2024 ANNUAL REPORT

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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Presented in compliance with the terms of the Compact and the state-enabling acts creating such Commission and Public Law 539-77th Congress assenting thereto (Chapter 283, Second Session, 77th Congress; 56 Stat. 267) approved May 4, 1942, as amended by Public Law 721, 81st Congress, approved August 19, 1950

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Our Mission

To promote cooperative management of fisheries – marine, shell, and diadromous – of the Atlantic coast of the United States by the protection and enhancement of such fisheries, and by the avoidance of physical waste of the fisheries from any cause.

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Introduction

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) is pleased to present our 2024 Annual Report. The report fulfills our obligation to inform Congress on the Commission's use of public funds, and provides stakeholders with an overview of activities and progress in carrying out our cooperative stewardship responsibilities for the marine, shell, and diadromous species under our care.

In the report, you will find a quick guide to stock status for the 27 species groups the Commission manages; a fisheries management section, focusing on species which had the most significant management or stock assessment activities in 2024; and sections highlighting major accomplishments in 2024 in the areas of fisheries science, habitat conservation, and fishery data collection and management. Please visit the Commission's website at *asmfc.org* for additional information on any of our programs or activities.

The Commission was formed 83 years ago by the 15 Atlantic coastal states to assist in managing and conserving their shared coastal fishery resources. With the recognition that fish do not adhere to political boundaries, the states formed an Interstate Compact, which was approved by the US Congress in 1942. The Commission's mission as stated in the Compact is to promote cooperative management of fisheries – marine, shell, and diadromous – of the Atlantic coast of the US by the protection and enhancement of such fisheries, and by the avoidance of physical waste of the fisheries from any cause. The states have found that their mutual interest in sustaining healthy coastal fishery resources is best promoted by working cooperatively, in collaboration with the federal government. With this approach, the states uphold their collective fisheries management responsibilities in a cost-effective, timely, transparent, and responsive fashion.

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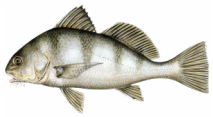
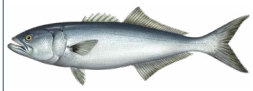
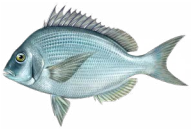
The Commission serves as a deliberative forum for the Atlantic coastal states to come together to discuss the biological, socioeconomic, and environmental issues central to developing management programs for each species. Each state is represented on the Commission by three Commissioners: the director of the state's marine fisheries management agency, a state legislator, and an individual appointed by the state's governor to represent fishery interests.

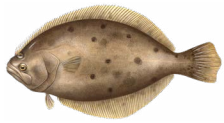
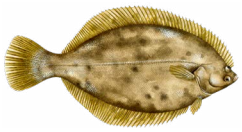
The task of managing finite marine resources continues to grow more complex in light of changing ocean conditions, competing ocean uses, predator/prey interactions, and marine mammal interactions, in addition to the more traditional considerations of stock maintenance, rebuilding, and allocation of fisheries resources. To support these activities at both the Commission and state level, the Commission has a budget of $54.2 million, which comes from a combination of state appropriations and federal grants, including the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act.

We remain grateful to Congress, the Administration, our Governors, and state legislators for their continued support of the Commission and its vision of **Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries**. Many of our accomplishments would not have been possible without their trust and confidence. In addition, the technical support provided by NOAA Fisheries, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and US Geological Survey staff to the Commission and states is an invaluable component of our interstate fisheries management, science, and data collection activities.

Quick Guide to ASMFC Species Stock Status

SPECIES		OVERFISHED	OVERFISHING	ASSESSMENT & MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW
	**American Eel**	Depleted	Unknown	Stock status based on trend analysis in 2023 benchmark stock assessment. Measures implemented in 2013/2014 to reduce fishing mortality and prevent expansion of the fishery. Maine's glass eel quota set at 9,688 pounds for 2025-2027. Coastwide yellow eel harvest cap reduced to 518,281 pounds based on continued population decline.
American Lobster 	**Gulf of Maine/ Georges Bank (GOM/GBK)**	N	N	2020 benchmark assessment estimated 2018 abundance and recruitment to be near record highs. 2024 Data Update indicates declines in abundance and slight improvements in YOY indices since the 2020 assessment. Benchmark assessment underway for both stocks.
	Southern New England	Depleted	N	Stock status based on 2020 benchmark assessment; abundance and recruitment lowest on record.
	**American Shad**	Depleted	Unknown	Stock status based on 2020 benchmark assessment. Species depleted on coastwide basis, with recovery limited by restricted access to spawning habitat. Amendment 3 established 2013 moratorium unless river-specific sustainability can be documented.
	**Atlantic Croaker**	Unknown	Unknown	2020 TLA triggered management action for Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic regions; changes to recreational and commercial fishery regulations implemented in 2021. Benchmark assessment underway.
	**Atlantic Herring**	Y	N	Stock status based on 2024 assessment update; SSB at 26% SSB target.
	**Atlantic Menhaden**	N	N	Stock status based on 2022 assessment update; use of ERPs approved by Board in 2020. Single-species assessment update, and ERP benchmark assessment and peer review scheduled for 2025.
	**Atlantic Striped Bass**	Y	N	Stock status based on 2024 assessment update. Stock rebuilding deadline is 2029. To support stock rebuilding, more restrictive management measures implemented in 2024 to reduce fishing mortality. Addendum III initiated to consider additional measures for 2026.
	**Atlantic Sturgeon**	Depleted	N	Stock status based on 2024 assessment update; coastwide abundance has likely increased since 1998 and total mortality is likely below reference point. Mixed results at DPS level. 40+ year moratorium implemented in 1998; listed in 2012 under the ESA.
	**Black Drum**	N	N	Stock status based on 2023 benchmark assessment; spawning biomass has been increasing; exploitation has remained at a higher, stable level since the early 2000s.
	**Black Sea Bass**	N	N	Stock status based on 2024 management track stock assessment; SSB estimated to be 2.2 times the biomass target. Management track scheduled for mid-2025.
	**Bluefish**	N	N	Stock status based on 2023 management track stock assessment. Amendment 2 (2021) established a 7-year rebuilding program, which will be in effect until biomass reaches target. Management track assessment scheduled for June 2025.
	**Coastal Sharks**	Varies by species and species complex		

SPECIES		OVERFISHED	OVERFISHING	ASSESSMENT & MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW
	**Cobia**	N	N	Stock status based on 2020 benchmark stock assessment. Pattern of rapid biomass increases in strong recruitment years followed by years of decline. Addendum II (2024) modifies recreational allocation framework, allows Board to quickly update allocations if underlying data are revised, expands range of data used in harvest evaluations, and allows Board to set management measures for longer periods.
	**Horseshoe Crab**	Unknown	Unknown	Stock status based on 2024 benchmark assessment update; NE region stock stable; NY region stock poor; and DE Bay and SE region stocks good. Coastwide abundance has fluctuated, with many surveys decreasing after 1998 but increasing in recent years. ARM Framework used since 2013 to set harvest levels for DE Bay-origin horseshoe crabs. ARM Framework Revision adopted via Addendum VIII in 2022.
	**Jonah Crab**	Not Depleted Compared to Historic Lows	Unknown	Stock status based on 2023 benchmark assessment; coastwide population abundance remains above historic lows but recent declines in landings and CPUE should be closely monitored. Measures implemented to prevent harvest of immature crabs and cap fishery to limit expansion.
	**Northern Shrimp**	Depleted	N	Stock status based on 2024 stock assessment update; SSB estimated to be the lowest in the time series and recruitment has remained below the time series average for the past decade. Environmental conditions continue to be unfavorable to rebuilding. Moratorium in place since 2014 to protect remaining spawning population. Amendment 4 initiated to consider extending specifications setting timeline to allow for ongoing or multi-year harvest moratoria and adding management triggers to the management program.
Red Drum 	**Northern Region**	N	N	Stock status based on 2024 benchmark stock assessment. Northern stock assessed using TLA; adult abundance and fishery performance metrics generally favorable although fishery performance metric indicates increasing fishing mortality in recent years. Continued monitoring is recommended.
	Southern Region	Y	Y	
	**River Herring**	Depleted	Unknown	Stock status based on 2024 benchmark assessment. No significant trends were detected coastwide and results varied by river. Amendment 2 established 2012 moratorium unless river-specific sustainability can be documented.
	**Scup**	N	N	Stock status based on 2023 management track stock assessment; SSB estimated to be over two times its target. Management track assessment scheduled for 2025.
	**Spanish Mackerel**	N	N	Stock status based on 2022 stock assessment update, which found stock status unchanged. However, if the high fishing mortality rate seen in 2020 continues, the stock may fall into an overfishing status.
	**Spiny Dogfish**	N	N	Stock status based on 2023 management track assessment; Despite a decline in stock productivity, SSB estimated to be 101% of the target and F to be 89% of the threshold.
	**Spot**	Unknown	Unknown	2020 TLA triggered management action for Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic regions; changes to recreational/ commercial fishery regulations implemented in 2021. Benchmark assessment will be initiated following completion of Atlantic croaker assessment.

SPECIES		OVERFISHED	OVERFISHING	ASSESSMENT & MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW
	**Spotted Seatrout**	Unknown	Unknown	No range-wide assessment. Omnibus Amendment includes measures to protect spawning stock & established 12" minimum size limit.
	**Summer Flounder**	N	Y	Stock status based on 2023 assessment. Assessment detected patterns of declining maturity and mean length/ weights at age. Management track assessment scheduled for 2025.
Tautog 	**Massachusetts-Rhode Island**	N	N	Stock status based on 2021 assessment update, which found improvements in all regions. Assessment update scheduled for 2025.
	Long Island Sound	N	N	
	New Jersey-New York Bight	Y	N	
	Delaware/ Maryland/Virginia	N	N	
	**Weakfish**	Depleted	N	Stock status based on 2019 assessment update. Species depleted since 2003; population experiencing high levels of natural mortality, preventing stock recovery. Harvest limited to 1 fish bag limit and a 100 pound commercial bycatch limit. Stock assessment update scheduled for 2025.
Winter Flounder	**Gulf of Maine**	Unknown	N	Stock status based on 2022 management track assessment; abundance indices relatively flat over time series with an increase in 2021/2022.
	**Southern New England/ Mid-Atlantic**	N	N	Stock status based on 2022 management track assessment; SSB at record lows despite sustained low levels of fishing mortality. Recruitment has declined sharply since 1980s and remains near time series low. Management track assessment scheduled for both stocks in 2025. Research track scheduled for 2026.

WHAT DOES A STATUS MEAN?

Unknown - There is no accepted stock assessment to estimate stock status.

Depleted - Reflects low levels of abundance though it is unclear whether fishing mortality is the primary cause for reduced stock size.

Overfished - Occurs when stock biomass falls below the threshold established by the fishery management plan (FMP), impacting the stock's reproductive capacity to replace fish removed through harvest, and that decline is driven primarily by fishing mortality.

Overfishing - Removing fish from a population at a rate that exceeds the threshold established in the FMP, impacting the stock's reproductive capacity to replace fish removed through harvest.

Benchmark stock assessment - A full analysis and review of stock condition, focusing on the consideration of new data sources and newer or improved assessment models. This assessment is generally conducted every few years and undergoes a formal peer review by a panel of independent scientists who evaluate whether the data and the methods used to produce the assessment are scientifically sound and appropriate for management use.

Stock assessment update - Incorporates data from the most recent years into a peer-reviewed assessment model to determine current stock status (abundance and overfishing levels).

Management track or operational assessments – Part of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) stock assessment process (management track) and the Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) stock assessment process (operational). Provides routine, scheduled, and updated advice to directly inform management actions. Management track and operational assessments ensure that stock status is updated on a regular and predictable basis.

Research track assessments – Part of the NEFSC and SEDAR stock assessment processes and are complex scientific efforts that are designed to be carried out over several years. They can (1) focus on research topics for one or more individual stocks, (2) evaluate an issue or new model/tool that could apply to many stocks and/ or (3) consider extensive changes in data, model, or stock structure. Research assessments can provide the basis for future management assessments.

TABLE ACRONYMS

ARM	Adaptive Resource Management	**F**	Fishing mortality
CPUE	Catch per unit yield	**SPRs**	Spawning potential ratio
DPS	Distinct populations segments	**SSB**	Spawning stock biomass
ERPs	Ecological reference points	**TLA**	Traffic Light Analysis
ESA	Endangered Species Act	**YOY**	Young of year

management program allows ME DMR to track the glass eels from initial purchase to export out of the state. Maine will continue to maintain daily trip level reporting and require a pound-for-pound payback in the event of quota overages in its glass eel fishery. Additionally, the state will continue to conduct its fishery-independent life cycle survey covering glass, yellow, and silver eels as required by the management program.

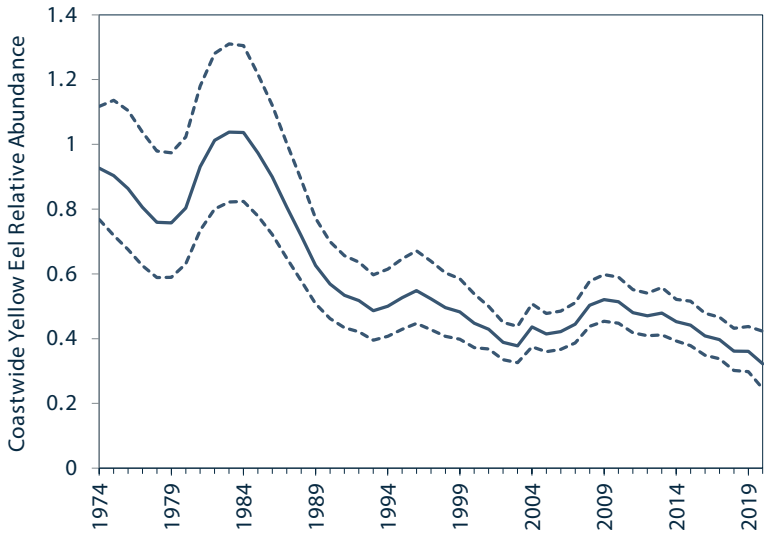
Addendum VII establishes a new yellow eel coastwide cap of 518,281 pounds, a reduction from 916,473 pounds. This action responds to the findings of the 2023 Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review Report, which indicated yellow eel abundance is at or near historically low levels due to a multitude of factors, including historical overfishing, habitat loss, food web alterations, turbine mortality, environmental changes, contaminants, and disease. The assessment and peer review recommended reducing harvest levels of the yellow eel life stage, while also recognizing that stock status is affected by other factors. The cap can be updated after three years using the additional years of abundance and catch data.

American Eel

Along the East Coast, American eel are a valuable resource from both a human use and biodiversity perspective. They serve as an important prey species for many fish, aquatic mammals, and birds. Although fisheries are a fraction of what they were historically, they continue to support valuable commercial, recreational, and subsistence fisheries in some areas along the Atlantic coast. The Maine elver fishery was worth almost $20 million in 2023.

In 2024, the American Eel Management Board approved two new addenda to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for American Eel. Addendum VI maintains Maine's glass eel quota at the current level of 9,688 pounds for 2025 to 2027. Maine commercial glass eel landings have not exceeded the quota since its implementation in 2015. The Maine Department of Marine Resources (ME DMR) manages the quota using a program that requires dealers to enter daily landings data and enables ME DMR to analyze those data within 24 hours of receipt. The quota

Coastwide Yellow Eel Relative Abundance Index with 95% Confidence Interval
Source: ASMFC American Eel Benchmark Stock Assessment Report, 2023



Atlantic Cobia

Avidly pursued by anglers as ready biters and fierce fighters, Atlantic migratory group cobia (Atlantic cobia) support recreational fisheries throughout the South Atlantic and into the Mid-Atlantic region with the stock occurring from Georgia northward. A fast growing, moderately lived species, they prefer to stay close to structure to feed and find shelter from predation. Atlantic cobia are not overfished nor experiencing overfishing according to the 2020 Benchmark Stock Assessment.

In 2024, the Coastal Pelagics Management Board approved Addendum II to Amendment 1 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Cobia. The Addendum modifies the recreational allocation framework, allows the Board to update allocations quickly if the underlying data are revised, expands the range of data used in harvest evaluations, and allows the Board to set management measures for a longer period of time. Addendum II responds to increased cobia harvest in some Mid-Atlantic states in recent years, as well as concerns about high uncertainty associated with cobia recreational harvest estimates. The Addendum's measures were effective upon the document's approval and will be used to set recreational measures for 2025 and beyond.

Addendum II changes both the geographic scope of the recreational allocation framework and the time frame of data used as the basis for allocations. The Addendum changes the allocation framework from a state-by-state to a regional, with a northern region of Rhode Island through Virginia and a southern region of North Carolina through Georgia. The new framework is intended to reduce uncertainty by using harvest estimates based on a larger sample size by combining multiple states in a region, instead of individual state-level harvest estimates.

Each region is allocated part of the recreational quota based on its percentage of the coastwide harvest in number of fish over the past ten years, combining 50% of 2014-2023 data and 50% of 2018-2023 data. Data from 2016 and 2017 were excluded due to fishery closures during those years, and data from 2020 were excluded due to COVID-19 impacts on recreational data collection. Using more recent data, as compared to previously using 2006-2015 data, accounts for changes in harvest and potential range expansion of the species in recent years.

Addendum II also allows the Board to set specifications (e.g., coastwide total harvest quota) via Board action for up to five years. Setting management measures for a longer period of time is intended to align management action with the availability of new stock assessment information.

Atlantic Menhaden

Atlantic menhaden are small, oily, schooling fish of historical, economic, and ecological importance. Historically, menhaden supported large-scale commercial reduction fisheries, bringing considerable growth to Atlantic coastal communities. The reduction fishery is so named because menhaden are processed (or reduced) into other products, such as agricultural fertilizer, fishmeal, and fish oil, as well as livestock and aquaculture feeds. Today, the reduction fishery is a fraction of what it once was, with one processing plant and several vessels operating on the Atlantic coast. However, menhaden are becoming increasingly valuable for use as bait in many important fisheries, including American lobster, blue crab, and striped bass. Total commercial catch in 2023 was approximately 166,844 metric tons, which is about 71% of the total allowable catch and a 15% decrease from 2022.

Ecologically, the species plays an important role in marine ecosystems as a forage fish (prey) for many fish, sea birds, and marine mammals. Since 2020, the Commission has been managing menhaden with the use of ecological reference

points that address the forage needs of its key fish predators. Under this management program and based on the 2022 stock assessment update, the stock continues to be successfully managed with the species not overfished nor experiencing overfishing. The next single-species assessment update and ecological reference point benchmark assessment and peer review are scheduled for completion in 2025.

In 2024, in response to public concern about possible localized depletion of Atlantic menhaden in the Chesapeake Bay and the effects of the reduction fishery on menhaden predator species in the Bay, the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board established the Work Group on Precautionary Management in Chesapeake Bay. The Work Group's charge is to consider and evaluate options for further precautionary management of Chesapeake Bay menhaden fisheries, including time and areas closures to be protective of piscivorous birds and fish during critical points of their life cycle. The Work Group will report back to the Board in May 2025.

Atlantic Striped Bass

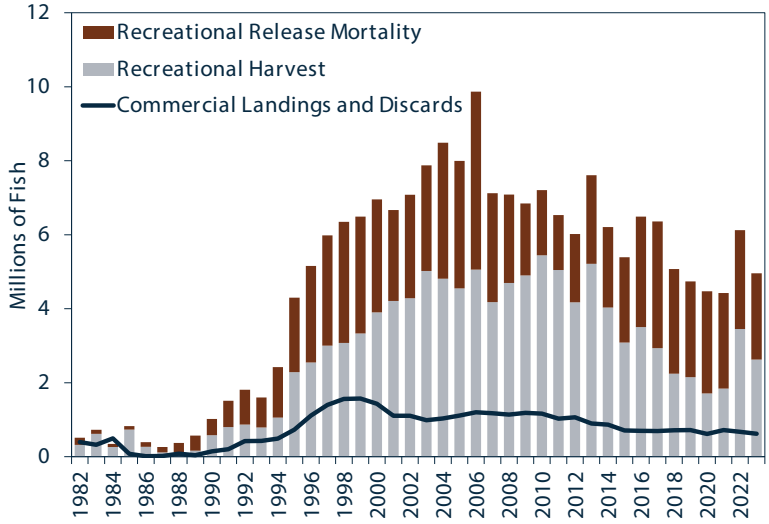
Atlantic striped bass is regularly referred to as America's greatest game fish on the US Atlantic coast. High demand for this species among fishermen and consumers, coupled with the complexity of its seasonal distribution along the coast, makes sustainable management of the population complex and challenging. Stakeholders regularly call for the Commission to implement biologically, economically, and socially sound regulations within each jurisdiction and sector. As a result, the dynamic nature of Atlantic striped bass fishery management will likely continue for many years to come, especially as the Commission focuses on rebuilding the stock to its biomass target by 2029 and as concerns continue about recent low recruitment and the lack of strong year-classes to support the stock and the fishery.

Throughout 2024, the Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board continued to evaluate modifications to management measures in response to concerns about increased removals and stock rebuilding beyond the 2023 emergency action. Early in the year, the Board approved Addendum II to Amendment 7 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Striped Bass. The Addendum implemented recreational and commercial measures designed to reduce 2024 removals from the 2022 level in order to achieve the target fishing mortality rate and support stock rebuilding. The action responds to projections that indicated a low probability of meeting the 2029 rebuilding deadline if the fishing mortality rate associated with the level of catch in 2022 continued. There was concern the existing management measures, in combination with the availability of the strong 2015 year-class to the fisheries, would lead to a similarly high level of catch in 2024.

Atlantic Striped Bass Commercial Landings and Discards & Recreational Landings and Release Mortality

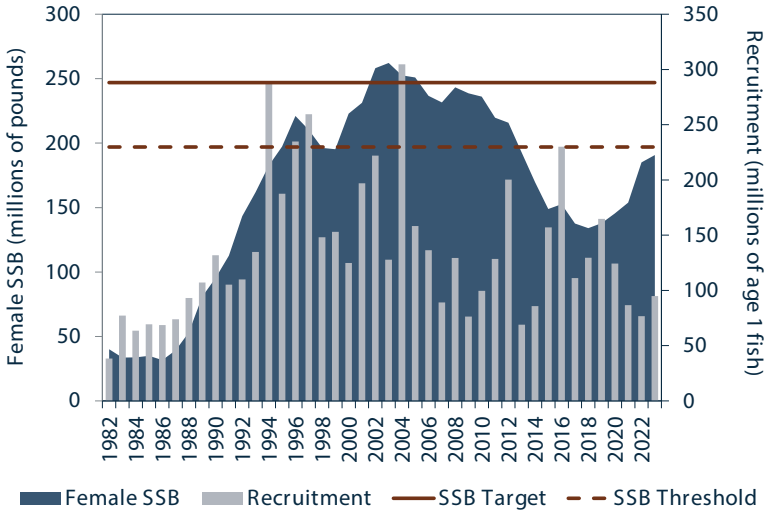
Source: ASMFC Atlantic Striped Bass Stock Assessment Update, 2024

* 9% of fish released alive are assumed to die because of being caught



Atlantic Striped Bass Female Spawning Stock Biomass and Recruitment

Source: ASMFC Atlantic Striped Bass Stock Assessment Update, 2024



Later in 2024, the Board met again to review the results of the 2024 Stock Assessment Update and consider whether further action was required for the 2025 fishing season. The Assessment Update found the resource remained overfished but was not experiencing overfishing. Short-term projections estimated an increase in fishing mortality in 2025 due to the above average 2018 year-class entering the current recreational ocean slot limit. At the meeting, the Board considered two possible paths forward. The first was to take immediate Board action to reduce fishing mortality in 2025. The second was a longer, more comprehensive process to consider changes in 2026 given one of the primary options being considered was seasonal closures, which represented a new management approach for the fishery. Ultimately, the Board chose to initiate an addendum that would provide more time to develop a comprehensive suite of management options, allow for the incorporation of 2024 fishery removals data, and afford the public with a more robust opportunity to provide input. The Board noted preliminary data indicate the current measures implemented through Addendum II are on track to reduce 2024 removals from 2023 and 2022 levels. As a result, Addendum II's management measures were maintained for the 2025 fishery while the Board considers Addendum III measures for implementation in 2026.

Horseshoe Crab

Horseshoe crabs are at the center of one of the most interesting marine resource management issues along the Atlantic coast. An ecologically important species, horseshoe crab eggs are a primary food source for red knots, a threatened shorebird under the Endangered Species Act, as they pass through the Delaware Bay on their migration from South America to the Arctic. Horseshoe crabs are also economically important, providing bait for commercial American eel and conch fisheries along the coast. Their bright blue blood is also used by the biomedical industry to produce Limulus Amoebocyte Lysate (LAL), the most widely used reagent for detecting contaminants in medical devices and drugs.

The challenge for fisheries managers is to ensure that horseshoe crabs are managed to meet all these diverse needs, while ensuring sustainability of the resource for future generations. Since 2013, horseshoe crabs in the Delaware Bay Region (New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia) have been managed under the Adaptive Resource Management (ARM) Framework. The Framework is used to set harvest levels with consideration of the needs of migratory shorebirds, specifically red knots. In the past decade, more data has been collected on red knots and horseshoe crabs and modeling software has advanced. Thus, in 2022 the ARM Framework was substantially revised to address previous peer review critiques, include newly available data, and transition to new modeling software since the old software is obsolete.

Due to the increased numbers of both male and female horseshoe crabs in the Delaware Bay Region, beginning in 2022, the Framework indicated limited female harvest was sustainable for the first time. However, given continued public and stakeholder concern about the status of the red knot population in the Delaware Bay, the Horseshoe Crab Management Board elected to maintain zero female horseshoe crab harvest for the 2023 to 2025 fishing seasons as a conservative measure.

In July 2024, the Board conducted a workshop with stakeholders interested in Delaware Bay region horseshoe crab management in response to significant stakeholder input following the ARM Framework revision. Workshop participants represented harvesters and dealers, biomedical industry, NGOs, shorebird and horseshoe crab scientists, and resource managers. The workshop aimed to identify stakeholders' values and concerns regarding the ARM Framework, as well as common ground for management. The Board considered several potential next steps based on the consensus recommendations developed at the workshop, with the first step being the initiation of an addendum to consider adding an additional specifications tool that would allow for male-only harvest for multiple years. The draft addendum will be released for public comment in early 2025.

In addition to the addendum, the Board supported recommendations to begin a dialogue with key stakeholders to better understand essential concerns for management, explore changes to the reward and utility functions of the ARM Framework, evaluate the Advisory Panel membership to ensure adequate representation of various stakeholder groups, and improve science communication about the ARM and channels for public participation.

Management of sustainable fisheries relies on accurate and timely scientific advice.

The Commission strives to produce sound, actionable science through a rigorous, peer-reviewed stock assessment process. Assessments are developed using a broad suite of fishery-independent surveys, fishery-dependent monitoring, and research conducted by a network of fisheries scientists at state, federal, and academic institutions. The Commission's scientific goals include developing innovative scientific research and methodology, and enhancing state stock assessment capabilities. Achieving these goals ensures that robust science underpins the Commission's evaluation of stock status and adaptive fisheries management actions.

STOCK ASSESSMENTS

In 2024, Commission analytical teams completed multiple species assessments and continued work on several stock assessments slated for completion in 2025. Each assessment supports significant management decisions and advances the quality of Atlantic fisheries science. Noteworthy achievements include new benchmark assessments for red drum and river herring, along with assessment updates for horseshoe crab, Atlantic sturgeon, and Atlantic striped bass. Additionally, state stock assessment scientists contributed to federal stock assessments for black sea bass, winter flounder, and Atlantic herring.

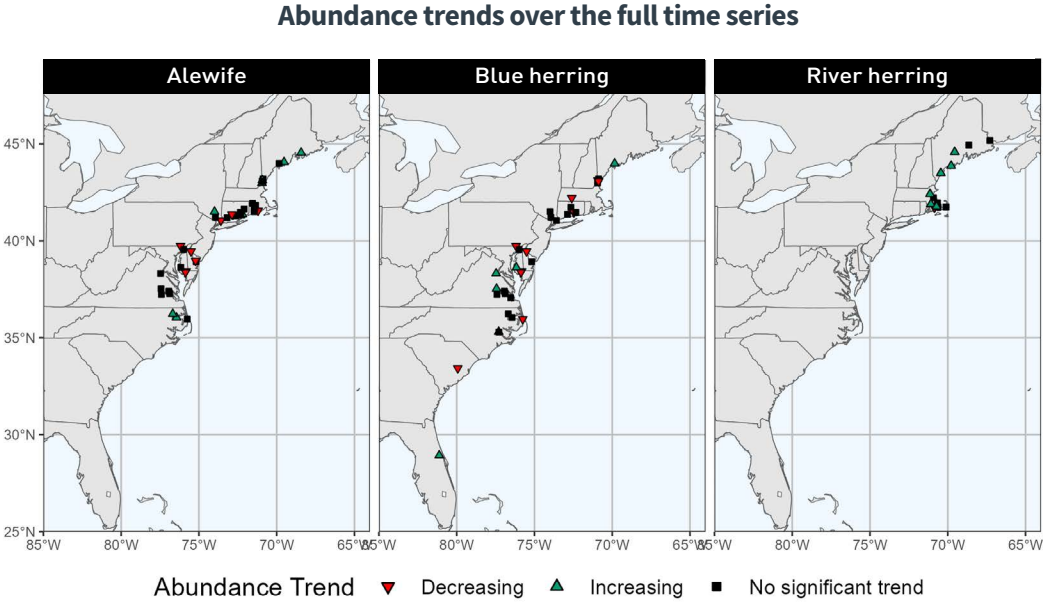
Red Drum

Red drum support very popular recreational fisheries, as well as commercial fisheries, along inshore coastal waters of the Southeast and Mid-Atlantic US. Management strategies aimed at protecting mature adults from harvest have proven successful after historical population declines. However, strategies limiting harvest coupled with the migration of mature red drum to offshore waters have resulted in data limitations, creating challenges for assessing the health of red drum stocks.

To address these challenges, a unique two-part process was implemented to improve stock assessments and provide better guidance to fishery managers. The first part involved a simulation-based evaluation of available assessment models. This framework generated data sets from simulated populations with red drum-like life histories for use in assessment models to predict population characteristics of interest (e.g., abundance, fishing mortality). Predictions were compared to the simulated populations' true, known population characteristics to evaluate accuracy and precision of different assessment models.

Given data deficiencies and high uncertainty in past red drum assessment results, the simulation evaluation was particularly valuable in the second part of the process – a traditional benchmark stock assessment. The results of the simulation evaluation demonstrated one type of model outperformed others. The selected model type was applied to both stocks to provide accurate estimates of mature fish abundance, a population characteristic not well understood in past red drum assessments.

The models that performed best in the simulation evaluation were then used in the traditional benchmark stock assessment. The simulated datasets were replaced with observed datasets from red drum populations, and assessment models were used



to estimate characteristics for the actual red drum stocks along the US Atlantic coast. The benchmark assessment determined that, throughout its range, red drum experienced increased fishing mortality in recent years and has exceeded its management reference points for healthy stocks in the Florida to South Carolina region. Lower than average recruitment of young fish, as well as high levels of fishery participation, have contributed to declining trends and conditions. The benchmark stock assessment was endorsed by a peer review panel of independent experts and accepted by Commissioners for informing management action. Assessment scientists and fishery managers are now using the models to develop management strategies to correct unfavorable trends and return red drum stocks to healthy population conditions.

River Herring

River herring is the collective name for two species of fish, alewife and blueback herring, that spend their lives in the ocean and return to rivers from Florida through Maine every spring to spawn. As a data-poor species, river herring pose significant assessment challenges. The 2024 benchmark stock assessment made progress in several areas from previous assessments. New data sources were incorporated, providing abundance or mortality information for 84 rivers, representing 105 stocks of river herring. Due to insufficient data for most rivers, trend analyses were used in lieu of a model-based assessment to evaluate recent trends in survey, monitoring, and fishery data. Methods for analyzing trends and calculating total mortality were refined, and new models were developed to understand the impacts of habitat loss and calculate limits on ocean bycatch.

The assessment found coastwide populations of both alewife and blueback herring are depleted relative to historic levels. The depleted status was used instead of overfished and overfishing because of the many factors that contributed to decreased abundance of river herring, including directed and bycatch fishing, habitat loss, predation, and changes to the environment. The habitat model indicated overall productivity of both species was significantly impaired by dams, suggesting dam removals would be much more effective than fish ladders or other means of passage above dams. When comparing abundance in rivers along the coast, a mix of positive, negative, or no trends were observed. Regionally, the Gulf of Maine showed more positive trends and higher abundance of river herring in recent years than other regions. Ocean bycatch may be a factor, as states further south closed their in-river fisheries and increased dam removals and fish passage, but have not seen the same positive trends. Genetic analyses suggest river herring from Southern New England and Mid-Atlantic comprise a significant portion of the ocean bycatch.

Fish Population Surveys

The Commission supports the Northeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (NEAMAP) and the South Atlantic component of the Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (SEAMAP-SA). These programs facilitate state- and federally-funded surveys that provide consistent sampling and long-term data series to inform fisheries stock assessments. In 2024, NEAMAP and SEAMAP-SA focused on streamlining data collection, improving collaboration across surveys, and expanding data collection in coastal waters of the eastern US.

NEAMAP

NEAMAP held workshops to support changes in scientific survey vessels and gears that ensure consistency in data collection methods. The first workshop resulted in the publication of the "NEAMAP and SEAMAP Guide to Vessel and Gear Changes and Calibrations" that provides technical guidance for making changes to survey vessels. The guidance

was particularly useful to the SEAMAP Coastal Trawl Survey that recently changed vessels. The second workshop produced recommendations for streamlining data collection by adopting more efficient collection technologies. Additionally, NEAMAP conducted a fish maturity sampling workshop to ensure that scientists from different surveys are measuring fish maturity metrics consistently, providing important data for population assessments. In 2024, NEAMAP data were used in several stock assessments, including: Atlantic striped bass, horseshoe crab, and river herring.

SEAMAP-South Atlantic

The SEAMAP Reef Fish Survey expanded into Florida waters with the support of increased Congressional funding. The survey now includes video sampling stations from Cape Hatteras, NC to Key West, FL. Fish count and length data are used to assess the status of reef fish in the Southeast. The SEAMAP Survey Operations Work Group designed a pilot survey for Atlantic cobia for North and South Carolina to address a key data gap in stock assessments. SEAMAP survey data were used in the Red Drum Benchmark Stock Assessment, as well as assessments for fisheries managed by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council.

HABITAT PROTECTION, RESTORATION, AND ENHANCEMENT

Protection, restoration, and enhancement of fish habitats are essential to promoting the sustainability of fisheries along the Atlantic coast. Fish Habitats of Concern (FHOC) constitute a subset of fish habitat – like submerged aquatic vegetation, spawning grounds, or nearshore estuarine habitats – that are of high ecological importance, rare, sensitive, or vulnerable to development threats. FHOC are defined based on the same criteria as federally-designated Habitat Areas of Particular Concern under the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA). However, since species solely managed by the Commission do not fall under MSA, their habitats lack federal legal protection, and consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service is not required. Therefore, in 2024, the Commission released an FHOC document for Commission-managed species to concentrate conservation efforts on specific habitats that are ecologically valuable, vulnerable, and necessary to support each life stage of a species. FHOCs are to be included as part of each Commission fishery management plan, emphasizing the critical role habitats play in fisheries production and ecosystem function.

The Commission's Habitat Committee also released "Anthropogenic Noise Impacts on Atlantic Fish and Fisheries: Implications for Managers and Long-Term Productivity." This report examines the effects of human-induced noise (e.g., pile driving, sonar surveys, vessel traffic) on coastal and marine fish species, highlighting physiological disruptions and behavioral changes. It explores impacts such as altered spawning behaviors, habitat use, reproductive success, and mortality rates, with a focus on implications for fish health and fisheries management. The document addresses the characteristics of natural and human-induced underwater noise and discusses potential mitigation strategies. Additionally, the report identifies key data gaps and research needs to improve our understanding of the issue, offering valuable insights for fisheries managers and policymakers concerned with the long-term sustainability of marine resources.

Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership

As a member of the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership (ACFHP), the Commission addresses habitat threats through

a broad and coordinated approach, leveraging resources from many agencies, organizations, and corporations to protect and improve Atlantic fish habitat. ACFHP operates under the purview of the National Fish Habitat Partnership.

On the Ground Projects

In 2024, ACFHP partnered with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to fund two new on-the-ground restoration projects. In the first project, which seeks to improve fish passage in the Delaware River watershed, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) partnered with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, USFWS, private landowners, and the Statewide Dam Removal Partnership to remove the Lower and Upper E.R. Collins Dams on the Pequest River. Located on a high-priority fish passage stream, the dams restricted fish passage for species such as American shad, blueback herring, alewife, American eel, and sea lamprey. Two additional upstream dams, No Name and Cedar Grove, are priorities for removal in the near future and recommended for funding in FY25. Removal of several dams on the Pequest River now and planned for the future will open and improve more than 100 miles of riverine habitat for migratory and resident fish in the Delaware River watershed.

The Maryland Coastal Bays Salt Marsh Restoration Project, led by the Delmarva Resource & Conservation Network, will restore 114 acres of degraded salt marsh in Maryland's coastal bays. Restoration efforts include sediment addition to nourish marshes, filling man-made ditches, creating meandering drainage channels, and planting marsh grasses. The project aims to enhance fish habitat, improve water quality, and bolster coastal resilience. As the first initiative of its kind in the Coastal Bays, it will serve as a model for future marsh restoration efforts. For more information on all ACFHP-funded projects, please visit: *atlanticfishhabitat.org/on-the-ground-projects/.*

Science and Data Projects

ACFHP completed an assessment of fish habitat through geographic information system mapping and analysis. With funding from NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office and Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office, the entire Atlantic coast was analyzed to identify fish habitats best suited for restoration or protection. Resulting maps are helping ACFHP and its partners prioritize future habitat restoration efforts and are used in the Partnership's annual request for proposals for habitat conservation project funding. To access the maps, final report, and user guides, visit: *atlanticfishhabitat.org/science-and-data-projects/.*

In 2024, ACFHP initiated plans to prioritize submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) for its next science and data product. Significant gaps remain in our understanding of SAV along the Atlantic coast. Inconsistent methods for mapping and monitoring SAV beds make it difficult to track long-term trends or identify key drivers of change. The impacts of environmental stressors—such as pollution, climate change, coastal development, and invasive species—on SAV and its resiliency also remain poorly understood. Restoration efforts face additional challenges due to a lack of standardized methods and metrics for measuring success, along with limited comparative studies on different approaches. Detailed data on the ecological roles and responses of individual SAV species to environmental changes are lacking, as is research on how SAV dynamics influence fish populations at various life stages, and ultimately fisheries production. Addressing seagrass information gaps will improve our ability to conserve and manage valuable habitats effectively.

Support ACFHP

There are many ways you can support ACFHP, including donating directly or by purchasing RepYourWaters outdoor apparel. To learn more, visit: *atlanticfishhabitat.org/donate/.*

Dependable and Timely Fisheries Statistics

Effective management depends on quality fishery-dependent data to inform stock assessments and management decisions.

The Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP), composed of state, regional, and federal partners along the Atlantic coast, plays a critical role in the collection and consolidation of national fishery data by providing timely and accurate catch and effort, biological, and socioeconomic data on Atlantic coast recreational, for-hire, and commercial fisheries to support science and management.

ACCSP was established in 1995 as one of five regional Fisheries Information Networks (FINs) to address the issues of inconsistent temporal and spatial coverage and dataset compatibility by standardizing and centralizing fishery-dependent data collection and data management along the Atlantic coast. FINs are collaborative state-federal programs that supply dependable and timely marine fisheries data in their respective regions.

In 2024, ACCSP collaborated with committee members and partner staff to maintain, extend, and modernize data systems. Major accomplishments include (1) providing funding at the state, regional, and federal levels to help partners complete projects that address the current goals and priorities of ACCSP; (2) building software that meets specific partner needs, reduces the burden on industry, and meets the reporting requirements of multiple jurisdictions in a single report; and (3) collecting, standardizing, and disseminating data in a timely fashion while maintaining the necessary levels of confidentiality.

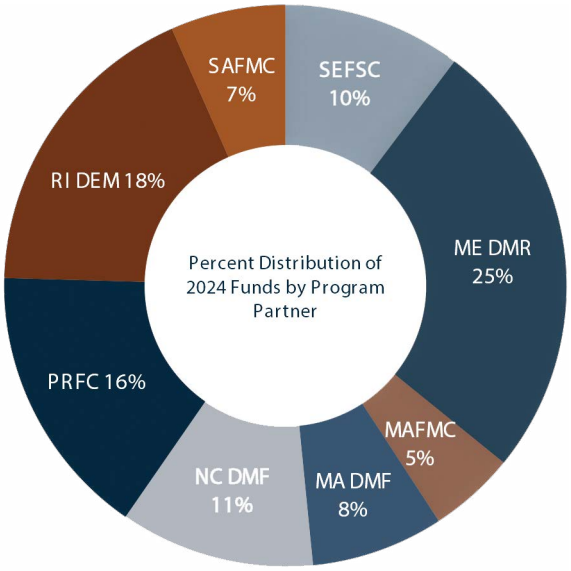
Funded Projects

Each year, ACCSP provides funding to its program partners to support improvements to data collection and management activities. In 2024, with support from Congressional funding, ACCSP awarded almost $1 million to several projects along the Atlantic coast, focusing on electronic reporting, biological sampling, and citizen science (see figure). Project highlights include the modernization of legacy data systems in Massachusetts, implementation of electronic reporting using ACCSP applications at the Potomac River Fisheries Commission, and development of statistical frames for dockside biosampling of the recreational headboat and commercial fishing fleets in the South Atlantic. To find out more about the funded projects, visit: *accsp.org/what-we-do/partner-project-funding/.*

Software Development

ACCSP provides partner agencies with electronic reporting tools for commercial dealers and commercial, for-hire, and recreational harvesters through the Standard Atlantic Fisheries Information System (SAFIS) suite of applications. SAFIS applications are available to dealers and harvesters at no cost, fulfilling mandatory reporting requirements of state and federal fisheries agencies. In 2024, SAFIS applications had over 7,500 users, with thousands more using third party applications and file upload to submit data to the SAFIS database. These electronic reporting systems have significantly improved the ease and efficiency of data entry for the fishing industry, enabling faster data submission to ACCSP and its partners.

In 2024, ACCSP worked with partners to modernize and streamline the submission of federally permitted dealer data. The previous manual file upload system was replaced with an application programming interface that allows one computer



KEY

MAFMC	Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
MA DMF	Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries
ME DMR	Maine Department of Marine Resources
NC DMF	North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries
PRFC	Potomac River Fisheries Commission
RI DEM	Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management
SAFMC	South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
SEFSC	Southeast Fisheries Science Center

to talk directly to another. This upgrade has significantly reduced the time between data submission and availability to managers. Additionally, the new system allows the incoming data to be automatically validated, providing real-time error warnings to dealers for immediate correction. Previously, data were manually validated, requiring staff to contact dealers for clarification and correction. The new data flow increases data quality and reduces the workload for federal/state staff and dealers.

SciFish was launched in early 2024, following a three-year collaboration with partners. This innovative mobile application allows the public to contribute to scientific research by collecting and sharing data on Atlantic coast fisheries. Approved researchers can develop standardized, citizen science data collection projects without incurring any application development costs. Projects developed in SciFish focus on collecting data for marine and/or diadromous fisheries along the Atlantic coast. The projects will help address current data gaps and research needs, support management and stock assessments, and foster collaboration between scientists and fishermen.

Data Collection and Dissemination

ACCSP compiles data from the Atlantic states and federally-permitted fisheries to support regional data needs for stock assessments and management in the New England, Mid-Atlantic, and Southeast regions. In 2024, ACCSP uploaded new 2023 data and revised historical data to ensure consistency among state, federal, and regional datasets, enabling scientific and management analyses to use the best available data. These data are available in the ACCSP Data Warehouse and are included as the Atlantic commercial contribution to NOAA's annual publication, *Fisheries of the United States*. ACCSP data contributed to all Atlantic coast federal stock assessments completed in FY24.

ACCSP administers state data collection for the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) along the Atlantic coast and presents MRIP catch and effort estimates in the ACCSP Data Warehouse. ACCSP continues to address the top three coastal priorities: improving catch estimate precision, developing for-hire logbook methods, and improving estimates of released fish. In 2024, the ACCSP Recreational Technical Committee, composed of representatives from all program partners, developed a pilot project for 2025 using a catch card as a supplementary sampling method to better collect released catch information in recreational fisheries along the Atlantic coast. The ACCSP funded project, to be conducted by eight states from Massachusetts to Georgia, will pilot a modified sampling design for the MRIP Access Point Angler Intercept Survey, collecting information from randomly selected anglers about their catches during recreational fishing trips. The need for quality release data in stock assessment models becomes increasingly critical for understanding its impact on fish stocks as the proportion of released fish increases due to catch-and-release fishing practices and regulations. This study will test a method for collecting the size and number of released fish to evaluate discard mortality and total removals from a fishery.

The majority of the Commission's budget goes directly to support the fisheries management, monitoring, and science activities of the states.

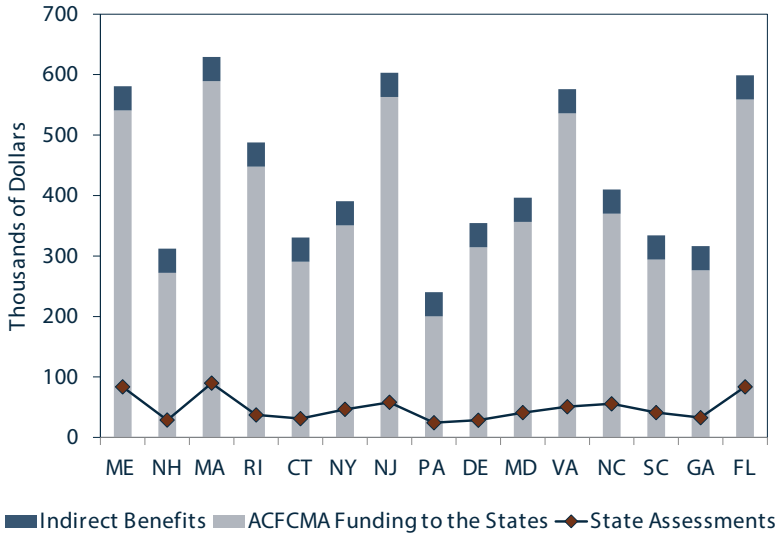
The Commission's FY25 budget is $54.2 million. The base funding ($733,445) is provided by the member states' annual appropriations, which are determined by the value of commercial fishing landings and saltwater recreational trips within each state. The bulk of the Commission's funding is received through federal cooperative agreements funded by line-item appropriations in the NOAA budget to implement the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act (ACFCMA) and the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program, as well as provide oversight and management for state conduct of the Marine Recreational Information Program. The Commission also receives funds from NOAA Fisheries to carry out the provisions of the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act (IFA). As seen in the accompanying graph, which illustrates the benefits states receive from ACFCMA and IFA, the majority of the Commission's budget goes directly to support the fisheries management, monitoring and science activities of the states. The US Fish and Wildlife Service also provides funding to the Commission through its Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Program (Wallop/Breaux). The Commission received $25,250 million to reimburse expenses incurred by the fishing industry to comply with the final 2021 rule to modify the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan, as well as North Atlantic Right Whale monitoring to inform state dynamic fisheries management, innovative gear development, implementing electronic tracking requirements within the Northeast lobster fishery, and research to inform future management actions.

The following two pages provide a condensed statement of financial position information for the years ended June 30, 2024 and 2023.

2025 Return on State Assessments to the Commission

Source: FY25 ASMFC Assessments and FY24 ACFCMA & IFA Allocations

*Indirect Benefits include travel and per diem for 6 people from each state to participate in Commission meetings. Please note that this figure does not include the collective benefits derived from the work of the FMP Coordinators and Science Staff.



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

Condensed Statement of Financial Position Information

For the Years Ended June 30, 2024 and 2023

ASSETS

	2024	2023
CURRENT ASSETS:		
Cash and cash equivalents	$ 433,787	$ 110,870
Grants and accounts receivable	5,423,148	5,279,738
Other receivables	–	49
Prepaid expenses	85,331	–
Total Current Assets	5,942,266	5,390,657
Investments	1,117,284	1,084,781
Property and Equipment, Net	2,743,010	2,839,489
Operating lease right-of-use asset, Net	54,942	53,360
Restricted Cash	259,049	–
TOTAL ASSETS	$ 10,116,551	$ 9,368,287

LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

CURRENT LIABILITIES:		
Accounts payable and accrued expenses	$ 3,763,415	$ 3,460,623
Deferred revenue and contract advances	473,586	208,428
Due to Consolidated Appropriations Act recipients	259,049	–
Operating lease liability, current portion	41,048	30,046
Total Current Liabilities	4,537,098	3,699,097
OTHER LIABILITIES:		
Operating lease liability, long-term portion	63,061	23,314
Total Other Liabilities	63,061	23,314
TOTAL LIABILITIES	4,600,159	3,722,411
NET ASSETS WITHOUT DONOR RESTRICTIONS	5,516,392	5,645,876
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	$ 10,116,551	$ 9,368,287

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

Condensed Statement of Activities Information

For the Years Ended June 30, 2024 and 2023

	2024	2023
REVENUE:		
Contract reimbursements	$ 56,212,911	$ 51,087,652
Contributions from member states	733,445	733,446
Annual Meeting fees	6,325	17,810
Other	32,504	(9,799)
Total Revenue	56,985,185	51,829,109
EXPENSES:		
Consolidated Appropriations Act pass through	12,816,756	17,814,651
Salaries and fringe benefits	7,749,733	6,851,313
Subcontracts	18,703,475	16,138,742
Travel	1,279,427	1,048,874
Disaster Relief Expense	15,442,441	8,742,887
Cyber Breach Expense	234,490	–
Other	888,347	841,758
Total Expenses	57,114,669	51,438,225
CHANGE IN NET ASSETS	(129,484)	390,884
NET ASSETS, BEGINNING OF YEAR	5,645,876	5,254,992
NET ASSETS, END OF YEAR	$ 5,516,392	$ 5,645,876

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