

# **Marine Resources Administration Monthly Report**

***APRIL 2023***

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

### **MEETING SUMMARIES**

- **Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program-ACCSP**

- Staff attended the annual ACCSP Commercial Technical Committee webinar. Major discussion points were commercial discards, conversion factors, confidential access, and clarification on dispositions. ACCSP also presented a new interface for SAFIS trip queries.
- Staff attended the annual ACCSP Information Systems Committee meeting. Major discussion points were software project updates and security updates.
- Staff attended an ACCSP validation workshop. During the workshop partners from all east coast states were encouraged to submit data on how their state uses data from the Standard Atlantic Fisheries Information System.
- Staff attended the ACCSP Operations/Advisory Committee Spring Webinar. The FY2024 Request for Proposals was reviewed and approved for distribution on May 8.

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

- Administration staff met with the Atlantic menhaden and ecological reference point (ERP) working groups to discuss considering an update assessment (vs benchmark) for menhaden (everyone generally on board with this) and discuss plans related to methods and data workshops for the ERP models. We are at the early stages of these assessments (planned for summer 2025), but once completed, they will form the basis of coastwide management for menhaden.
- Administration staff met with the ASMFC's assessment science committee (ASC). Main topics of discussion included recommendations for some changes to the stock assessment schedule to accommodate workloads, and loss of functionality to NOAA's MRIP query page related to their new data standards. This loss will hamper staff and frustrate some likely comparatively small segment of stakeholders.
- The ASMFC Tautog Technical Committee (TC) met via webinar on April 3, 2023, to draft a set of core questions to be included in a survey about the commercial tagging program. The TC members will distribute the survey to their respective states' tautog harvesters and dealers regarding their experiences with the program. The survey will focus specifically on the tags currently in use as the ASMFC has received numerous complaints about these tags causing injuries, infections and mortality to the fish. The TC will meet in May to discuss the survey results.
- The ASMFC Tautog Plan Review Team (PRT) met via webinar on April 20, 2023 to discuss the results of state compliance report reviews and to discuss edits to the draft Fishery Management Plan Review Report for fishing year 2021. The PRT compliance review conclusions and the final FMP Review Report will be presented to the Tautog Management Board at the ASMFC summer meeting in August.

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

- A joint Sturgeon Bycatch Fishery Management Action Team (FMAT)/ Plan Development Team (PDT), formed by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and New England Fishery Management Council, met on Friday, April 21<sup>st</sup> via webinar to discuss a framework action to address Atlantic sturgeon bycatch in the monkfish and spiny dogfish gillnet fisheries. The joint FMAT/PDT met to discuss action plan recommendations as they relate to the monkfish and dogfish gillnet fisheries, develop types of measures to be refined into a range of alternatives, and discuss what other information/data analyses would be helpful beyond the action plan. Discussed was requiring vessels

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to use low-profile gear, consideration of small time/area closures, and restrictions on soak time for gillnet gear. A hot spot map was shared which showed New Jersey and Virginia had the highest number of observed sturgeon interactions, although due to confidentiality reasons, more information could not be shared. The measures put forward by the joint FMAT/PDT would only apply to federal waters with the hope that similar measures will be adopted by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC).

## **INDEPENDENT FISHERIES**

### **• Delaware Bay Tagging**

- The Delaware Bay Striped Bass Tagging Survey has concluded for 2023. During 16 trips, 273 striped bass were tagged, which ranks 2nd highest in the last 12 years. Scale samples were taken from 276 striped bass. The majority of striped bass (265) were tagged in the month of February.

### **• Delaware River Seine Survey**

- Data from the 2023 Delaware River Seine Survey was validated and finalized. The full database was submitted to PSEG as required by their funding grant on April 17.
- Data was compiled for the annual striped bass compliance report. During the 2022 sampling season, 191 seine hauls were performed, catching 293 age zero striped bass, producing a whole river geometric mean CPUE index of 0.77. This ranks as the 28th highest index in the 43-year time-series and is below both the time-series average (1.02) and the average of the last ten years (1.11). Young-of-year (yoy) striped bass occurred in 90 out of the 191 samples taken (47%) with individual catches ranging from 0 to 26 bass. There were 14 yearling striped bass caught for a geometric mean CPUE index of 0.045 (Table 10). The number of yearlings ranked 35th in the time-series.

### **• Eel Surveys**

- The 2023 Glass Eel Survey was completed on April 14. Data is currently being entered and validated.
- The 2023 Spring Yellow Eel Pot Survey (Great Bay) began on April 17. Sampling protocols were updated prior to the start of the survey.

### **• Herring Surveys**

- The gill net portion of the of the River Herring Survey has been sampling 2 days a week through the month of April. Catches on both rivers have been dominated by Alewife and white perch. Striped Bass scales and otoliths have been collected from 13 fish.

### **• Ocean Trawl**

- The April Ocean Trawl Survey was completed in 6 sampling days on April 6th. Catches were relatively light, consisting primarily of male spiny dogfish, little skates, and large amounts of horseshoe crabs south around Cape May. Notable catches include 13 Atlantic sturgeon, with the largest measuring 212cm total length. Fewer than average numbers of river herring were caught, but the survey was executed earlier than normal. Bottom temperatures are still very cold, around 7 Celsius.

### **• Raritan-Sandy Hook Bay Complex Inventory Project**

- The Raritan Inventory Project began April sampling on April 4<sup>th</sup> 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 striped bass (n=8), but also caught an Atlantic menhaden and a horseshoe crab. Otter trawl sampling consisted of primarily bay anchovies and spotted hake. Seine sampling consisted only of mostly Atlantic silverside and killifish (both striped and mummichog). Sixteen eDNA water samples were collected and filtered from otter trawl stations and nine eDNA water samples were collected and filtered from seine stations.

### **• Sturgeon Receivers**

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- Staff downloaded data from the sturgeon receivers in Delaware Bay for the first time since their initial 2023 deployment in March. All 19 receivers were located. The acoustic receivers are used to track tagged sturgeon and understand their temporal/spatial movements around Delaware Bay. Data downloads and analyses will take place monthly until November when the receivers will be pulled from the water for the winter.
- **Ventless Trap Survey**
  - Staff is conducting the 8th year of sampling and has just concluded the April/May period for 2023. Bottom temperatures on both the northern Sea Girt site and the southern Little Egg Inlet Site started measured 6 degrees Celsius resulting in light catches dominated by crabs and very few fish. The survey typically runs for 4 weeks, however this season we extended an extra week to observe catches and diversity during increased water temperatures. As bottom temperatures rose to 11 degrees Celsius catches increased dramatically. Traps transitioned from nearly only crab catches to an abundance of black sea bass and increased numbers of tautog. Interestingly, bottom temperatures increased first in our southern sites and consequently saw the first increase in both species' biomass and assemblage in the traps. Also of note was the difference in biomass of spider crabs in the southern site compared to the northern site where the southern site produced consistently larger catches than the north with that increase scaling up with increased temperatures.

### DEPENDENT FISHERIES

- **Access Point Angler Intercept Survey-APAIS**
  - The draw for April consisted of 91 site assignments and 3 head boat assignments that yielded a total of 599 intercepts (187 SH, 51 CH, 340 PR, 21 HB).
  - Staff continue to make updates to the Vessel Directory and Site Register in preparation for Wave 4.
  - April mileage has been validated and submitted for reimbursement; March mileage reimbursements have been received.
  - Wave 2 sampling ended with a total of 646 intercepts (206 SH, 51 CH, 355 PR, 34 HB) which is more than double the intercepts collected in Wave 2 of 2022 across all modes other than HB.
  - Data for the March Fishdump were reviewed and necessary edits were submitted.
  - Interviews were conducted for an ASMFC contracted NJ APAIS technician.
- **Commercial Fisheries/Quota Management**
  - Staff has been entering and proofing all commercial harvester trip reports for 2023. Reports have been slow during the winter and early spring months.
  - Staff approved 2 confidential access requests. The applicants are from a state, federal partners and contractors and were receiving initial or renewal of their access.
  - Staff provided state and ACCSP staff with commercial landings for American eel, Atlantic croaker, blue crab, bluefish, tautog, spiny dogfish and spot.
  - Staff worked with state biologists and endangered and non- game staff on terrapin and crab pot interactions.
- **For-Hire Telephone Survey-FHTS**
  - 72 vessels were drawn for the month of April. 14 vessel representatives responded, resulting in a response rate of 19.4%.
  - Staff completed all vessel directory changes that were needed ahead of the Wave 3 FHTS draw on April 18<sup>th</sup>. New Jersey's imports inbox was also cleared ahead of the Wave 3 draw, allowing all HMS permit renewals and new permit applications to be pushed through with the proper vessels.
  - Staff continue to print, pack and mail the weekly mailings on time with no complications.
- **NJ Saltwater Recreational Registry Program-NJSRRP/Volunteer Angler Survey-VAS**

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- As of April 30, 2023, there were 60,837 individuals and 495 for-hire vessels registered with the New Jersey Saltwater Recreational Registry Program (NJSRRP) for 2023. (Last month: March 31, 2023, there were 37,570 individuals and 361 for-hire vessels registered for 2023).
- **Striped Bass Bonus Program-SBBP**
  - Staff began accepting applications for the 2023 Striped Bass Bonus Program (SBBP) which will open May 15, 2023. Staff have issued permits to 4,609 individuals and 117 party/charter boats so far. The SBBP webpage was updated, and an email message was sent out to Marine Fisheries email subscribers. Staff completed entering and proofing 2022 SBBP data. In 2022, 5,742 bonus fish were harvested weighing 36,807 pounds, which represents 17.0% of the quota. This ranks as the 3rd highest harvest (by numbers of fish) and 8th highest harvest (by pounds) in the 33-year time series.
- **Tournament Sampling**
  - Staff began preparations for the 2023 tournament & party/charter boat sampling program. Staff are scheduled to attend eight tournament weigh-ins during May. The majority of May tournaments focus on striped bass.

### **OUTREACH**

- The fourth and final drafts of the 2023 Marine Digest were reviewed and final comments/edits were submitted to the editor. The digest is currently being printed by the publisher, with an anticipated shelf date on or around May 10.
- Staff participated in an interview with Tom P of Rack N Fin Radio. The interview mainly focused on the Bureau's Striped Bass Tagging Survey. Topics included the history, funding, and results from the tagging data.
- Staff conducted an ESPN interview on Rack and Fin Radio this month providing the show with a summer flounder prospectus prior to the opening of the fishery on May 2 this year. Staff provided background on the management process this year as well as tips and tricks for fishing for this species on NJ reefs and finding other productive bottom both in the back bays and ocean.

### **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, archival and real-time passive acoustic monitoring for large cetaceans, satellite tagging of humpback whales, benthic monitoring, 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 DSR to discuss RMI project development and Solicitation #3.
    - Staff participated in the proposal review committee for NYSERDA's call for proposals for offshore wind research projects.
    - Staff attended the Wind Institute Symposium and assisted in a session for collaboration of RMI projects.
  - Permitting support
    - Biweekly permitting meetings were held with Atlantic Shores Offshore Wind (ASOW) and Ocean Wind 1 and 2 (OW1 and OW2).

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- Staff completed comments on the CAFRA permitting and Federal Consistency for Ocean Wind 1. Those permits were issued on April 27. The following are fish and fisheries related highlights from the Federal Consistency certification:
  - Ocean Wind would implement a **compensation program** for lost income for commercial and recreational fishermen and other eligible fishing interests for construction and operations consistent with BOEM’s draft guidance for Mitigating Impacts to Commercial and Recreational Fisheries on the Outer Continental Shelf Pursuant to 30 CFR 585 or as modified in response to public comment.
  - Ocean Wind, LLC shall develop a **Project Mitigation Plan that is informed by public engagement**, consultation with the appropriate state, federal (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries), and regional, nongovernment organizations (i.e., the Regional Wildlife Science Collaborative for Offshore Wind and the Responsible Offshore Science Alliance). The Plan shall summarize the expected impacts; describe and provide technical details for each mitigation measure (including the type of impact to which it relates and the conditions under which it is required); identify policies and standards to be used and complied with; and, be responsive to impacts detected in project monitoring and other monitoring and research studies and initiatives, including Ocean Wind Fisheries Monitoring Plan, Ocean Wind Benthic Monitoring Plan, and the New Jersey Research and Monitoring Initiative for Offshore Wind.
  - Therefore, to minimize impacts to the fisheries resource and fishing industries uses, a **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to be executed by the Department and Ocean Wind LLC will establish a Compensatory Mitigation Fund** to compensate fishermen for verifiable claims of negative impacts of a significant nature, including economic losses, caused by the Ocean Wind 1 offshore wind facility during its construction, operation and/or decommissioning. The Letter of Intent to execute the MOU was executed by the Department and Ocean Wind LLC on April 27, 2023.
- The following are highlights from the State Permit:
  - No activities authorized in Barnegat Bay under this permit may commence until a monetary contribution has been made to the Department’s account for Shellfish Habitat Mitigation. This contribution is based upon the area of shellfish habitat impacted by the electric transmission cable installations, the documented shellfish density, and the commercial value of the shellfish resource.
  - Prior to any construction activities in Barnegat Bay authorized by this permit, the permittee shall perform a submerged aquatic vegetation (“SAV”) habitat pre-construction survey of the work area...Upon completion of the pre-construction survey, the permittee shall coordinate with the Department to develop a mitigation plan for the impacts to SAV.
  - No sediment generating activities (e.g., pile-driving, sheet driving, dredging, etc.) shall occur within State waters, including the Atlantic Ocean inlets and/or any tidal waterway, between March 1st and June 30th of each calendar year to protect anadromous fish and spawning activities during migration for diadromous fish.
- Staff provided talking points to the Commissioner’s Office on the NOAA Biological Opinion for Ocean Wind on the Endangered Species Act.
- Stakeholder Engagement

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- Staff assisted the Deputy Chief of Staff prepare for the April meeting of the NJ Environmental Resources Working Group and made a presentation at the meeting about development of research priorities.
- Board of Public Utilities
  - Staff assisted BPU prepare for quarterly BMP meetings for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Solicitation awardees. Staff made recommendations to the developers related to planning for fisheries and environmental monitoring and mitigation.
- Regional coordination
  - Staff attended a NYSERDA F-TWG Meeting regarding the NYSERDA Site Assessment Activities for Master Plan 2.0. Staff will participate in the Project Advisory Committee for the Environmental Sensitivity Analysis.
  - Staff met with the program manager for the NYSERDA F-TWG to coordinate project monitoring and cooperative research.
  - Staff attended a presentation on the Integrated Ecosystem Assessment for the Gulf of Maine hosted by the Responsible Offshore Development Alliance.
  - Staff attended a quarterly meeting of Project WOW as an external Advisory Council member.
  - Staff met with the Research Director of the Responsible Offshore Science Alliance a second time to discuss regional coordination of project-specific monitoring.
- Other
  - Staff attended a webinar, Marine Biodiversity and Offshore Wind Infrastructure.

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

#### **• Regulatory/Legislative**

- Notices of Administrative Changes (NOACs)
  - A rule amendment prohibiting gaffs in the striped bass recreational fishery was published in the April 3, 2023, NJ Register.
  - A rule amendment reducing the possession limit for American shad in the recreational fishery was published in the April 3, 2023, NJ Register.
  - A rule amendment modifying recreational black sea bass size, season and possession limits, and recreational scup season and possession limits was filed with the Office of Administrative Law on March 31, 2023, for publication in the May 1, 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
  - No Activity to report due to Budget Hearings.
- Legislative Activity – Federal
  - H.R.1020/Rep. Moore (R-AL), "BAITS Act" To amend the Agricultural Act of 2014 to include certain farm-raised fish losses under the livestock indemnity payment program, and for other purposes. 4/28/2023 referred to Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities, Risk Management, and Credit.

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- H.R. 2950, (Rep. Huffman, D-California)/S1381 (Sen. Cardin (D-MD), a bill to authorize the Secretary of the Interior, through the Coastal Program of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, to work with willing partners and provide support to efforts to assess, protect, restore, and enhance important coastal landscapes that provide fish and wildlife habitat on which certain Federal trust species depend, and for other purposes. 4/27/2023 Introduced and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
- H.R. 2560 (Rep. Keating, D-Massachusetts), The “Sea Turtle Rescue Assistance Act of 2023”, a bill to require the Secretary of Commerce to establish the Sea Turtle Rescue Assistance Grant Program, and for other purposes. Introduced on April 10, 2023, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
- H.R. 2716 (Rep. Malliotakis, R-New York), The “Offshore Wind for Northeastern Energy Revenue Act” or the “OWNER Act”, a bill to distribute revenue from offshore wind projects in the New York Bight Area to certain coastal States and promote conservation and workforce development. Introduced on April 19, 2023, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
- H.R. 2735, the “Coastal State Climate Preparedness Act of 2023”, (Rep. Carbajal, D-California), a bill to amend the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972 to require the Secretary of Commerce to establish a coastal climate change adaptation preparedness and response program, and for other purposes. Introduced on April 20, 2023, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee.
- S. 1227 (Sen. Sullivan, R-Alaska), The “Fighting Foreign Illegal Seafood Harvests Act of 2023” or the “FISH Act of 2023”, a bill to combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing at its sources globally. Introduced on April 20, 2023, and referred to the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee.
- H.R. 2811/Rep Arrington (R-TX), The “Limit, Save, Grow Act of 2023” a bill to provide for a responsible increase to the debt ceiling, and for other purposes. SEC. 20118. OFFSHORE WIND ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS STUDY. (a) INGENERAL. —Not later than 60 days after the date of the enactment of this section, the Comptroller General shall conduct a study to assess the sufficiency of the environmental review processes for offshore wind projects in place as of the date of the enactment of this section of the National Marine Fisheries Service, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, and any other relevant Federal agency. Introduced on April 25, 2023. On April 26, 2023, the bill passed the House of Representatives.
- H.R.1213 (Rep. Grijalva, D-Arizona), “Restoring Effective Science-based Conservation Under Environmental laws protecting Whales Act of 2023” or the “RESCUE Whales Act of 2023”, a bill to amend the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 by repealing certain provisions relating to North Atlantic right whales. On April 18, 2023, the House Natural Resources Committee’s Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries held a hearing. On April 11, 2023, the House Natural Resources Committee’s Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries held a legislative field hearing.
- H.R. 1335 (Rep. Westerman, R- Arkansas), “Transparency, Accountability, Permitting, and Production of American Resources Act” or the “TAPP American Resources Act”, a bill to restart onshore and offshore oil, gas, and coal leasing, streamline permitting for energy infrastructure, ensure transparency in energy development on Federal lands, and for other purposes. Introduced on March 3, 2023, and referred to the House Natural Resources Committee; and in addition to the House Agriculture Committee, and the House Budget Committee. On March 9, 2023, the House Natural Resources Committee ordered the bill to be



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Reported (Amended) by the Yeas and Nays: 24 – 19. On March 23, 2023, the report to accompany the legislation was filed. On March 23, 2023, the House Agriculture Committee was discharged from further consideration. On March 23, 2023, the House Budget Committee was discharged from further consideration. On March 23, 2023, the bill was placed on the Union Calendar.

- H.R.2734 (Rep Carbajal (D-CA), "Ocean Acidification Research Partnerships Act" to provide for ocean acidification collaborative research grant opportunities. The Secretary shall provide grants for collaborative research projects on ocean acidification developed and conducted through partnerships between the seafood industry and the academic community. 4/20/2023 Introduced and referred to the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology.
- H.R.872/Rep. Calvert (R-CA), "Federally Integrated Species Health Act" or the "FISH Act", a bill 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. (Note: this legislation would amend Section 3 of the Endangered Species Act by transferring all authority for the conservation of endangered or threatened anadromous and catadromous fish species from the Department of Commerce to the Department of the Interior.) On March 29, 2023, the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee ordered the bill to be reported by the Yeas and Nays: 35 – 0.
- S.1149/Sen. Heinrich (D-NM), To amend the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act to make supplemental funds available for management of fish and wildlife species of greatest conservation need as determined by State fish and wildlife agencies, and for other purposes. 3/30/2023 Introduced in Senate, referred to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.
- H.J.Res.46/Rep Bentz (R-OR), Providing for congressional disapproval under chapter 8 of title 5, United States Code, of the rule submitted by the National Marine Fisheries Service relating to "Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Regulations for Listing Endangered and Threatened Species and Designating Critical Habitat". 3/30/2023 Introduced and referred to NR Committee. 4/18/2023 Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries hearing held. 4/28/2023 Mark-up session held and ordered to be reported by the yeas and nays 17-12.
- H.R.1213 (Rep. Grijalva, D-Arizona), "Restoring Effective Science-based Conservation Under Environmental laws protecting Whales Act of 2023" or the "RESCUE Whales Act of 2023", a bill to amend the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 by repealing certain provisions relating to North Atlantic right whales. On April 18, 2023, the House Natural Resources Committee's Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries held a hearing.
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- **Scientific Collection Permits**

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

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## **\*\*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**
  - Committee members continue to plan for attendance at 2023 events.
- **Outreach Events**
  - MRA staff participated in the [ACUA Earth Day Event](#). Exhibits highlighted various MRA surveys, projects and regulatory information.
- **Presentations**
  - Staff presented on the MRA's Shell Recycling Program for Commissioner LaTourette's monthly Teams broadcast. The presentation provided a general overview of the program and future plans.
  - Staff attended the Solid Waste Association of North America (SWANA) conference to present on the Shell Recycling Program and participate in a panel discussion on innovative recycling. The panel discussion included representatives from local and state government, as well as private industry. Staff was able to network with waste haulers and recycling agencies about shell recycling which may help in future expansion of the program.

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

- **Restoration and Enhancement**
  - Staff began communicating with shellfish hatcheries to inquire about hard clam seed availability for a spring planting. Staff will continue to communicate with the hatcheries to plan for planting within the first few weeks of May.
  - Staff continues to contact barge companies to obtain a barge rental for the shell plant planned for this coming summer.
  - Staff met with other Bureau staff on the side scan imagery obtained during the surveying of the Mullica River. Staff plans to use the data obtained to help accurately assess the boundaries of the Mullica River oyster reefs and assist in the development of a more quantitative survey for the reefs. Staff will continue to work with other Bureau staff to ground truth and delineate the reef boundaries.
- **Shell Recycling Program**
  - Staff continues to coordinate with Shell Recycling Program participants for weekly shell collection and investigate additional venues.
  - Staff collected **268 bushels** of recycled shell in the month of April.
  - Staff continues to coordinate with CRDA staff to develop a public drop-off location for shell recycling in Atlantic City. CRDA has compiled a list of potentially suitable locations. Staff is reviewing the locations and hopes to establish a drop-off before summer.
  - Staff attended two outreach events for the Shell Recycling Program in April. The Galloway Green Market, and the Atlantic County Utilities Authority Earth Day Festival. Both events were successful and provided excellent platforms to engage with the public on shell recycling and environmental stewardship.
- **Environmental Review/ Waterfront Development**

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- 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:
  - Heislerville Living Shoreline
    - Staff received an expedited LMR request for the adaptive management of a previously permitted living shoreline project PDE started in 2020. This update would place additional shell bags between two previously installed locations. Staff provided comments for this project.
  - Island Beach State Park Living Shoreline
    - The project proposed to construct a living shoreline at Island Beach State Park using several T-groin structures and sand fill. The MRA provided comments and applied an appropriate timing restriction.
  - Staff assisted DLRP staff on several mapping interpretations for waterfront development applications with potential impacts to shellfish and submerged aquatic vegetation.
- Staff attended a JPP meeting on a proposed living shoreline project in West Wildwood. The project intends to place stone breakwaters and sand fill. Staff informed the applicant of mapped shellfish habitat within the project area and advised the avoidance of the use of plastic materials. Staff will continue to communicate with DLRP for this project when a formal application is submitted.
- **Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV)**
  - Staff attended the first very meeting for the East Coast SAV Collaborative workgroup. The workgroup's mission is to bring together experts in SAV research and management from each of the U.S. East Coast states from North Carolina to Maine to share ideas and information, provide training and resources, and collaborate on efforts that bring actionable science to the forefront of our SAV management strategies.
  - Staff received feedback and provided adjustments to the Natural Working and Lands Strategy's (NWLS) blue carbon targets for SAV.
  - Staff began drafting an SAV guidance manual to be used for future SAV mitigation, enhancement, and restoration efforts. As part of the NWLS, staff are hoping to provide this manual to the public within the next few years.
- **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.

### **GIS Data Development**

- Bureau staff are awaiting the final outputs of GIS data development for Atlantic Coast shellfish and SAV data layers. These data sets are in high demand from multiple DEP and external users:
  - Offshore wind energy companies
  - 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)
  - 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

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## Aquaculture and Shellfish Leases

- **Commercial Shellfish Aquaculture Website Committee**
  - Bureau of Marine Habitat and 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 deployed hazard buoys maintained by the Bureau to demarcate the off-shore ADZ-2 site utilized by two lease holders.
- **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**
  - Season open April 3 – November 24, 2023
  - SARC Recommended and Council Approved Pre-Transplant Quota:
    - Medium Mortality Market Region – 19,256 bu.
    - Shell Rock Region – 16,344 bu.
    - High Mortality Region – 28,450 bu.
    - Individual starting quota is 800 bu. per license
  - Seven active dredging vessels
  - Weekly Harvest & Dealer Reports required
  - Season Tag Sales and Harvest Highlights (harvest April 3 - Nov24):

	Mar	Apr 3	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov 24
Single Tags (\$2)	3,200	1,304							
Cage (\$48)	500	379							
Revenue	\$30,400	\$20,800							
Harvest (bushels)	N/A	15,400							

- Total reported harvest for April was from Bennies (15,160 bu.) and Nantuxent (240 bu.)
- **Intermediate Transplant Program – 2023**
  - The ITP began Monday, April 24 and ended Thursday, May 11. On Friday, May 12, one vessel conducted a separate transplant for the tonging industry from Cohansey to Nantuxent tongers areas.
  - The project cost \$3.25 per deck bushel transplanted, which was paid from the industry funds from the Oyster Resource Development Account to go towards enhancement efforts for the oyster resource.
  - SARC Recommended and Council Approved Transplant Parameters:
    - Very Low Mortality Transplant Region to a region TBD – 2,562 bu.
    - Low Mortality Transplant Region to Shell Rock and/or Medium Mortality Market Region – 19,906 bu.
    - Medium Mortality Transplant Region to High Mortality Market Region – 18,681 bu.
- **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.

## Marine Resources Administration Monthly Report

- Water Classification Charts were updated by Bureau of Marine Water Monitoring. Some downgraded waters affected tonging areas.
- Season opened November 1 – April 30
- 1 active harvester for April
- Weekly Harvest & Dealer Reports required
- Total Season Tag Sales and Harvest highlights:

	Oct '22	Nov '22	Dec '22	Jan '23	Feb '23	Mar '23	Apr '23	Oct-April Season Total
Single Tags (\$2ea)	500	250	250	100	150	50	50	1,350
Revenue	\$1,000	\$500	\$500	\$200	\$300	\$100	\$100	\$2,700
Weekly Report (bu)	0	380	236	154	112	130	50	1,062
Dealer Report (bu)	0	339	188	152	116	139	37	971

- **Great Bay Hard Clam Stock Assessment**

- Staff returned to the data analysis, chart production, and report composition of the 2016 hard clam stock assessment of Great Bay. A handful of stations were not surveyed as was intended in 2016, due to weather and vessel problems. Consequently, the standing stock estimate of 2016 cannot be truly compared with the one completed in 1988. Nevertheless, the 2016 work offers multiple insights into a more modern status of the stock, its distribution, and other characteristics. A full report will be available shortly.

### Surveys/Laboratory

- **2023 Field Schedule**

- Staff continue to utilize the living Gantt chart document to plan the 2023 field season.

- **Sturgeon Acoustic Receiver Project**

- MRA staff continue to monitor, maintain, and download data from the acoustic receiver array within Delaware Bay, NJ waters.

- **Raritan Bay Sediment Sample Collection**

- Staff collected sediment samples in Raritan Bay as a part of the hard clam stock assessment. A select few stations within the Naval Weapons Station Earle security zone still need to be collected. Staff will work with the staff at the Naval station to get approval to enter the security zone and collect the remaining samples.

- **Delaware Bay Tributaries Survey**

- Staff conducted side-scan sonar surveys in areas of the Cohansey River and Cove, Back Creek, and parts of Nantuxent Cove. This was done to aid in resource enhancement efforts in the area, which included an oyster transplant from the Cohansey tongers areas to the Nantuxent Cove tongers areas. This data will also aid in future shell planting efforts.
- The Council approved the spending funds from the sale of tonging tags collected over the past ten years. Staff also contacted members of the tonging industry to receive comments on location of known 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.

### Buildings, Grounds, Vessels, and Vehicles

- **Boat Maintenance**

- Bureau staff continue to maintain the R/V James W. Joseph and R/V Zephyrus by performing regular maintenance, repairs, and equipment upgrades as necessary.
- Bureau staff continue to maintain state vehicles with routine and scheduled service.

# **Marine Resources Administration Monthly Report**

## **Administrative/Miscellaneous**

- **License Sales**
  - Revenue collected from the Delaware Bay Office totaled \$27,839.00 for April 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.
- **Miscellaneous**
  - Staff began the paperwork and worked with human resources on hiring an hourly employee to begin in May.