Technical Committee. The committee was tasked with updating American Lobster reporting requirements. The committee will meet weekly until reporting guidelines are updated.
  - Staff attended a webinar with ACCSP Commercial Technical Committee. The committee was tasked with determining aquaculture reporting throughout the east coast states and how viable it would be to enter aquaculture data into ACCSP databases.

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- The Striped Bass Technical Committee met to discuss the results of the sensitivity analyses that explored the relative impact of different release mortality rate estimates on stock status. The results indicated there is no significant effect on stock status, even under the most extreme scenarios. The TC also came to a consensus regarding the next update assessment and will recommend to the Board that it be delayed until 2022.
- The American Eel Stock Assessment Subcommittee continued the benchmark stock assessment data workshop on December 1-2. New Jersey's finalized ageing data was submitted to the SAS on December 2. TC and SAS members reviewed and provided comments on a workshop summary document.
- The American Eel Plan Review Team held a conference call on December 14 to review 2020 state compliance reports (fishing year 2019) and the FMP Review document. Staff reviewed and provided comments on the FMP Review and assigned compliance reports (Delaware, South Carolina and Florida) before the call. New Jersey's updated report, with all ageing data complete, was sent to ASMFC on December 2. All documents will be submitted to the Management Board for review and approval in February 2021.
- The ASMFC Tautog Stock Assessment Subcommittee (SAS) met via webinar on December 7, 2020. Progress on continuity runs of the Age Structured Assessment Program (ASAP) model utilizing data through 2015 (to compare changes with recalibrated MRIP estimates from the results from the 2016 assessment) and ASAP runs with data through 2019 were reviewed. All regions except DelMarVa had completed at least the continuity runs of the model with no problems reported for model convergence. The SAS will continue work on the ASAP runs for both the continuity series through 2015 and the new data through 2019 and meet via webinar in January 2021 to discuss results.
- The ASMFC Horseshoe Crab Adaptive Resource Management (ARM) SubCommittee (SC) met via webinar on December 10, 2020. Red knot monitoring updates, ASDP (old) and MDPSolve (proposed new) model comparisons, and a new red knot population model were provided for review and discussion. The ARM SC agreed to pursue the use of the new red knot population model which will incorporate recruitment estimates. The ARM SC will meet in February 2021 for a 3-day virtual modeling workshop.
- As Chair, staff participated via webinar in a meeting of the Shad and River Herring Technical Committee on December 9<sup>th</sup>. The goal of the meeting was to review states'/jurisdiction's responses to the outcome of the 2020 benchmark stock assessment in regards to their planned management and monitoring actions/changes going forward. The TC recommended that the all state proposals be approved by the Board, some as is, some with minor changes. Staff presented the proposal for the Delaware River Cooperative's plans for the Delaware River which included no changes to monitoring or management for the 2021 fishing season in anticipation of the updated COOP Shad SFMP which will be completed for 2022. The COOP will incorporate data/methods from the assessment into the SFMP and develop a strategy for reducing adult shad mortality levels to below the Z40 benchmark of 1.07.
- Administration staff worked with a subgroup of the ASMFC's Assessment Science Committee to flesh out additional guidance related to a risk and uncertainty tool designed to assist managers in selecting a transparent and objectively derived probability of management success. The subgroup came to consensus and feels that the tool is ready for a formal test by Technical Committee's (likely to be striped bass or lobster).
- **Miscellaneous**
  - Staff participated via webinar in the final quarterly meeting for 2020 of the Delaware River Cooperative. Major topics of discussion included an ASMFC Delaware River Basin Shad Habitat Plan Update, 2021 Lewis Haul Seine Funding, results from the first few years of YOY Sampling in

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the Upper Delaware River, and Co-op Prioritization of Projects for Future Delaware River Basin Conservation Act Funding. The Shad Habitat Plan was approved by the COOP's TC and once all edits are finalized will be passed up to the COOP's Policy Committee for approval before being submitted to the ASMFC.

## **INDEPENDENT FISHERIES**

### **• Eel Surveys**

- Staff completed the first draft of the Standard Operating Procedure for the Yellow American Eel Pot Survey. This SOP includes a history of the survey as well as current methodologies and safety protocols. Various staff members are currently reviewing/editing the Yellow Eel and Glass Eel Survey SOPs.

### **• Ocean Trawl**

- The Ocean Trawl Survey remains postponed indefinitely. We will remain on the contractor's vessel schedule throughout 2021 in case conditions favor a safe participation in which case operations will resume.

## **DEPENDENT FISHERIES**

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

- The November Fishdump was reviewed. Necessary edits and comments were submitted.
- December's 98 site assignments yielded a total of 138 intercepts (102SH, 4CH, 32PR). Headboat assignments for 2020 remain suspended.
- Staff continue to update the SR and online Vessel Directory in preparation for 2021 sampling.
- In state Fish Identification Training is schedule for January 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>. ACCSP directed Procedural Training for 2021 is scheduled for January 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>. Both trainings will be held VIA webinar and attended by all APAIS field staff.
- Wave 2 sampling ended with the collection of 39 intercepts (24SH, 0CH, 15 PR)
- Wave 3 sampling ended with the collection of 0 intercepts due to suspended sampling.
- Wave 4 sampling ended with the collection of 664 intercepts (135SH, 49CH, 480PR)
- Wave 5 sampling ended with the collection of 622 intercepts (286SH, 34CH, 302PR)
- Wave 6 sampling ended with the collection of 513 intercepts (276SH, 27CH, 210PR)

### **• Artificial Reef**

- Staff is working with the marine contractor to tow a 4-vessel deployment leaving from Norfolk Virginia and destined for the Little Egg Inlet and Manasquan Inlet reef sites. LE will receive three of the four vessels while Manasquan will acquire the fourth vessel. We are contracted with a towing company and all Coast Guard inspections have been performed with all vessels and received satisfactory results.
- Staff is working with the Office of Fish & Wildlife Information Systems to complete the update of the 2021 Artificial Reef Guide. The guide was last updated in 2007. Target rollout for the new guide is March 2021.

### **• Biological**

- American eel biological samples collected from the commercial fishery in 2019 were processed. Length, weight and age samples were taken from 399 yellow eels in 2019. The mean length of all samples was 17.44 inches, while the mean weight of all samples was 0.395 pounds. The majority of samples (173) were collected in the Little Egg Harbor Bay, and the remainder were collected from three other locations throughout the state. All otoliths were processed for ageing and 333 samples were successfully aged. Ages ranged from 1 to 10 years, with the majority (28.8%) at age 3.

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- New Jersey has completed most of the age samples collected throughout 2019, as well as some back logged samples collected from previous years. A summary table below breaks down the type of age structures completed or still in progress.

- **2019 Age sample completed in 2020**

SPECIES	OTOLITHS	SCALES	OPERCULUM	SPINES	AGED	AGER
BASS, BLACK SEA	154				153	NEFSC
BLUEFISH	84				49	NEFSC
CROAKER, ATLANTIC	17				17	NJFW
EEL, AMERICAN	399				333	NJFW
FLOUNDER, SUMMER	277				271	NEFSC
MENHADEN, ATLANTIC		1150			In Progress	NMFS
TAUTOG	131		415	139	242	NJFW
WEAKFISH	121				118	NJFW
BASS, STRIPED		722			In Progress	NJFW

- **2018 Age samples completed in 2020**

	OTOLITHS	AGED	AGER
TAUTOG	359	256	NJFW

- **2017 Age samples completed in 2020**

	OTOLITHS	AGED	AGER
FLOUNDER, WINTER	87	87	NJFW

- **Commercial Fisheries/Quota Management**

- In total, 101 Miniature Fyke Licenses were sold in 2020. As of December 15, preliminary commercial American eel landings for 2020 were 8,841 pounds.
- Staff mailed season and quotas letters to all commercial permit holders informing of the 2021 measures implemented for summer flounder and black sea bass.
- Blue crab compliance has improved but, there are 10 crab potters and 5 Atlantic coast dredgers who are missing reports as of December 15, 2020. The next update will take place this week followed by an offense mailing. This will be the first time since March an offense will be issued for a missing report.
- Commercial Landings for 2020
  - Menhaden- The commercial Atlantic menhaden fishery ended on December 31<sup>st</sup>. Preliminary numbers reflect 99.3% of the purse seine fishery's quota harvested and 52.9% of all other gears' quota harvested.
  - Spiny Dogfish- The 2020 commercial spiny dogfish fishery will continue through April 30, 2021. To date, 1,535,737 pounds has been harvested of New Jersey's 1,773,165-pound quota. A potential transfer is being looked at to prevent any premature closures to the fishing season.
  - Bluefish- The commercial bluefish fishery ended on December 31<sup>st</sup>. Preliminary numbers show 151,752 pounds were harvested of the 264,935- pound adjusted quota (57%).
  - Black Sea Bass- 74,000 pounds remain of the quota equating to 93% of the quota harvested.
  - Summer flounder- 63,000 pounds remain of the quota equating to 97% of the quota harvested.
  - Scup- The federally managed Winter II season began on October 1<sup>st</sup>. Current coast wide landings are 1,419,812 pounds, of which New Jersey accounts for 22% of (306,029 pounds).

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- Staff continued to prepare for the upcoming update to SAFIS online. Staff beta tested the new system and has been in constant communication with ACCSP regarding updates and changes.
- Staff approved a change to how ACCSP confidential access applications are handled. Request in queue would be limited to a year and any request put on hold would have a indicator next to the request.
- **For-Hire Telephone Survey-FHTS**
  - Staff called all 230 drawn boats for December. We received 148 responses, creating a response rate of 64.35% which was above the weekly average for the year 2020.
  - More non-trip and inactive boats recorded than usual due to December being a shoulder month for much of the for-hire fleet heading into the colder months. Many boats pulled after the Striped Bass, Black Sea Bass and Tautog bites fell off.
  - Staff continued with vessel directory changes at the end of wave 6.
  - Staff began the process of identifying boats within the vessel directory that need more info or new info to be eligible in the coming year (2021).
- **NJ Saltwater Recreational Registry Program-NJSRRP/Volunteer Angler Survey-VAS**
  - As of December 14, 2020, there were 162,544 individuals and 705 for-hire vessels registered for 2020. Beginning December 15, 2020, registrations for 2021 opened up. As of January 1, 2021, there were 3,580 individuals and 26 for-hire vessels registered for 2021 with the New Jersey Saltwater Recreational Registry Program (NJSRRP). (Last month: November 30, 2020, there were 162,160 individuals and 701 for-hire vessels for 2020)
- **Striped Bass Bonus Program-SBBP**
  - A total of 8,696 individuals and 165 party/charter boats were enrolled in the 2020 Striped Bass Bonus Program (SBBP) which closed January 1, 2021. The SBBP webpage was updated and a listserv was sent out regarding the closure. The preliminary 2020 bonus harvest is 33,524 lbs. from 5,189 fish. This represents 15.5 % of the quota and is the highest bonus harvest since 2004.
- **Tournament Sampling**
  - Staff extracted otoliths from 101 fall bluefish samples collected from 4 party/charter boat trips and one volunteer recreational angler. New Jersey is required by ASMFC to collect 100 bluefish samples each year (50 fall samples and 50 spring samples).

### **OUTREACH**

- An article highlighting an ecosystem-based approach to fishery management (rather than single-species management) was published on the Division website. For more information, check it out here: [https://www.njfishandwildlife.com/artmarine\\_ebfm20.htm](https://www.njfishandwildlife.com/artmarine_ebfm20.htm)

### **ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS**

- **Environmental Reviews/Technical Assistance**
  - Winter flounder timing restrictions requested for 3 waterfront development project permits. The proposed work plans are in regions which have been determined to be Essential Fish Habitat for all life history stages of winter flounder.

### **ADMINISTRATION/MISCELLANEOUS**

- **Regulatory/Legislative**
  - Notice of Administrative Changes (NOAC):
    - The NOAC to adjust the open seasons of aggregated large coastal sharks (LCS) and hammerhead species groups was published in the January 4, 2021, New Jersey Register. Changes to the open seasons of species belonging to the aggregated large coastal sharks (LCS)

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and hammerhead groups have been made to comply with the ASMFC Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Coastal Sharks. The FMP mandates a closed season for the aggregated LCS and hammerhead groups from May 15 through July 15 in all States' waters (from 0 to three miles offshore) from Virginia to New Jersey to provide protection to these species of sharks in shark pupping grounds and nursery areas.

- The draft NOAC modifying the 2021 trip limits for black sea bass and summer flounder commercial fisheries was filed with the Office of Administrative Law on December 9, 2020, and published in the New Jersey Register on January 4, 2021. The new rules are effective upon filing.
- In October 2020, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission approved an addendum that modified recreational cobia measures for Atlantic Coast states classified as de minimis, which are those having less than 1 percent of the coastwide recreational landings and include New Jersey. Under the FMP, states that are de minimis for their recreational fisheries were provided an option to match the recreational management measures implemented by an adjacent non-de minimis state (or the nearest non-de minimis state if none are adjacent), or limit its recreational fishery to 1 fish per vessel per trip with a minimum size of 37 inches. NJ currently matches Virginia's cobia provisions. Accordingly, NJ cobia regulations must also be changed to either match VA's once again, or default to the measure for the 2021 season. A NOAC to amend cobia vessel limit, size limits, and season was presented to the NJ Marine Fisheries Council at their January 7, 2021, meeting. The motion to vote on the measure was tabled until the March Council meeting in response to public comment requests for additional public involvement in the decision.

### ○ Rule Proposals

- Staff reviewed and made comments the Menhaden Multispecies Rule Proposal after receiving feedback and questions from the legal review staff of the Governor's Office. The Rule Proposal is on track for publishing in the February 16<sup>th</sup> NJ Register. A 60-day public comment period will follow. Barring any unforeseen issues the publishing of the Rule will mark the culmination of 6+ years of MFA staff's hard work and dedication to better NJ's Marine Fisheries interests by giving the MFA the flexibility to respond to mandated fishery management requirements, preventing out of compliance findings due to bureaucratic delays.
- MFA rule team continues to develop a new multispecies rule proposal amending N.J.A.C. 7:25-18.5A Artificial reefs, among others, while also recodifying portions of DFW Rules.

### ○ Congressional Action

- 2021 Consolidated Appropriations Act, approved on 12/27/2020, includes fishery disaster funding (CARES Act) extended through Sept 30, 2021.
- National Sea Grant College Program Amendments Act of 2020 was approved on 12/18/2020. This bill reauthorizes through FY2024 and revises the National Sea Grant College Program, through which NOAA supports university-based programs that focus on studying, conserving, and effectively using U.S. coastal resources.
- Save Our Seas 2.0 Act was approved on 12/18/2020. This a bill to improve efforts to combat marine debris, and for other purposes.

## ● HOT TOPICS/Miscellaneous

- Staff has been reviewing and processing CARES applications. Applications are reviewed and either approved, returned or an appeal notification is sent to the applicant.
- The Marine Fisheries Administration collected and donated \$270 for the local Community FoodBank of New Jersey. Through an anonymous triple-match donor, this donation became \$810!

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- Administration staff researched, developed, and discussed a list of projects for expending ASMFC funds accrued from savings in ASMFC's meeting budget. Several projects have been preliminarily identified and additional discussion are under way to assess feasibility.

### **\*\*SHELLFISHERIES\*\***

#### **Offshore Wind Development**

- Biweekly permitting coordination calls were held with Atlantic Shores on December 3 and Orsted on December 10.
- Staff assisted Jane Rosenblatt and Megan Brunatti prepare for the next Environmental Resources Working Group meeting, which is scheduled for January 13.
- The monthly Interstate Fisheries call was held on December 4. We discussed the ROSA monitoring framework, OREC solicitations, and the plans for floating turbines in Maine.
- An Internal DEP meeting on Barnegat Bay crossing was held on December 8 followed by a meeting with Orsted regarding permitting.
- The Internal monthly DEP meeting for OSW was held on December 9. On the same day, NJ's second OREC solicitation closed. The BPU anticipates approximately 30 days will be required for the completeness review, which means programs including the MFA will be evaluating applications as soon as mid-January. There were three applicants with a range of projects from 1200-2400 MW. The NY announcement for their next awards should come at about the same time, and the NJ announcement is slated for June 2021. The regional research and monitoring funds that are a requirement of our 2020 solicitation will be administered by the DEP and that effort will be led by the Office of Science and Research with support from the MFA. The BPU and DEP continue to work towards a state agreement with PGM to facilitate an offshore grid in order to achieve the Governor's goal of 7.5 GW by 2035.
- On December 11, DEP OSW staff had their monthly meeting with NYSERDA to coordinate research and monitoring.
- DEP staff met with John Toth and Artie Ulrich of the NJ Outdoor Alliance on December 14 to discuss a list of concerns that the NJOA sent to the Governor regarding offshore wind. A list of reliable sources of scientific information was later sent to Mr. Toth and Mr. Ulrich.
- Staff assisted with the NJPACT rule amendments regarding offshore wind. An internal meeting was held on December 16. Determination of a minimum cable burial depth was discussed, and information was provided later to Kim Springer on the use of Cable Burial Risk Assessments. Staff has reviewed cables policy from the New England Fisheries Management Council to consider their utility here in NJ.
- On December 17, staff participated in a meeting to coordinate the upcoming Federal Consistency review for Ocean Wind.
- MFA staff met with the Orsted fisheries monitoring coordinator on December 21. A productive conversation was held regarding a path forward for monitoring, including following ROSA recommendations, consistency with existing surveys, and incorporating appropriate new methods like eDNA. Follow up meeting are planned for every 2-3 months. Staff then spoke with NYSERDA to coordinate.
- Staff spoke with Dr. Daphne Munroe of Rutgers University on December 22 to collaborate on appropriate monitoring of the Atlantic Shores lease, specifically the need for establishing abundance and distribution of surfclam.



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- Staff observed the NJPACT stakeholder meeting on December 22. Fisheries and offshore wind discussions had to be delayed, and are planned for the Environmental Working Group meeting on January 13.

### **MFA Outreach, Education, and Communications**

- **MFA Website Committee**
  - The MFA Website Committee members are diligently working on updating and creating content for various MFA webpages.
- **Support NJ Seafood Story Map**
  - The NJ DEP, Division of Fish and Wildlife staff in collaboration with the NJ Department of Agriculture, Rutgers Cooperative Extension, and NJ Sea Grant Consortium representatives continue to work on expanding the story map to include more retail markets and add on wholesale distributors, delivery/pick-up businesses and restaurants who sell seafood that has been landed, grown or harvested in New Jersey. The Support NJ Seafood team met on January 7, 2020 to discuss priorities for 2021.
  - Information on the Support NJ Seafood story map has been shared on social media and the DFW website.

### **Nantuxent Creek Dredging Project**

- **Updates:**
  - Staff held a JPP meeting conference call on 12/14/2020 with Stockton, Shellfisheries Council reps, NJODST, NJDOT, USFWS, and USACE to review the project plans Stockton developed. The final channel configuration was agreed upon, as well as the potential plans for the beneficial use site on Nantuxent Beach. Any concerns were discussed, of which there was not many, and the group seemed agreeable to the project plans.
  - A site visit was held on 12/23 for site inspection and to discuss logistics while on site.
  - Stockton is aiding the Bureau with drafting required permit applications and project plans, which are expected to be submitted in January.
- **Next Steps:**
  - The sampling results along with the dredging plan will be used to apply for dredging permits, which will likely be a 5-year permit with an application for 5-year extension to ensure it is permitted for the possibility of future maintenance dredging by DOT.
  - The dredge spoils are planned to potentially be used for a beach replenishment on Nantuxent Beach, which used to have homes that were bought out and demolished by the Blue Acres Program.
  - Dredging will most likely occur in the fall of 2021 via hydraulic dredging by DOT, with mechanical dredging in the Creek.
  - The channel path will be dredged to remove about 20,010 cubic yards of sediment to make the channel 9 feet below mean low water to allow the oyster dredge boats to navigate.
- This is an important project since the multimillion dollar oyster industry uses that channel for its main port. The industry's vessels have difficulty using this shallow channel with many shoals. This limits when boats can use that channel based on tides, as well as safety concerns with getting shellfish to the dock in a timely manner to provide a safe product to consumers.

### **Aquaculture and Leasing**

- **Shellfish Aquaculture Working Group – Commercial Shellfish Aquaculture Website Committee**

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- Bureau of Shellfisheries staff and representatives from various agencies involved in commercial shellfish aquaculture permitting, regulations, and outreach continue to work on the NJ Commercial Shellfish Aquaculture website design and content.

### **Surveys/Laboratory**

- **2021 Shellfish Lease Renewals**

- The procedure for 2021 shellfish lease renewals changed since the Nacote Creek and Delaware Bay Shellfish offices were closed to the public with mandatory staff restrictions due to COVID-19. In October, the Bureau mailed each leaseholder a lease renewal package with all required documents to be completed and returned to the appropriate shellfish office by December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020.
- The procedure for 2021 shellfish lease renewals changed since the Nacote Creek and Delaware Bay Shellfish offices were closed to the public with mandatory staff restrictions due to COVID-19. In October, the Bureau mailed each leaseholder a lease renewal package with all required documents to be completed and returned to the appropriate shellfish office by December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020.
- Most leaseholders submitted their applications prior to the deadline. Bureau staff attempted to contact all leaseholders who did not submit a renewal packet and inquired about the leaseholder's intention to renew or vacate their lease. The majority of leaseholders contacted on or just after the December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020 decided to vacate their lease.
- Given the circumstances of the change in renewal process due to COVID-19 restrictions, Bureau staff is giving those who did not submit their paperwork prior to the end of 2020 and wish to renew their leases the opportunity to submit their lease renewal packet postmarked before the Shellfish Council Meetings on January 11th and 12th, 2021.

### **Waterfront Development, Permit, and Environmental Reviews**

- MFA staff submitted comments on The New York and New Jersey Harbor Deepening Channel Improvements (NYNJHDCI) draft Integrated Feasibility Report and Environmental Assessment.

### **Restoration, Enhancement, and Mitigation**

- **Shell Recycling Program**

- Staff continues to coordinate with Shell Recycling Program participants for weekly shell pickups. Some participants are still not operating at normal levels due to COVID-19 and are not in need of pickup at this time. Staff is in communication with all participants and will continue to adjust pickup schedules dependent on restaurant operations and need for pickup.
- Staff had a virtual meeting with representatives from Caesar's Entertainment to gauge interest in participating in the Shell Recycling Program. Caesar's Entertainment consists of three casinos in Atlantic City- Caesar's, Harrah's and the Tropicana. The addition of these three venues would be extremely beneficial to the program and add significantly to the total volume of shell collected. Caesar's Entertainment expressed great interest in the program and wants to participate. However, due to the current state of casinos during the COVID-19 pandemic, they will be unable to participate until they are able to reopen all of their restaurants and bring back the appropriate number of staff. Staff will remain in contact with Caesar's Entertainment and plans are in place for a follow up call this upcoming Spring to evaluate the timeline for Caesar's participation in the program.

- **SOAR: Supporting Oyster Aquaculture and Restoration**

- Staff coordinated with PEW Charitable Trusts, The Nature Conservancy-New Jersey, and other MFA staff to schedule and perform plantings for the Supporting Oyster Aquaculture and Restoration Program (SOAR). The project purchased 625,000 farm raised oysters to use for habitat

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restoration and enhancement. MFA agreed to partner and assist on the restoration and planting portion of the project. Purchased oysters were planted at three predetermined sites on the Atlantic Coast and one on the Delaware Bay. These sites include the Mullica River, Maurice River Cove in Delaware Bay, the Stockton University Tuckerton Research lease and Naval Weapons Station Earle. All plantings involving MFA staff were completed in December.

- **ReClam the Bay (RCTB)**
  - Staff attended a virtual meeting with RCTB to discuss plans for 2021. As in previous years, staff will work to purchase hard clam seed for RCTB to grow in their upweller systems for educational programs/ presentations. The clams will then be planted at designated locations approved by the MFA. Staff will remain in communication with RCTB staff to discuss plans for the seed as well as any other areas we may be able to collaborate this year.
- **Living Shorelines and Beneficial Use**
  - Staff reviewed and provided comments on a beneficial reuse project taking place in the Ring Island Complex in Cape May County.
  - Staff reviewed and provided comments on a GP24 Application for the American Littoral Society's Mouth of Maurice River Resilient Habitat and Infrastructure project. The project intends to create a series of protection measures along the Maurice River Cove and the Northwest Reach including, the use of large stone breakwaters and Tensar marine mattresses. Staff provided all mapped resources along with appropriate considerations and timing restrictions for the project area/timeline. Staff particularly noted the use of a large amount of plastic materials in the project and the MFA's preference to avoid the addition of plastic materials in the marine environment whenever possible. Staff will continue to coordinate with DLRP and the applicant as the project develops.
  - Staff reviewed and provided comments on a Federal Consistency Determination and Environmental Assessment for dredging of the NJIWW and the placement of dredge material in the East Pool of the Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge. Staff provided all mapped resources along with appropriate considerations and timing restrictions for the project area/timeline.
  - Staff reviewed and provided comments on a GP 24 Application for a living shoreline at the Lighthouse Center for Natural Resource Education in Waretown. Staff provided all mapped resources along with appropriate considerations and timing restrictions for the project area/timeline. Staff particularly noted the importance of submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) habitat and requested that the project minimizes disturbance to SAV present wherever possible.
  - Staff attended a virtual Barnegat Bay Islands Working Group. The working group is made up of Academia, non- government and government organizations. Discussions centered around current projects being performed by the Barnegat Bay Partnership, The Nature Conservancy and the Stockton Coastal Research Center.

### **Commercial Fisheries/Quota Management**

- **Delaware Bay Oyster Dredge Fishery – Direct Market Harvest Program**
  - In December, staff reviewed the call-in, weekly, and dealer reports to obtain the final 2020 harvest for the Direct Market Harvest Program.
  - The season closed on November 30<sup>th</sup> with an approximate final harvest of 96,490 bu.
  - A significant portion of the 2020 harvest was planted onto shellfish leases instead of being sold directly to market due to the impacts the pandemic had on the worldwide seafood market. The plantings mostly occurred in April and May, and tapered off over June and July.

# **Marine Fisheries Administration Monthly Report**

## **Buildings, Grounds, Vessels, and Vehicles**

- **Boat Maintenance**
  - Bureau staff continue to maintain and improve the R/V James W. Joseph and the R/V Zephyrus by performing regular maintenance, repairs, and equipment upgrades as necessary.
    - Staff continues to work with Yank Marine to complete upgrades to the R/V Zephyrus.

## **Administrative/Miscellaneous**

- Staff continues in efforts to purchase the BioSonics Habitat Echosounder. This equipment will help to identify and map existing submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) throughout the State. Having detailed mapping for SAV is critical to protecting this valuable resource.
- **License Sales**
  - Bureau staff has been selling licenses and assisting the public with questions or concerns over the phone and through email since staff started working from home from mid-March through December 2020. License sales for the Delaware Bay Office were \$41,245.00 December 2020.