



ASMFC

FISHERIES *focus*

Vision: Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Upcoming Meetings
page 2

From the Executive Director's Desk
Atlantic Striped Bass Board Takes Emergency Action to Stay on Track for 2029 Rebuilding Target
page 3

Species Profile
Black Drum
page 4

ASMFC Outreach Survey
page 6

Fishery Management Actions
*American Lobster
Atlantic Striped Bass
Horseshoe Crab*
page 7

Science Highlight
ASMFC Fish Ageing Activities & Quality Control
page 9

Data & Methods Workshop Scheduled for Atlantic Menhaden ERP Benchmark Stock Assessment
page 10

ACCSP Enhances Software with Oracle Spatial Tools
page 11

Comings & Goings
page 12

ACFHP Seeks Nominations for 2023 Melissa Laser Fish Habitat Conservation Award
page 13

ASMFC Presents 2023 Annual Awards of Excellence

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission presented its Annual Awards of Excellence to a number of individuals for their outstanding contributions to congressional/legislative issues, fisheries science, and law enforcement along the Atlantic coast. Specifically, the 2023 award recipients were Miranda Peterson for congressional/legislative contributions; Carol Hoffman for technical and scientific contributions; and Region 3 New York State Department of Conservation Police 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 ASMFC 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."

Congressional and Legislative Contributions

Miranda Peterson, Legislative Assistant for Representative Frank Pallone

As a Legislative Assistant in Representative Frank Pallone's office, Miranda Peterson has consistently gone above and beyond to help secure funding for the Virginia Tech Mid-Atlantic Horseshoe Crab Trawl Survey. Understanding the importance of the sustainable management of this species, Miranda has worked diligently to help fund this program. In 2023, she secured the signatures of seven Congressional Representatives on a Dear Colleague letter, which was an all-time high in signatories who support funding the survey.

The Virginia Tech Trawl Survey is necessary for the effective and timely management of horseshoe crabs in the Delaware Bay. The survey has been in operation since 2002, but lost funding for several years which complicated the stock assessment and management in the region. Since 2016, Congress has annually instructed NOAA Fisheries to fund this survey to provide a consistent time series. A healthy Delaware Bay population supports the economically and ecologically important birding, fishing, and biomedical communities. The continuation of this yearly data is due in a large part to Miranda's efforts.

In addition to these efforts, Miranda's in-depth knowledge of coastal and marine issues, including commercial and recreational fisheries, marine mammals, and offshore energy development is not only an asset to Representative Pallone and New Jersey constituents, but also to the management of marine resources along the Atlantic coast.



ASMFC Executive Director Bob Beal with Miranda Peterson, Legislative Assistant for Rep. Frank Pallone

see ANNUAL AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE, continued on page 6

Upcoming Meetings

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 the deliberative body of the Atlantic coastal states, coordinating the conservation and management of nearshore fishery resources, including marine, shell and diadromous 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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June 5 (10 AM - Noon)

Atlantic Striped Bass Technical Committee and Plan Development Team; visit <https://asmfc.org/calendar/6/2023/atlantic-striped-bass-technical-committee-and-pdt/2148> for more information

June 6 - 8

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Hilton Virginia Beach Oceanfront, 3001 Atlantic Avenue, Virginia Beach, VA; visit <https://www.mafmc.org/council-events/2023/june-council-meeting> for more information

June 7 & 8

Red Drum Stock Assessment Data Workshop; visit <https://asmfc.org/calendar/6/2023/red-drum-data-workshop/2136> for more information

June 12 (1 - 4 PM)

Harvest Control Rule 2 Framework and Addenda PDT/FMAT; visit <https://asmfc.org/calendar/6/2023/harvest-control-rule-2-framework-and-addenda-fmat-pdt/2151> for more information

June 12 - 16

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, World Golf Village Renaissance, 500 South Legacy Trail, St. Augustine, FL; visit <https://safmc.net/council-meetings/> for more information

June 15 (9 - 10 AM)

Recreational Demand Model Decision Support Tool Working Group; visit <https://asmfc.org/calendar/6/2023/recreational-demand-model-decision-support-tool-working-group-for-summer-flounder,-black-sea-bass,-and-scup/2150> for more information

June 21 (2 - 5 PM)

Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Advisory Panel; visit <https://asmfc.org/calendar/6/2023/Summer-Flounder,-Scup,-and-Black-Sea-Bass-Advisory-Panel/2119> for more information

June 22 (4 - 5:30 PM)

Bluefish Advisory Panel; visit <https://asmfc.org/calendar/6/2023/bluefish-advisory-panel/2125> for more information

June 27 (1 - 3 PM)

American Eel Technical Committee and Stock Assessment Subcommittee; visit <https://asmfc.org/calendar/6/2023/american-eel-technical-committee-and-stock-assessment-subcommittee/2138> for more information

June 27 - 29

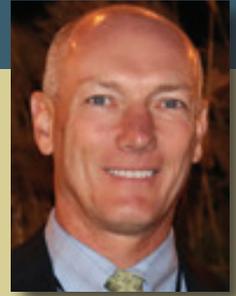
New England Fishery Management Council, Hilton Garden Inn, Freeport, ME; visit <https://www.nefmc.org/calendar/june-2023-council-meeting> for more information

June 28 (10 AM - Noon)

Atlantic Striped Bass Technical Committee and Plan Development Team; visit <https://asmfc.org/calendar/6/2023/atlantic-striped-bass-technical-committee-and-pdt/2149> for more information

July 31 - August 3

ASMFC Summer Meeting, The Westin Crystal City, 1800 Richmond Highway, Arlington, VA



Atlantic Striped Bass Board Takes Emergency Action to Stay on Track for 2029 Rebuilding Target

In drafting the Commission's Interstate Fisheries Management Program Charter back in the early 1990s, Commissioners envisioned there may be rare instances when a management board might need to take emergency action to address circumstances under which public health or the conservation of coastal fishery resources has been placed substantially at risk by unanticipated changes in the ecosystem, the stock, or the fishery. While they recognized that it is a non-preferred approach, it gives managers the ability to act quickly outside our standard fisheries management process. Even a fast-paced addendum takes three to six months to go from development through approval, and fishery management plans and amendments take even longer, anywhere from 12 to 18 months to move from initiation to board approval. Since adoption of the Charter in 1995, the emergency action provision has been used less than a dozen times. The most recent cases involved the early closure of the 2009/2010 and 2010/2011 northern shrimp fishery in order to ensure that the annual harvest limits would not be exceeded.

In May, for the first time in 12 years, the emergency action provision was used again. This time it was employed by the Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board to implement a 31" maximum size limit for striped bass recreational fisheries in order to control recreational harvest and protect a strong year class that could aid in stock rebuilding. The Board's action responded to newly available data and analysis on the unanticipated increase of the 2022 recreational harvest and its implications for the 2029 rebuilding timeline.

Specifically, data show a near doubling of recreational harvest from 2021 to 2022. Further, stock rebuilding projections based on this increase estimate the probability of rebuilding to its biomass target by 2029 drops to less than 15% under the assumption that the higher 2022 fishing mortality rate continues each year. One of the primary drivers of the significant increase in harvest is the fact that the abundant 2015 year-class has begun to grow into the ocean slot limit (28" to < 35") that was implemented by the majority of states in 2020. This year, the 2015 year-class will be almost entirely recruited into this size range. This means they would all be available for harvest if the slot remained 28" to <35", suggesting the potential for even greater recreational harvest in 2023 without swift action to amend the slot limit.

The 2015 year-class is important to the future of striped bass because it is one of the few large year-classes that has been produced in the past 20 years. Striped bass can survive more than 30 years and spawn more than 20 times, and this capability evolved in striped bass (and many other fish) to compensate for years when environmental conditions or other factors would lead to poor survival of their young. Since 2005, the number of age-1 striped bass entering the population each year has been mostly below average, including four of the past five years. With fewer striped bass born in the years before and after 2015, it is

important for as many striped bass from the 2015 year-class to grow to spawning size and have as many opportunities to reproduce as possible in an effort to yield additional strong year-classes and support stock rebuilding.

Another factor that played into the Board's decision was strong public support for actions that aid in stock rebuilding, as evidenced in the public comments received during the Amendment 7 process, and calls for the Board to expeditiously respond to the new stock projections. Even with these overwhelming reasons, the Board did not take this action lightly. During their deliberations, Board members expressed concern about the possible impact the emergency action would have on the for-hire industry and recreational anglers. However, the need to take decisive and quick action to protect the 2015-year class and ensure rebuilding prevailed.

As part of the emergency action for striped bass, the Commission is required to hold four public hearings to inform the public of its action and identify next steps for management. These hearings were held virtually from mid- to late May.

Next Steps

To address the concerns about increased removals and stock rebuilding beyond 2023, the Board also initiated Addendum II to consider 2024 management measures designed to reduce fishing mortality to the target. The Draft Addendum will include options for the ocean recreational fishery, Chesapeake Bay recreational fisheries, and all commercial fisheries. Consistent with the addendum process, there will be ample opportunity for the public and interested stakeholders to provide their input on 2024 measures.

For measures beyond 2024, the Board intends to consider the results of the upcoming 2024 stock assessment update to inform subsequent management action. To enable an expedited management response to the 2024 stock assessment update, the Draft Addendum will propose an option that would enable the Board to respond to the results of the stock assessment updates via Board action (instead of an addendum) if the stock is not projected to rebuild by 2029.

As one of the Commission's flagship species and one of the premier fisheries along the Atlantic coast, the Commission is fully invested in ensuring striped bass is given its very best chance of rebuilding. The emergency action is one of several steps the Atlantic Striped Bass Board has taken over the past few years to get striped bass on a positive rebuilding trajectory. Further, the steps that are needed to do so will require the concerted effort of all those who derive the greatest benefit from the resource. We cannot recover the species without your help and hope you will join us in making sure that happens.

2023 Benchmark Stock Assessment Finds Stock Not Overfished Nor Experiencing Overfishing

Introduction

As the largest member of the drum family and known to provide a tough fight, recreational anglers are increasingly interested in black drum (*Pogonias cromis*) on the Atlantic coast. In the South Atlantic, recreational fisheries mainly keep small sub-adults and release larger, mature black drum. In contrast, the Mid-Atlantic recreational fisheries harvest mostly larger, mature fish. While recreational fisheries occur on a larger scale than commercial, black drum are harvested in both sectors along the coast.

The first Black Drum Fishery Management Plan (FMP), approved in 2013, and first coastwide stock assessment, which was completed in 2015, were initiated due to number of concerns, such as increases in commercial and recreational harvest, and the targeting of younger fish and the older breeding stock, which could undermine the stock's ability to sustain itself.

The 2023 Black Drum Benchmark Assessment is the second coastwide assessment to be conducted for this species and found, similar to the 2015 benchmark assessment, that this stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring.

Life History

Black drum can be found in nearshore waters along the Atlantic coast from the Gulf of Maine to Florida and as far south as Argentina. The Atlantic coastal population migrates inshore to the north in the spring, and to the south in the fall. Fish can reach over 46", 120 pounds, and 60 years of age. Black drum have a fairly unique life history, as they are relatively long-lived, but, unlike a lot of other long-lived species, are also fast growing and mature early. They grow rapidly until the age of 15, at which time growth slows.

Spawning occurs during the winter and early spring, occurring earlier in the southern areas (November - April) and later in the northern areas (April - June). An average-sized female (13.4 pounds) may spawn 32 million eggs each year. Recruitment appears to be sporadic, with infrequent large events.

Black drum are primarily bottom feeders. Young black drum feed on small fish and invertebrates, such as copepods, annelids, and amphipods. Adults primarily feed on mollusks, such as oysters and mussels, and crabs. The eggs and larvae of this species were shown to be subject to high predation. As juveniles, they are prey to a wide range of estuarine fish species, such as spotted seatrout and crevalle jack.

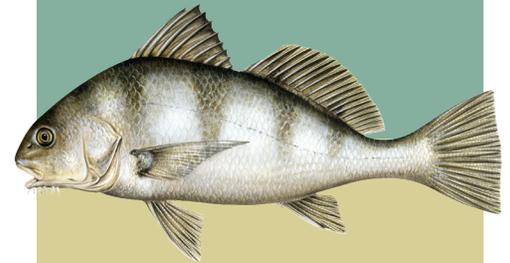
Commercial & Recreational Fisheries

With sizes reaching over 46 inches in length and 120 pounds in weight, black drum are drawing increasing interest from recreational anglers, particularly as a catch and release fishery. Outside of a large peak in 2008, recreational and commercial landings have remained fairly stable since 2000, with recreational landings far exceeding (typically 20-30 times) those of commercial (by weight). On average, from 2013 to 2022, recreational landings made up 96% of the total coastwide harvest.

Recreational landings in 2022 were 4.9 million pounds, or 849,406 fish, with landed fish constituting roughly 31% of all black drum caught by the fishery. The other 69% of recreationally caught fish (1.9 million fish in 2022) were released alive, largely due to implementation of the 2013 FMP, which required implementation of a minimum size limit. Florida, followed by North Carolina and South Carolina, landed and released the majority of recreational harvest in 2022.

The commercial fishery landed approximately 238,511 pounds in 2022. North Carolina, Virginia, and Florida fisheries comprised the majority of total commercial harvest.

Species Snapshot



Black Drum
Pogonias cromis

Species Range: Nearshore waters from the Gulf of Maine to Argentina

Management Unit: New Jersey through Florida

Common Names: Black drum, black fish, big ugly, striped drum

Interesting Facts

- Largest member of the drum family, growing to over 120 pounds
- An average size female (13.4 pounds) may spawn 32 million eggs each year.
- All fish in the drum family have the ability to make a "drumming" noise with their air bladder, which is most developed in the black drum and can sometimes be heard by boaters as schools swim by.
- Black drum have one of the strongest bite forces of all fish due to their diet of oysters, mussels, clams, and crabs.

East Coast Record: 122 pounds and 4 feet long, caught in South Carolina in 2020

Life Span: 60+ years old

Stock Status: Not overfished nor experiencing overfishing

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Stock Status

The 2023 benchmark stock assessment for black drum was endorsed by an independent Peer Review Panel of fisheries experts and accepted by the Sciaenids Management Board for management use this May.

The assessment indicates the stock is neither overfished nor experiencing overfishing. The model estimated increasing spawning biomass, which has remained above the spawning biomass threshold throughout the time series. Exploitation has remained below the exploitation threshold throughout the time series. Exploitation was estimated to be relatively high in the mid-1980s, followed by lower levels throughout the 1990s. Exploitation increased around 2000 and has remained at a higher, stable level throughout the remainder of the time series.

A suite of indicators from black drum data sets were also developed as part of this assessment to annually monitor the stock for any concerning trends. Indicators include eight indices of abundance, one index of range expansion, and six indices of fishery characteristics (i.e., regional catch time series). The assessment reviewed the indicators for the time series of 1982-2020. The indicators show increased fishery removals in the past 20 years and less frequent large recruitment events in the Mid-Atlantic in the past ten years. There are no clear indications of a declining trend in abundance from abundance indicators, but there is a declining trend in the final two years of the recreational releases time series that may be reflective of abundance in addition to other factors. There is some indication of northern range expansion. Overall, stock indicators do not appear negative at this time.

More information on the results of the benchmark assessment, can be found in the [Stock Assessment Overview](#) and the [2023 Benchmark Assessment and Peer Review Report](#).

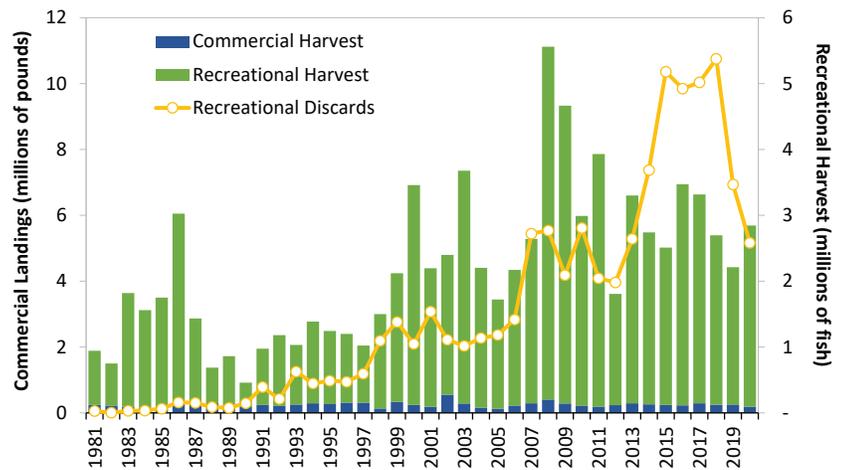
Atlantic Coastal Management

In 2013, the Commission adopted the first Black Drum FMP, which required all states to implement a maximum possession limit and a minimum size limit of no less than 14 inches in addition to maintaining their previous regulations. Further, the FMP established a management framework to address future concerns or changes in the fishery or population. The FMP also included a management framework to adaptively respond to future concerns or changes in the fishery or population. Concern about the increase in harvest by both recreational anglers and commercial harvesters were alleviated by the findings of the 2015 stock assessment. Given the assessment findings, the Board chose to not make any additional changes to the management program at that time.

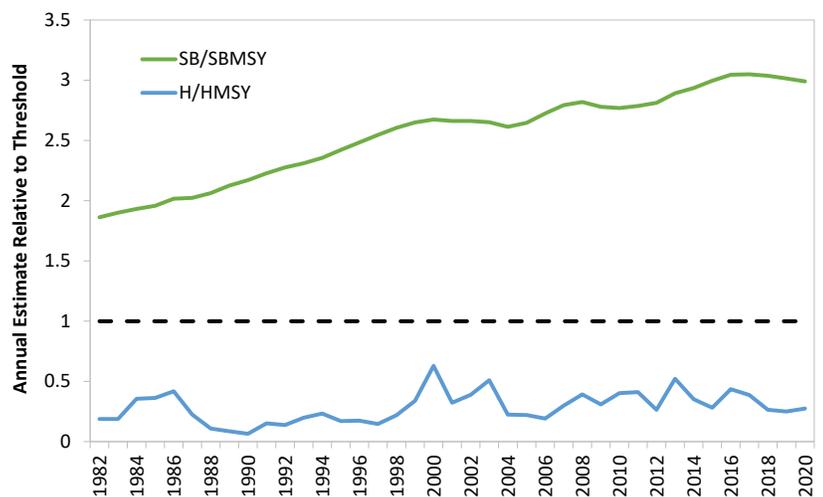
In March 2017, a report on [Sciaenid Fish Habitat](#) was released including information on habitat for several species, including black drum, during all stages of their lives, their associated Essential Fish Habitats and Habitat Areas of Particular Concern, threats and uncertainties to their habitats, and recommendations for habitat management and research. This report is meant to be a resource when amending FMPs in the future for these species.

The Board approved Addendum I in 2018. The Addendum allowed Maryland to reopen its black drum commercial fishery in the Chesapeake Bay with a daily vessel limit of up to 10 fish and a 28-inch minimum size. For more information, please contact Tracey Bauer, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at tbauer@asmfc.org.

Black Drum Recreational and Commercial Harvest and Recreational Discards



Black Drum Relative Spawning Biomass and Exploitation



Scientific and Technical Contributions

Carol Hoffman, (retired) New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

Carol Hoffman, previously with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, was recognized for her longstanding scientific and technical contributions to the management of Atlantic striped bass and American eel. Her keen understanding of fishery management plans and strong analytical abilities helped to ensure that New York managed these species in consideration of both state and coastwide needs. Carol's thorough and detailed approach to data analysis and report development has been key to maintaining New York's high quality of work. Her unmatched ability to meticulously remember the Commission's procedures and timelines ensured that New York consistently fulfilled its interstate management responsibilities.

A strong communicator and dedicated team player, Carol fostered strong relationships not only within the marine district, but also with New York's inland and Hudson River fisheries. She developed vital working relationships with her neighboring states of New Jersey and Connecticut which allowed striped bass and eel to be monitored and managed successfully on a regional level. Particularly for eel, Carol worked tirelessly to provide alternative data sets from a citizen science group and a power plant in New York, both of which are now used to assess the species.

Not only has Carol delivered timely and accurate data analyses and compliance reports, she has also been instrumental in the extensive process of regulation formulation that supports the Commission's mandates. Her efforts contributed to New York being an active and dedicated participant in the Commission's fisheries management process.



From left to right: ASMFC Executive Director Bob Beal, Environmental Conservation Officer Lieutenant Sean Reilly, Carol Hoffman, Awards Committee Chair Jim Gilmore, and ASMFC Chair Spud Woodward

Law Enforcement Contributions

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Police, Region 3

The last award was presented to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Police (Region 3) for their efforts in the protection of the Atlantic striped bass along the spawning grounds of the Hudson River. Over the past three years, Region 3 officers have conducted patrols of the Western, Putnam, Orange, and Rockland Counties for recreational fishery compliance inspections.

Throughout February and March, the Environmental Conservation Police dedicated its resources to the protection of migrating striped

bass. During 14 dedicated patrols in 2023 alone, officers issued 430 tickets for violations of striped bass regulations and other associated violations. Officers also seized 184 illegally possessed striped bass during their patrols; these fish were later donated to a local zoo. The dedicated patrols were conducted at varied times of the day and night. Officers used specialized night vision gear to aid in the detection of anglers. Over the course of this operation, violations included: fishing without a marine registration; failure

to use circle hooks; exceeding the possession and size limits; and targeting striped bass during a closed season.

With the opening of the season on April 1, the dedicated patrols have ended, but officers continue to diligently monitor the fishery. Through their efforts, these officers have helped to ensure that fishing regulations are upheld and the resource is given its best chance to rebuild.

ASMFC Outreach Survey: Help Us to Improve Our Website and Outreach Activities!

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission will be updating its website over the next several months and seeks your input on what you like best about it and areas where you would like to see improvements. We hope to make changes to improve navigability and accessibility, and revise content to best meet your needs. The survey also asks questions on some of our other outreach activities.

Please take some time to fill out the survey (see below link) and submit your responses by **Tuesday, June 20**. The survey is expected to take 7-10 minutes to complete. Feel free to share the link with anyone you think may have an interest in the Commission's website and outreach activities. We very much appreciate your time and effort.

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ASMFC_Survey

American Lobster

In May, the American Lobster Management Board approved Addendum XXVII to Amendment 3 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for American Lobster. The Addendum establishes a trigger mechanism to implement management measures – specifically gauge and escape vent sizes – to provide additional protection of the Gulf of Maine/Georges Bank (GOM/GBK) spawning stock biomass (SSB). It also implements changes to management measures for Lobster Conservation Management Areas (LCMAs) 1, 3, and Outer Cape Cod (OCC) to improve the consistency of measures across the GOM/GBK stock.

The Board initiated the Addendum as a proactive measure to improve the resiliency of the GOM/GBK stock. Since the early 2000s, landings of the GOM/GBK stock have rapidly increased. In Maine alone, landings have increased from 57 million pounds in 2000 to a record high of 132.6 million pounds in 2016. Maine landings have declined slightly but were still high at 97.9 million and 108.9 million in 2020 and 2021, respectively. However, since 2012, lobster settlement surveys throughout the GOM have generally been below the time series averages in all areas. These surveys, which measure trends in the abundance of juvenile lobsters, can be used to track populations and potentially forecast future landings. Persistent low settlement could foreshadow declines in recruitment and landings. In the most recent years of the time series, declines in recruitment indices have also been observed.

In response to these trends, Addendum XXVII establishes a mechanism where changes to the current gauge and escape vent sizes in LCMAs 1, 3 and OCC will be implemented automatically based on observed changes in recruit abundance indices. If the index of recruit abundance declines by 35% from the reference level (equal to the three-year average from 2016-2018), a series of gradual changes to gauge and vent size will be initiated in the following fishing year. These include two

Timing of Management Changes in American Lobster Addendum XXVII

When change(s) will be implemented	What change will be implemented		
	LCMA 1	LCMA 3	Outer Cape Cod
January 1, 2024	Trap tags issuance limited to harvester allocation		v-notch definition: 1/8" with or without setal hairs; Maximum gauge size: 6 3/4"
Fishing year following an observed 35% decline in the trigger index (Year 1)	Minimum gauge size: 3 5/16"		
Year 3	Minimum gauge size: 3 3/8"		
Year 4	Escape vent size: 2 x 5 3/4" rectangular; 2 5/8" circular		
Year 5		Maximum gauge size: 6 1/2"	Maximum gauge size: 6 1/2"

increases to the minimum gauge size in LCMA 1 (GOM) and a single decrease to the maximum gauge size in LCMA 3 (offshore federal waters) and OCC. The gauge and escape vent size changes are intended to increase the proportion of the population that is able to reproduce before being harvested, and to enhance stock resiliency by protecting larger lobsters of both sexes.

Additionally, Addendum XXVII implements measures that resolve discrepancies between the regulations for state and federal permit-holders, provide a more consistent conservation strategy, and simplify interstate commerce and enforcement across management areas. Specifically, the Addendum implements a standard v-notch definition of 1/8" with or without setal hairs in LCMA 3 and OCC, and a standard maximum gauge size of 6 3/4" for LCMA 3 and state and federal permit holders in OCC. It also modifies the management program such that for LCMA 1 and 3 permit holders, states must limit the issuance of trap tags to equal the harvester trap tag allocations unless trap losses are documented. The implementation date for these changes is January 1, 2024.

The accompanying table specifies the timing of management changes for each of the three LCMAs addressed under Addendum XXVII. The Addendum is available at https://asmfc.org/uploads/file/64651dabAmLobsterAddendumXXVII_May2023.pdf.

For more information, please contact Caitlin Starks, Senior Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at cstarks@asmfc.org.

Atlantic Striped Bass

In May, the Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board approved an emergency action to implement a 31-inch maximum size limit for striped bass recreational fisheries, effective immediately for 180 days (through October 28, 2023). This action responds to the unprecedented magnitude of 2022 recreational harvest, which is nearly double that of 2021, and new stock rebuilding projections, which estimate the probability of the spawning stock rebuilding to its biomass target by 2029 drops from 97% under the lower 2021 fishing mortality rate to less than 15% if the higher 2022 fishing mortality rate continues each year.

"Based on concern for the stock and the long-term interests of its stakeholders, the Board acted decisively to protect one of the few remaining strong year classes," said Board Chair Marty Gary with the Potomac River Fisheries Commission. "The public is concerned about stock rebuilding and has urged the Board to expeditiously respond to the new stock projections. Striped bass is one of the flagship species of the Commission, and this action sends a strong signal that the Board is firmly committed to rebuilding the stock for current and future

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generations. At the same time, the Board recognizes that this action will have a profound impact on the for-hire industry and recreational anglers, however, it feels it is a necessary step to ensure rebuilding.”

As outlined in the Commission’s Interstate Fisheries Management Program Charter, a management board can take emergency action to address circumstances under which public health or the conservation of coastal fishery resources or attainment of fishery management objectives has been placed substantially at risk by unanticipated changes in the ecosystem, the stock, or the fishery.

The Board implemented the emergency 31” maximum size limit for 2023 to reduce harvest of the strong 2015-year class. The 31” maximum size limit applies to all existing recreational fishery regulations where a higher (or no) maximum size applies, excluding the May Chesapeake Bay trophy fisheries which already prohibit harvest of fish less than 35”. All bag limits, seasons, and gear restrictions will remain the same. Jurisdictions are required to implement the required measure as soon as possible but no later than July 2, 2023. If it deems necessary, the Board may extend the emergency action for two additional periods of up to one year each at a future Board meeting.

Draft Addendum II Initiated

The Board also initiated Addendum II to Amendment 7 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan to consider 2024 management measures designed to reduce fishing mortality to the target. Specifically, the Draft Addendum will propose options for the ocean recreational fishery, including modifications to the slot limit with harvest season closures as a secondary non-preferred option. It will also propose options for the Chesapeake Bay recreational fisheries, as well as all commercial fisheries, including maximum size limits. Board members emphasized the importance of soliciting public input

through the addendum process for 2024 measures following the 2023 emergency action.

The Draft Addendum will also propose an option that will allow the Board to respond to the results of the stock assessment updates via Board action if the stock is projected to not rebuild by 2029. The Board will consider the Draft Addendum at the Summer Meeting, when it will either approve the document for public comment, or provide feedback for further development of the document.

Addendum I Approved

The Board also approved Addendum I to Amendment 7. When the stock is not overfished, the Addendum enables the Board to decide every one to two years whether it will allow voluntary transfers of ocean commercial quota. The Board can also set criteria for allowable transfers, including a limit on how much and when quota can be transferred in a given year, and the eligibility of state to request a transfer based on its landings. When the stock is overfished, no quota transfers will be allowed.

To inform final action on this Addendum, the Board considered public comments, Advisory Panel input, and a Technical Committee report addressing the impact of additional quota utilization on stock rebuilding.

“The Board’s decision on Addendum I balances the commercial industry’s desire for a quota transfer mechanism with the need for caution when the stock is overfished,” said Board Chair Gary. “This was the most restrictive option for allowing transfers, giving the Board the ability to establish boundaries around quota transfers, as needed.”

Addendum I will be available in June on the Commission website at <http://www.asmfc.org/species/atlantic-stripped-bass> under Management Plans and FMP Reviews. For more information, please contact Emilie Franke, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at efranke@asmfc.org.

Horseshoe Crab

In May, the Horseshoe Crab Management Board approved revisions to a guidance document on Best Management Practices (BMPs) for Handling Horseshoe Crabs for Biomedical Purposes. The document recommends broadly applicable industry standards that are expected to minimize mortality and injury of horseshoe crabs associated with the biomedical process. It also provides background on the horseshoe crab biomedical fishery, information on current regulations in the Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Horseshoe Crab related to biomedical collections, and research recommendations that could further inform the BMPs and potentially further reduce mortality or injury of biomedical horseshoe crabs.

The revised document is the product of a Board-appointed work group that was tasked with reviewing and updating the BMPs for handling biomedical catch since over a decade has passed since the BMPs were originally developed. The work group included technical committee and advisory panel members with expertise in horseshoe crab biology, ecology, and biomedical processing.

It is the Board’s intention to keep this document up-to-date, with periodic updates in the future. The document is available at https://asmfc.org/uploads/file/645bf065HSC_Biomedical_BMPs_2023.pdf.

For more information, please contact Caitlin Starks, Senior Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at cstarks@asmfc.org.

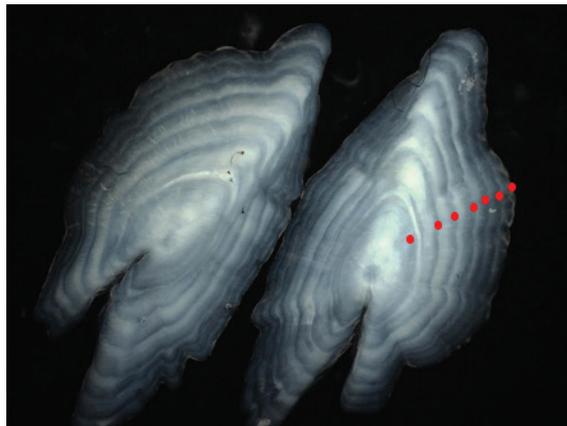


ASMFC Fish Ageing Activities & Quality Control

Fish age data is an important component of any stock assessment in describing the life history of a fish, such as growth, or as an input to an age-structured model. Fisheries biologists determine the age of a fish by counting annual markings of growth observed on one or more body parts. Annual markings (also called annuli) form because fish grow at different rates during the warm (faster) and cool (slower) seasons, producing alternating translucent and opaque bands on an ageing structure. These marks can be read in the same way that rings are counted to age trees. The most commonly used ageing structures are fish scales and otoliths (ear bones), but opercula (gill plates) and spines are also used. Because of the importance of fish ages to stock assessments, the Commission organizes workshops to address important questions related to fish ageing techniques such as stand-alone species workshops and an annual Fish Ageing Quality Assurance/Quality Control Workshop.

Many of the stock assessments for fish species managed by the Commission identify the collection of ageing hard parts, development of sample processing and reading protocols, and regular sample exchanges as research priorities. Several species have had their own ageing structure exchange and workshop in response to the publication of a new ageing technique, to resolve an issue that emerges during the analysis of age data, or to establish protocols. In 2019, for example, the Tautog Technical Committee tasked the Ageing Committee with evaluating the use of pelvic spine ages and determining if spines provided ages consistent with those of opercula and otoliths following a published study on the method. Agers from Massachusetts through Virginia participated in a workshop to receive training on preparing and reading pelvic spines followed by a sample exchange to read all three ageing structures. Following that exercise, agers approved spine ages for use in assessment models. The pandemic paused in-person ageing workshops for a few years, but both Atlantic sturgeon and Atlantic menhaden have workshops and exchanges planned for 2023-2024.

In addition to stand-alone workshops, there is a continued need for a quality assurance/quality control (QA/QC) workshop because any gradual decline in ageing accuracy could have detrimental effects on stock assessments, and consistency should be monitored over time. Following the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC) protocol to hold an annual workshop for its participating members to evaluate ageing structures from their managed species, the Commission made this a research priority. From 2016 to 2019 and beginning again in 2023, the Commission has held an annual Fish Ageing QA/QC Workshop for agers from Maine to



Tautog otoliths with red dots showing the annuli rings (c) ASMFC

Florida to maintain consistency for Commission-managed species and identify any ageing issues.

Each spring, the Ageing Committee meets at the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FL FWRI) in St. Petersburg to age six to seven different species. Jessica Carroll, an Associate Research Scientist and head of the ageing lab at the FL FWRI, coordinates the workshop with Commission staff and also participates in the GSMFC QA/QC Workshop, thus providing a link between the two annual ageing meetings. The

Ageing Committee maintains a collection of ageing structures from Commission-managed species that are routinely aged along the Atlantic coast. The full QA/QC sample collection contains approximately 20 samples from the following species: Atlantic croaker, Atlantic menhaden, Atlantic striped bass, American eel, black sea bass, bluefish, cobia, red drum, scup, summer flounder, tautog, weakfish, and winter flounder. The collection used to include river herring but, after 2018, they were removed since few labs age the species and there was a lot of river-to-river variation in the samples. For the 2024 workshop, spot and black drum will be added for the first time. For species that use two or more hard parts for providing ages to an assessment, like tautog, paired samples (meaning that a spine, otolith, and opercula collected from the same fish) are included in the workshop collection.

At the workshop each year, agers rotate between stations that have each species' samples. In groups of three to four people, the agers record their individual age readings, familiarity with ageing that species, and a group consensus age. Both individual and group ages are analyzed. Ageing precision between groups for consensus ages is evaluated using average percent error (APE). A low APE indicates higher agreement between readers and a high APE indicates low agreement between readers. An APE of 0%, as was the case for weakfish in 2023, indicates that every group provided the same age for every sample in the collection (see table on page 10). APE varies over the years for each species and often helps the readers identify common issues. For example, bluefish used to have high APE values the first few years of the workshop because of the difficulty distinguishing between age-0 and age-1 fish. Due to this workshop, APE for bluefish has decreased over the years as participants revisit the issue and maintain their training on ageing this species.

The workshop is also an opportunity to discuss emerging ageing issues and make recommendations for ageing labs along the Atlantic coast. Some agers noted at the 2023 workshop that they have observed changing timelines in annulus deposition

continued on next page

in species such as bluefish. To address this, new samples will be added (e.g., collected in 2020 or later) for next year’s workshop so the agers can begin to assess if this is an issue among species the Commission manages and possibly make recommendations on how to address it. The group did something similar with tautog by adding all three approved ageing structures to the sample collection following the stand-alone workshop for the species. The results from the 2023 QA/QC Fish Ageing Workshop indicated that spines and otoliths provide ages with higher agreement – both between readers and structures – than those from opercula. The recommendation from the group is to discourage opercula ageing for tautog, while recognizing that not all state programs can pivot to collecting and ageing different structures.

Ageing structure with sample size in parentheses and average percent error (APE) between the ageing groups for each species at the annual ASMFC QA/QC Fish Ageing Workshops.

Species	Ageing structure (sample size)	2016	2017	2018	2019	2023
Alewife herring	scales (5), otoliths (5)	13.2%	-----	29.2%	-----	-----
American eel	otoliths (20)	-----	-----	-----	10.4%	-----
Atlantic croaker	otoliths (20)	7.8%	10.6%	-----	0.6%	-----
Atlantic menhaden	scales (19)	-----	15.4%	13.5%	-----	-----
Black sea bass	scales (4), otoliths (16)	3.7%	-----	12.7%	-----	7.6%
Blueback herring	scales (5), otoliths (5)	13.2%	-----	23.1%	-----	-----
Bluefish	otoliths (20)	23.1%	25.6%	17.7%	-----	5.8%
Cobia	otoliths (20)	-----	-----	-----	-----	4.4%
Red drum	otoliths (20)	-----	-----	26.8%	-----	0.3%
Scup	otoliths (14), scales (6)	-----	-----	11.6%	-----	5.3%
Striped bass	scales (15), otoliths (15)	5.0%	-----	7.5%	5.9%	-----
Summer flounder	scales (6), otoliths (14)	-----	3.6%	-----	6.9%	-----
Tautog	opercula (8), pelvic spine (6), otoliths (8)	6.1%	10.9%	11.3%	8.2%	9.6%
Weakfish	otoliths (20)	-----	-----	-----	-----	0.0%
Winter flounder	scales (5), otoliths (15)	-----	4.4%	-----	7.8%	-----

Since 2016, the QA/QC Fish Ageing Workshop has been an opportunity for agers to collaborate and advise on relevant issues for ageing ASMFC species. It has contributed to maintaining consistent ageing practices along the coast and refining best practices for the Atlantic states ageing labs. Annual QA/QC Fish Ageing and individual species’ ageing workshop reports can be found on the Commission website at <https://asmfc.org/fisheries-science/research#Ageing>. If there are any ageing issues identified by biologists or agers in your state that should be discussed by the Ageing Committee, please contact Kristen Anstead, Senior Stock Assessment Scientist, at kanstead@asmfc.org.

Data & Methods Workshop Scheduled for Atlantic Menhaden Ecological Reference Point Benchmark Stock Assessment

The Commission has begun work on the Atlantic Menhaden Ecological Reference Point (ERP) Benchmark Stock Assessment. The assessment will be used to evaluate the health of the stock and inform the management of the species in an ecological context. In order to ensure the incorporation of the most up-to-date information on Atlantic menhaden, a single-species menhaden stock assessment update will also be completed in 2025. The ERP assessment will be peer-reviewed in 2025. The ERP Work Group will conduct a Data & Methods Workshop from October 2 – 6; details on the location will be released once they become available. The Workshop is open to the public, with the exception of discussions of confidential data*, when the public will be asked to leave the room.

The Commission welcomes the submission of data sources and alternate models that will improve the accuracy of the assessment. This includes, but is not limited to, data on commercial landings and discards, catch per unit effort and relative abundance, biological samples (length or age frequency), and life history information (growth, maturity, fecundity, natural mortality, spawning stock biomass) for Atlantic menhaden. As an ecological-based assessment, the Commission is also interested in information on major predators of Atlantic menhaden (e.g., predator diets, consumption rates, trends in abundance) and alternate prey species such as Atlantic herring or bay anchovies, including evidence for localized depletion or changes in abundance at finer regional scales. For data sets or models to be considered, the data must be sent in the required format with accompanying description of methods to Katie Drew, Stock Assessment Team Lead, at kdrew@asmfc.org by **Friday, September 1, 2023**. Any models submitted without complete, editable source code and input files will not be considered. For more information about the assessments, the submission and presentation of materials at the Data and Methods Workshop, or attending the Workshop, please contact James Boyle, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at jboyle@asmfc.org.

* Each state and federal agency is responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of its data and deciding who has access to its confidential data. In the case of our stock assessments and peer reviews, all analysts and, if necessary, reviewers, have been granted permission by the appropriate agency to use and view confidential data. When the assessment team needs to show and discuss these data, observers to our stock assessment process are asked to leave the room to preserve confidentiality.

ACCSP Enhances Software with Oracle Spatial Tools

What are spatial data?

Spatial data are any data related to or containing information about a specific location on the Earth’s surface. In the partner data that ACCSP works with, these elements include latitude, longitude, statistical area, management areas, distance from shore and more. These spatial components can be used to simplify data collection, and present data in a more accessible format across space and time.

Oracle spatial tools consist of integrated functions, procedures, data types, and data models that support spatial analytics. Essentially, it is all the cool spatial analysis features provided through your favorite GIS software, right inside the database. The APEX map region feature was released by Oracle in 2021. These tools allow ACCSP developers to integrate dynamic visualizations of spatial data (maps) in SAFIS and Data Warehouse applications.

How is ACCSP using these tools now?

ACCSP is leveraging the technology to create efficiencies and products that benefit our partners and industry users. Notably, ACCSP has used the map to create parts of the application supporting the vessel tracking requirements of American Lobster Addendum XXIX and Jonah Crab Addendum IV. A small group of administrators with approved confidential access can view reports and maps that visualize location data based on the permit and vessel activity (Figure 1). ACCSP has also released a new map feature in eTRIPS/online that allows users to see statistical areas when reporting their location. The map allows them to record a latitude and longitude with a single click on the map (Figure 2).

What is ACCSP planning?

ACCSP will be exploring enhancements to the existing map features over the next few years. One example is working with Massachusetts and Rhode Island on geofencing aspects of their ACCSP funded project. In eTRIPS/online, ACCSP is exploring a ‘one-click’ format, where users could drop a single point on a map that populates all their spatial data questions, saving them time. Also, we are developing a page for Data Warehouse users to visualize non-confidential coastal landings.

There are many potential uses for these tools that would help ease reporting burden on harvesters and dealers, aid state and federal managers, and provide visualizations for public data users in the ACCSP Data Warehouse. Visit www.accsp.org to see the latest map features and news.

Figure 1. Vessel Trip Viewer Showing Locations Color-Coded Based on the Speed of the Vessel

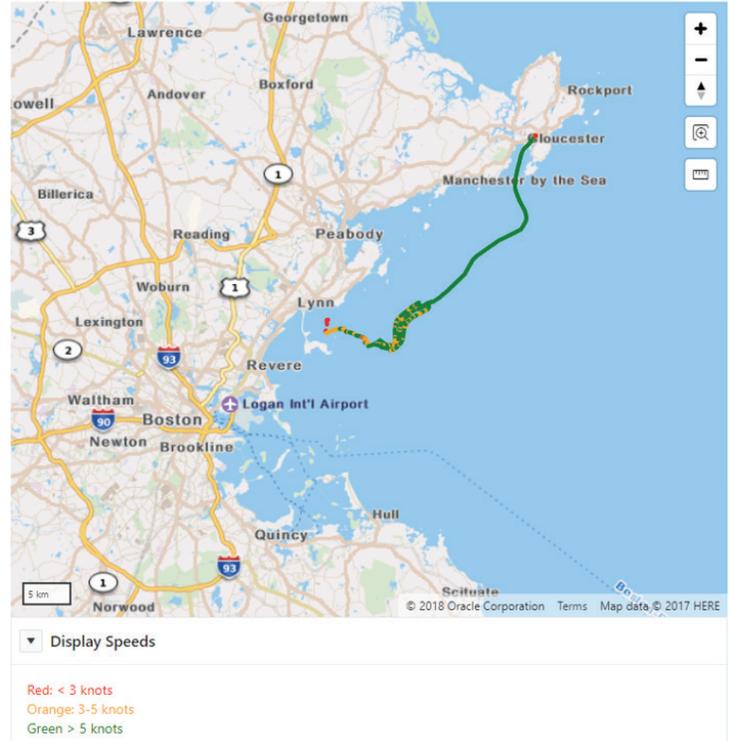
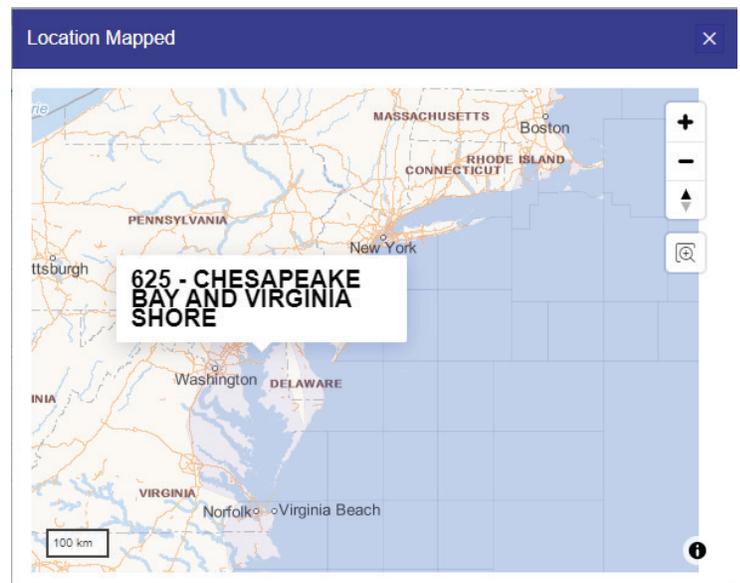


Figure 2. eTRIPS/Online Map Location Picker Showing Statistical Area



ACCSP is a cooperative state-federal program focused on the design, implementation, and conduct of marine fisheries statistics data collection programs and the integration of those data into a single data management system that will meet the needs of fishery managers, scientists, and fishermen. For further information please visit www.accsp.org.

COMMISSIONERS



REPRESENTATIVE JOSEPH P. GRESKO

Ongoing proxy: Craig Miner

In May, Representative Joseph P. Gresko became Connecticut's Legislative Commissioner to ASMFC, replacing Senator Craig Miner, who had actively served in that position from 2009-2022. Representative Gresko chairs the House Environment Committee and serves on the Energy & Technology Committee and the Executive & Legislative Nominations Committee. In 2019, he received the Legislator of the Year Award from the Bridgeport Regional Business Council.

Representative Gresko obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in environmental science from Central Connecticut State University. Upon graduation, he worked as a weather forecaster at Western Connecticut State University and Techni-Weather before catching the news bug and beginning a career in radio news. He had a successful career as a radio news reporter/anchor at WICC/WEBE, winning many Associated Press awards and twice the Ellen Abrams award for best radio reporter in the state.

After working in the City of Bridgeport administration managing all media relations and public affairs functions including the police and fire departments, Representative Gresko served as the Deputy Chief of Staff for State of Connecticut House Speaker Jim Amann. Representative Gresko currently works on green initiatives ranging from energy efficiency and renewable energy to urban forestation and sustainable growth. Representative Gresko volunteers at the CT Food Bank and annually at the Housatonic River clean-up and is a member of Protect Your Environment, the Stratford Rotary, the Lordship Fathers Club and the Stratford Oldtimers Athletic Association. He is an auxiliary member of the local VFW Post 9460 and was also a lector at Holy Name of Jesus Church. Welcome Representative Gresko and thank you Senator Miner for your longstanding and continuing service to the Commission.



REPRESENTATIVE ANITA ASTORINO KULIK

In May, Representative Anita Astorino Kulik became Pennsylvania's Legislative Commissioner to ASMFC.

Representative Kulik serves as the state representative for the 45th Legislative District and is Majority Chair of the House Game & Fisheries Committee, representing the interests of the Commonwealth's sportsmen and women.

Representative Kulik began her legal career as a law clerk in the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas. She has served as an adjunct professor teaching paralegal courses, as well as a clerk in the Pennsylvania Superior Court. Her practice has consisted of domestic cases, including custody and protection from abuse matters, as well as real estate and estate matters. Representative Kulik's political career started in Kennedy Township as a township commissioner from 2003 through 2016. She served as the township representative to the Char-West Council of Governments,

and as a legislative assistant to her predecessor, state Representative Nick Kotik. She has been active with many community organizations, including conducting various fundraising activities for her local fire department and various youth organizations. Anita continues to be an active member of St. Malachy Parish and the Parkway West Rotary Club. Welcome Representative Kulik.

STAFF



ADAM LEE

Since November 2021, Adam Lee has been a Data Coordinator for the ACCSP. In that position, he was the lead staff for the Biological Review Committee, working on updates to the biological sampling priority matrix and an online inventory of sampling programs available through the ACCSP Data Warehouse. He has advanced several state and federal agency submissions to the ACCSP, specifically the Southeast Fisheries Science Center Trip Interview Program data; North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries biological data; and species-specific datasets for American lobster, Atlantic herring, black sea bass, and Jonah crab. Adam also prepared landings data for several ASMFC stock assessments on species with complex reporting or data management schemes, including Atlantic menhaden, Jonah crab, and river herring.

Adam brought a collaborative, friendly, and engaging approach to all that he did. Adam moved to Florida a couple of months ago, continuing to work for the ACCSP via telecommuting. May 31st was his last day with the ACCSP and we wish him the very best in all his future endeavors.

JAINITA PATEL

On June 1st, Jainita Patel joined the Commission staff as its Fisheries Science Coordinator. As Coordinator, Jainita will be working with a number of science-based committees, such the Committee on Economics and Social Sciences; Assessment Science Committee;

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Management and Science Committee; Ecological Reference Points Work Group; Risk & Uncertainty Work Group; as well as committees that support the fisheries-independent data collection and data management efforts of the Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (SEAMAP)-South Atlantic and the Northeast Monitoring and Assessment Program (NEAMAP).

Jainita has spent the past three years as a graduate research assistant at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science in the Community Ecology Lab. Her work focused on testing alternative substrates for oyster recruitment and examining the impact of these substrates on benthic community ecology in the York River. Prior to that position, she worked as a restoration ecologist under contract with the Department of Defense in San Diego, and she also interned for a partner of the National Parks Service in San Francisco. Jainita has two Bachelor of Arts degrees -- one in English and the other in Environmental Studies -- from New York University and a Master of Science in Marine Science (Biological Oceanography) from the Virginia Institute of Marine Science. Please join us in welcoming Jainita.

CINDY ROBERTSON

In May at the Commission's Spring Meeting, Commissioners, proxies and staff bid a fond farewell to Cindy Robertson, ASMFC Meetings Assistant, upon her retirement after 17 years with the ASMFC. Cindy began at the Commission in 2006 as an Administrative Assistant and was promoted to Meetings Assistant in 2011. Since 2011, Cindy has assisted the Director of Finance and Administration in securing offsite accommodations and meeting venues for hundreds of meetings involving species technical committees, stock assessment subcommittees, NEAMAP and SEAMAP-SA groups, and ACCSP supporting committees. She also supported our quarterly meetings, working on meeting notices and agendas, compiling meeting materials, and finalizing proceedings.

We wish Cindy the best during her retirement and hope she gets to spend more time with her family, gardening, traveling, and enjoying life.



ACFHP Seeks Nominations for 2023 Melissa Laser Fish Habitat Conservation Award

The Melissa Laser Fish Habitat Conservation Award is bestowed by the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership upon individuals deemed to further the conservation, protection, restoration, and enhancement of habitat for native Atlantic coastal, estuarine-dependent, and diadromous fishes in a unique or extraordinary manner.

The award was established in memory of Dr. Melissa Laser who passed away unexpectedly on April 27, 2010. Melissa was a biologist with the Maine Department of Marine Resources where she worked tirelessly to protect, improve, and restore aquatic ecosystems in Maine and along the entire Atlantic coast.

As an astute strategic thinker and leader, Melissa edited and coordinated the Strategic and Operational Plan for the Restoration of Diadromous and Resident Fishes to the Penobscot River. She coordinated fish passage projects, managed and oversaw the biological field staff for the Maine Western Region, and was the Bureau of Sea Run Fisheries and Habitat Program lead for habitat restoration studies and projects. She was also an effective champion for Atlantic salmon, directing and coordinating Endangered Species Act-related actions pertaining to the species. Melissa brought her

smiling dedication and enthusiasm to the Commission's Habitat Committee and Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership's Steering Committee, catalyzed by the Commission in 2006. Her contributions to these committees and to her home state were tremendous. She is deeply missed.

View the instructions on how to submit a 2023 nomination, or visit: <https://www.atlanticfishhabitat.org/melissa-laser-fish-habitat-conservation-award/>

Read about the 2021 and 2022 award recipients, Wenley Ferguson of Save the Bay – Narragansett Bay, and Tom Twyford of West Palm Beach Fishing Club, respectively, here: Andrew Goode and Wenley Ferguson Receive the 2020 and 2021 Melissa Laser Fish Habitat Conservation Awards and Tom Twyford Receives the 2022 Melissa Laser Fish Habitat Conservation Award. We plan to present the 2023 award at the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Annual Meeting this fall.

The nominations deadline has been extended to June 19; please send nominations to Simen Kaalstad, ACFHP Director (SKaalstad@asmfc.org).