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Christie Administration Reopens Atlantic Coast Shellfish Beds From Little Egg Inlet to Cape May Point

Wednesday, November 14, 2012

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Oyster Harvest Season for Delaware Bay is Extended Until November 30

Trenton, NJ – Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Bob Martin today signed an order reopening shellfish beds in Atlantic coastal waters from Little Egg Inlet south to Cape May Point, effective at sunrise on Thursday.

Commissioner Martin signed the order following water monitoring and tissue sampling that found no issues with contamination from bacteria or viruses as a result of the storm. The beds had been closed since Oct. 29 as a precaution as a result of the approach of Hurricane Sandy.

The DEP has also extended the Delaware Bay oyster harvest season until Nov. 30, or until the annual quota is reached, to help oystermen recover losses resulting from closures of beds in the bay. Those beds were reopened as of Monday.

The DEP is also allowing commercial oyster harvesting on Saturdays, which will help the shellfisheries industry compensate for lost time and revenues that resulted in the closure of beds due to the storm.

"While so much of our coastline and our fishing industry took significant hits from the storm, it is encouraging that we are now able to reopen more of our coastal shellfish beds, and tests also show that our ocean water quality is excellent," Commissioner Martin said. "It is important to get people back to work in areas affected by the storm as much as possible. Toward that end, extending the oyster harvest for Delaware Bay will help that segment of our shellfish industry recoup some of their losses caused by Sandy."

The DEP closed all New Jersey shellfish beds to commercial and recreational harvesting on Oct. 29 in preparation for Hurricane Sandy, due to concerns over degradation of coastal water quality from the storm.

On Nov. 11, the DEP reopened shellfish beds in Delaware Bay from Lower Alloways Creek south to Cape May Point after sampling found no issue with contamination as a result of the storm.

Beds in the Raritan Bay-Sandy Hook area remain closed until further notice due to discharges of partially treated and untreated wastewater resulting from storm damage to treatment plants and pump stations. Shellfish beds in Barnegat Bay also remain closed due to elevated levels of bacteria.

The DEP is continuing to monitor water quality and will make a determination on reopening shellfish beds in these areas when monitoring and sampling criteria are met.

The DEP's Division of Fish and Wildlife decided to extend the oyster harvest season in Delaware Bay after consultation with the Delaware Bay section of the New Jersey Shellfisheries Council. This year's oyster harvest season started in April and was scheduled to conclude on Nov. 16.

The DEP will consider extending the season into early December if the annual quota has not been reached and water temperatures allow. Oysters close their shells and enter a state similar to hibernation when water temperature reaches 50 degrees Fahrenheit, precluding harvesting.

For more information, including a map of reopened shellfish beds, visit: <http://www.nj.gov/dep/wms/bmw/sandy.html>

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