



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission NEWS RELEASE

Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 1, 2024

PRESS CONTACT: Tina Berger
703.842.0749

ASMFC Presents 2024 Annual Awards of Excellence

Arlington, VA – Last evening, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission presented its Annual Awards of Excellence to a number of individuals for their outstanding contributions to management, scientific, and law enforcement efforts along the Atlantic coast. Specifically, the 2024 award recipients are Phil Edwards for management and policy contributions; Nicole Lengyel Costa and Laura Lee for technical and scientific contributions; and Deputy Chief Jason Snellbaker for law enforcement contributions.

“Every year a great many people contribute to the success of fisheries management along the Atlantic coast. The Commission’s Annual Awards of Excellence recognize outstanding efforts by professionals who have made a

difference in the way we manage and conserve our fisheries,” said Awards Committee Chair Spud Woodward of Georgia. “I am humbled by the breadth and extent of accomplishments of the recipients and am grateful for their dedication to Atlantic coast fisheries.”



From left: ASMFC Executive Director Bob Beal, AAE Recipients Deputy Chief Jason Snellbaker, Laura Lee, Nicole Lengyel Costa and Phil Edwards, and ASMFC Chair Joe Cimino

Management and Policy Contributions

Phil Edwards of the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management

Phil has been an active and integral member on several Commission species management boards over the years, including serving as Chair of the American Eel, and Shad and River Herring Boards. Management of

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission was formed by the 15 Atlantic coastal states in 1942 for the promotion and protection of coastal fishery resources. The Commission serves as a deliberative body of the Atlantic coastal states, coordinating the conservation and management of nearshore fishery resources, including marine, shell and diadromous species.

these diadromous resources is challenging due to data limitations and the various threats they face throughout their extensive range between freshwater and ocean ecosystems. Under his leadership, Phil has been able to deftly guide management of these species. As board chair and member on other boards, Phil has brought a wealth of knowledge and policy acumen to all his Commission endeavors, and the Commission at-large has benefitted from Phil's work ethic, leadership, and expertise.

Phil's strong policy and fisheries management skills are backed by over 20 years of participation on various technical committees and assessment work for Commission species. His extensive knowledge and years of work on fish passage has improved conservation of diadromous fish in Rhode Island, and by extension along the East Coast, and serves as an example of his dedication to these efforts.

Scientific and Technical Contributions

Nicole Lengyel Costa of the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management

For many years, Nicole has been an engaged and important member of several Commission technical committees, fish ageing projects, and plan development teams, and has served as Chair of the Atlantic Striped Bass Technical Committee for the past few years.

Aside from her technical contributions, Nicole has helped the Commission develop several particularly tricky management actions for striped bass, including recent actions to stop overfishing and aid in stock rebuilding. These actions were structurally complex and Nicole, working closely with her colleagues at the Commission, put together well-crafted documents in order for the public to understand and comment on these complicated proposed measures.

In addition to her efforts with striped bass, Nicole is a long serving member of the ACCSP Operations Committee and has been involved with age and growth work used in stock assessments across Commission species. Nicole brings to all her endeavors a strong scientific skill set and a keen understanding of fisheries management policy. Her efforts not only benefit Rhode Island but fisheries science and management activities along the entire East Coast.

Laura Lee of the US Fish and Wildlife Service and formerly with the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries (NC DMF)

Laura has been involved in Commission stock assessments for nearly 25 years, including some of the first stock assessments for species such as Atlantic croaker, American eel, and spot. She has advanced fisheries science through the development of innovative approaches to common issues faced by stock assessments and the contribution of years of expertise and mentorship to numerous stock assessment subcommittees and scientists along the Atlantic coast. There is hardly a coastal Atlantic species Laura has not worked on, having been involved with or serving as chair on technical committees or stock assessment subcommittees for a multitude of species. During her time as a stock assessment scientist with NC DMF, she developed numerous codes for routine analyses used by the majority of Commission stock assessments today. With her new position as an ecologist at the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Laura will continue her productive fisheries career.

Aside from these professional accomplishments, Laura is an invaluable resource on Atlantic coast fish species and stock assessment methods. She is generous with her time and has mentored several fisheries scientists through complex analyses and approaches. Laura provided advanced statistical analysis and guidance to DMF staff for virtually every FMP adopted during her tenure. Some of these scientists have

gone on serve on Commission technical committees and to further their careers at other state agencies, NOAA Fisheries, and in academia. Despite her formal transition off Commission and Division committees due to her new role, she has continued to show her dedication to Atlantic species by regularly participating in committee meetings and providing valuable feedback to keep science projects moving forward.

Law Enforcement Contributions

Deputy Chief Jason Snellbaker of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's Bureau of Law Enforcement

Since becoming a member of the Commission's Law Enforcement Committee (LEC) in 2014, Jason has promoted the role of law enforcement in fisheries management. He has represented the Committee on a number of species management boards, including tautog; summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass; Atlantic sturgeon; and bluefish. He has been the voice of the LEC on critical topics such as commercial tautog tagging and the summer flounder research set aside program.

During Jason's time with the LEC, he was selected by his peers to serve in a leadership role as Vice-chair and Chair. He accepted these roles during the pandemic, a particularly challenging time for the LEC as members were drawn to other responsibilities in their home states. Jason kept the flow of communication open and provided steady leadership by staying on as Chair for an extended period. At the state level, Jason's exceptional leadership has been recognized by both NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement for his efforts in support of the Cooperative Enforcement Program, and by the Commission for his work as part of a team of officers working in the New Jersey Fish and Wildlife marine region. He has also promoted marine fisheries law enforcement in forums such as the National Association of Conservation Law Enforcement Chiefs where he took on an advisory role and participated in an exchange program with an agency in Belize.

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