

# **Marine Fisheries Administration Monthly Report**

***JANUARY 2022***

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

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

- The Winter flounder Plan Review Team wrapped up their annual review of the winter flounder fisheries management plans. There are no recommendations.

### **MEETING SUMMARIES**

- **Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission-ASMFC (TC, SAS, Boards)**
  - The Red Drum Stock Assessment Subcommittee (SAS) and Technical Committee (TC) met via webinar on January 28<sup>th</sup> to review and approve the simulation stock assessment for peer review.
  - Administration staff met with the bluefish working group to talk about progress on several tasks related to the scheduled winter 2022 research track assessment. Major topics of discussion included continued progress made towards development of a bluefish prey / availability index, including preliminary results, review of preliminary life history analyses, updates and progress towards an ecosystem and socioeconomic profile analysis, multinomial age length keys, fishery independent index development, and meeting logistics for a winter data workshop.
  - The Striped Bass Plan Development Team (PDT) held a final conference call regarding Draft Amendment 7 on January 5<sup>th</sup>. The PDT finalized some last remaining decision points. In addition, staff attended the Striped Bass Advisory Panel webinar to get feedback on Draft Amendment 7. Final comments on the draft were submitted. The Board approved Draft Amendment 7 for public comment at the January ASMFC Board meetings.
  - The ASMFC Horseshoe Crab Adaptive Resource Management (ARM) Subcommittee met via webinar on January 7 to review the peer review panel report on the ARM Revision and two modifications specifically recommended by the panel to be completed prior to the Revision's presentation to the Board. The panel recommended standardizing the abundance index from the Delaware Bay Trawl Survey using a GLM or GAM instead of the delta distribution previously used due to the survey's fixed-site design. They also recommended modifying the horseshoe crab recruitment parameters to include the full time series of data instead of just the previous 5 years. The results of these modifications and updated model runs will be incorporated into a supplemental report to accompany the ARM Revision and peer review reports being sent to the Board for its January meeting.
  - The ASMFC Tautog Technical Committee met via webinar on January 11 to review hypothetical scenarios for the Risk and Uncertainty Decision Tool and the results from the recent tautog ageing exchange. Since no management action was initiated during the last Board meeting, the Risk and Uncertainty Decision Tool was not utilized, and hypothetical scenarios were then developed to illustrate the tool's potential impacts on probability percentages for achieving target fishing mortality. The ageing exchange was conducted to evaluate the efficacy of using pelvic spines as an acceptable ageing structure for tautog along with the current use of opercula and otoliths. The Risk and Uncertainty Decision Tool analysis will be presented to the Board at the January meeting.
  - Staff Chaired a meeting of the ASMFC's Shad and River Herring Technical Committee via webinar on Thursday, February 3<sup>rd</sup>. During the meeting the TC reviewed a draft memo on American shad passage prioritization and finalized recommendations for the Board for FERC projects with upcoming licensing issuances and renewals. Additionally, the TC reviewed and recommended approval of an updated American Shad Habitat Plan for the Connecticut River and a River Herring Fishery Management Plan update for the Hudson River.
  - As part of the ASMFC's Shad and River Herring Passage Efficiency Working Group, staff continue to work on developing a draft memorandum for the Board that explains the Group's work on

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prioritizing FERC projects where passage efficiency metrics as part of the operating permit would have the most benefits.

- **Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council-MAFMC**

- Two public information webinars were held on the evenings of January 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> to provide an update on Atlantic mackerel stock status and rebuilding. These webinars were held due to the continued poor condition of the Atlantic mackerel stock as determined by the 2021 management track stock assessment which resulted in the MAFMC revising the rebuilding plan for Atlantic mackerel. Additional commercial and recreational management measures are being considered. These meetings reviewed the stock assessment, expected quotas for upcoming years, and potential management measures.
- The Illex Research Track Working Group met via webinar on January 24<sup>th</sup> to give an overview of what is completed and give updates on what still needs to be done. Updates were given on generalized depletion modeling, trace elements, oceanographic indicators, data needs for in-season approach, and research recommendations. Two additional meetings will be held in early February to finalize all outstanding issues before the peer review in early March.

- **Miscellaneous**

- Staff attended NOAA Fisheries' Marine Recreational Information Program's third data user seminar on January 25. This presentation provided an overview of how the [MRIP Query Tool](#) can be used to filter NOAA Fisheries' recreational catch and effort statistics by time series, geographic area, species, mode, and other characteristics. It also explained how the tool will change following the full implementation of the agency's [Recreational Fishing Survey and Data Standards](#), including the switch to cumulative rather than wave-specific estimates and the adoption of a precision threshold. These topics are documented sections two and four of the [MRIP Data User Handbook](#). The terms used to set queries are defined in the [Recreational Fishing Data Glossary](#).
- Staff attended the ACCSP spring data coordination call. Discussed on the call was several upcoming deadlines along with other issues such as updating blue crab within the data warehouse and adding American shad data.
- Staff hosted a call with ACCSP staff to discuss confidential data access for a national survey of seafood marketing. Staff discussed the best uses for states confidential data.
- Staff has begun training on the licensing system. After two calls staff has learned how to create reports for commercial compliance and several types of other reports.
- Staff completed the NJ Participant and Dealer Lists for the ACCSP Data Warehouse Spring Data Load.
- Staff attended an ALWTRT meeting on January 18<sup>th</sup>. The meeting gave an update to the Risk Reduction tool as well as a summary of comments submitted during the Mid-Atlantic reduction scoping period.
- Staff attended an ALWTRT Gear Advisory Subgroup meeting on January 27<sup>th</sup>. The Subgroup presented futures plans and goals in response to reduce the occurrence of Right Whale entanglements in US static gear fisheries.
- Staff participated via webinar in a meeting of the Delaware River Cooperative's TC's American Shad Sustainable Fishery Plan Working Group. The purpose of the meeting was to review the work done in regards to how fishing effort and gear limitations in the Delaware state gill net fishery could be used to limit shad harvest and discard without significantly impacting the striped bass fishery. Landings of shad were directly correlated to striped bass fishing effort. The findings, which were expected, will be presented to the PC at their meeting in early February.

## INDEPENDENT FISHERIES

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- **Delaware Bay Tagging**
  - Staff began preparations for the 2022 Delaware Bay Striped Bass Tagging Survey which will begin March 1st. Staff are preparing the boat and gear in addition to acquiring new nets before the start of the survey.
- **Delaware River Seine Survey**
  - Data from the 2021 seine survey has been proofread and edited twice and is considered finalized. Several individual species' catch and length data was pulled and submitted to biologists. The next step is for all data to be incorporated into the master database and shared with staff.
- **Eel Surveys**
  - Preparation was completed for the 2022 glass eel fyke net and artificial collector survey. Sampling is expected to begin on February 7 when the fyke net is set. Two training sessions were held for field staff. Training served as a reminder of survey protocols and to inform them about changes taking place in 2022. Staff will be collecting biological samples (lengths, weights and pigmentation stages) from the glass eels caught in the collector (60 eels/day). All resources for the survey were placed on the shared drive for field staff to access at any time.

## **DEPENDENT FISHERIES**

- **Access Point Angler Intercept Survey-APAIS**
  - Fishdump data from December were reviewed.
  - Staff continue to prepare the Site Register (SR) and Vessel Directory (VD) for the upcoming 2022 sampling season. All SR edits will be approved by February 1 for March sampling; the VD will be edited by February 15<sup>th</sup> to have all updates included in the first assignment draw for 2022.
  - All 2021 data edits and responses have been provided to ACCSP for their final report.
  - 2022 sampling materials and updated protocols have been distributed to staff. The yearly workshop conducted by ACCSP will be held virtually February 23-24.
- **Artificial Reef**
  - Staff has acquired the 105-foot NEW ENGLAND COAST from Dan Marine Towing. This project is funded entirely through donations from Dan Marine and will maintain no cost to the NJ Reef Program. The vessel is being prepared for a spring 2022 deployment at an undetermined reef site.
  - Staff is working with KINKISHARYO International for the acquisition of 20 rail cars. These will likely be deployed on a northern reef site as the proximity to the companies facility is in Piscataway. This project is in its early phases and will require initial inspections followed by project agreements. Discussions that have taken place thus far include full cost provided by KINKISHARYO International.
  - Staff is working again with the NJDEP Aids to Navigation to deploy another set of 32 reef balls on the Garden State North site. The reef balls have been purchased and are now waiting for delivery to NJ and deployment timing.
- **Biological**
  - Biological sampling concluded for Atlantic menhaden on December 22<sup>nd</sup>. In total, 1,090 samples were collected for 2021.
  - Biological sampling for tautog concluded on January 26<sup>th</sup>. In total, 282 samples were collected for 2021.
  - Biological sampling for American eel concluded on January 26<sup>th</sup>. In total, 147 samples were collected for 2021.
- **Commercial Fisheries/Quota Management**
  - Staff issued a mailing to Delaware Bay crab dredge and crab pot commercial licenses holders. The letter notified them of their opportunity to transfer beyond the immediate family limitation as stated

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in the new blue crab regulation. An email was issued to those who have signed up to receive information regarding the newly released regulations.

- A Summary of the newly released blue crab regulation a link to the full regulation and an updated transfer application was added to the state's website.
- Staff has been answering fishermen's questions on how to enter the new transfer lottery for the blue crab limited entry fishing license. It is to note one fisherman has requested information on how to file an OPRA request and stated his opposition to how this lottery is running.
- The Commercial reporting deadline for the 2021 harvest year ended January 10. Staff are in review of reporting compliance.
- Staff submitted the Atlantic herring compliance report for the 2021 fishing year.
- Staff has been working with ASMFC and the spiny dogfish workgroup to supply data for the upcoming research track assessment.
- Staff received a request for commercial harvester information regarding wind energy. The request was processed and sent to the appropriate party.
- Staff approved 2 requests for confidential access. Both requests were renewals and from state/federal employees.
- Staff has been entering and reviewing trip reports. The deadline that all 2021 reports must be entered and proofread by is March 7.
- Summer flounder: The Directed Season 1 harvest is currently 22% of the Seasonal allocation. Weekly catch limits were increased to 6,000 pounds on January 31<sup>st</sup> to prevent underharvest of the Season 1 fishery.
- Black Sea Bass: The Directed Season 1 harvest is currently 33% of the Seasonal allocation. Weekly catch limits were increased to 6,000 pounds on January 31<sup>st</sup> to prevent underharvest of the Season 1 fishery.
- Menhaden: The commercial menhaden fishery began on January 1<sup>st</sup>. Preliminary quotas for individual sectors are: 43,825,368 pounds for the purse seine fleet and 2,306,598 pounds for all other sectors. Harvest remains low.
- Bluefish: The commercial bluefish fishery began on January 1<sup>st</sup>. The 2022 quota is 524,493 pounds, a 28% increase compared to the 2021 season. Harvest remains low.
- Scup: The winter I season began on January 1<sup>st</sup>. Current coastwide harvest is 4% of the quota. New Jersey accounts for 15% of those landings with 58,318 pounds.
- Spiny dogfish: Current harvest is 59% of the 2021/22 commercial quota, 1,333,632 pounds landed through December. The commercial season runs through April.
- **For-Hire Telephone Survey-FHTS**
  - Staff concluded the 2021 sampling year. 2021 was the second full year the For-Hire Telephone Survey was successfully completed in New Jersey. Staff reviewed 2021 data to identify what worked and what needed improving moving forward.
  - Staff reviewed all remaining vessel directory updates leftover from 2021. All updates were marked as completed. Staff reviewed the vessel directory for any changes needed moving forward into year 2022.
  - Staff began reviewing and submitting the imports inbox of new HMS registrations for the calendar year 2022.
- **NJ Saltwater Recreational Registry Program-NJSRRP/Volunteer Angler Survey-VAS**
  - As of January 31, 2022, there were 13,374 individuals and 172 for-hire vessels registered with the New Jersey Saltwater Recreational Registry Program (NJSRRP) for 2022. (Last month: December 31, 2021, there were 143,704 individuals and 745 for-hire vessels registered for 2021 with the New

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Jersey Saltwater Recreational Registry Program (NJSRRP) and 2654 individuals and 29 for-hire vessels pre-registered for 2022).

- **Striped Bass Bonus Program-SBBP**

- Staff continue to finalize harvest reports from the 2021 Striped Bass Bonus Program. The current 2021 bonus harvest is 37,058 lbs. from 5,690 fish, which represents 17.2% of the quota. This ranks as the highest bonus harvest since 2004. The deadline for anglers to return their fishing logs was January 15, 2022. Staff will continue to process both individual and party/charter boat logbooks over the next couple months.

## **OUTREACH**

- Staff submitted comments and edits on the two Marine Digest articles which were provided by the editor. The publisher's schedule was forwarded to all staff. The editor submitted all Marine Fisheries contributions to the publisher. The first draft of the digest is expected February 4.
- Staff has been working on creating a seafood availability table. Table represents local harvest and locally sold seafood and which months of the year you can find the specific seafood. Staff sent an email to approximately 40 dealers, processors, and restaurants with a list of questions that the hopefully industry can provide feedback with.
- Staff presented via webinar to 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> graders at the Kenneth R. Olson Middle School, Tabernacle, NJ. The presentation explained everything about being a fisheries biologist including what they do, who they work for, equipment they use, and what they catch. The presentation tied in nicely with the natural resource management lessons the students have been learning over the past few weeks.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS**

- **Wind Energy**

- The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) held a series of fishery gear-specific stakeholder meetings to inform the Central Atlantic (CA) Planning Area for offshore wind. This is the third round of wind energy area identification for the New England/Mid-Atlantic region.
  - New Jersey was not considered an affected state, and therefore had little input on the Planning Areas before these meetings. Staff used federal landings data to determine that NJ vessels fish in these areas routinely, landing scallop, squid, surfclam, Jonah crab, squid, menhaden, and herring. Staff communicated the importance of the Planning Areas to NJ fisheries, and the Department made a request to BOEM to include NJ as an affected state. BOEM agreed.
  - In the January Interstate Wind/Fisheries meeting, staff asked representatives from other affected states if they would like to coordinate during development of these areas. A call between affected states is scheduled for February.
  - The first intergovernmental Task Force meeting for the CA will be held on February 16, with MFA and BPU staff representing NJ.
- Staff continued to work on the New Jersey Research and Monitoring Initiative (RMI).
  - Meetings were held weekly to discuss projects that are being considered with the internal RMI team.
  - Meetings were held with faculty from Stockton University and Monmouth University to initiate a dialog on research opportunities through the RMI.
  - MFA staff are working with Division of Science and Research staff to continue to identify opportunities for regional research and monitoring to address research priorities. Note that only two of these have received approval for funding at this time (see \*).
    - Offshore wind and fisheries data standardization and housing

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- Regional Wildlife Science Entity (RWSE) membership\*
- Offshore wind GIS tool for visualization of research and monitoring efforts in the Mid Atlantic
- Multi-year deployment of RUCOOL gliders to study the Cold Pool
- Acoustic telemetry to understand north/south migration of fish species of concern
- Expansion of eDNA on MFA surveys
- Bottom-mounted passive acoustic monitoring (PAM) for large whales
- Construction and calibration of a novel surfclam survey dredge\*
- Socio-economic effects of offshore wind on NJ recreational fisheries
- Harbor seal tracking off of NJ to understand pre-construction use of the lease areas
- SAV mapping, monitoring, and restoration around cable landings
- Staff continued to participate in other regional planning meetings for offshore wind, including:
  - Stakeholder meeting for the Final Sale Notice for the NY Bight Wind Energy Areas, January 19
  - PAM workshop planning, January 3.
  - The first of two two-day workshops to inform the NOAA Survey Simulation Experimentation and Evaluation Project (SSEEP) to adapt the Northeast Fisheries Science Center Bottom Trawl Survey, January 20 and 21.
  - The RWSE State Sector Caucus, January 21.
  - A meeting between the DEP and Clean Energy Group/Clean Energy States Alliance to discuss upcoming virtual offshore wind learning exchange between the Netherlands for the Mid-Atlantic states, January 25.
  - Attended the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Winter Meeting update on offshore wind, January 26. How the ASMFC can support offshore wind development was discussed, and this information was taken by staff to the Interstate Wind/Fisheries meeting to brainstorm suggestions for our state Commissioners.
- Staff continued to coordinate with Atlantic Shores Offshore Wind (ASOW) and Ocean Wind (OW), including:
  - Biweekly permitting meetings with ASOW and OW.
  - A discussion of permitting for OW and potential conflict with surfclam areas, Section Chief of Environmental Protection in the Bureau of Coastal Permitting, January 7. Staff prepared a response for Ocean Wind and sent it that day.
  - Meeting with Orsted to discuss the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's framework for fisheries mitigation, January 26.
- Staff prepared comments for BOEM's Request for Information for developing guidance to mitigate potential impacts from offshore wind projects on commercial and recreational fisheries and sent to the Office of Permitting and Project Navigation on January 5.

### **ADMINISTRATION/MISCELLANEOUS**

#### **• Regulatory/Legislative**

- Regulatory
  - The MFA rule team has drafted a new rulemaking proposal to amend N.J.A.C. 7:25-18.1(p) to include "gear types and gear restrictions" within the list of provisions authorized to be changed by notice to meet ASMFC Atlantic Coastal Sharks Board requirement to use non-offset, corrodible, non-stainless steel circle hooks when fishing for sharks recreationally in state waters, except when fishing with flies or artificial lures. Additionally, drafts of the Rule

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Proposal Memo and the Proposal Launch Memo are currently underway. The target filing date per NJ Register schedule is April 7, 2022, for the May 2, 2022, issue of the NJ Register.

- MFA 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. Marine Fisheries-related rules will be reorganized under N.J.A.C. 7:25B.
- In accordance with the new rules adopted in December 2021, MFA is administering the new commercial Crab License Lottery. MFA is accepting applications to transfer commercial Crab Pot and Delaware Bay Crab Dredge Licenses from January through the end of February. In March, applications will be processed as follows:
  - 20 Active Crab Pot/Trot Line License transfers;
    - To qualify as an active commercial crab harvester, 200 bushels of hard crabs or 2,000 peelers must have been harvested in the previous year;
  - Five Inactive Crab Pot License transfers;
  - Five Delaware Bay Crab Dredge License transfers;
  - License Transfer Lottery winners will be selected at random and will be notified by mail about the opportunity to transfer a license;
    - Selected licensees will have 30 days from the postmark date of the notice to respond to the Marine Fisheries Administration;
    - Unsuccessful licensees will have other opportunities to transfer in subsequent years;
- Legislative Activity
  - A110 – Provides for no net loss of DEP lands for fishing, hunting, and trapping purposes. Introduced and referred to Assembly Ag and Food Security Committee 1/11/2022.
  - A191 – Exempts State residents 65 years of age and older from certain hunting, trapping, and fishing fees and license requirements. Introduced and referred to Assembly Senior Services Committee.
  - A154 – Increases minimum civil fine for harassing a person taking wildlife and increases criminal penalty for subsequent offenses. Introduced and referred to
  - S793 – Requires assessment of bay scallop resource, and authorizes DEP to establish a bay scallop fishery. (2020:S 912; 2018:S 901) 01/18/22—Introduced, ref to Sen Environment & Energy.
  - A430 – Regulates assignment and use of State vehicles. (2020:A 389; 2018:A 1166). 01/11/22—Introduced, ref to Asm State & Local Govt.
  - A451/S208 – Allows person calling certain State or local government entities to have option of speaking or leaving a recorded message with a human telephone operator during normal business hours. (2020:A 2533; 2018:A 2153) 01/11/22—Introduced, ref to Asm State & Local Govt. 01/11/22—Introduced, ref to Sen State Govt, Wagering, Tourism & Hist Preservation.
  - A598 – Requires DEP to establish artificial reef plan for commercial and recreational fishing. (2020:A 341; 2018:A 242) 01/11/22—Introduced, ref to Asm Agriculture.
  - A600 – Establishes restrictions and requirements for use of fishing gear and conch, fishing, and lobster pots on artificial reefs. (2020:A 343; 2018:A 244) 01/11/22—Introduced, ref to Asm Agriculture.
  - A733 – Requires assessment of bay scallop resource, and authorizes DEP to establish a bay scallop fishery. (2020:A-900; 2018:A-682) 01/11/22—Introduced, ref to Asm Agriculture.



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- A1171 – Requires modernization of all State blanks, forms, documents, and applications to incorporate new standards for collection of information about sex, gender, and sexual orientation. (2020:A 1060; 2018:A 4870) 01/11/22—Introduced, ref to Asm Human Svcs.
- A338 - Prohibits DEP from charging fee for resident mobile sportfishing vehicle permit to veterans, active military members, former or current members of the NJ National Guard or Reserve, or volunteer emergency workers. (2020:A-3722; 2018:A-2843) 01/11/22—Introduced, ref to Asm Env & Solid Waste.
- A444 – Provides preference for in State businesses in State contracting. (2020:A 409; 2018:A 5544) 01/11/22—Introduced, ref to Asm State & Local Govt. (there are a number of procurement bills dictating in-state preferences.)
- A1661 – Changes law regulating size limits of lobsters. (2022:S 868; 2020:A 4799; 2018:S 905) 01/11/22—Introduced, ref to Asm Agriculture.
- A943 – Requires gender balance in membership of certain boards and commissions established by statute. (2020:A 5821) 01/11/22—Introduced, ref to Asm Women & Children.
- A1466 – Requires racial and gender diversity in membership to be considered for appointments to certain boards and commissions established by statute. (2020:A 5348) 01/11/22—Introduced, ref to Asm State & Local Govt.
- A770 – Revises law establishing individual transferable quota system for menhaden purse seine fishery. (2020:A 4199) 01/11/22—Introduced, ref to Asm Agriculture.
- A847 – Appropriates \$54.5 million from constitutionally dedicated CBT revenues for recreation and conservation purposes to DEP for State capital and park development projects. (2020:A-6212) 01/11/22—Introduced, ref to Asm Appropriations.
- S 520 – Exempts commercial shellfish producers from prohibition on taking shellfish on Sunday. (2020:S 4085) 01/11/22—Introduced, ref to Sen Environment & Energy.
- S 556 – Eliminates shellfish license fee for veterans and active duty service members. (2020:S 502; 2018:S 3717) 01/11/22—Introduced, ref to Sen Environment & Energy
- **Scientific Collection Permits**
  - One hundred four scientific collecting permits have been issued for 2021 and 18 for 2022.
- **HOT TOPICS/Miscellaneous**
  - Staff received and processed a data request from University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science, VIMS, and ASMFC for striped bass age-length keys from 1982 -2019 to assist in the development of a spatial stock assessment model.
  - Staff participated in EAS Supervisor-Manager Webinar to improve team building and leadership skills, January 20<sup>th</sup>.

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

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

- **MFA Website Committee**
  - The MFA Website Committee members continue to work on updating and creating content for various MFA webpages. The committee has also reviewed and provided feedback on the hub wireframe pages.
- **New Jersey Seafood Finder Story Map**

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- 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, wholesale distributors, delivery/pick-up businesses and restaurants who sell seafood that has been landed, grown or harvested in New Jersey.

### **Meetings**

- **Delaware Bay Section of the NJ Shellfisheries Council**
  - On January 4, 2022, staff hosted the virtual Council meeting. Notable topics and updates discussed included the annual election for chairman and vice chairman, lease ground transactions, 2022 lease renewals, Leasing Committee, Direct Market Harvest Program, oyster tonging industry, dermo and *Vibrio*, Oyster Industry Science Steering Committee, and Stock Assessment Workshop announcement.
- **Atlantic Coast Section of the Shellfisheries Council Meeting**
  - On January 10, 2022 the Council met to discuss lease applications for consideration, decision and transfer. There was discussion on leases that were vacated after the renewal period ended. Other topics of discussion included offshore wind updates, lease policy committee update, hard clam management plan, NJ COVID-19 Assistance Program, Aquaculture Advisory Council update, Sea Grant/SOAR Oyster Restoration Program updates, legislative updates, the suspension of 2022 Hard Clam Relay Program, shellfish water classification downgrade in Ludlam Bay, and updates on the 2021 Mullica seed bed sampling. The next Council meeting will be held on March 21, 2022.
- **Delaware Bay Leasing Committee**
  - On January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022, staff facilitated a Delaware Bay Leasing Committee meeting. The primary topics of discussion were recommendations for updates to the Delaware Bay commercial shellfish lease policy and recommending a rule change to require a New Jersey commercial shellfish leaseholder to also possess a valid commercial shellfish license in order to annually renew the lease with the State, which is already the case for Atlantic Coast commercial shellfish leaseholders. The next Delaware Bay Leasing Committee is scheduled for February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

### **Offshore Wind, Restoration, Enhancement, Mitigation, and Habitat**

- **Offshore Wind**
  - Staff reviewed and provided comments on the NYSED draft assessment framework for assessing potential cable corridors for offshore wind.
- **Shell Recycling Program**
  - Staff continues to coordinate with Shell Recycling Program participants for weekly shell collection.
  - Staff participated in a shell recycling working group meeting to discuss the status of shell recycling in New Jersey. The meeting was held by the Barnegat Bay Partnership and representatives from NGOs, Academia, Industry, State and Municipal government were present. The group will work towards developing a document outlining best management practices for shell recycling for the State.
  - Staff continues to work on developing a comprehensive standard operating procedure for the Shell Recycling Program. The document outlines the entire shell recycling process including, adding venues, managing data, physically collecting shell, curing standards, shell planting, and equipment operation and maintenance.
  - Staff started getting quotes on a barge rental for the 2022 (June/July) shell plant. Staff intends to secure a barge in the coming weeks once all quotes are compiled.

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- Staff met with Division of Land Resource Protection staff to go over the requirements to extend the Bureaus restoration/ enhancement permits. Staff will complete and submit the full application package over the next several weeks.
- Staff had a virtual meeting with representatives from ReClam the Bay to discuss goals for 2022. Staff will continue to coordinate with ReClam the Bay staff and collaborate where appropriate.
- Staff began planning the logistics and purchasing of hard clam and oyster seed for 2022. Staff will begin to contact New Jersey based hatcheries in the coming weeks to attempt to obtain quotes.
- Staff attended the monthly New Jersey Bay Island Initiative meeting. The meeting focused on updates to the Bay Island Restoration Planner tool that has been developed.
- Staff met with EPA staff to discuss their current work in SAV mapping, mitigation, and communities of practice. EPA staff provided information regarding the use of existing satellite imagery for SAV mapping along with additional insight on field sampling, current studies, blue carbon, and upcoming meetings. Staff will continue to communicate with EPA staff, whose knowledge and experience in this area will be helpful to inform future SAV mapping/ sampling efforts in New Jersey.
- **Natural and Working Lands Trust Intro. Session**
  - Staff attended a meeting to introduce the next steps in the DEP's development of the Natural and Working Lands Trust strategy to capitalize on NJ's existing carbon sinks in support of reaching carbon sequestration goals.
  - Oyster beds, hard clams, and SAV have the potential to facilitate carbon cycling and lead to sequestration of carbon. While there is good information to help quantify the cycling and sequestration associated with shellfish, the state does not have comprehensive information on the state's SAV resources.
  - The last comprehensive survey of the Atlantic coastal estuaries was in 1979. The most recent data is ancillary to the hard clam stock assessment, and does not (nor is designed to) provide the necessary data to quantify the resource. The need for comprehensive SAV surveys is not limited to this project; the dearth of information makes shellfish management challenging, but more importantly it makes the regulation of waterfront development (docks, marinas, dredging, cables, etc.) even more challenging.
  - Without updated and regularly available resource mapping (on an annual or bi-annual basis) permit decisions are often made on data only as recent as 1987.
  - Staff recently submitted a brief draft proposal through DLRP for upcoming CZM funding to support a comprehensive surveying program. New Jersey is significantly far behind other coastal states in documenting SAV resources.
- **Waterfront Development**
  - CZM Waterfront Development Guidance Manual Updates
    - Staff began its first annual review of the Guidance Manual for the Processing of Land Resource Protection Permits and the Protection of Marine Fish and Shellfish Resources, Habitats, and Fisheries relative to the Rules on Coastal Zone Management at N.J.A.C. 7:7 ("Guidance Manual"). The document was published in March 2021 and was the first update to a Division-wide manual developed in 2008.
    - The manual is designed to assist both DLRP and MFA staff in review of applications, by providing resource maps, interpretation of rules, guidance, and detailed supporting information for policy perspectives. It is a 'living document' that allows MFA to update it as needed based on evolving fishery management plans, research, and other available resource data. Staff are aiming to have the update available by the end of March.
    - Concurrent with the manual update are updates to some MFA-only instructions. This 'instruction' document is different from the manual because it provides background on the

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CZM rules, describes staff duties and roles as project reviewers, and provides recommendations on composing reviews for large and complex projects. Multiple MFA staff are involved in the manual updates while the Waterfront Development Coordinator is responsible for compiling staff work and updating the instructions document.

- Staff reviewed and provided comments to DLRP staff on several waterfront development permit applications. These applications include:
  - An application to rebuild a fishing pier in Ocean Grove that was destroyed during Superstorm Sandy.
  - A request from The Port Authority New York & New Jersey to delay the start of timing restrictions by one week to allow enough time for cofferdam installation to be completed. Staff concurred with NOAA's determination to allow for the additional week of in-water work.
- **Rt 72 Joint-Agency SAV Advisory Committee Meeting**
  - Staff participated in the annual joint-agency meeting to discuss the status of SAV mitigation associated with the 2012/2013 approval of the Rt 72 bridge over Manahawkin Bay. The NJDOT's contractor has completed the original plan for mitigation in terms of timing...a 7-year program. Additional monitoring will be conducted to determine if mitigation targets have been achieved.
  - Based on the information provided so far, it is difficult to determine if the targets have been met, and clarification was requested. DLRP is the entity charged with determining if compliance is met. There are significant challenges with SAV restoration because there are many environmental factors that cannot be controlled which affect success, and there is no commercial nursery production of plants or seeds. Coupled with the challenges of physically accessing restoration sites (due to water depth, water temperature, etc.) mitigation targets may be hard to achieve, and there continues to be discussion in the SAV practitioner community about how best to set and achieve mitigation or restoration targets.

### **Aquaculture and Shellfish Leases**

- **Aquaculture Advisory Council Meeting**
  - Bureau staff attended the Department of Agriculture Aquaculture Advisory Council meeting on January 21, 2022. Council members include representatives from: Bureau of Shellfisheries, Department of Agriculture, Department of Health, commercial shellfish aquaculturists and Rutgers University Staff. Discussions included the development of a marketing committee, legislative committee, and reconvening the Aquaculture Management Practices review committee, and right to farm.
- **Shellfish Aquaculture Working Group – Commercial Shellfish Aquaculture Website Committee**
  - Bureau of Shellfisheries staff and representatives from various agencies involved in commercial shellfish aquaculture permitting, regulations, and outreach continue to work on finalizing the NJ Commercial Shellfish Aquaculture website design and content.
- **NJEMS Shellfish Lease Development**
  - Staff continue to provide data, testing, and feedback on the development of incorporating the leasing database into the NJEMS program. Staff is also working with the Bureau of GIS to allow GIS to input data directly into the NJEMS system.

### **State Fisheries and Quota Management**

- **Delaware Bay Oyster Tonging Fishery**
  - As of 1/31/22, the total reported harvest was approximately 1,156 bushels, with most of the harvest from Nantuxent Cove.

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- There were 1,500 tags sold across nine tongs, all of whom reported harvest.
- **Hard Clam Management Plan Development**
  - Staff began an earnest push forward in the development of the state's first ever hard clam management plan. Primarily, this was a formal presentation with a rudimentary draft outline to the Atlantic Coast Shellfisheries Council, a meeting with Councilman Mathis on the development of a stakeholder committee, and the beginnings of populating that committee. There was good interest from academia and the recreational sector for participation, but filling the slots of the multiple commercial sectors (aquaculture, wild harvest, depuration) have been more challenging. The plan is for staff to present Council with a list of recommended committee members in time for a decision at the March council meeting. Staff envision the committee as an advisory body, providing public input and feedback on the direction and the development of the plan's components as they are drafted. It is not envisioned that the committee be active in the plan composition or formal decision-making. Overall, the plan development is expected to take the next 12-18 months to complete.

### **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.
- Bureau staff continue to maintain state vehicles with routine and scheduled service.

### **Administrative/Miscellaneous**

- **License Sales**

License sales for the Delaware Bay Office were \$5,135.00 in January 2022. Staff continue to assist the public with sales over the phone and by email to set up appointments and use COV