



ASMFC

FISHERIES *focus*

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Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission • 1444 Eye Street, N.W. • Washington, D.C.

Working towards healthy, self-sustaining populations for all Atlantic coast fish species or successful restoration well in progress by the year 2015

Getting to Know the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership

Introduction

Healthy waterways and robust fish populations are vital to the well being of our society. They provide clean water and sustainable fisheries. They also are vital for less tangible reasons, as anyone who has fished wild waters or canoed a tranquil stream can attest. Unfortunately, in many waters around the country, fish and the habitats on which they depend are in decline. Although significant measures have been taken to protect and restore aquatic habitats, current efforts have not kept pace with impacts resulting from population growth and land-use changes. Additionally, given the diverse array of federal, state, tribal, local, and private jurisdictions, the need has never been greater for increased action and improved coordination of fisheries conservation measures across boundaries and jurisdictions.



ACE Basin National Estuarine Research Reserve (Photo courtesy of Dept. of Commerce, NOAA Central Library)

The National Fish Habitat Action Plan

To address the need for improved coordination of fisheries conservation efforts throughout the nation, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and the Departments of the Interior and Commerce adopted the National Fish Habitat Action Plan (NFHAP) in April 2006. The NFHAP is an action-oriented, science-based effort with a mission to protect, restore, and enhance the nation's fish and aquatic communities through partnerships that foster fish habitat conservation and improve the quality of life for Americans. The objectives of the national effort are to: (1) conduct a condition analysis of all fish habitats within the U.S. by 2010, (2) identify priority fish habitats and establish fish habitat partnerships (FHPs) targeting these habitats by 2010, (3) establish 12 or more FHPs throughout U.S. by 2010, (4) prepare a "Status of Fish Habitats in the United States" report in 2010 and every five years thereafter, (5) protect all healthy and intact fish habitats by 2015, and (6) improve the condition of 90% of priority habitats and species targeted by FHPs by 2020.

Fish Habitat Partnerships

The National Fish Habitat Board has recognized that local or regional FHPs formed around important aquatic habitats, distinct geographic areas, keystone species, or system types will be the primary work units of the NFHAP. Five pilot FHPs currently exist, and their focus is primarily on protecting and restoring habitat for freshwater species. It has been acknowledged that the existing NFHAP lacks a partnership focused specifically on diadromous and estuarine-dependent fish and the coastal habitats on which they depend.

An FHP focused on reversing habitat degradation and persistent declines in Atlantic slope coastal drainage systems, which provide critical habitats for diadro-

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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 anadromous species. The fifteen member states of the Commission are: Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida.

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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Upcoming Meetings

7/16 - 20:

Shad Stock Assessment Peer Review, Crowne Plaza Old Town Alexandria, 901 N. Fairfax, Alexandria, Virginia.

7/24 (7:00 PM):

Public Hearing on Draft Addendum V to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Tautog, New York Department of Environmental Conservation, 205 Belle Mead Road, East Setauket, New York.

7/24 & 25:

ASMFC Sturgeon Technical Committee, Radisson Hotel Manchester, 700 Elm Street, Manchester, New Hampshire.

7/31 - 8/2 (9 AM - 5 PM each day):

ASMFC Striped Bass Stock Assessment Subcommittee, Radisson Hotel Manchester, 700 Elm Street, Manchester, New Hampshire.

8/7 - 9:

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Danford's on the Sound, 25 East Broadway, Port Jefferson, New York; 631-928-5200.

8/13 - 16:

ASMFC Summer Meeting Week, Crowne Plaza Old Town, 901 N. Fairfax Street, Alexandria, Virginia; (800) 333-3333 (see preliminary agenda on page 7).

9/2 - 6:

American Fisheries Society Annual Meeting, San Francisco, California. For more information, please contact Chair David Manning at (707) 547-1988.

9/17 - 21:

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Avista Resort, 300 North Ocean Boulevard, North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina; 800-968-8986.

9/17 - 21:

ASMFC Technical Committee Meeting Week, location to be determined.

9/18 - 20:

New England Fishery Management Council, Radisson Hotel, Plymouth, Massachusetts.

10/16 - 18:

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, New Bern Convention Center, 203 S. Front Street, New Bern, North Carolina., North Carolina; 252-638-1551.

The Commission as a Strong Partner

The reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSRA) has important implications for our state-federal partnerships. As most know, the Commission's fisheries management process differs from the federal system. Ours is structured to be effective and responsive, and contains important qualities that are worth noting. It is designed to produce results by incorporating three important principles: balance of power, timeliness of action, and stakeholder buy-in. Here's how...

Balance of Power

Natural resource management seeks to strike a balance between professional management and stakeholder involvement. Decision-making processes heavily grounded in stakeholder input create inherent conflicts of interest, disputes regarding scientific advice, and reluctance to make short-term sacrifices to protect and rebuild the resource. Some, but not all, of the regional fishery management councils where stakeholders dominate are perceived to have these characteristics.

In the Commission process, state directors have a strong presence; their actions reflect their professional training as natural resource managers. In addition, Legislative and Governor-appointed Commissioners provide stakeholders with a greater voice than they might have in a system exclusively run by professional managers. The one state/one vote concept drives the delegations to address the stakeholder-resource balance at the state level. While stakeholders participate in and contribute to the process, it is difficult under this structure for them to dominate it.

Timeliness of Action

Intuitively, natural resource management is a balance between time and consequences. An action taken too quickly can lead to unforeseen impacts, while excessive analysis of potential consequences can render a proposed action moot. Under the federal process, multiple layers of review, stemming from different mandates, contribute to a cumbersome and often uncoordinated analysis of impacts. Often these delays are caused by (or result in) outdated scientific information. (Also, litigation can result in changing or evolving policies, adding further delay and uncertainty to the federal management process.)

The Commission's process can bring fishery management plans and amendments on line significantly faster than the federal system. Through the adaptive management process, addenda to fishery management plans can be developed and implemented within months. Thus, Commission action can be based on current information making it highly responsive to detected problems (provided the political will exists to act).

Stakeholder Buy-in

Stakeholders enhance natural resource management processes through their active participation and input. The Commission holds public hearings in states affected by a proposed action. Our hearings promote two-way communication by providing a forum to explain the proposed action as well as to collect public comment. Our advisory panels also provide the input of diverse stakeholder groups.

In taking action, the Commission typically establishes broad management policies, allowing states the flexibility to accommodate regional differences in the fishery and stakeholder needs.

State-Federal Partnerships

Overarching these principles is the concept of state-federal cooperation, an essential element for successful fisheries management. The federal government provides resources and guidelines through the Congress, while states have sovereignty over coastal resources, activities, and habitat. The following are essential to strong state-federal partnerships:

- Ensuring that federal and Commission processes are complementary
- Dividing responsibilities based on effectiveness and efficiency
- Operating in a climate of mutual understanding and trust, and working toward the common goal of responsible resource stewardship

New provisions in the MSRA, including requirements for annual catch limits, greater accountability, and the rebuilding of stocks will put greater pressure on the federal system to produce results. This will present new opportunities and challenges for our state-federal partnerships. Ultimately, putting more fish in the water for everyone to catch, eat, and enjoy on a sustainable basis is what the Commission is all about. Hopefully, that is something we can all agree to.



**American Lobster
*Homarus americanus***

Interesting Facts:

- Lobsters smell food will small hairs covering their body & 4 small antennae
- Lobsters' teeth are in their stomachs
- Lobsters must molt in order to grow. In the 1st year, they molt 10 times to reach a length of 1 - 1 ½"
- A 1 lb lobster carries ~ 8,000 eggs while a 9 lb female may carry >100,000 eggs
- Eggs are carried internally for 9 - 12 months & externally for another 9 - 12 months, attached to swimmerets under the tail by a glue-like substance

Stock Status:

- GOM - No overfishing & not depleted**
- GBK - No overfishing & not depleted**
- SNE - Overfishing is occurring & stock is depleted**

Fact Sources: Lobster Institute & RI Sea Grant, NMFS

Species Profile: American Lobster Managers Face the Challenge of Rebuilding Depleted Southern New England Stock

Introduction

With an ex-vessel value of nearly \$416 million in 2005, American lobster ranks as one of the top commercial fisheries along the Atlantic coast. Over the last decade, coastwide landings have increased substantially, rising from 57 million pounds in 1993 to 88 million pounds in 2005. Despite these overall increases, landings in Long Island Sound and the waters off of Rhode Island and southern Massachusetts have been declining over the past several years. These declines have been explained in part by the 2005 peer-reviewed stock assessment, which found low abundance and recruitment in Southern New England (SNE), and decreased recruitment and abundance in Massachusetts Bay and Stellwagen Bank.

Addendum XI, approved in May by the Commission's American Lobster Board, is designed to assist in the recovery of the SNE stock through a comprehensive rebuilding plan. This plan includes a 15-year rebuilding timeline (ending in 2022) with a provision to end overfishing immediately, and management measures such as minimum and maximum size limits, and trap reductions.

Life History

American lobster, *Homarus americanus*, is a bottom-dwelling crustacean, widely distributed over the continental shelf of North America. In the inshore waters of the U.S., it is most abundant from Maine through New Jersey, with abundance declining from north to south. Offshore, it occurs from Maine through North Carolina.

Lobsters are solitary and territorial, living in a variety of habitats as long as there is a burrow or crevice in which they can take cover. Females hatch their eggs from mid-May to mid-June. Larvae transition through five stages. For the first four stages larvae are planktonic, swimming at or near the water surface. At the fifth larval stage, juvenile lobsters sink to the ocean floor where they remain for the rest of their lifetime. Lobsters reach market size in about five to seven years, depending on water temperature.

Atlantic Coastal Management

Historical Overview

Several observations can be drawn from reviewing the history of the lobster fishery. Large lobster were found in inshore shallow water throughout the range of the lobster. Declines in size structure and catch per trap that occurred in the 1880s were attributed to increased fishing effort throughout the range of the fishery. These declines were initially local (Boston and Provincetown) and then spread coastwide. Terms such as commercial extinction were in use as early as 1903. Low productivity, as measured by landings, extended for long periods. In particular, coastwide landings declined over a 25-year period (1889-1915) and remained low for another 50 years. By 1999, U.S. and Canadian landings reached historic highs. The debate about relative importance of fishing and other factors such as predation and degraded habitats was well established at the turn of the 20th century. Echoes of that debate remain today. Most of the management measures under consideration today (minimum sizes, v-notching, closed season, maximum size, slot limits,



Dory fishermen hauling lobster pots off Cape Ann, MA (From photograph by T. W. Smillie; image courtesy of Dept. of Commerce, NOAA Central Library)

trap limits, protection of egg bearing lobster) were either discussed or implemented over 100 years ago. In many cases, these regulations were more restrictive than they are today.

Current Management Program

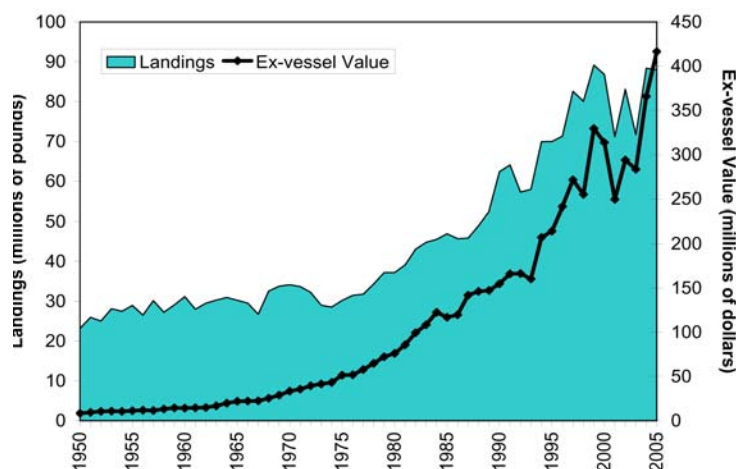
American lobster is managed under Amendment 3 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan. Its major provisions include: 3 ¼-inch minimum carapace length (larger minimum lengths in most areas); prohibition on the possession of berried lobsters; prohibition on possession of lobster meat and lobster parts; mandatory escape panels and vents on pots to allow lobsters to escape from old, lost pots; prohibition on spearing lobsters; prohibition on possession of female v-notched lobsters; limits on landings with non-trap gear; and maximum trap sizes. Amendment 3 establishes seven lobster management areas: Inshore GOM (Area 1), Inshore SNE (Area 2), Offshore Waters (Area 3), Inshore Northern Mid-Atlantic (Area 4), Inshore Southern Mid-Atlantic (Area 5), New York and Connecticut State Waters (Area 6), and Outer Cape Cod. Lobster Conservation Management Teams (LCMTs), composed of industry representatives, were formed for each management area. The LCMTs are charged with advising the Lobster Board and recommending changes to the management plan within their areas.

Amendment 3 also provides the flexibility to respond to current conditions of the resource and fishery by making changes to the management program through addenda. Since 1999, the American Lobster Board has approved 11 addenda to further the conservation and management goals of Amendment 3.

Commercial & Recreational Fisheries

The lobster fishery has seen incredible expansion in effort and landings since the late 1940s and early 1950s, when landings varied around 25 million pounds. The last decade alone has seen dramatic increases in lobster landings, rising from 57 million pounds in 1993 to 88 million pounds in 2005. In 1999, commercial landings reached an historic high of 89 million pounds, with ex-vessel prices totaling \$330 million. Of this catch, approximately 80 percent are caught in state waters, which extend from zero to three miles from shore. Lobster pots are the predominant commercial gear. Lobster is also taken recreationally with pots and by hand while SCUBA diving.

Figure 1. American Lobster Landings & Ex-Vessel Value
Source: Personal communication from NMFS Fisheries Statistics Division, 2007



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New Ventless Trap Survey

With the dramatic decline in the lobster resource south of Cape Cod and subsequent impacts on the fishery, it is imperative to effectively monitor the relative distribution and abundance of the lobster fishery in coastal waters. To address this need, a cooperative random stratified ventless trap survey was designed to generate accurate estimates of the spatial distribution of lobster by length frequency, relative abundance and recruitment while attempting to eliminate the biases identified in conventional fishery-dependent surveys. This survey is a regional sampling design developed cooperatively by coastal states from Maine to New York. In the past, fishery-dependent trap sampling data have not been included in generating relative abundance indices for lobster due to associated biases with the data collection method. Lobstermen are very efficient at catching lobsters and will only fish where lobsters tend to congregate, moving their gear to follow their annual migrations. This bias does not give an accurate picture of the resource relative to the entire area. A fishery-independent survey, where scientists and contracted fishermen cooperatively collect the data, will provide greater control over the sampling design, as well as the data quality and quantity necessary to maintain a stratified sampling approach that provides unbiased data.



Photo courtesy of Trisha Cheney, ME DMR

Species Profile: American Lobster

(continued from page 5)

Stock Status

2005 Peer Review

The 2005 peer-reviewed stock assessment report indicates the American lobster resource presents a mixed picture, with stable stock abundance throughout most of the Gulf of Maine (GOM) and Georges Bank (GBK), low abundance and recruitment in Southern New England (SNE), and decreased recruitment and abundance in Massachusetts Bay and Stellwagen Bank (Area 514). Of particular concern is SNE, where depleted stock abundance, low recruitment, and high fishing mortality rates over the past few years led the Peer Review Panel to call for additional harvest restrictions.

2006 Assessment Update

Over the last few years, state lobster managers in SNE have been grappling with the mechanics of how to rebuild the lobster stock in their waters. The SNE stock is depleted and overfishing is occurring as determined in the 2005 coastwide assessment. While “depleted” is not the same as “overfished,” low abundance is still troublesome. The new spring abundance indices for the SNE stock present a mixed picture at best and a dismal picture of continued historic lows at worst. Landings have been low in some areas, but have increased in other areas for the first time since the 1998-1999 die-off. The Commission’s American Lobster Management Board asked its Technical Committee to examine the data to determine if fishing in 2004-2005 took a bigger or smaller proportion of the population compared to an average value calculated for 1984-2003 (it is important to note that this average is not the same number that was calculated in the 2005 coastwide assessment). While the next full coastwide assessment is planned for 2008, the Lobster Board wanted a progress report to guide the development of SNE stock rebuilding plan as well as keep tabs on the two northern stocks, GBK and GOM.

The SNE stock was evaluated using fall research trawl survey catch indices from the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, and the National Marine Fisheries Service. Each survey index was paired with landings from the federal statistical area(s) where the survey is conducted to compute an annual “relative exploitation” (RE) and relative abundance (N). All three surveys consistently showed that abundance increased in the 1990s and decreased after 1999. This fact provides additional support for labeling lobsters found south of Cape Cod as one coherent stock.

However, the ups and downs of abundance versus landings highlight differences among the SNE fisheries. Abundance in Rhode Island (statistical area 539) showed modest increases in 2004 and 2005 for both legal size lobsters and lobsters one molt away from legal size, while landings declined substantially. In Long Island Sound (CT/NY, statistical area 611) abundance remained very low, as did the landings. Abundance offshore also showed no change in 2004 - 2005 while landings increased slightly. Overall, stock-wide abundance estimates for 2004 and 2005 are about 50% below the long-term average, while relative exploitation estimates for the same time period are more or less where they were in 2003.

Moving north, the GBK stock was evaluated using trawl indices from the NMFS fall survey in the GBK’s stock area. Results showed a slight decline in abundance in 2004 - 2005 compared to 1996 - 2003, however, annual values for 2004 - 2005 are still about 40% above the long-term (1982-2003) average. Landings from this area increased in 2004 - 2005 compared to earlier years. Since landings went up and abundance went down, the new estimates of relative exploitation increased. These new values are

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Photo courtesy of Carl Wilson, ME DMR

NOAA Fisheries Service Seeks Public Comment on Proposed Area 3 Lobster Fishery Regulations

NOAA Fisheries Service recently published a proposed rule that considers future management measures for the offshore Area 3 lobster fishery. This action proposes to implement federal regulations for Area 3 that would increase the minimum legal carapace length for American lobster to 3 1/2 inches by 2008, increase the lobster trap escape vent size in 2010, and employ a four-year series of trap reductions from 2007 through 2010 that would reduce each qualified Area 3 vessel’s trap allocation by approximately 15%. The proposed measures are consistent with the recommendations for federal action in the Commission’s Amendment 3 to the Interstate FMP for American Lobster. Comments on the proposed rule can be sent to <Lob0607@noaa.gov> and must be submitted no later than 5:00 PM EST on August 6, 2007. A complete copy of the rule may also be obtained via the following link - <http://www.nero.noaa.gov/StateFedOff/lobster/>

ASMFC Summer Meeting

August 13 - 16, 2007

Crowne Plaza

901 N. Fairfax Street

Alexandria, Virginia

Preliminary Agenda

Please note: The preliminary agenda is subject to change. The agenda reflects the current estimate of time required for scheduled meetings. The Commission may adjust this agenda in accordance with the actual duration of meetings. Interested parties should anticipate meetings starting earlier or later than indicated herein. The detailed final agenda will be posted to the Commission's website (www.asmfc.org) two weeks prior to the meeting. If you intend to bring any meeting materials for use by a board or committee not included in the Commission's Summer Meeting Briefing Materials/CD-ROM, please bring 50 copies.

Monday, August 13

2:00 PM - 5:00 PM American Lobster Management Board

2:00 PM - 6:00 PM Habitat Committee

Tuesday, August 14

8:00 AM - 11:00 AM Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Board

9:00 AM - 5:00 PM Habitat Committee and ACFHP Steering Committee

11:15 AM - 12:15 PM American Eel Management Board

1:30 PM - 2:30 PM Sturgeon Management Board

2:45 PM - 5:15 PM Spiny Dogfish & Coastal Sharks Management Board

5:30 PM - 6:30 PM Presentation by NOAA Fisheries Service, Office of Highly Migratory Species on Amendment #2 to the Federal Shark Plan

Wednesday, August 15

8:00 AM - 10:00 AM Tautog Management Board

10:15 AM - 12:15 PM Stock Assessment Workshop for Commissioners

1:15 PM - 4:45 PM ISFMP Policy Board

5:00 PM - 6:30 PM Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board

Thursday, August 16

8:00 AM - 11:00 AM Shad & River Herring Management Board

11:15 AM - 12:15 PM ISFMP Policy Board

12:15 PM - 1:00 PM Business Session

Draft Oyster EIS Delayed: EIS Team Releases Progress Report

The team evaluating alternatives to significantly increase the population of oysters throughout the Chesapeake Bay has released a comprehensive Progress Report. The report is published in lieu of the anticipated May/June 2007 release of a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), the completion of which has been delayed by challenges in developing a native oyster demographic computer model, an important tool for evaluating the environmental consequences of the various restoration alternatives under consideration. Following a mid-July meeting, the Oyster EIS Executive Committee expects to announce a new target date for release of the Draft EIS. For a copy of the Progress Report and additional information on the progress of the EIS, accomplishments to date, available scientific findings, and upcoming meetings go to the EIS website at <http://www.dnr.state.md.us/dnrnews/infocus/oysters.asp>.

On the Legislative Front

The 110th Congress has introduced a whole host of ocean, coastal, and marine-related legislation so far this session. Perhaps building off momentum created by the passing of the Magnuson-Stevens Reauthorization Act, this Congress is more active in dealing with these types of issues than any in recent history. The Administration is also getting more involved by drafting proposed legislation in a number of areas.

Last month, Senator Olympia Snowe (R – ME) introduced a bill (S. 1579) to reauthorize the Coastal Zone Management Act. It renews grant programs to help states with pollution control and habitat restoration and preservation. The bill also allows states to amend their coastal zone management plans to address the impacts of climate change on coastal resources. NOAA has been working with the Coastal States Organization to get input from stakeholders that is expected to help fine tune the bill. Senator Snowe's counterpart in Maine, Senator Susan Collins (R), is sponsoring the Working Waterfront Preservation Act of 2007 (S. 741). Her bill amends the Magnuson-Stevens Act to make grants available to state and local governments, nonprofit organizations, and fishing cooperatives to acquire or improve waterfront access to commercial fishermen or for aquaculture.

This Congress has seen a flurry of bills introduced to address aquatic invasive species. Four bills from the House side (H.R. 260, 767, 889, and 2423) and two from the Senate (S. 725 and S. 1578) seek to set standards to prevent aquatic invasive species damage or deal with the negative impacts of these species.

'OCEANS-21' (H.R. 21), introduced by Representative Sam Farr (D – CA) and supported by 54 cosponsors, embodies a number of recommendations by the Joint Ocean Commission Initiative and its predecessors, the U.S. Commission on Oceans Policy and Pew

Oceans Commission. The bill establishes national standards for a national oceans policy and creates nine ocean regions in which state and federal agencies form partnerships to address regional issues. A hearing has been held on OCEANS-21 but skeptics fear it will have trouble moving through the House because it contains a number of issues that cut through many different committees.

Introduced by Representative Nick Rahall (D – WV), Chair of the Natural Resources Committee, on behalf of the Administration, the National Offshore Aquaculture Act of 2007 (H.R. 2010) seeks to promote a fish farming industry in federal waters to help satisfy the growing demand for seafood in the U.S. and around the world. The bill sets up a framework to establish environmental standards and the permitting process.

In June, the House Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, and Oceans approved two noncontroversial ocean bills that will be passed to the full Natural Resources Committee for its consideration. Both bills establish new programs within NOAA. The first, H.R. 1834, creates programs for ocean exploration and undersea research. The second (H.R. 2400) sets up an ocean and coastal mapping program for U.S. coastal waters and Great Lakes.

Other bills submitted during this Congress amend the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 (H.R. 1007), provide grants for protecting coastal lands



(H.R. 1907, S. 1142), and reauthorize the Chesapeake Bay Program (H.R. 16).

It remains to be seen which bills, if any, will become law in this Congress. The broad interest in both the House and Senate in ocean-related issues makes it worth keeping an eye on the situation. To track congressional activity on the bills mentioned above or to read the full text of bills, visit the Library of Congress' website thomas.loc.gov

ASMFC Comings & Goings

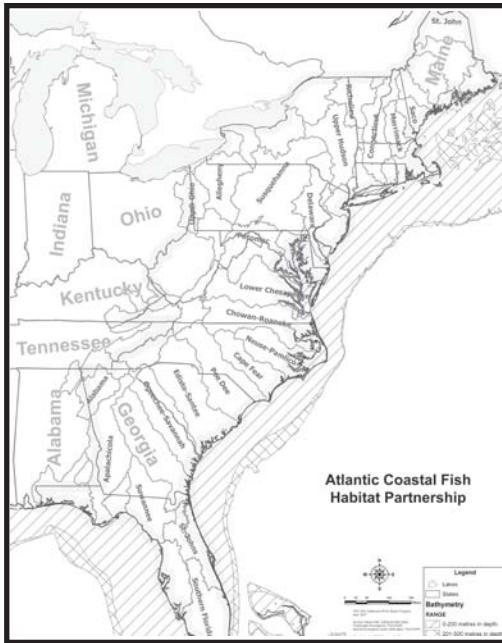
Gordon C. Colvin -- In June, Mr. Gordon Colvin retired from the New York Department of Environmental Conservation, where he served as Director of its Marine Resources Bureau for 25 years. In the capacity of State Director, Mr. Colvin was a prominent member of the Commission (as NY Administrative Commissioner) and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council. He was a persuasive orator, who spoke passionately about resource conservation, state sovereignty, and stakeholder equity. Fishery management programs for striped bass, lobster, summer flounder, scup, black sea bass, weakfish and American eel have all benefited from his leadership and steadfast commitment to resource conservation. In 1999, he received the Commission's highest award, the Captain David H. Hart Award, for his contributions to the betterment of marine fisheries on the Atlantic coast.

Not ready to leave the field of marine resource management, Mr. Colvin has accepted the position of Team Leader for the National Angler Registry Team. His job will be to assist the Team in developing the new national saltwater angler registry and state exemption program per the Magnuson-Stevens Reauthorization Act. We wish Mr. Colvin the very best in his new position!

Getting to Know the ACFHP (continued from page 1)



mous fish populations and estuarine-dependent fish species, will help fill that gap. These critical coastal habitats are under siege from anthropogenic impacts such as poor water quality including eutrophication, low dissolved oxygen, sedimentation, and toxic contaminants; physical disturbances and barriers including dredging, hardened shorelines, filling, dams, changes in sediment composition, and water diversions; climate change including elevated water temperatures, sea level rise, and pH changes; and invasive species. What is needed is a plan to examine these problems holistically along the coast and implement local partnerships to restore these critical habitats.



The Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership

In May 2006, the Commission charged its Habitat Committee with developing a coastal FHP under the auspices of the NFHAP. The existing infrastructure and collaboration of the 15 Atlantic coastal states make the Commission an ideal candidate to catalyze such a partnership. Through the development of a draft Foundation Document, the Habitat Committee proposed that the partnership initially focus on diadromous and estuarine-dependent species. Primarily this was done; because the Commission is concurrently in the process of developing a source document on the habitats utilized by the different life history stages of Commission-managed diadromous fish species, which could serve as a resource for the development of a conservation strategy for the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership (ACFHP).

Last fall the Commission submitted letters to the National Fish Habitat Board indicating the Commission's interest in the partnership process and outlining efforts to date. The ACFHP has since been recognized by the NFHAP Board as a "candidate partnership." In the spring of 2007, the Commission's Habitat Program conducted five informational discussion sessions along the Atlantic coast to gather potential ACFHP partners, and disseminate information on NFHAP and ACFHP activities. The informational sessions, held in Florida, South Carolina, Virginia, New Jersey, and New Hampshire, were relatively well attended and received.

lina, Virginia, New Jersey, and New Hampshire, were relatively well attended and received.

On May 16 and 17, 2007, a coastwide ACFHP Workshop was held in Baltimore, Maryland; approximately 80 partners and stakeholders attended the workshop. The objectives of the workshop were to: (1) engage partners in developing and implementing an ACFHP; (2) establish the focus (species, habitat, and regional components) of the ACFHP; (3) establish the ACFHP's administrative structure; and (4) discuss strategies for addressing the next steps for ACFHP.

Preliminary target species and habitats for the ACFHP were determined to be: diadromous fish, estuarine-dependent fish, macrocrustaceans, tidal river systems, non-tidal river systems, marshes, nearshore coastal habitats, structurally complex habitats, and water quantity and quality issues. Additionally, participants agreed to create one overarching coastwide partnership that would ultimately regroup into regional sub-partnerships (the decision was made to delay the delineation of boundaries for regional components until partnership structure is more defined). Future work and potential membership of the Steering Committee, Science, Communications, and Joint Southeast Working Groups were discussed during break-out sessions.

The Plan

Through the ACFHP, an unprecedented effort will be made to collect the hundreds of existing conservation plans and datasets in the Atlantic region and synthesize them into one comprehensive assessment of important focus areas for habitat protection and restoration. This assessment will be imperative to the development of a conservation strategy for the Atlantic coast. Also key to the success of the ACFHP will be the development of a suite of communications tools, including accessible publications and web-based tools for information dissemination. Development of these tools will culminate with the publication of a coastwide conservation strategic plan and website which will serve as a portal for information, learning, and coordination amongst the public and partnership members. The ACFHP will then use these tools to protect, restore, and enhance fish habitat along the Atlantic coast. For more information, please contact Jessie Thomas, Habitat Coordinator, at jthomas@asmfc.org or (202) 289-6400.



Maine Passes Mandatory Trip-Level Reporting Regulation for Seafood Dealers; SAFIS Management System is More User-Friendly for Fisheries

All Maine Seafood Dealers to Report Trip-Level Landings Data

The State of Maine passed a regulation in mid-June requiring all state seafood dealers to report trip-level landings data. Up until this regulation was passed, only federal dealers, about 12% of the 650 Maine dealers, were required to report 100% of their landings at the trip level.

This new regulation will mark major changes for the 570 state permitted dealers in Maine. Before the regulation was passed, many dealers were required to submit monthly summaries for selected species only, while others were not required to submit landings at all.

The Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR) has been working with its dealers since 2004 to ensure this change in landings requirements will be a smooth transition. DMR has approached dealers offering seven different options to report landings. Three of these options are electronic, including use of the ACCSP's Standard Atlantic Fisheries Information System (SAFIS). The other four methods are paper-based options. It is expected that many of the larger dealer operations will report electronically and the numerous smaller dealer op-

erations will report using one of the four paper-based methods that best meet their needs. All the landings data will be recorded in SAFIS, either directly by the dealers or by state staff, who will key in or load the reported data on their behalf.

Updates to the SAFIS Management System are Expected to Increase Efficiency for States

The Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) has given a face-lift to the SAFIS management system, which is used by state fisheries managers on the Atlantic coast. It now has a more unified look, and numerous descriptors have been included to help users understand the functionality of each page.

SAFIS encompasses four applications: electronic dealer reporting (eDR); electronic vessel trip reporting (eVTR); audits; and, SAFIS management system (SMS). These applications are real-time, web-based data entry tools used by fisheries managers, Atlantic coast dealers (and now fishermen in New Jersey). The eDR and eVTR SAFIS applications help these groups fulfill their mandatory reporting requirements efficiently by allowing dealers and fishermen, or their state counterparts, to enter trip-level data electronically.

managing contacts. The purpose of the SAFIS management system is to make repetitive tasks such as adding users, a routine and simple process. The success of the SAFIS management system will enable managers more time to focus on mandatory reporting and dealer/fishermen issues.

The SMS is available to managers and administrators only. Access is provided to SMS through ACCSP by contacting support@accsp.org.

About the ACCSP

The ACCSP is a cooperative state-federal program to design, implement, and conduct marine fisheries statistics data collection programs and to integrate those data into a single data management system that will meet the needs of fishery managers, scientists, and fishermen. It is composed of representatives from natural resource management agencies coastwide, including the Commission, the three Atlantic fishery management councils, the 15 Atlantic states, the Potomac River Fisheries Commission, the DC Fisheries and Wildlife Division, NOAA Fisheries and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. For more information, please visit www.accsp.org or call (202) 216-5690.



State fishery managers and administrators are responsible for providing access to SAFIS applications. Additional responsibilities may include managing permits, users, passwords, loading data, managing audits, and

Edith S. Carr Recognized for 10 Years of Dedicated Service to the Commission

Edith S. Carr, longtime Staff Assistant for the Commission, was recently recognized for ten years of dedicated service to the Commission and its member states. Edith has been the smiling face and professional voice of the Commission, warmly greeting and assisting the public we serve. As Staff Assistant, she has earned a reputation for her efficient and careful processing of travel vouchers, ensuring the Commission's many participants receive quick reimbursement for travel and meeting expenses. Edith has provided administrative support to staff while also coordinating the weekly mailings to Commissioners, helping them stay informed on key issues. Beyond attending to her assigned duties, she has always been willing to lend a helping hand to others. Edith has earned the respect and admiration of all of our staff over the years for her kind heart and gracious dignity, always willing to lend a listening ear or, when asked, to provide gentle words of wisdom. In all that she does, Edith has distinguished herself as a trusted and valuable employee, contributing to the Commission's reputation as a first-class organization. Her hard work has helped advance the Commission's vision of healthy, self-sustaining populations of Atlantic coast fish species by the year 2015. Congratulations, Edith!



Tagging Study to Focus on Striped Bass Health

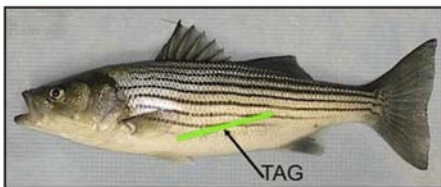
The Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) are conducting a cooperative tagging study to better understand mycobacteria disease of resident striped bass in the Chesapeake Bay.

Mycobacteriosis is a bacterial disease known to be present in striped bass since at least the mid 1980s. Stock assessment analysis has not demonstrated a decline in the population of striped bass and reproduction remains high. This tagging study is designed to determine how or if the disease progresses in fish over time. Diseased and healthy fish are collected, assessed for current health condition, implanted with bright-green anchor tags and released back into the Chesapeake Bay.

“Coordination between DNR and VIMS will ensure that fish recaptured in the Chesapeake Bay are collected and analyzed in a timely manner, regardless of where they are caught,” said Howard King, Director of DNR’s Fisheries Service. “Results of this study will increase our understanding of the potential impacts of mycobacteriosis on the striped bass population.”

Fish will be tagged each spring and fall through at least 2009. Both agencies are using a bright-green colored anchor tag marked with either “VIMS” or “MD DNR” that includes a toll free number (1-866-845-3379) to report the fish. A reward is being offered for the return of tagged whole fish to biologists so that they can be examined. Fish bearing the bright-green tag are exempt from Maryland and Virginia daily catch limits and seasonal and size restrictions, provided that they are reported promptly, kept intact, kept cool or chilled (not frozen) and turned over to DNR or VIMS. Cooperation by anglers, commercial fishermen and charter boat captains is very much needed for success of this study. Tagged fish captured outside Maryland and Virginia waters should still be reported on the toll free number and the tag returned by mail.

Rewards For Striped Bass Tags



\$125		<p>Tag Reads: USFWS - \$125 REWARD - 575501 Save Tag & Call 1-800-448-8322 NOTE: No Expiration Date</p>
\$20 & \$5		<p>Tag Reads: VIMS GLOUCESTER POINT, VA CALL 866-845-3379 REWARD V05895 NOTE: \$20 for Fish with Tag \$5 for Tag Only No Expiration Date</p>
Hat		<p>Tag Reads: REWARD CALL 1-800-448-8322 IF UNDERSIZE CUT OFF TAG - RELEASE FISH NOTE: Reward is a hat.</p>
Variable Rewards		<p>Maryland Promotional Campaign (not a scientific study) NOTE: HAS an Expiration Date; after that reward is a hat or t-shirt</p>

Please Call Dan Gonzales, Toll Free, at 866-845-3379 if You Have Questions.



Species Profile: American Lobster (continued from page 6)

near the long-term average, the number designated in the 2005 coastwide assessment as the threshold when overfishing begins. Even though these RE numbers are not the same as the fishing rates calculated in the 2005 assessment, they do indicate an increasing trend in the harvest rate since 2003 that needs to be monitored.

The GOM stock was evaluated using trawl indices from the NMFS fall survey in the GOM's stock area. The Massachusetts trawl survey indices were available through 2004 only, and so were not used, but indices from the Maine trawl survey for 2000 - 2005 were incorporated with the federal indices for these years in order to better measure inshore versus offshore abundance trends. The two indices were weighted by the ratio of inshore (ME) to offshore (NMFS) landings of 70:30, giving twice as much weight to the inshore indices as the offshore indices. The two indices show similar trends except for 2005 when the NMFS survey shows a decline and the ME index shows a large increase. Results showed a down turn in abundance in 2004 compared to 1996-2003, followed by an increase in 2005 using the NMFS/ME weighted index, or a decrease using the NMFS index alone. Fortunately, annual abundance values for 2004 - 2005 using either index are still well above the long-term average. However, landings in 2004 - 2005 increased more than abundance did. The resulting RE estimates exceed the long-term average in 2004, when landings increased and abundance decreased, but returned to the average value in 2005. Again, even though these RE numbers are not the same as the assessment fishing rates, they indicate fairly high harvest rates. If abundance in the Gulf significantly declines, harvest will have to follow a similar path if the stock is to sustain such a large fishery.

The new reference points established by Addendum VIII are designed to take advantage of multiple measures of stock status. This progress report on relative trends in exploitation and abundance focus on just two of the many measures of stock status the Technical Committee is continuing to monitor. However, just like the old reference points, many of these new measures of stock status depend heavily upon the accuracy of landings data from every area of the coast. The expanded reporting programs, established by Addendum X, are vital for reliable status assessments that can resolve differences by area and have a quick enough turn around time to be useful to those who need to make decisions now not years after the fact. For more information, please contact Toni Kerns, Senior Fisheries Management Plan Coordinator for Management, at (202)289-6400 or tkerns@asmfc.org.

Return Service Requested

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