



# **4.18** FISHING FAILURE

## SECTION 4.18 FISHING FAILURE

### 4.18-1 HAZARD OVERVIEW

Fishing failure in New Jersey could be disastrous to the State's fishing industry, economy, and coastal communities. A fishing failure could occur for many different reasons including overfishing, disease, changing migration patterns, or climate change.

- Overfishing is the taking of wildlife from the sea at rates too high for fished species to replace themselves. It is the result of growing demand for seafood, combined with poor management of fisheries and the development of new, more effective fishing techniques.
- Diseases are a known contributor to declines in wild fish populations. They are often a result of compromised environmental conditions.
- Migrating fish may encounter altered ecosystems and barriers that impact their ability to survive and predation from other species may also have an impact.
- Changes in climate could affect the distribution and migration of more than 1,000 species of commercial fish and shellfish around the world.
- Fishing failure may also be caused by other manmade hazards, such as hazardous substance release like an oil spill.

New Jersey Sea Grant Consortium indicates that for centuries, New Jersey's coastal communities along the Atlantic Ocean have relied on fishing as a source of food, employment, and tourism. The loss of any portion of this industry would be detrimental to the State, specifically the coastal communities. New Jersey's fishery and aquaculture resources contribute more than \$1 billion annually to the State's economy.

For over 300 years, commercial fishing has been a livelihood for fishermen. Seafood landed by New Jersey fishermen is shipped to seafood markets around the world. New Jersey commercial fisheries include over 100 different species of finfish and shellfish, the most economically important being sea scallops, surf clams, Atlantic mackerel, hard clams, blue crabs, ocean quahogs, fluke, monkfish, Atlantic herring, and American lobster. The economic benefits associated with the commercial fishing industry extend beyond the industry itself and can provide direct and indirect economic support to other waterfront industries and surrounding communities. Increasing competition for the State's coastal resources is threatening the industry's viability and is creating challenges that the industry must work to overcome.

Figure 4.18-1 Fishing Wharf in Barnegat Light, New Jersey



In 2020, there were 2,630 fishermen in the New Jersey commercial fleet, 1,791 seafood processors and dealers, and 4,304 wholesalers and distributors. Commercial fishermen in New Jersey landed 173,948,000 pounds of finfish and shellfish, earning \$185,264,000 in landings revenue. In New Jersey, landings revenue was dominated by sea scallops (\$97,540,000) and squid (\$10,885,000). In 2020, New Jersey generated \$11,170,215 in sales, \$2,312,149 in income, and \$3,886,532 in value added impacts (NOAA Fisheries, n.d.).

Aquaculture is the farming of aquatic organisms such as fish, shellfish, and plants (NJDA). Shellfish production, primarily hard clams and oysters, account for the majority of aquaculture that takes place in New Jersey. In 2018, there were 52 aquaculture operations in New Jersey, generating \$7,218,000 in sales (NJDA, 2021). The majority of oyster culture is conducted in the Delaware Bay. However, commercial oyster culture is also common along the Atlantic coast.

In addition to salt-water fisheries, the State is home to pristine recreational cold-water fisheries supporting large populations of freshwater fish. These fisheries can be found throughout the State, with the highest concentration in the northwestern region. New Jersey is also home to some of the oldest operating trout hatcheries dating back to the mid-1800s. Combined, these facilities support a statewide trout management program that stocks approximately 600,000 fish into cold-water fisheries throughout the State (Wildlife, 2013).

## 4.18-2 LOCATION, EXTENT, AND MAGNITUDE

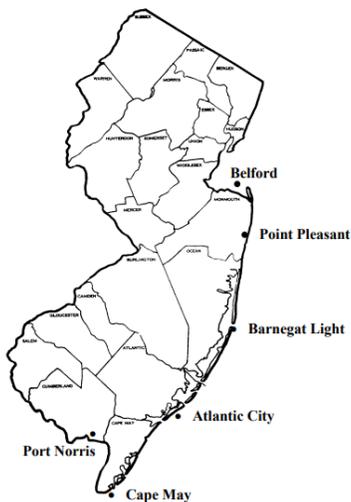
### Location

The New Jersey Fishing and Aquaculture states that there are six major commercial fishing ports on New Jersey's coastline and a number of smaller ports on the Delaware, Barnegat and Raritan Bays. The major ports include Bedford, Point Pleasant, Barnegat Light, Atlantic City, Cape May and Port Norris. With the exception of Atlantic City, each supports a number of inshore and offshore fisheries. The Atlantic City fleet is exclusively dedicated to the surf clam/ocean quahog fishery.

The Garden State Seafood Association indicates that one of the benefits of New Jersey's small size is the access to major transportation routes. Newark Airport and Port Newark/Elizabeth are within easy, same-day reach of each of New Jersey's commercial fishing ports.

In addition, New Jersey is home to a pristine cold-water trout fishery that covers all counties throughout the State. This fishery is home to native trout as well as New Jersey-grown and stocked fish and provides public access for recreational fishers seeking freshwater fishing.

Figure 4.18-2 Major Commercial Fishing Ports in New Jersey



Source: New Jersey Fishing and Aquaculture

## Extent and Magnitude

New Jersey is home to a variety of fish species, including 93 freshwater species and over 330 marine species. The effects of a fishing failure on the public of New Jersey could be potentially great. In the event of a fishing failure, food supplies could be interrupted, and the public could experience a rise in overall food prices. Also, a widespread failure affecting entire commercial fishery industry of the NJ due to contamination by a toxic pollutant, foreign agent, or a biological organism could create doubts about the safety of the food supply.

The economic conditions of the State could be greatly impacted by a fishing failure. In 2018, New Jersey aquaculture operations generated \$7,218,000 in sales (NJDA, 2021). The economic benefits associated with the commercial fishing industry extend beyond the industry and can provide direct economic support to other waterfront industries and surrounding communities. New Jersey's economy is somewhat dependent on the fishing industry, but the impacts could be severe on coastal towns that rely on the fishing industry. The tourism industry may also be impacted by a fishing failure.

### 4.18-3 PREVIOUS OCCURRENCES AND LOSSES

In this section, fishing failure events that occurred in the State from 2010 to the present will be discussed further. However, the descriptions do not include all incidents.

#### *Superstorm Sandy – 2012*

Superstorm Sandy caused severe flooding that mandated statewide closures of waters where shellfish are produced, prohibiting growers from harvesting their products. Ongoing re-openings of these growing areas have occurred in stages. Shellfish hatcheries sustained considerable damage from Sandy, including the destruction of and damage to equipment and the working waterfront, inhibiting them from producing seed for farms around the State. The six hatcheries and nurseries that were impacted supply 90% of the seed to clam farmers.

Two clam hatcheries in the Borough of Tuckerton (Ocean County) were completely destroyed and suffered a disproportionate amount of damage because of the amount of seed they supply. These facilities produced between 30% and 40% of New Jersey's clam seed. These hatcheries experienced nearly a 100% loss, including building, foundation, equipment, outside raceways, and product. Operators have been forced to rebuild temporary structures in other locations to salvage some seed production capacity. According to the NJDA, property damage to these hatcheries included the hatchery buildings' foundations, bulkheads, raceways (where clams are grown to a certain size before farmers take them onto their leases), and equipment losses, totaling a \$1 million loss. Product loss included clam seed that would otherwise be sold to clam farms, totaling \$10,000 in losses.

Other hatcheries, as well as clam and oyster growers, have also experienced damage to their facilities and equipment from Sandy's impact. Four hatcheries in Atlantic City sustained minor damage to property and product loss from water closings. Their losses totaled \$100,000 in combined property damage and \$20,000 in product losses. Clam growers with leases in the intertidal areas of Barnegat Bay south through Brigantine and in the Sea Isle area of Cape May County have recorded damage to their predator protection screens and product losses on their leases. Losses totaled \$18,000 in property damage and \$100,000 in product loss. Atlantic Coast Hatcheries lost oyster seed valued at \$1,500. Two oyster growers along the Delaware Bay Cape Shore reported approximately \$16,000 in product losses. An oyster grower in Barnegat Bay reported \$33,000 in property damage and \$66,500 in product loss (NJDA, 2013). Overall, New Jersey's fishing industry sustained between \$77 and \$120 million in losses, which included recreational fishing-related industries, which accounted for more than 80% of all losses (NJDEP, 2013).

Figure 4.18-3 Boats Destroyed by Hurricane Sandy



Source: FEMA

## 4.18-4 PROBABILITY OF FUTURE OCCURRENCES

Based on the location of New Jersey along the eastern seaboard, the likelihood of a fishing failure caused by a weather-related event such as hurricane or Nor'easter is great. While these events are short in duration, the relocation of the aquatic wildlife may have an immediate impact on the fishery. However, recovery usually starts immediately, with a full recovery within a few months. Freshwater impacts from storms pose a greater threat from the modification of streambeds creating a change in living and breeding habitat. While freshwater impacts are generally more severe than those affecting a saltwater fishery, the return of fish begins following the reduction of water levels.

### Potential Effects of Climate Change

Climate change may impact the frequency and intensity of severe weather. Increased severe weather during open fishing seasons may have an impact on the industry. Changes in weather patterns may also affect the distribution and migration of fish, specifically warm waters causing species to move north, which will impact fishing productivity.

Sea level rise could have a potentially devastating impact on many of New Jersey's coastal marshes. Many commercially and recreationally important species rely on coastal wetland for food or habitat during some or all of their life cycle. Loss of this ecosystem could have dire repercussions on fish populations within State waters.

## 4.18-5 VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT

The following discusses New Jersey's vulnerability, in a qualitative way, to the fishing failure hazard. Impacts on the public, responders, continuity of operations, and delivery of services; property, facilities, and infrastructure; and the environment, economic condition of the state, and the public confidence in the State's governance are discussed in Section 10.0: EMAP in accordance with EMAP standards. This section addresses assessing vulnerability and estimating potential losses by jurisdiction and to state facilities.

## Built Environment

NJDEP's Division of Fish and Wildlife Bureau of Freshwater Fisheries is responsible for the propagation, protection, and management of the State's freshwater fishery resources as well as promoting their recreational use. The Pequest Trout Hatchery in Oxford and the Charles O. Hayford Hatchery in Hackettstown are both located in Warren County. These hatcheries raise and stock warm-water and cool-water species for stocking water bodies across the State. Additional facilities that support the fishing industry include, but are not limited to fishing ports, fish processing facilities, and commercial fishery support services.

The potential losses to state facilities caused by the fishing failure hazard are difficult to quantify. The most direct potential losses of a fish population hazard could be the loss of the State-run Pequest Trout Hatchery in Oxford and the Charles O. Hayford Hatchery in Hackettstown. These hatcheries raise and stock warm-water and cool-water species for distribution throughout the State. Further, state facilities that support the main fisheries and ports may not be physically harmed but their mission would be altered if the fisheries industry declined.

## Population and Economy

All counties in the State have publicly accessible streams, rivers, lakes, ponds, and reservoirs that provide public places to fish and are thus vulnerable to the fishing failure hazard. A list of both rivers/streams and ponds in each county with a population of desirable fishing species is located on NJDEP's website: <https://dep.nj.gov/njfw/fishing/freshwater/fabulous-fishing-in-new-jersey/>. While all counties are prone to fishing failure, Atlantic, Cape May, Cumberland and Ocean Counties are considered the most vulnerable to this hazard since the six major commercial fishing ports are located in these counties.

The economic conditions of the State could be greatly impacted by a fishing failure. Commercial fisherman in the New Jersey netted \$185,264,000 in landings revenue from finfish and shellfish in 2020 (NOAA Fisheries, n.d.). The value of the seafood harvest extends well beyond the industry itself. The effects of a prosperous seafood industry are felt in other waterfront activities such as shipbuilding, maintenance and repair, support services (equipment, fuel, materials, and supplies), and ecotourism. Most importantly, the dollars earned in fishing communities tend to remain in those communities, adding incrementally to the local economy and in turn strengthening the relationship between the industry and its homeport. New Jersey's most valuable fisheries in 2020 were sea scallops (\$97,540,000) and squid (\$10,885,000) (NOAA Fisheries, n.d.).

Recreational fishing within the State of New Jersey supports local economy through the purchase of goods such as equipment, vehicles, lodging, and food. It is estimated that in 2011, over \$1 million were spent in support of recreational fishing within the State of New Jersey with residents of the Garden State spending over 8,000 days fishing versus non-residents spending 1,500 days fishing (2011 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, & Wildlife Associated Recreation, 2012).

## Ecosystems and Natural Assets

A fishing failure could have a potentially severe impact on the environment if the cause of the failure was attributed to contamination by a toxic release, foreign agent, or a biological organism. If a massive fish kill was associated with the event, clean up and recovery could take months and the cost would be quite substantial. Additionally, a massive fish kill could result in an imbalance that could impact the food chain and lead to loss of other marine life.

## Impact Analysis

### *Severity and Warning Time*

Complete fishing failure within the State, while unlikely based on the diversity of the State fisheries, could range from a small, localized impact to a statewide industry failure. Events that have the potential to impact at the catastrophic level include the introduction of an invasive species, introduction of an animal-based disease, or a sudden change in climate within the region. Any of these would have an immediate impact on the fish population, leaving a large number of industry employees without work. The loss of the industry as a whole would provide an economic loss of billions of dollars and employment for thousands of residents, not including the impact to the end users.

In most cases, fishing failure does not occur with any available forewarning. The majority of fishing failures occur gradually over time and require scientific study to recognize. These studies provide a snapshot of gradual change and thus allow for immediate responses to mitigate future failures.

### *Secondary Hazards*

Secondary hazards associated with fish loss are based on the type of loss associated with the fishery. A loss of fishing ability within the State would have an immediate impact on the thousands of residents relying on the industry for a means of income. Additionally, the global implication of a loss of New Jersey seafood will have an impact on the pricing of seafood nationwide and possibly worldwide. Based on the reason for fish loss, a secondary impact that may present is a public health concern. Through the introduction of an animal-based disease, a rapid die-off of any of the 100 species of fish will present health considerations caused by large numbers of deceased animals in the water and shore areas.

Finally, the adverse impact from any fish loss would be the reduction of the New Jersey recreation industry. The pristine cold-water fisheries, combined with the 100 miles of fishable shoreline, provide thousands of fishers the opportunity to enjoy New Jersey's natural beauty. These fishers support the State through the purchase of equipment, travel, and lodging in excess of \$1 million annually.