

Marine Resources Administration Monthly Report

JUNE 2023

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****MARINE FISHERIES/MRA****

ASMFC/MAFMC/COOP/NOAA/ACCSP

- Staff submitted NJ's Striped Bass Compliance Report (2022 data) to ASMFC on June 15th. 2022 Striped Bass Bonus Program harvest (by numbers of fish) ranked as the 4th highest in the timeseries. 2022 MRIP harvest estimates (by numbers of fish) ranked as the 4th highest in the timeseries as well. 2022 MRIP discard estimates (by numbers of fish) ranked 2nd highest in the timeseries. The 2022 juvenile abundance index (JAI) from the Delaware River Seine Survey was below average and ranked 28th in the 43-year timeseries. 2022 Striped bass tagging in the Delaware Bay ranked 3rd lowest in numbers of fish tagged in the 34-year timeseries.

MEETING SUMMARIES

- **Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program-ACCSP**
 - Staff attended an ACCSP For-Hire Technical Review as Operations Committee Leadership on June 14 and 15. The ACCSP Comprehensive For-Hire Data Collection program design document has been a high priority with broad development through the Recreational Technical Committee. This first review is a milestone in the MRIP design certification process. The MRIP RET (Research and Evaluation Team) has reviewed the design document and engaged external reviewers to evaluate the design and respond to the terms of reference. This document is a step towards addressing a major priority in the Atlantic Recreational Implementation Plan to more fully utilize For-Hire logbooks in the MRIP estimates.
 - The Recreational Technical Committee Discards Subcommittee met June 15th to further discuss the Discards Proposal. The subcommittee ultimately voted to postpone the submission of the Discards Proposal pilot project until ACCSP announces the FY2025 RFP. The RTC Discards Subcommittee will be holding monthly meetings going forward to prepare the pilot proposal for submission.
- **Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission-ASMFC**
 - The Striped Bass Plan Development Team held three conference calls in June to develop draft Addendum II to Amendment 7 for striped bass. The addendum will consider 2024 measures for both the recreational and commercial fisheries to achieve the fishing mortality (F) target in 2024. Options will include modifications to the slot limit and harvest closures for the recreational fishery and a max size limit for commercial fisheries.
 - The Striped Bass Plan Development Team and Technical Committee held two additional joint conference calls in June to discuss the 2023 Emergency Action and development of draft Addendum II. Topics of discussion included the methods used to estimate 2023 removals accounting for the emergency action and how to conduct projections to determine the level of removals (and resulting percent reduction from 2022) to achieve F target in 2024. The TC used two methods to estimate 2023 removals following the emergency action and the results were similar indicating an estimated 30% reduction in removals. The TC also reviewed the methodology the PDT is using to develop options for the ocean and Chesapeake Bay recreational fisheries and provided technical advice and recommendations. The PDT will refine the calculations based on the TC feedback and plan to have the draft addendum completed in the next few weeks.
 - The American Eel Technical Committee and Stock Assessment Subcommittee held a joint conference call on June 27. The purpose of the call was to review the Supplemental Report to the benchmark assessment, the SC index issue, Maine's aquaculture proposal for 2024 and Maine's life cycle study. At the February 2023 Board meeting, the SAS was tasked with responding to some

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comments from the Peer Review Panel and providing additional work on the indices and proposed management tool. The Supplemental Report outlines the follow-up tasks, results and conclusions. In an unfortunate turn of events, a data set from South Carolina that should have been considered for the assessment was not. The TC was presented with a memo outlining the issue and providing some sensitivity runs for consideration and potential paths forward. The TC recommended that the data be written up and included as an amendment to the Supplemental Report. The TC approved Maine's aquaculture proposal and it will be submitted to the Board along with the Supplemental Report at the August meeting.

- Administration staff participated in the first meeting of the newly formed FMAT/PDT for round two of recreational management reform. Much of this meeting focused on review of work from the most recent effort that is set to sunset at the end of 2025; additional topics included the role of the FMAT/PDT, suggestions for the role of the MAFMC SSC, scope of work for this current effort, needed analyses, rebranding, and next steps. This effort will henceforth be referred to as, in brief, the recreational measures setting process, or RMS (previously, harvest control rule, or HCR).
- The ASMFC Horseshoe Crab Technical Committee (TC) and Stock Assessment Subcommittee (SAS) met via webinar on June 1, 2023, to discuss the scheduling for the next stock assessment update; the need to elect TC chair, TC vice chair and SAS chair; review the update on biomedical best management practices; and to begin a discussion on wind farm effects on horseshoe crabs. After discussing the pros and cons of delaying the update assessment from 2024 until 2026 (to accommodate a crowded ASMFC assessment schedule), the TC and SAS reached consensus to keep to the original schedule of 2024 to help states address recent controversies surrounding horseshoe crab management along the coast. Data for the update assessment will be collected during the summer, and the SAS will meet via webinar in the fall to begin work on the assessment. ASMFC staff will collect nominations for the committee chairs and present them at a later meeting.
- The Index Working Group within the Spot & Croaker Stock Assessment Subcommittee met via webinar on June 22 to review nominal indices from the fishery-independent surveys submitted for consideration in the current assessment. The Group reached consensus on which surveys to advance for index standardization and which surveys to reject for reasons which included inappropriate survey design, lack of sufficient time series, inconsistent methodology, duplication in spatial coverage with better surveys, and low proportions of positive samples. The Group will meet again in July to review initial standardization results.
- **Marine Fisheries Council/Advisory Committees**
 - The Striped Bass Committee and advisors met to discuss the recent ASMFC emergency action for striped bass to implement a 1 fish at 28" to less than 31" slot. Majority of the advisors expressed their frustration with the emergency action but ultimate support to implement the new measures to remain in compliance. The Committee recommendation to the Marine Fisheries Council is to implement the 28" to less than 31" slot with one member expressing indecision until additional data/analysis becomes available.
 - The NJ Marine Fisheries Council (Council) held a special meeting on June 20th to consider implementing a new slot limit of 1 fish at 28" to 31" for the recreational striped bass fishery to remain in compliance with the ASMFC Emergency Action. The Council voted in favor of implementing the new slot. The Administration drafted a Notice of Administration Change to implement the new slot limit on July 2, 2023.
- **Miscellaneous**
 - The Monkfish Research Set-Aside Working Group met on June 5th via webinar to review the work plan, timing, and objectives of the working group; discuss the 2019 Program Review of New

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England RSA Programs; and to discuss the challenges and opportunities to improve the Monkfish RSA program.

- The 2025 New Jersey State Wildlife Action Plan (NJSWAP) review began with the first round completed which entailed revising the Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) list which were pre-screened based on specific criteria and factors. Our role was to review and make any status changes. A meeting was then held with ENSP staff to discuss suggested changes and the justifications for those changes.

INDEPENDENT FISHERIES

• Delaware River Seine Survey

- The 2023 Delaware River Seine Survey began on June 19. All regions were sampled once during the month of June. A total of 70 striped bass were caught, 12 of which were young of year.
- A flathead catfish was captured on June 19 at the Riverwinds Beach station in region 2. This is the same location where one was caught in 2021 and in the same general area where one was caught in 2022, not far from the River Gate public boat ramp in West Deptford/National Park. A summary sheet of New Jersey's invasive fish species was compiled and provided to all field staff for quick reference.

• Eel Surveys

- The 2023 Spring portion of the Yellow Eel Pot Survey ran from April 17 to June 15. During that time period, staff tended 44 strings of pots (each string consists of 4 pots) at 28 individual locations in Great Bay. The total number of yellow stage American eels caught was 185, averaging 4 eels per string (1 per pot). Lengths and weights were collected from all eels with an average length of 471.8 millimeters and an average weight of 219 grams. A total of 131 eels were tagged and released and there were zero recaptures. Additionally, 40 otolith samples were collected to supplement the commercial fishery sampling program, 43 were examined for swim bladder parasite presence (1 present) and 31 were examined for sex (23 male, 2 female and 6 undetermined). A total of 7 conger eels were caught as bycatch during this sampling period.

• Horseshoe Crab Survey

- The 2023 Horseshoe Crab Spawning Survey has concluded sampling for the year. A total of twelve sampling nights were scheduled, resulting in ten successful nights and only two nights being cancelled due to weather. Fortescue beach is eroding in multiple spots and will need to be reevaluated for next year's survey.

• Ocean Trawl

- Inclement weather over the weekend delayed the June Ocean Trawl Survey by two days, but the survey was completed in 6 full sampling days on Thursday evening. Water temperatures continue to rise with bottom temperatures in the 50's (F). Catches were relatively light with summer species beginning to appear such as smooth dogfish and rays. Notable catches include 2 blacktip sharks, several Atlantic sturgeon, a loggerhead sea turtle, and 2 adult white sharks. The only other white shark recorded during the survey was a juvenile caught in 2011.

• Raritan-Sandy Hook Bay Complex Inventory Project

- The Raritan Inventory Project for May began sampling on June 7th and was completed in 6 days within the month. All 16 otter trawl stations, 16 seine stations and 12 gillnet stations were completed. Gillnet sampling consisted of mostly of smooth dogfish (n=63) and Atlantic menhaden (n=61), but also caught spider crabs, striped bass, blue crabs, and horseshoe crabs. Otter trawl sampling consisted of primarily Atlantic silversides (n=179) and bay anchovy (n = 169). Other species caught in trawl sampling consisted of Atlantic menhaden, black sea bass, scup, spotted hake, spider crabs, and Atlantic herring. Seine sampling consisted only of mostly Atlantic silverside (n =

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17,140), and Atlantic menhaden (n = 12,517). Other species caught in seine sampling consisted of bay anchovy, horseshoe crabs, mummichog, striped killifish, windowpane, and winter flounder. Sixteen eDNA water samples were collected and filtered from otter trawl stations and nine eDNA water samples were collected and filtered from seine stations.

DEPENDENT FISHERIES

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

- The draw for June consisted of 176 site assignments and 12 head boat assignments that yielded a total of 1231 intercepts (477 SH, 127 CH, 540 PR, 87 HB).
- Assignments on June 8th were cancelled due to unsafe air quality.
- Staff continue to make updates to the Vessel Directory and Site Register in preparation for Wave 5.
- June mileage has been validated and submitted for reimbursement; May mileage reimbursements have been received.
- Wave 2 Summary: 646 intercepts: 206 SH, 51 CH, 355 PR, 34 HB
- Wave 3 Summary: 2136 intercepts: 760 SH, 219 CH, 1014 PR, 143 HB
- Data for the May Fishdump were reviewed and necessary edits were submitted.

- **For-Hire Telephone Survey-FHTS**

- June included sampling weeks 22-25. There were 256 vessels drawn for the month with 156 of those vessels responding. This resulted in a response rate of 60.9%. All weekly mailings for May were sent out to the proper vessel representatives. The wave 4 draw was completed by ACCSP. Staff successfully printed letters and log sheets for July's upcoming weekly mailings.
- Staff continue to work in the vessel directory making updates as needed. HMS permits were successfully filtered and processed in the imports' inbox.

- **NJ Saltwater Recreational Registry Program-NJSRRP/Volunteer Angler Survey-VAS**

- As of June 30, 2023, there were 99,985 individuals and 608 for-hire vessels registered with the New Jersey Saltwater Recreational Registry Program (NJSRRP) for 2023. (Last month: May 30, 2023, there were 82,406 individuals and 568 for-hire vessels registered for 2023).

- **Striped Bass Bonus Program-SBBP**

- Staff have issued permits to 9,427 individual anglers and 132 party/charter boats. Individual angler applications have increased by 33% compared to 2022. Staff believe the increase in participation is due to the ASMFC emergency action. The current 2023 Bonus harvest is 2,184 lbs. from 301 fish.

- **Tournament Sampling**

- Staff attended one tournament and collected samples from two party/charter boat trips in June. Staff are scheduled for six tournaments in July.

OUTREACH

- The online version of the Marine Digest and all associated webpages were updated to include information on the new striped bass regulations which went into effect on July 2.
- Staff attended Egg Harbor Township Library's summer program story hour on June 30. The theme for 2023 All Together Now, a theme of community and feeling safe with friends. Staff read a story called "The Lucky Hermit Crab and Her Swirly New Shell" which follows a hermit crab trying to find her perfect new home. Through the story, hands on displays and a craft project, staff taught the children about coastal marine life, including sea anemones, limpets, barnacles and more.
- Staff attended an outdoor field trip with the Jordan Road School in Somers Point on June 7. The purpose of the event was to teach sixth grade students about the local marine environment. Staff provided a mini APAIS training and mock interview for the students to participate in. Students learned how to identify local saltwater species and collect biological data (lengths and weights). Students also learned what kind of data

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is collected during the survey, what it is used for and how they (the public) are an important part of the data collection process.

- On June 3, staff presented an overview of horseshoe crab fishery management to the Green Eggs and Sand workshop for students and educators focused on horseshoe crabs, shorebirds and their interconnection. The presentation included the Adaptive Resource Management framework that incorporates both horseshoe crab and red knot data to recommend crab harvest options in the Delaware Bay region.
- Staff participated in an interview on June 5th with Nick Honachefsky from the Salt Water Sportsman magazine for an upcoming article on weakfish focused on their population, predation pressures, behavior, and migration patterns.

ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS (Marine Resources Administration)

- **Wind Energy**
 - New Jersey Research and Monitoring Initiative (RMI).
 - Staff participated in weekly Department internal RMI meetings.
 - Additional meetings were held to discuss projects and concepts in development including a kickoff meeting for the acoustic telemetry project, surfclam fishery enhancement, archival and real-time passive acoustic monitoring for large cetaceans, satellite tagging of humpback whales, socio-economic impacts of offshore wind on recreational fisheries, aerial acoustic surveys for large whales, eDNA for fisheries, and sea turtle tracking.
 - Following the failure of the second attempt at an rfp for passive acoustic monitoring for large whales, the PIs of the acoustic telemetry project were asked if they could do the work. Their response was promising, and they are now looking for another PI with expertise in cetacean acoustics.
 - Staff continued to work with DSR to resolve workflow challenges and a request from the BPU for criteria for funding mitigation-specific research for offshore wind.
 - Staff attended the monthly DSR lunch time presentations on research. The focus of this month's meeting was the socio-economic study on recreational fishing being conducted by Montclair University scientists.
 - Permitting support
 - Biweekly permitting meetings were held with Atlantic Shores Offshore Wind (ASOW) and Ocean Wind 1 and 2 (OW1 and OW2).
 - Staff met with Attentive Energy to review the project's export cable routing to shore.
 - Staff attended the semi-annual Inter-Agency Project Update Meeting for OCS A-0539/Community Wind. Staff also attended the monthly meeting with Community Wind fisheries staff to discuss monitoring and mitigation. This month we also discussed topics for the June Marine Fisheries Council Offshore Wind Committee meeting.
 - Staff attended weekly interdepartmental meetings to coordinate on the Federal Consistency determination for Empire Wind.
 - Staff collected information on compensation determinations for Vineyard Wind and Southfork wind for Mike Russel in the Commissioner's Office.
 - Stakeholder Engagement
 - Staff hosted a meeting of the Marine Fisheries Council Offshore Wind Committee. This meeting was scheduled to provide updates to the Committee on all leases in the NY/NJ Bight, and for a question-and-answer session.
 - Staff provided information regarding scheduling the next Environmental Resources Working Group meeting.

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- Board of Public Utilities
 - Staff participated in the quarterly BMP meeting with Atlantic Shores, a requirement of the offset agreement. There was a discussion of fisheries and environmental monitoring.
 - Staff met with the BPU to review bids for the NJ Offshore Wind Strategic Plan request for quotes and a proposal was selected.
- Federal Permitting
 - MRA staff prepared and submitted comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Atlantic Shores South, which includes Project 1 and Project 2. Project 1 has an offset with NJ (formerly referred to as power purchase agreement.) Staff attended two of the public meetings for the release of the draft Environmental Impact Statement for Atlantic Shores.
- Regional coordination
 - Staff attended the Offshore Wind session of the June meeting of the Mid Atlantic Fishery Management Council. Presentations were made by BOEM regarding federal permitting updates, Joe Cimino on the interstate working group on fisheries compensation, Katie Westfall on NOAA updates, and several developers.
 - Staff attended an Advisory Council meeting of the Responsible Offshore Science Alliance and participated in a panel discussion of coordination of project monitoring.
 - Staff met with NOAA GARFO to discuss the Atlantic Shores project.
 - Staff met a second time with GARFO to discuss fisheries compensation.
 - Staff attended RWSC Subcommittee Meetings in June, including the Marine Mammal, Habitat & Ecosystem, and Sea Turtle subcommittees, and a meeting to launch the draft Science Plan for the RWSC.
 - Staff met with the Executive Director of ROSA to discuss regional coordination of monitoring.
 - Staff hosted the monthly NJ Surfclam Research Needs and Progress meeting.

MISCELLANEOUS (Marine Resources Administration)

• Regulatory/Legislative

- Notices of Administrative Changes (NOACs)
 - On May 2, 2023, the ASMFC's Atlantic Striped Bass Board approved an emergency action to implement a 31-inch maximum size limit for the Atlantic Striped Bass recreational fishery. A draft NOAC to implement the emergency management measure was approved at the June 20, 2023, Marine Fisheries Council special meeting. The NOAC was filed with the OAL on July 2, 2023, per the ASMFC implementation deadline, and will be published in the August 7, 2023, NJ Register.
- Rulemakings
 - MRA 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. The first draft proposal is currently under review.
 - Another rulemaking proposal is underway to allow modifications via NOAC to expeditiously comply with any management criteria approved by NOAA or the applicable regional management body. Under this rulemaking all Marine Fisheries-related rules will be reorganized under N.J.A.C. 7:25B.
- Legislative Activity – State
 - S520;A3847/S. Cruz-Perez (D5), S. Calabrese (D36), Freiman (D16), Spearman (D5); Exempts shellfish aquaculturists with commercial shellfish aquaculture permit from law

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prohibiting taking of shellfish on Sunday. Passed Assembly on 6/15/2023 (64-11-1). 6/30/2023 passed in Senate and sent to Governor 34-2.

- A5566/Asm. Scharfenberger (R13), Asm. Flynn (R13); Directs DEP to establish sonar testing permit program. Introduced on 6/5/2023 and referred to Assembly Environment and Solid Waste Committee.
- A5563/Asm. McGuckin, Asm Catalano (R10); S3917/Sen. Holzapfel; Prohibits imposition of civil penalties on State agencies by State agencies. Introduced on 6/5/2023 and referred to Assembly State and Local Government Committee; Referred to Senate State Government, Wagering, Tourism and Historic Preservation Committee.
- A5613/Asm. Danielsens (D17); Makes various changes to process for requesting access to government records for commercial purposes. Introduced on 6/15/2023 and referred to Assembly Oversight, Reform and Federal Relations Committee.
- A5616/Asm. Danielsens (D17); Makes various changes to process for requesting access to government records. Introduced on 6/15/2023 and referred to Assembly Oversight, Reform and Federal Relations Committee.
- A5654/Asm. Freiman (D16), Asw. Reynolds-Jackson (D15), Asm. Quijano (D20), Asm. Smith (D17), Asm. Turner (D15); Appropriates \$9,184,427 to DEP from constitutionally dedicated CBT revenues for grants to certain nonprofit entities to acquire or develop lands for recreation and conservation purposes, and for certain administrative expenses. On 6/30/2023, passed in Senate and sent to Governor 36-0. Signed by the Governor P.L.2023, c.89.
- A5655/Asw. Sumter (D35), Asm. Tully (D38), Asm. Wimberly (D35); Asw. Greenstein (D14); Asw. Turner (D15); Appropriates \$87,783,515 from constitutionally dedicated CBT revenues and various Green Acres funds to DEP for local government open space acquisition and park development projects, and for certain administrative expenses. On 6/30/2023, passed in Senate and sent to Governor 36-0. Signed by the Governor P.L.2023, c.88
- S2835/Sen. Stanfield (R8), Sen. Beach (D6); Extends right to hawk, peddle, and vend food items on premises of State-owned or State-leased office building. Amended on Senate floor on 6/20/2023, 2nd reading in Senate by voice vote (Ruiz)
- S3768/Sen. Gopal (D11); Sets noise limit for vessels operated on State waters. On 6/27/2023, withdrawn from the files.
- S3769/Sen. Gopal (D11); Sets speed limit for vessels on the Navesink River in Monmouth County. On 6/27/2023, withdrawn from the files.
- S3971/Sen. Gopal (D11); Provides that 10-year term does not apply to lease of certain municipal properties unless they are waterfront properties or related to waterfront concessions. Introduced on 6/15/2023 and referred to Senate Community and Urban Affairs Committee.
- Legislative Activity – Federal
 - Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries Hearing: On Tuesday, June 6, 2023, at 10:15 a.m., the House Natural Resources Committee’s Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries will hold an oversight budget hearing titled “Examining the Impacts of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s proposed changes to the North Atlantic Right Whale Vessel Strike Reduction Rule.” On August 1, 2022, NOAA published the proposed rule amending the North Atlantic Right Whale Vessel Strike Reduction Rule (87 Fed. Reg. 46921-46936). The proposed rule extends the applicability of the speed restriction rule to include boats measuring 35 feet and longer, expands the seasonal management areas (renamed as seasonal speed zones and shown in Figure 2), makes dynamic management areas mandatory (renamed as dynamic speed zones), and changes how the current safety deviations can be used. NOAA

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is currently reviewing the over 20,000 public comments submitted for the proposed rule. While there is no official timeline, NOAA anticipates a final rule by the end of the year.

- S. 2086, (Sen. Markey, D-Massachusetts), a bill to require the Secretary of Commerce to establish the Sea Turtle Rescue Assistance Grant Program. Introduced on June 21, 2023, and referred to the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee.
- H.R. 4051, (Rep. Wittman, R-Virginia), a bill to direct the Secretary of Commerce to establish a task force regarding shark depredation, and for other purposes. Introduced June 12, 2023, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
- H.R. 4030, (Rep. Huffman, D-California), a bill to amend the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act to prohibit oil and gas leasing in certain areas of the Outer Continental Shelf. Introduced on June 12, 2023, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
- H.R. 4013, (Rep. Cammack, R-Florida), a bill to establish a regulatory system for sustainable offshore aquaculture in the United States exclusive economic zone, and for other purposes. Introduced on June 12, 2023, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee, and in addition to the House Agriculture Committee, and the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned.
- H.R. 3980, (Rep. Lucas, R-Oklahoma), a bill to formally establish within statute an independent scientific research and development agency known as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and for other purposes. Introduced on June 9, 2023, and referred to the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee; and in addition to the House Natural Resources Committee, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned.
- H.R. 3978, (Rep. Levin, D-California), a bill to amend the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act to prohibit oil and gas leasing in the Southern California planning area. Introduced on June 9, 2023, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
- H. Res. 486, (Rep. Bonamici, D-Oregon), a resolution recognizing World Oceans Day and the necessity to protect, conserve, maintain, and rebuild our ocean and its resources. Introduced on June 9, 2023, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee, and in addition to the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned.
- S. 1861, (Sen. Wicker, R-Mississippi), a bill to establish a regulatory system for sustainable offshore aquaculture in the United States exclusive economic zone, and for other purposes. Introduced on June 7, 2023, and referred to the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee.
- S. 1860, (Sen. Wicker, R-Mississippi), a bill to direct the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to establish a grant program to fund youth fishing projects. Introduced on June 7, 2023, and referred to the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee.
- H.R. 3925, the “Youth Coastal Fishing Program Act of 2023”, (Rep. Salazar, R-Florida), a bill to direct the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to establish a grant program to fund youth fishing projects. Introduced on June 7, 2023, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
- S. 1833, the “Protecting Whales, Human Safety, and the Economy Act of 2023”, (Sen. Manchin, D-West Virginia), a bill to prohibit the issuance of an interim or final rule that

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amends, updates, modifies, or replaces the North Atlantic Right Whale vessel strike reduction rule until mitigation protocols are fully developed and deployed. Introduced on June 6, 2023, and referred to the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee.

- S. 1808, the “Coastal Communities Ocean Acidification Act of 2023”, (Sen. Murkowski, R-Alaska), a bill to amend the Federal Ocean Acidification Research And Monitoring Act of 2009 to require the Secretary of Commerce, acting through the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, to collaborate with State and local governments and Indian Tribes on vulnerability assessments related to ocean acidification, research planning, and similar activities, and for other purposes. Introduced on June 6, 2023, and referred to the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee.
- S. 1806, the “Ocean Regional Opportunity and Innovation Act of 2023”, (Sen. Murkowski, R-Alaska), a bill to establish Ocean Innovation Clusters to strengthen the coastal communities and ocean economy of the United States through technological research and development, job training, and cross-sector partnerships, and for other purposes. Introduced on June 6, 2023, and referred to the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee.
- H.R. 3873, the “Ocean Regional Opportunity and Innovation Act of 2023”, (Rep. Pingree, D-Maine), a bill to establish Ocean Innovation Clusters to strengthen the coastal communities and ocean economy of the United States through technological research and development, job training, and cross-sector partnerships, and for other purposes. Introduced on June 6, 2023, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee, and in addition to the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee, and the House Financial Services Committee, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned.
- H.R. 3767, (Rep. Graves, R-Louisiana), a bill to require the Council on Environmental Quality to submit to Congress a report on the potential for online and digital technologies to address delays in reviews and improve public accessibility and transparency under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Introduced on May 31, 2023, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
- H.R. 3746, the “Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023”, (Rep. McHenry, R-North Carolina), a bill to provide for a responsible increase to the debt ceiling. Introduced on May 29, 2023, and referred to the House Ways and Means Committee, and in addition to the House Budget Committee, the House Appropriations Committee, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, the House Rules Committee, the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, the House Judiciary Committee, the House Education and the Workforce Committee, the House Agriculture Committee, the House Energy and Commerce Committee, the House Financial Services Committee, the House Natural Resources Committee, the House Small Business Committee, and the House Homeland Security Committee, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned. The legislation passed the House of Representatives on May 31, 2023 by a vote of 314 - 117. The bill then passed the Senate on June 1, 2023 by a vote of 63 – 36. The bill was signed by the President on June 3, 2023 and became Public Law 118-5, included provisions amending the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).
- H.R. 615, the “Protecting Access for Hunters and Anglers Act of 2023”, (Rep. Wittman, R-Virginia), a bill to prohibit the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture from prohibiting the use

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of lead ammunition or tackle on certain Federal land or water under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture, and for other purposes. On June 21, 2023, the bill was amended and ordered reported favorably by a roll call vote of 21 to 15.

- **Scientific Collection Permits**

- Ninety scientific collecting permits have been issued in 2023. An additional three applications have been reviewed and will be processed upon receipt of all required materials.

- **HOT TOPICS/Miscellaneous**

- Administration staff are in discussions with OIT re Shiny server time to facilitate making some open-source R software outreach and calculation tools available to staff and the public. Due to a number of potential obstacles, OIT is strongly supporting the proprietary software Tableau as an alternative. An OIT presentation indicated that Fish and Wildlife is already using Tableau and MRA staff are interested in finding out who, to understand more about Table capabilities and limitations (i.e., how is Fish and Wildlife using this software currently).

****MARINE HABITAT & SHELLFISHERIES/MRA****

- **MRA Website Committee**

- The MRA Website Committee members continue to work on creating and updating content for various MRA webpages.

- **MRA Event Committee**

- Committee members continue to plan for attendance at 2023 events.

- **Environmental Review/Waterfront Development**

- Staff reviewed and provided comments to the Office of Environmental Review on several pre-applications, Land Management Reviews, and waterfront development permit applications. These reviews include:
 - Hyatt Regency Pier Substructure Repairs OPPN Request
 - Staff received a request for structural repairs at the Hyatt Regency Pier in Jersey City, NJ. MRA provided comments for this proposed project.
 - Sea Village Marina Egg Harbor Township
 - MRA staff received a request for the redevelopment of the Sea Village Marina, including removal of existing remnants, dredging, and more. MRA staff provided comments and applied a timing restriction.
 - ASOW Atlantic Shores DEIS
 - MRA staff reviewed the Atlantic Shores DEIS and provided comments.
 - Conaskonk Point Transfer of Management to Monmouth County
 - MRA staff received an LMR request for the transfer of management of the land from the DEP to Monmouth County Parks. MRA provided comments.
 - MRA staff worked with DLRP staff on several mapping interpretations

- **Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV)**

- Staff continued to work on updates to the Natural Working Lands Strategy's (NWLS) blue carbon targets for SAV.

- **SAV Aerial Mapping and Field Validation Survey**

- Staff continued field validation efforts for the 2023 SAV Aerial Mapping Survey. The field validation portion of this project is conducted by visiting sites previously surveyed from the 2003 and 2009 mapping conducted by Lathrop & Haag (2011) and placing an L-shaped grid to estimate

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percent cover of *Zostera marina* (eelgrass), *Ruppia maritima* (widgeon grass), and macroalgae. MRA staff samples ~100 sites throughout the Barnegat Bay to Little Egg Harbor estuary system. Results of the survey will demonstrate how SAV coverage throughout the estuary has changed since the survey was last conducted. MRA staff wrapped up the field validation in late June and is already planning efforts to map northern rivers for the summer of 2024.

- **Delaware Bay Trawl Survey**

- Staff sampled all 11 stations for the survey in June. The stations are in shallow, nearshore waters from the Cohansey River south to the Villas, NJ. The survey started in April and will run through October.

- **Lease Holder Correspondence**

- The Bureau has advised all shellfish leaseholders on securing “Permission to Work” authorization for their employees or person other than the leaseholder that use the lease without the leaseholder present. These authorizations validate the agreement between leaseholder and those given permission in obtaining permits or shellfish seed importations. The PTW would assist Marine Enforcement in protecting lease s from invasion.

- **Shell Recycling Program**

- Staff continues to coordinate with Shell Recycling Program participants for weekly shell collection and investigate additional venues.
- Staff collected **318 bushels** of recycled shell in the month of June.
- Staff communicated with additional venues and beginning in June Resorts Hotel & casino and Tropicana Hotel and Casino became restaurant partners. These venues will be added to the weekly collection route.
- Staff continues to coordinate with CRDA staff to develop a public drop-off location for shell recycling in Atlantic City.
- Staff presented on the Shell Recycling Program at the Rutgers Cooperative Extension Coastal Stewardship Course

- **Mullica River Shell Plant**

- Staff planned and executed the third annual shell plant on the Mullica River oyster reefs. Staff planted an estimated of 6,000 bushels of shell over a 2-acre parcel. Approximately 3,000 bushels of the planted shell, came from the MRA Shell Recycling Program in Atlantic City. Many MRA staff assisted over the course of a three-week period to achieve a successful planting effort. The site will be monitored for spat settlement and as a part of regular survey work in the Mullica River.
- Staff coordinated with Lands Management staff who generously delivered additional shell from Collier’s Mill to Nacote Creek to help achieve this year’s shell planting goals. Staff will continue to work with Lands Management staff to coordinate shell pickup/delivery in the future.
- Staff deployed spat bags over the Mullica River reefs. The bags will be collected bi-weekly and help to assess oyster larvae’s presence in the system. This data over time will help to achieve better timing in shell planting to help it coincide with the oyster spawn to the greatest extent possible.