



Striped bass fishing is popular among New Jersey anglers.

photo: Sam Talarico

Exercise Caution when Fishing near Shellfish Leases in Coastal Bays

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Throughout New Jersey's coastal bays, shellfish harvesters lease areas for the cultivation of hard clams and oysters. New Jersey first began leasing areas for shellfish cultivation in the late 1800s to early 1900s. The practice continues today and is administered by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's Division of Fish and Wildlife, Bureau of Shellfisheries.

Most individual shellfish lease parcels are between two acres to five acres delineated by corner markers made of cedar poles or PVC stakes. Typically, lease parcels are concentrated in defined areas and not scattered throughout the bays. Most leaseholders use these parcels to plant juvenile shellfish acquired from a hatchery and cultivate them until the shellfish reach market size. To protect their investments, many shellfish harvesters use screening material to inhibit predators from feasting on the juvenile shellfish.

Shellfish lease areas seldom interfere with recreational boaters and anglers since these shellfish beds occupy only a small fraction, currently about 1.5 per-cent, of the total coastal bay acreage. These beds also are generally established away from navigation channels in shallow portions of New Jersey's coastal bays.

Conflicts, however, do arise. Boat propellers and fishing rigs can become entangled in the nets, resulting in costs due to equipment repairs, lost time and pre-dation loss from damaged nets.

By approaching these marked shellfish lease areas with caution, recreational boaters and anglers can avoid entanglements and foster a mutual respect between shellfish harvesters and others who use New Jersey's coastal bays.