

# **Marine Resources Administration Monthly Report**

***FEBRUARY 2023***

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# Marine Resources Administration Monthly Report

## **\*\*MARINE FISHERIES/MRA\*\***

### **MEETING SUMMARIES**

#### **• Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission-ASMFC**

- Staff participated in a meeting of the Atlantic Sturgeon Technical and Stock Assessment subcommittees. The main purpose of the call was to determine whether the 2023 assessment should be an update or a full benchmark. After reviewing methods used in the 2017 assessment as well as progress made towards research recommendations deemed critical for the next benchmark, the groups felt that an update assessment in 2023 would be best. Also discussed in this meeting was the reinitiating of an ageing workshop that was delayed due to the inability to coordinate a reference set of paired samples. Staff anticipate receiving the new reference set for ageing as part of the Ageing Subgroup in the fall/winter of this year. The SAS will reconvene in March 2023, with an assessment delivery date to the Management Board by summer 2024.
- Staff attended via webinar the winter meeting of the ASMFC's Shad and River Herring Management Board on Thursday, February 2<sup>nd</sup>. As chair of the Technical Committee, staff presented a brief presentation on an updated sustainable fishery management plan for American shad from the state of North Carolina, highlighting changes to the plan's sustainability parameters and fishing regulations. The plan was approved by the Board by consensus.
- Staff participated in an NRCC Assessment Oversight Panel meeting related to several stocks: summer flounder, scup, spiny dogfish, bluefish, longfin squid, Atl mackerel, and deep sea red crab. The Panel came to consensus assessment review level recommendations on all stocks, and each will be peer reviewed in June (or otherwise reviewed by a technical body), and will provide catch advice generally for the next two years (2024-2025).
- Administration staff participated in a conference call of the menhaden Technical Committee and Ecological Reference Points Working Group. This was a planning call in advance of the upcoming benchmark assessment. The ERP reviewed the tentative assessment terms of reference. Both groups reviewed progress made towards research recommendations. Workshops are planned between May 2023 through February 2025, with a peer review scheduled for August 2025, and presentation to ASMFC management/policy Boards in October 2025.
- MRA staff participated in an Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission Technical Committee meeting for Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass. The meeting focused on the methodology for developing a 10 percent reduction in recreational harvest in 2023 compared to 2022 for black sea bass and scup while retaining status quo measures for summer flounder. Presently, the National Marine Fisheries Services Northeast Science Center (NESC) has a statistical modeler that will be conducting all iterations of proposed management changes for both species, scup and black sea bass, requiring a reduction for 9 states along the coast including NJ. States will have the opportunity to present 10 sets of measures for each species one time a week that will potentially satisfy the reduction. As staff works through options to achieve the reduction, a NJ Marine Fisheries Council recreational advisory committee meeting will be scheduled during the third or fourth week of January to receive feedback, input, and direction forward for each species providing staff the ability to provide weekly revisions to the NESC and further develop a state conservation equivalency proposal to the ASMFC in mid-February.

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- Staff attended the ACCSP's annual Bycatch Prioritization Committee Meeting on February 7<sup>th</sup>. The purpose of the meeting was to update the rankings of commercial bycatch species of importance on the matrix, to be used for the FY25/26 funding years.
- The ASMFC Black Drum Technical Committee (TC) and Stock Assessment Subcommittee (SAS) met via webinar on February 28 to review a revision to the base model used in the stock assessment. The revision was a simplification of the fleet specifications which the peer review panel requested. The SAS agreed the resulting model was an improvement over the original base model and inserted the revised model along with associated results, sensitivity and retrospective analyses into the final stock assessment report as an appendix. The TC agreed with the SAS that the revised model should be recommended for management use at the May meeting of the ASMFC Board.
- **Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council-MAFMC**
  - The Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish (MSB) Advisory Panel met via webinar on February 24<sup>th</sup> to conduct an annual review of the Illex fishery and create the Illex Fishery Performance Report. Three main points were echoed by numerous members of the advisory panel: Loligo fishing was very good, better than Illex, which gave vessels a choice, fuel prices were very high, and squid prices remained stable. It was also recommended to not get focused on the last years Illex performance and it should be considered that there are two types of seasons that have dominated the fishery for the last 30 years and there is a need to stop focusing on the few good years.
- **Marine Fisheries Council/Advisory Committees**
  - Staff conducted a series of two meetings of the NJ Marine Fisheries Council's Recreational Black Sea Bass and Scup Advisory Committee were held via webinar on January 19 and 26, 2023 to discuss management options for the New Jersey recreational black sea bass and scup fisheries for the 2023 fishing year.
- **Miscellaneous**
  - Requests for Ocean Trawl data and associated indices were fulfilled, including one from the group involved with the Ocean Wind RMI glider project to ground-truth their findings. The annual report for the ocean trawl survey was submitted for staff review on Feb 1.
  - A paper on the utilization of the Catch Multiple Survey Analysis for Delaware Bay origin horseshoe crab stock assessment is nearing final revision and re-submission. The lead author is ASMFC scientist Kristen Anstead with all members of the stock assessment subcommittee for the 2019 benchmark assessment (including MRA staff) listed as co-authors. In late January, the paper was given preliminary acceptance by the publication, Marine and Coastal Fisheries, with minor revisions requested by the editors and peer reviewers.

### **INDEPENDENT FISHERIES**

- **Delaware Bay Tagging**
  - The Delaware Bay Striped Bass Tagging Survey began a month earlier than usual on February 1st. During the first six trips, 146 striped bass were caught, which already ranks 3rd highest in the last 10 years. Tagging will continue until the end of April.
- **Eel Surveys**
  - The 2023 Glass Eel Survey began on February 9. The fyke net was set in Patcong Creek and one (1) alternative collector was set in Nacote Creek. Both were sampled daily through the end of the month.
  - Preparation is under way for the 2023 Yellow Eel Pot Survey which is scheduled to begin mid-April. Options for gunwale protection are currently being explored in an attempt to maintain the integrity of the fiberglass along the sides and top of the gunwales. Quotes are being solicited and the work should be completed by April. Annual pre-survey boat maintenance and engine preparation is also underway.

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- A presentation about the development and history of the Yellow Eel Pot Survey was given during the Marine Fisheries staff meeting on February 16. The presentation can be found on the V Drive.
- **Herring Surveys**
  - Staff began preparations for the spring adult gillnet portion of the river herring survey. The vessel and gear were rounded up and are ready to go for the first week of sampling in March.
- **Ocean Trawl**
  - The January Ocean Trawl Survey was cancelled due to prolonged repairs to the survey vessel R/V Seawolf. The repairs are expected to be completed in time for the April survey, scheduled to begin March 30<sup>th</sup>.
- **Sturgeon Receivers**
  - Staff began preparing gear and equipment for the deployment of the sturgeon receivers scheduled for the end of March.

### DEPENDENT FISHERIES

- **Access Point Angler Intercept Survey-AP AIS**
  - Staff have completed mandatory trainings for Fish Identification and Procedure updates. Training was held by ACCSP staff in Providence, RI on February 7-8. Staff not present in RI completed training over two sessions that were held in-state on February 14-15 and February 18-19.
  - All active AP AIS sampling staff have signed the Non-Disclosure Agreement for 2023 sampling. These documents were submitted to ACCSP.
  - All site, vessel and headboat pressure updates for Wave 2 were completed and March's assignment draw was released on February 10th. All 60 site assignments and 3 headboat assignments were scheduled and released to the sampling staff.
- **Biological**
  - 2023 Yellow Eel Pot Survey data was entered into the commercial database. Data collected during the survey includes lengths, weights, otoliths, swim bladder parasite presence/absence, sex and tag information (released or recaptured).
- **Commercial Fisheries/Quota Management**
  - Summer flounder: Preliminary 2022 harvest was 91.5 % of NJ's allocated commercial quota. The 2023 Directed Season 1 began on January 1<sup>st</sup>, with current harvest at 50% of the Seasonal quota.
  - Black sea bass: The commercial black sea bass directed season closed on January 21<sup>st</sup>. An estimated 90% of the seasonal quota was harvested within that three-week period. Season 2 trip limits were set to mirror Season 1, but advisors recommended reducing those trip limits in half to extend the directed season. A letter will be mailed today with those modifications.
  - Menhaden: The commercial menhaden season began on January 1<sup>st</sup>. Landings remain low at less than 1% of the annual quota harvested.
  - Bluefish: The commercial bluefish season began on January 1<sup>st</sup>. Landings remain low at 2% of the annual quota harvested.
  - Scup: The winter I scup season quota is currently 35% harvested. New Jersey accounts for 63% of those landings at 1,460,798 pounds.
  - Spiny dogfish: The 2022/2023 commercial fishery began on May 1. Harvest is currently at 53% of the Seasonal quota.
- **For-Hire Telephone Survey-FHTS**
  - Staff continue winter maintenance of the NOAA vessel directory. These changes will impact the 2023 sampling season which will begin in March. Most changes that were necessary before the wave 2 draw date were completed. There are still a few possible updates that need vessel representative confirmations before being completed.

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- Staff attended annual training hosted by ACCSP via webinar. All FHTS interviewers are now up to date with trainings and knowledge of procedures for the upcoming 2023 sampling season. Staff were also trained on the weekly mailing procedures.
- **NJ Saltwater Recreational Registry Program-NJSRRP/Volunteer Angler Survey-VAS**
  - As of February 28, 2023, there were 22,451 individuals and 248 for-hire vessels registered with the New Jersey Saltwater Recreational Registry Program (NJSRRP) for 2023. (Last month: January 31, 2023, there were 14,817 individuals and 182 for-hire vessels registered with the New Jersey Saltwater Recreational Registry Program for 2023).
- **Striped Bass Bonus Program-SBBP**
  - Staff have entered 2022 SBBP logs from about 1,900 individual anglers and 119 party/charter boats. Staff will continue to finalize the data over the next few weeks. Preparations have begun for the 2023 SBBP. Permits and the print request have been ordered. Staff plan to begin accepting applications April 1st.

### **OUTREACH**

- The first draft of the 2023 Marine Digest was sent to staff on February 3. Edits and comments were compiled and provided to the editor on February 15. The second draft is due during the first week of March.

### **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 surfclam fishery enhancement, passive acoustic monitoring for large cetaceans, satellite tagging of humpback whales, sea turtles, socio-economic impacts of offshore wind on recreational fisheries, surfclam fishery enhancement, and phytoplankton.
    - Staff met with DSR regularly to discuss development of research for the RMI, including a discussion of the evolution of research priorities for the RMI.
    - Staff met with a representative from Lund's Fisheries and the NJ Marine Fisheries Council Offshore Wind Committee to get feedback on the RMI on February 24.
    - Staff attended a public stakeholder meeting for the RMI on February 27.
  - Permitting support
    - Biweekly permitting meetings were held with Atlantic Shores Offshore Wind (ASOW) and Ocean Wind 1 and 2 (OW1 and OW2).
    - Staff met internally on February 9 and then on February 27 with ASOW and the USACE, to discuss the export cable route that lands in Manasquan. ASOW has not identified a route alternative that completely avoids the Axel Carlson artificial reef. Options for requiring avoiding the reef and how to mitigate impacts if avoidance is not possible were considered.
    - Staff met with Community Wind on February 10 to discuss fisheries communication and mitigation for offshore wind on February 10.
    - Staff participated in a meeting with OPPN and DLUR on February 21 to discuss the Federal Consistency determination for Ocean Wind.
  - Offshore wind stakeholder engagement
    - Staff responded to requests for information related to RMI, offshore wind impacts, and recent whale mortalities and offshore wind activities.
    - Staff made a presentation on offshore wind and minimizing impacts to marine resources to DEP staff on February 9 at the Lunch and Learn event. There were over 80 attendees.

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- Board of Public Utilities
  - Staff continued to assist the BPU in preparing the 3<sup>rd</sup> Offshore Wind Solicitation Guidance Document. This included a final meeting to prepare the final document on February 2.
- Regional coordination
  - Staff attended the monthly meeting between the Department and the leads for NYSERDA's E-TWG and F-TWG on February 2 to coordinate on offshore wind research and mitigation.
  - Staff met with a scientist from Oregon State University to discuss offshore wind and community benefits on February 3.
  - Staff worked with commercial fishing representatives in NJ to prepare a poster on opportunities for cooperative research for offshore wind (involving fishing vessels in field work). That poster was presented at the NOAA Cooperative Research Workshop in RI on February 15. Staff spoke with fishers, researchers, and government representatives at that workshop to learn more about facilitating engagement of the fishing industry with offshore wind.
  - Staff attended a pre-meeting for the NYSERDA Maritime Technical Working Group on February 6.
  - Staff met internally and then with a professor and graduate student from Rutgers University to discuss an internship for the student with the MRA to investigate relationships between fish populations and environmental conditions.
  - Staff hosted a meeting of the Central Atlantic Offshore Wind Fisheries group on February 13.
  - Staff met with the offshore wind lead from NOAA Greater Atlantic Fisheries Office on February 24 to discuss permitting for Ocean Wind.

### **MISCELLANEOUS (Marine Resources Administration)**

- **Regulatory/Legislative**
  - Notices of Administrative Changes (NOACs)
    - A rule amendment requiring circle hooks while recreationally fishing for sharks became effective on February 22, 2023. The rule will be published in the March 20, 2023, NJ Register.
    - A rule amendment prohibiting gaffs in the striped bass recreational fishery became effective on February 27, 2023. The rule will be published in the April 3, 2023, NJ Register.
    - A rule amendment reducing the possession limit for American shad in the recreational fishery became effective on February 27, 2023. The rule will be published in the April 3, 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 target proposal first draft is March 2023.
    - 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
    - A4243; S2908; S428/Smith (D17), Oroho (R24); Singer (R30), Cruz-Perez (D5); Thomson (R30) Establishes certain shellfish aquaculture activities as eligible for Right to Farm Protections. 2/2/2023 Passed in Senate and sent to Governor 39-0.

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- A5197/Conaway (D7) Directs DEP to identify oyster reefs in need of restoration and allow certain entities to establish no-harvest restoration sites. 2/16/2023 Introduced and referred to Assembly Environment and Solid Waste Committee.
- S1336/Beach (D6); Greenstein (D14) Directs Department of Agriculture to establish Jersey Fresh sales pilot program; appropriates \$500,000 2/3/2023 Introduced and referred to Senate Environment and Energy Committee. 2/16/2023 Reported out of committee.
- Legislative Activity – Federal
  - H.R. 676/Rep. Pingree (D-ME), Coastal Communities Ocean Acidification Act of 2023: 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. 1/31/2023 Introduced and referred to the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology. 1/26/2023 Introduced. 2/21/2023 Referred to the Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries.
  - H.R.886/Rep. Bonamici (D-OR); S318/Sen Sullivan (R-AK), To amend the Save Our Seas 2.0 Act to improve the administration of the Marine Debris Foundation, to amend the Marine Debris Act to improve the administration of the Marine Debris Program of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and for other purposes. 2/9/2023 Introduced. 2/21/2023 Referred to Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries. 2/9/2023 Introduced and referred to Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation.
  - H.R. 565/Rep. Neguse (D-CO) To require the Director of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to enter into an agreement with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to establish the Community Resilience and Restoration Fund. The term “restoration and resilience lands” means fish, wildlife, and plant habitats, and other important natural areas in the United States, on public lands, private land (after obtaining proper consent from the landowner), or land of Indian Tribes, including grasslands, shrublands, prairies, chaparral lands, forest lands, deserts, and riparian or wetland areas within or adjacent to these ecosystems. 1/26/2023 Introduced. 2/21/2023 Referred to the Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries.
  - H.R.1020/Rep. Moore (R-AL) To amend the Agricultural Act of 2014 to include certain farm-raised fish losses under the livestock indemnity payment program, and for other purposes. 2/14/2023 Introduced in House and referred to the House Committee on Agriculture.
  - H.R.178/Rep. Levin (D-CA) For acquisition of land by the Secretary of the Interior or the Secretary of Agriculture that would result in a net increase of total land acreage under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land Management, or the Forest Service, the Secretary concerned shall offer for sale an equal number of acres of Federal land that is under the same jurisdictional status. 1/9/2023 Introduced in House. 2/21/2023 Referred to Subcommittee on Federal Lands.
  - H.R. 872/Re. Calvert (R-CA) To amend the Endangered Species Act of 1973 to vest in the Secretary of the Interior functions under that Act with respect to species of fish that spawn in fresh or estuarine waters and migrate to ocean waters and species of fish that spawn in ocean waters and migrate to fresh or estuarine waters, and for other purposes. 2/8/2023 Introduced in House. 2/21/2023 Referred to the Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries.
  - H.R. 913, (Rep. Fletcher, D-Texas), a bill to modify the disposition of certain outer Continental Shelf revenues and to open Federal financial sharing to heighten opportunities

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for renewable energy, and for other purposes. Introduced on February 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.

- H.R. 956, (Rep. Smith, R-New Jersey), a bill to prohibit oil and gas exploration, development, and production in the North Atlantic Planning Area of the Outer Continental Shelf. Introduced on February 9, 2023, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
- H.R. 1056, (Rep. Smith, R-New Jersey), a bill to require the Comptroller General to conduct a study to assess certain environmental review processes with regard to offshore wind projects, and for other purposes. Introduced on February 17, 2023, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
- H.R. 1142, (Rep. Pfluger, R-Texas), a bill to amend the Endangered Species Act of 1973 to require consideration of economic impact in making a listing decision with respect to the list of threatened and endangered species, and for other purposes. Introduced on February 21, 2023, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
- H.R. 1196, (Rep. Plaskett, D-Virgin Islands), a bill to require the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to establish a grant program to benefit coastal habitats, resiliency, and the economy, and for other purposes. Introduced on February 24, 2023, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee, and in addition to 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.
- **Nominations**
  - **Referred to Senate Judiciary Committee:** Jeffrey Kaelin, of Cape May, to replace Thomas Fote on Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission.
- **Scientific Collection Permits**
  - Sixty-two scientific collecting permits have been issued in 2023. An additional two applications have been reviewed and will be processed upon receipt of all required materials.

### **\*\* MARINE HABITAT & SHELLFISHERIES/MRA \*\***

#### **MRA Outreach, Education, and Communications**

- **MRA Website Committee**
  - The MRA Website Committee members continue to work on creating and updating content for various MRA webpages.
- **MRA Event Committee**
  - The MRA Event Committee continues to plan for attendance at 2023 events. MRA exhibited at the Surf Day Show in February 2023.

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

- **Restoration and Enhancement**
  - Staff attended the monthly New Jersey Bay Islands Initiative meeting. The meeting focused on partner updates and the Bay Island Restoration Planner online tool.



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- Staff met with other MRA staff to discuss the development of a quantitative survey for the Mullica River oyster reefs. The Bureau of Marine Habitat & Shellfisheries has performed a long-standing qualitative survey on these reefs since the 1950s. The Bureau intends to create a more quantitative survey and sampling plan that will allow for more frequent and accurate data collection. Staff will continue to work with other MRA staff to delineate these reefs using side scan sonar and habitat echo sounders. Updated mapping products will assist in survey development.
- **Offshore Wind**
  - Consultations continue with DLRP and Ocean Wind regarding OW's proposed cable route through eelgrass beds and habitat in Barnegat Bay. The proposed route crosses IBSP and exits through a derelict channel that is surrounded by high density SAV beds. Some SAV is also found within the derelict channel. On the western side of the bay at the proposed landing site known as "the Farm" or "Holtec" there is a historic documentation of SAV but none recently found by Ocean Wind's surveys (although the surveys were not always conducted under the most appropriate conditions). In all, the amount of potentially impacted SAV from the cable installation (including the work area for equipment, anchoring, etc.) is likely to be substantial and will require long-term monitoring and active mitigation (up to 10 years). SAV mitigation is often unsuccessful.
- **Shell Recycling Program**
  - Staff continues to coordinate with Shell Recycling Program participants for weekly shell collection and investigate additional venues.
  - Staff collected **258** bushels of recycled shell in the month of February.
  - Staff completed the movement of collected shell from the primary storage location to the secondary location in preparation for the upcoming planting beginning in June of 2023.
  - Staff met with Hard Rock Hotel & Casino staff to discuss the status of shell collection, advertisement of the program, and a direction for 2023. Staff will continue to communicate with Hard Rock staff to allow for continued success in shell collection from this venue.
  - Staff is finalizing the 2022 annual Shell Recycling Program report. The report outlines the entire shell recycling process, including program history, collection methods, collection results, outreach, and plans for the new year.
  - Staff provided updated information for the Shell Recycling website to outreach staff. The website will be updated to display all current partners, logos, and updated information regarding shell planting activities.
  - Staff virtually attended the quarterly Shell Recycling Partnership meeting. The group is made up of representatives from NGOs, academia, industry, and the State. The meeting focused on the development of Best Management Practices for shell recycling in the State of NJ. Staff will continue to assist with the drafting of these practices to help ensure shell recycling is done responsibly throughout the State.
- **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:
    - Lower New York Bay Lateral Maintenance Project
      - The project proposed to perform maintenance on several areas of underwater pipeline. The proposal includes four areas in New Jersey that will receive rock placement over the pipeline. Staff compiled and provided comments and contact information for project leads of MRA surveys that operate in the area.

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- Point Pleasant Bulkhead Repair
  - Project proposed bulkhead repairs on the Northern end of the Point Pleasant Canal. Staff compiled and provided appropriate timing restrictions, recommendations for public access, and guidance on nearby SAV habitat.
- Abbotts Meadow Wildlife Management Area Marsh restoration/habitat enhancement
  - The project proposed the restoration of wetlands within the Abbotts Meadow WMA. Staff requested that best management practices for deploying and containing dredge material for beneficial reuse be adhered to.
- Brigantine Inlet Borrow Area
  - The project looked to expand an access channel to the Brigantine inlet borrow area. Staff compiled and provided appropriate timing restrictions and comments.
- High Bar Harbor Living Shoreline
  - The project intends to have three phases, including the installation of a rock sill with spat-on shell, filling behind the sill with dredge material, and vegetative plantings. Staff compiled and provided comments on appropriate timing restrictions, SAV, and shellfish considerations and requested clarification on project details. Staff will continue to work with DLRP to provide further comments on the project.
- Margate City Dredging Project
  - The project intends to dredge Orient Canal, Sunset Canal, Bayshore lagoon, and Beach Thorofare in Margate. Staff provided guidance on shellfish habitat and timing restrictions.
- NJ Turnpike Authority Interchanges 1 to 4 Capacity Enhancements Project
  - The project proposed various improvements, including road widening and lane additions. Staff provided feedback specifically on the bridge crossings over the Delaware River Tributaries.
- Brick Township Dredging Project
  - Project proposed dredging of Cartagena lagoon. Staff provided appropriate timing restrictions and comments regarding nearby documented SAV.
- Cape May County Dredging Project
  - Proposed a small dredging project in Avalon, Cape May County. Staff identified mapped shellfish habitat and requested all best management practices for dredging be adhered to.
- Colonial Pipeline Raritan River crossing
  - Proposed horizontal directional drilling cable crossing in the Raritan River. Staff requested all HDD best management practices be adhered to.
- Staff assisted DLRP staff on several mapping interpretations for waterfront development applications with potential impacts to shellfish and submerged aquatic vegetation.
- Staff assisted OER staff with assessing several timing restriction modification requests.
- Staff provided general guidance to USACE in support of their request for direction in preparing mitigation plans for impacts to shellfish and SAV habitat resulting from executing the proposed tide gates and other structures in the Back Bay Flood Risk Mitigation Study (not yet funded by Congress). This included providing USACE with locations of existing SAV mitigation plots (for the Rt 72 bridge), directing them to DLRP's Mitigation Technical Manual, and indicating that the Bureau does not have 'preset' or established locations for receiving either shellfish or SAV mitigation activities...such locations are usually agreed upon on a case-by-case basis. Staff also indicated that avoidance of SAV habitats is the preferred first approach to lessening impacts, as

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active mitigation (seeding or planting of SAV) is very expensive, time consuming, and often unsuccessful.

- **CHARM Presentation on SAV policy in NJ**
  - Staff presented on current sources of information, survey methods, policies, and desired research relative to SAV and living shorelines/habitat improvement projects at the monthly CHARM meeting. Staff from the Division of Land Resource Protection presented on CZM rules and permits needed for living shoreline/habitat enhancement projects that potentially impact or are designed to improve SAV habitat. Feedback from participants was positive, and indicated that much of the information shared was previously unknown, particularly the Bureau's perspectives on trade-offs between SAV resources and others (like wetlands) when implementing projects and desired research on impacts to SAV from projects that purport to avoid or improve SAV habitat.
- **Chapter on SAV Policy to Barnegat Bay Partnership**
  - Staff drafted and finalized a chapter on SAV policy in NJ for a forthcoming technical document on standardizing SAV restoration methods and success criteria by Barnegat Bay Partnership. The chapter discussed current SAV policy in the state of NJ, as well as policy in nearby states. The purpose was to compare NJ to nearby states and demonstrate what changes for SAV policy may be needed in the future.
- **Upcoming SAV Mapping Project**
  - Staff communicated, and continues to communicate, with Dr. Lathrop at Rutgers University and Dr. Lacey at Stockton University in preparation for upcoming SAV fieldwork relating to a mapping project. Staff plans to meet and train with Dr. Lacey on field validation methods and equipment needs for this project soon.

## GIS Data Development

- Staff are nearing final publication of shellfish and SAV resource layers along the Atlantic Coast dating 1963-2015. The work required multiple different approaches to developing the data, moving from georeferencing and creating data from older images (1963-1980s) and then transitioning to imputing raw data from 2000-2015 into the software to draw the maps, and finalize that method for all future map production (everything that will come after 2015). Staff continue to work with F&W OIS to finalize the organization format within forthcoming GeoHub and GeoWeb products. There are challenges with providing a format that meets the user-friendly needs of MRA staff, DLRP staff, and the public, and the data management efficiency needs of F&W OIS. These data sets are in high demand from multiple DEP and external users:
  - MRA/BSF for review of waterfront development permits
  - DLRP for review of waterfront development permits
  - Rutgers' Aquaculture Siting Tool
  - Bay Islands Initiative (The Nature Conservancy and partners)
  - Orsted (for their Ocean Wind I project)
  - USACE for Backbay Flood Risk Mitigation study and implementation
  - Bureau and externally funded SAV and shellfish enhancement projects, as part of climate change, coastal resilience, or blue carbon funding initiatives
  - RGGI blue/green carbon grant funding opportunities/planning

## Aquaculture and Shellfish Leases

- **Aquaculture Coordination Meeting**
  - Bureau staff attended the Aquaculture Coordination meeting on February 9, 2023. Meeting attendees consisted of other state and federal agencies involved in aquaculture and discussion

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included permit compliance, floating cages/bird deterrents, Aquaculture Right to Farm, and the Sunday Harvest Bill.

- **Public Meeting – Bird Deterrents on Structural Aquaculture**
  - Bureau staff attended a public meeting hosted by the Bureau of Marine Water Monitoring on February 21, 2023. Attendance included state representative and shellfish industry members to discuss the potential threat of bird waste to water quality and public health and held an open discussion on potential bird deterrents to use on structural aquaculture leases.
- **NJ Aquatic Invasive Species Management Plan – Working Group**
  - Bureau staff attended a meeting to discuss the development of a NJ Aquatic Invasive Species Management Plan.
- **Commercial Shellfish Aquaculture Website Committee**
  - Bureau of Shellfisheries staff in partnership with other agencies continue to work on managing the [NJ Commercial Shellfish Aquaculture website](#).
- **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.
- **Aquaculture Development Zone**
  - Staff worked in conjunction with Bureau of Land Management to issue a permit to allow a non-ADZ leaseholder to utilize the beach access found in Dennis Creek W.M.A. The access was created as part of the Programmatic Biological Opinion concerning red knots (*Calidris canutus*). By issuing the permit, the grower will be held to the same standards as ADZ leaseholders, which ensures the safety of red knots, when present, and minimizes the impact on the surrounding habitat.
  - Staff facilitated the issuance of an ADZ lease. The application for the lease went before the Delaware Bay Section of the New Jersey Shellfisheries Council for consideration in January, and was approved at the March Council meeting. The new lease is a three acre parcel located intertidal waters that can be accessed by both land and water.
- **Dennis Creek WMA**
  - Bureau staff continue improvements to the WMA's beach access to avoid user conflicts.

### State Fisheries and Quota Management

- **Direct Market Harvest Program – 2023**
  - Quotes to purchase tags were obtained from three vendors. Tags for the 2023 DMH season were ordered from Dickey Manufacturing Company on 1/31/23 and delivered 3/2/23.
  - 30,000 Single/white and 4,000 cage/neon orange
- **Delaware Bay Oyster Tonging Fishery**
  - Bushel tags were ordered for the 2022-2023 tonging season. There were 4,000 white single H-Seal tags ordered on 8/10 and were received 8/29.
  - Water Classification Charts were updated by Bureau of Marine Water Monitoring. Some downgraded waters affected tonging areas.
  - Season open November 1 – April 30
  - Weekly Harvest & Dealer Reports required
  - Season Tag Sales and Harvest highlights:

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	Oct '22	Nov '22	Dec '22	Jan '23	Feb '23	Mar '23	Apr '23	Oct - Feb Total
Single Tags Sold (\$2 ea)	500	250	250	100	150			1,250
Revenue	\$1,000	\$500	\$500	\$200	\$300			\$2,500
Weekly Report (bu)	0	380	236	154	104			874
Dealer Report (bu)	0	339	188	152	116			795

- **Delaware River Tributaries Survey**

- Staff informed the Delaware Bay Section of the New Jersey Shellfisheries Council that it would be focusing its mapping and survey efforts in the area of Nantuxent Cove and its three tributaries (Back, Cedar, and Nantuxent Creeks) at the start of the 2023 field season, following the deployment of hydrophones for the federally funded sturgeon monitoring program. This will be done to aid in resource enhancement efforts in the area, which are planned to immediately follow the Direct Market Harvest Program's shell planting effort. At the meeting, Council approved the spending funds from the sale of tonging tags collected over the past ten years. Staff is also contacting members of the tonging industry to receive comments on location of know resources throughout various tributaries along the Delaware Bay and where to focus enhancement efforts. Comments, survey findings, and a finalized enhancement plan will be presented at the next Council meeting in May.

### Surveys/Laboratory

- **2023 Field Schedule**

- Staff coordinated and drafted the 2023 Delaware Bay Office field schedule and distributed it to Bureau staff 1/25/23. There were 41 days scheduled for projects conducted by the Bureau annually, and approximately 15 days (+/- a few days) scheduled for the oyster enhancement projects typically conducted annually to total approximately 56 days.
- During February, staff discussed other projects likely occurring in March, April, and July that would be added to the existing 2023 schedule. The projects involve habitat mapping with the Bureau's Side-scan Sonar unit, and enhancement projects for the Delaware Bay Tongers Areas.
- Nacote staff has created a living Gantt chart document to keep track of all Bureau field schedule dates. Staff plan to keep the document updated throughout the year with changes or additional projects as needed.

### 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.
  - Recent repairs needed for the R/V Zephyrus include replacement of an alternator and starter. Additional electronic issues are currently being diagnosed.
  - The R/V Joseph has its continued maintenance and repairs being conducted at the boat yard including hydraulic work, fiberglass repairs, and hull painting.

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

### Administrative/Miscellaneous

## **Marine Resources Administration Monthly Report**

- **License Sales**
  - Revenue collected from the Delaware Bay Office totaled \$5,236.00 for February 2023.
- **E-Library**
  - Staff continued work on an e-library (Zotero) to store literature for reference. Once complete, the e-library will provide easy access for Bureau staff to all literature. It will also enable staff to add future literature as needed.