Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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MEMORANDUM

TO: **Atlantic Menhaden Management Board**

FROM: **James Boyle, FMP Coordinator**

DATE: **October 26, 2026**

SUBJECT: **Public Comment Summary on Addendum II to Amendment 3**

Revised November 2, 2026 to include additional comments

The following is an overview of all comments received by ASMFC on Addendum II to Amendment 3 to the Atlantic Menhaden Fishery Management Plan as of October 9, 2026 (closing deadline).

A total of 48,282 comments were received on Draft Addendum II from individual comments, organizations, and form letters. A total of 56 organizations submitted comments; 5 organization letters included supporting organization signatories, including one with 54 signatories, another with 21 signatories, one with 15 signatories, and two letters with two signatories. A total of 43,166 comments were received through 19 form letters[1]. Additionally, 7 letters with a total of 44 signatories came from county, state, and federal government representatives. The remainder of comments (4,921) came from individual comments including from private anglers, charter captains, commercial fishermen, and concerned citizens. Of those individual comments, 2,400 (49%) were received via email/webpage comment box and 2,521 (51%) were received via the comment survey.

7 public hearings were held from September 15 through October 1, 2026. 3 hearings were conducted in-person only, 1 hearing was conducted in a hybrid format with attendees participating in-person and via webinar, and 3 hearings were conducted via webinar only. 861 individuals (not including state staff, ASMFC staff, or Commissioners/Proxies) attended the hearings, and some of these individuals attended multiple hearings.

The following pages include comment tables summarizing written and hearing comments for each option proposed in Addendum II. There is also a list of other topics/themes commonly raised in the comments. The summary tables are followed by the comments themselves. The public hearing summaries and attendee lists are provided as a separate attachment included in the 2026 Annual Atlantic Menhaden Board main meeting materials.

[1] Form letters (more than 3 of the same comment) include comments stating support for an organization's comments; however, if the commenter provided additional comments/rationale related to management beyond the organization's or letter's comments, then it was considered an individual comment.

Public Comment Summary Tables

Table 0. Comment Count

Number of written comments received by individuals, organizations, and form letters, and number of people who attended and participated in the polls/provided comments for each public hearing

Written Public Comments Received	
Individual Comments	4,923[#]
Form Letters	43,202[^]
Organizations	56
Org/Business Signatories[+]	89
Government Letters	7
Government Signatories	44
TOTAL	48,320

Public Hearing	**# Public Attendees[*]**	**Commenters[**]**
Maine-New Hampshire-Massachusetts-Rhode Island	49	11
Connecticut-New York	102	13
New Jersey-Delaware	91	23
Maryland-PRFC	61	21
Virginia (Heathsville)	439	42
Virginia (Fort Monroe)	25	10
General	94	28
TOTAL	*861**	*148***

[#]2,402 individual comments received via email/webpage comment box and 2,521 individual comments received via the online comment survey.

^20 different form letters received.

+5 organization letters included supporting organization signatories, which are categorized as Signatories (subset of Organizations). The letters included one with 54 signatories, another with 21 signatories, one with 15 signatories, and two letters with two signatories.

**Some people attended multiple hearings. Public attendees do not include state staff, ASMFC staff, or Commissioners/Proxies.*

*** Some individuals and organizations provided verbal comments at multiple hearings.*

Chesapeake Bay Cap Amount

Section 3.1

Table 1. Bay Cap Amount

	Option A	Option B1	Option B2	Option B3	Option B4
Individual	43	7	29	46	2,098
Organization	2				45
Form Letter					77
Government	1				1
Hearings					
General				1	25
ME					
NH					
MA					
RI	2				4
CT					
NY	1				7
NJ					
DE	1				18
MD					
PRFC	2				4
VA	13				4
NC					
FL					
TOTAL	**65**	**7**	**29**	**47**	**2,283**

Table 2.Different combinations of Option C for the Bay Cap Amount

	Option C1a	Option C1b	Option C1c	Option C1d	Option C1e	Option C2a	Option C2b	Option C2c	Option C2d	Option C2e
Individual	92	18	32	43	1,108	896	170	11	32	64
Organization			2		92	88	1			
Form Letter					40,235	40,159				
Government					31	31				
Hearings										
General										
ME										
NH										
MA										
RI					1					
CT										
NY										
NJ										
DE					7*					
MD										
PRFC					9	9				
VA					7	6				
NC										
FL										
TOTAL	**92**	**18**	**34**	**43**	**41,483**	**41,189**	**171**	**11**	**32**	**64**

**7 commenters prefer Option B4 but wanted to record their second preference to be C1e. They are not counted in the C1e total.*

Most comments favored a combination of Options C1e and C2a to link the Bay Cap to the coastwide Total Allowable Catch (TAC) by setting it as a 13.6% proportion of the TAC and establishing its maximum limit as 51,000 mt and no minimum limit. Many of the comments in support of Option C, as well as those that support Option B4 (50% reduction in Bay Cap), expressed concern for the ecosystem impacts from menhaden fishing, particularly related to ospreys and striped bass in Chesapeake Bay and along the coast, and relayed a noticeable decline in menhaden observations in recent years. A significant number of comments also said the lack of menhaden is causing a decline in predators who are the target of recreational and charter fisheries, and these effects have had harmful economic impacts on the recreational operators. Commenters in favor of Option B4 and Option C often supported additional reductions to the Cap or reduction fishing overall, including a full moratorium in the Bay, that were beyond the scope of the options in the document.

Many comments in favor of Option B4 explicitly opposed linking the Bay Cap and the TAC to because of the lack of a concrete scientific connection between the two and to avoid the possibility of the TAC increasing beyond 25,500 mt without a designated public comment period.

Comments in support of Option A (status quo) often discussed the potential socioeconomic impacts to the reduction fishery and its harvesters, and emphasized the precautionary nature of the Bay Cap to argue that there should not be any action taken until there is an assessment to determine a scientifically-based Bay Cap. Additionally, they responded to concerns about osprey declines by noting that the fishery has been active later in the season in recent years; therefore, the fishery is not the impediment to menhaden reaching osprey, but rather, environmental conditions are delaying menhaden ingress into the Bay.

Other Comments Related to the Bay Cap Amount

Many additional comments also expressed support for reducing menhaden harvest or enacting the strongest restrictions but were not more specific.

Chesapeake Bay Cap Distribution

Quota Periods

Section 3.2.1

Table 4. Quota Periods

	Option A	Option B1	Option B2	Option B3
Individual	165	539	1,177	170
Organization	2	30	96	
Form Letter			40,287	
Government	1	1	31	
Hearings				
General		21	1	
ME				
NH				
MA				
RI	2	2		2
CT				
NY	1		7	
NJ				
DE	1	5	2	
MD				
PRFC	2		9	
VA	13		7	
NC				
FL				
TOTAL	**187**	**598**	**41,617**	**172**

Most comments were in favor of Option B2 (25%/25%/50% quota periods) to minimize harvest in the spring and summer as the most critical forage periods for nesting ospreys. Commenters in favor of Option B1 (even length and harvest periods) also often expressed concern for ecological effects of harvest but wanted to avoid concentrating harvest in any season, including the fall migratory periods for many species.

Comments in favor of Option A (status quo) were concerned about the burden on the fishery to be less able to react to the movement and timing of the stock.

Comments in favor of B3 (uneven length periods) often did not cite a specific reason, although a few noted allowing for more flexibility for the fishery or to minimize harvest in the spring and fall striped bass migrations.

Quota Period Overages and Underages
Section 3.2.2

Table 5. Overage and Underages

	Option A	Option B	Option B + Sub Option 1
Individual	342	739	452
Organization	2	90	31
Form Letter		40,159	
Government	1	31	1
Hearings			
General		2	18
ME			
NH			
MA			
RI			2
CT			
NY	1		
NJ			
DE	1	2	
MD			
PRFC			
VA	13	6	
NC			
FL			
TOTAL	**360**	**41,029**	**504**

Most comments supported Option B (overage payback with rollover to 3rd period), and many emphasized their preference to shift harvest away from critical osprey periods in the spring and summer.

Comments in support of Option B with Sub Option 1 (rollover to periods 2 and 3) were concerned about concentrating harvest in any particular season, including the fall.

Comments in support of Option A (status quo) were generally opposed to quota periods entirely.

Other Comments Related to the Bay Cap Distribution

A significant number of comments expressed support for quota periods but did not specify a particular option. Additional comments did not support a rollover provision.

Chesapeake Bay Cap Revisit Provision

Section 3.3

Table 6. Revisit Provision

	Option A	Option B
Individual	177	1,772
Organization		126
Form Letter		40,211
Government		32
Hearings		
General		19
ME		
NH		
MA		
RI		4
CT		
NY		
NJ		
DE		8
MD		
PRFC		9
VA	13	7
NC		
FL		
TOTAL	**190**	**42,188**

Most comments supported Option B (3-year provision) citing the uncertainty of data on the Bay and changing conditions. Additionally, commenters supported incorporating new data from upcoming research projects. A subset of these comments noted that they prefer the Board consider this issue more frequently than every 3 years.

Supporters of Option A (status quo) varied with many commenters expressing concern for the ecosystem and supporting a full moratorium on menhaden harvest or reduction harvest. Other

commenters did not support any measure changing the Bay Cap at least until more research can establish a scientifically-based Cap.

ADDITIONAL TOPICS RAISED IN PUBLIC COMMENTS

In addition to comments on the specific options, the following topics/themes were commonly raised by commenters. Due to the breadth of comments, this overview does not represent the entirety of topics addressed in the comments.

Additional common themes/topic raised during the hearings included:

- Support for reducing the TAC to achieve the F target or beyond
- Support for reallocating harvest to bait fisheries, particularly in New England
- Concern about the complexity of Addendum II

Comments were submitted by the following groups and organizations:

Alliance for the Mystic River Watershed
American Bird Conservancy
American Littoral Society
American Rivers
American Saltwater Guides Association
American Sportfishing Association
Anacostia Riverkeeper
Angler Action Foundation
Anne Arundel Bird Club
Anne Arundel County Maritime Industry Advisory Board
Arundel Rivers Federation
Audubon Mid-Atlantic
Audubon Society of Central Maryland
Bassdozer Worldwide Fishing LLC
Bayshore Center at Bivalve
Beaverdam Creek Watershed Watch Group
Bergen County Audubon
Berkeley Striper Club
Birding Easter Shore, Inc.
Blue Water Baltimore
Boat U.S.
Bonefish & Tarpon Trust
Cape Henry Audubon Society
Catoctin Land Trust
Center for Biological Diversity
Centro de Apoyo Familiar
Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Chesapeake Conservancy
Chesapeake Legal Alliance
Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage
Chestnut Hill United Church
Choose Clean Water Coalition
Citizens United to Protect the Maurice River and its Tributaries
Coastal Conservation Association
Coastal Conservation Association Maryland
Coastal Conservation Association Virginia
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Connecticut Charter & Party Boat Association
Conserve Wildlife Foundation of New Jersey
Cornell University
Corsica River Conservancy
Delaware Nature Society
Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society
Eastern Pennsylvania Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation
Elizabeth River Project
Fish Hawks
Forked River Tuna Club
Friends of Dyke Marsh
Friends of Patuxent Research Refuge

Friends of St Clements Bay
Friends of the Rappahannock
Garden State Seafood Association
Gotham Whale
Great Egg Harbor River Council
Great Egg Harbor Watershed Association
Guy Harvey Ocean Fund
Hartford Bird Club
Hi-Mar Striper Club of Middletown, Monmouth County, New Jersey
Hudson River Fishermen's Association
International Game Fish Association
Izaak Walton League of America Mid-Shore Chapter
James River Association
Jersey Coast Anglers Association
Lilian Lumber Company
Linnaean Society of New York
Lower Keys Guides Association
Lund's Fisheries
Lynnhaven River NOW
Maine Audubon
Maine Coast Fishermen
Maine Lobstermen's Association
Marine Retailers Association of the Americas
Marist Green Team
Mars, Incorporated
Maryland League of Conservation Voters
Maryland Light Tackle Fishing Guides Association
Maryland Native Plant Society
Maryland Ornithological Society
Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association
Mattawoman Watershed Society
Menhaden Defenders
National Aquarium
National Marine Manufacturers Association
National Parks Conservation Association
National Sierra Club
National Wildlife Federation
Natural Resources Defense Council
Nature Forward
New Jersey Conservation Foundation
New Jersey Endangered and Nongame Species Advisory Committee
New York State Ornithological Association
NorthBay Education
Northern Virginia Bird Alliance
Northumberland Booster Club
NY/NJ Baykeeper
NYC Plover Project
Operation Osprey
Osprey Stewards East Coast Alliance
Otsego County Conservation Association
Owl Moon Raptor Center
Patapsco Heritage Greenway
Peninsula Salt Water Sports Fishing Association
Potomac Riverkeeper Network
Queen Anne's Conservation Association
Rachel Carson Council
Ranson Community Gardens
Rhode Island Saltwater Anglers Association
Rockbridge Bird Club
Rockfish Valley Foundation
Rockland Audubon Society
Safe Healthy Playing Fields, Inc.
Save Barnegat Bay
Save Our Soils
Save the Bay – Narragansett Bay
Scenic Rivers Land Trust
Sea Owl Fishing Charters
Seatuck Environmental Association
Severn River Association
Sleepy Creek Watershed Association
Society For Sustainable Water Future
South Atlantic Fishing Environmentalists
Southern Maryland Audubon Society
Southern Maryland Recreational Fishing Organization
Sportsmen's Alliance Foundation
St. Mary's River Watershed Association
Stockton University
Strathmere Fishing and Environmental Association
Strathmere Fishing and Environmental Club

Surfrider Foundation
Surfrider Foundation- DC Chapter
Surfrider Foundation- Virginia Chapter
Talbot Green Hands
The Nature Conservancy
The Safina Center
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Virginia Conservation Network
Virginia League of Conservation Voters
Virginia Saltwater Sportfishing Association
Virginia Wilderness Committee
Waterkeepers Chesapeake
Wetlands Watch
Wild Oceans
York River Steward

Comments were submitted via the following form letters:

American Bird Conservancy (8,433)

Chesapeake Bay Foundation (24,131)

City of Annapolis Maritime Advisory Board (11)

Forage Fish Campaign (52)

Great Bridge Fisherman's Association (3)

National Wildlife Federation (5,125)

Oceana (1,567)

Rumson Fair Haven Regional HS Fishing Club (11)

Severn River Association (479)

Sierra Club Maryland (155)

Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership (862)

Virginia Osprey Foundation (532)

Virginia Sierra Club (275)

Form Letters from unknown sources:

Form Letter 1 (720)

Form Letter 2 (263)

Form Letter 3 (340)

Form Letter 4 (60)

Form Letter 5 (16)

Form Letter 6 (164)

Form Letter 7 (3)

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MEMORANDUM

TO: **Atlantic Menhaden Management Board**

FROM: **Atlantic Menhaden Advisory Panel**

DATE: **November 2, 2026**

SUBJECT: **Advisory Panel Review of Draft Addendum II and Quota Utilization**

The Atlantic Menhaden Advisory Panel (AP) met via webinar on Wednesday, October 21, 2026, to review and provide comment on Draft Addendum II and quota utilization ahead of the Board discussing reallocation.

AP Members in attendance*:*, Michael Dawson (ME), Vincent Balzano (ME), Eric Lorentzen (MA), Patrick Paquette (MA), Melissa Dearborn (NY), Will Caldwell (NY), Peter Himchak (VA), Jimmy Kellum (VA), Scott Williams (NC), Barbara Garrity-Blake (NC)

ASMFC Staff: James Boyle, Katie Drew

Draft Addendum II

3.1 Chesapeake Bay Cap Amount

Peter Himchak, Jimmy Kellum, and Barbara Garrity-Blake support Option A (status quo) until the upcoming research on menhaden in Chesapeake Bay can be completed and determine a scientifically-based Cap. They do not support the Board taking further precautionary action without a biological justification that may harm the reduction fishing community. Peter Himchak also highlighted the positive signs of menhaden recruitment in Bay fishery-independent surveys in the last four years.

Melissa Dearborn and Will Caldwell support Option B4 (50% reduction) because of the absence of menhaden in New York waters in recent years, particularly larger fish. They support reducing harvest in Chesapeake Bay to allow more fish to get larger and migrate north to other fisheries.

3.2 Chesapeake Bay Cap Distribution

Peter Himchak and Jimmy Kellum support Option A (status quo). They cited changing oceanographic conditions since 2023 that may have caused menhaden to stay further offshore and impact nearshore bait fisheries. Additionally, they highlighted that the reduction fishery is already operating later in the year after the critical osprey nesting period due to menhaden entering the Bay later.

Melissa Dearborn and Patrick Paquette did not specify a preferred option because they want to support bait fisheries in the Bay but there was no representative of those fisheries to provide a perspective on the most helpful option.

3.3 Revisit Provision

The AP support Option B (3-year revisit provision) by consensus. Peter Himchak added that he is not necessarily tied to the 3-year timeline but support revisiting the Cap with additional data that is reviewed and presented by the Technical Committee.

Quota Reallocation

Jimmy Kellum supports maintaining the current allocations as they have worked since implementation in 2023 to properly redistribute quota. They also highlighted that when Virginia receives quota transfers, those are only providing quota to the bait fishery, and none is allocated to the reduction fishery.

Peter Himchak supports modifying the minimum allocations to provide more quota to states that are able to meet their quotas and often require quota transfers to continue operating each year.

Michael Dawson and Patrick Paquette support increasing quota to Maine and Massachusetts to better provide bait for the lobster industry and prevent the fishery closing and needing to utilize the EESA program. Additionally, Patrick Paquette is concerned about how little quota is divided amongst many states outside of Virginia and New Jersey. They discussed how the trip limits imposed under the EESA are prohibitively low to make harvest profitable, and that there is a bait shortage in Massachusetts that affects local bait and tackle shops.

Melissa Dearborn and Will Caldwell support more quota being allocated to bait fisheries but do not want to lose quota in New York because of highly variable landings. They highlighted that the Board should consider the more restrictive gear requirements that prevent their harvesters from catching fish unless there is such an abundance that it drives fish farther inshore. Peter Himchak supports revisiting the allocations more frequently to accommodate with variable conditions that affect landings.

Total Allowable Catch (TAC)

5 AP members support maintaining or increasing the TAC:

Michael Dawson opposed reducing the TAC to maintain the healthy fishery in Maine.

Peter Himchak opposed reducing the TAC because the 2025 projections indicate that at the current level, there is a 0% probability of overfishing. The standard should be to avoid overfishing not to achieve the target. Additionally, has seen the bait fishery grow from 6% to 25% of coastwide harvest, and supports more fish being allocated to those fisheries but should not be at the expense of VA or NJ as the largest historic harvesters.

Eric Lorentzen opposes reductions in the TAC impacting bait fisheries and states with smaller quotas. The vast majority of quota is allocated to two states, and reductions in the other states are large impacts to those fisheries. If the Board wants to reduce harvest, should reduce from just the states with the most quota or the reduction fishery to prioritize quota to small bait businesses.

Jimmy Kellum does not believe that NJ and VA should be penalized for good management and practices. They have a history of transferring quota to states that need it. Would prefer to add 10% to the TAC but assign more of it to bait fisheries, rather than taking quota away from VA. The declines in pound net CPUEs are caused by algae blooms not reduction harvest.

Patrick Paquette emphasized the history of the fishery in MA and how it was once one of the largest fisheries before seeing multiple collapses and recoveries.

Lastly, Barbara Garrity-Blake was elected as AP Chair.

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Atlantic Menhaden Management Board

FROM: James Boyle, FMP Coordinator

DATE: October 27, 2026

SUBJECT: Update on Recent Menhaden Fishery Performance

This memorandum serves as a review of recent (2018-2025) landings information relative to commercial allocations and quota transfers. The information is provided to aid the Board in revisiting the quota allocations established in Addendum I to Amendment 3 to the Atlantic Menhaden Fishery Management Plan (FMP).

Overview of Amendment 3 Quota Allocations

Addendum I to Amendment 3, approved in November 2022 and implemented for the 2023 fishing year, established new commercial quota allocations to manage the annual Total Allowable Catch (TAC). Each jurisdiction is allocated a fixed minimum quota with Pennsylvania receiving 0.01%; South Carolina, Georgia, Connecticut, Delaware, North Carolina, and Florida receiving 0.25%; and the remaining states continuing to receive a minimum of 0.5%. The remainder of the TAC, excluding the 1% for episodic events in the states of New York through Maine under the Episodic Event Set Aside (EESA) Program, is allocated based on landings from 2018, 2019, and 2021. On an annual basis, jurisdictions have the option to relinquish part of or all of their fixed minimum quota by December 1st of the preceding fishing year. Any quota relinquished by a jurisdiction is redistributed to other jurisdictions that have not relinquished their quota, based on landings data from 2018, 2019, and 2021. Any overage of quota allocation is determined based on final allocations (inclusive of transfers) and the overage amount is subtracted for that jurisdiction's quota allocation in the subsequent year on a pound-for-pound basis. Quota allocations are to be revisited every three years following implementation of Amendment 3 (2018).

Summary of Recent Landings Trends

Table 1 shows each jurisdiction's total landings as a percentage of the annual coastwide total. Total Landings data from 2018-2025 are included to show trends before and after the implementation of Addendum I. Total landings include directed bait and reduction landings, incidental catch/small-scale fisheries (IC/SSF) landings, and landings occurring under the EESA Program. Total landings may encompass more than a jurisdiction is allocated in a given year due to quota transfers, episodic landings or incidental catch. For these same reasons, annual landing percentages higher than Addendum I allocations do not necessarily indicate a quota overage. Since the implementation of the Addendum, the TAC has not been exceeded. The EESA Program has been in place since the 2013 fishing year and landings under this program

have changed in volume and distribution. Since 2023, Maine was the only jurisdiction to opt into the EESA program every year (Massachusetts opted into the program in 2025). While IC/SSF landings increased annually from 2018-2022, peaking at about 18 million pounds, there have been no reported landings under this provision since the implementation of Addendum I in 2023.

Table 1. Jurisdiction total landings as a percentage of coastwide landings, 2018-2025. Total landings include directed bait and reduction landings, incidental catch, and harvest under EESA. Amendment 3 allocations were implemented beginning in 2018, and Addendum I allocations were implemented in 2023. To protect confidentiality, information for New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Georgia have been removed.

Jurisdiction	Amendment 3 Directed Landings Allocations (%)	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Addendum I Directed Landings Allocations (%)	2023	2024	2025
Maine	0.52%	3.48%	4.91%	6.33%	5.12%	5.99%	4.80%	7.96%	6.60%	9.95%
New Hampshire	0.50%		0.99%		1.12%	1.16%	1.19%	1.19%		2.05%
Massachusetts	1.27%	1.35%	1.51%	2.17%	2.31%	2.42%	2.12%	0.81%	3.01%	3.76%
Rhode Island	0.52%	0.17%	0.01%	0.05%	0.83%	0.14%	0.81%	0.04%	0.46%	0.11%
Connecticut	0.52%	0.20%	0.02%	0.03%	0.04%	0.07%	0.33%	0.05%	0.01%	0.02%
New York	0.69%	0.22%	0.31%	1.00%	0.75%	0.27%	0.84%	0.18%	0.28%	0.23%
New Jersey	10.87%	11.95%	10.95%	12.27%	10.62%	10.89%	11.00%	11.11%	11.72%	14.70%
Pennsylvania	0.50%						0.01%			
Delaware	0.51%	0.04%	0.02%	0.04%	0.01%	0.01%	0.27%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%
Maryland	1.89%	0.74%	0.73%	0.64%	0.65%	0.78%	1.17%	0.54%	0.25%	0.14%
PRFC	1.07%	0.79%	0.51%	0.54%	0.59%	0.83%	1.09%	0.56%	0.17%	0.05%
Virginia	78.66%	80.79%	79.86%	75.70%	77.84%	77.27%	75.21%	77.28%	76.78%	68.82%
North Carolina	0.96%	0.17%	0.12%	0.15%	0.10%	0.13%	0.37%	0.22%	0.09%	0.14%
South Carolina	0.50%						0.25%			
Georgia	0.50%						0.25%			
Florida	0.52%	0.06%	0.05%	0.06%	0.03%	0.04%	0.29%	0.04%	0.01%	0.01%
Total	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Figure 1 shows each jurisdiction's directed landings as a percentage of their base quota from 2018-2025 and then just from 2023-2025 to see the period after Addendum I's implementation. Since the base quota does not include quota transfers or redistributed relinquished quota, values over 100% do not necessarily indicate an overage. Additionally, directed landings do not include landings under the EESA or IC/SSF provisions.

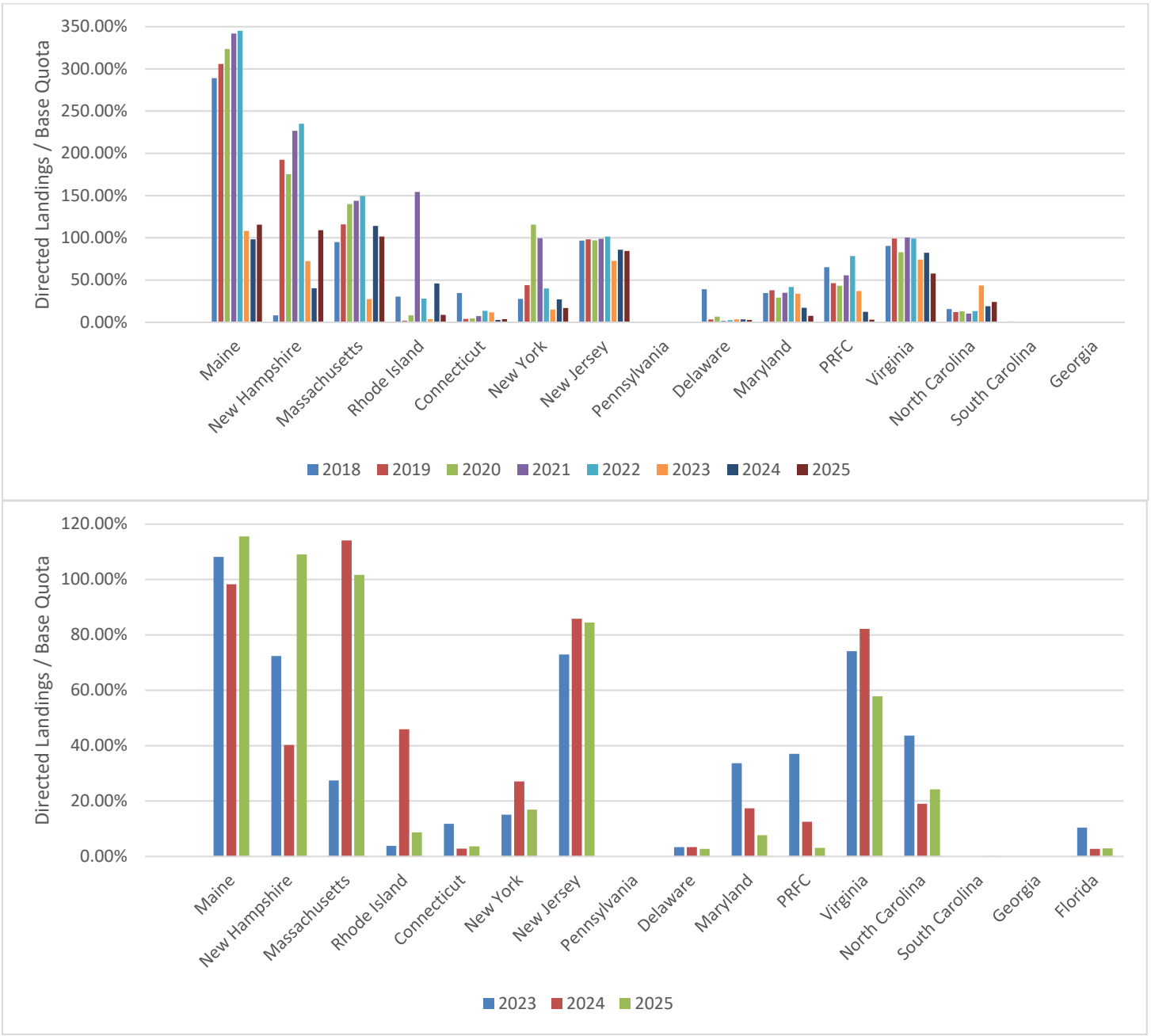


Figure 1. Directed landings as a percentage of base quota by jurisdiction for 2018-2025 (above) and 2023-2025 (below).

Prior to Addendum I, Maine, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire were consistently harvesting above their base quotas through quota transfers, and in 2022, New Jersey also exceeded its directed quota. Since 2023, Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts all harvested above their base quotas for at least one year, including all 3 states in 2025, but no jurisdiction has harvested above their base quota for all 3 years.

Quota Transfers

Table 2 outlines quota transfers from 2018-2025. Not every jurisdiction transferred quota consistently; only Maine either gave or received quota every year from 2018-2025. Prior to Addendum I, the only jurisdictions to have a net increase in quota through transfers were Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts. After Addendum I, Maine, Massachusetts, and Virginia had a net increase in quota through transfers. In 2020 and 2021 there were a total of 16 state-to-state quota transfers, which then increased to 24 in 2022. Since then, there were 5 quota transfers in 2023, 3 quota transfers in 2024, and 7 quota transfers in 2025.

Table 2. Quota transfers in pounds by jurisdiction for 2018-2025.

Jurisdiction	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Pre-Addendum I Total	Pre-Addendum I Average	2023	2024	2025	Post-Addendum I Total	Post-Addendum I Average
Maine	5,400,000	6,573,592	5,450,000	5,437,698	5,380,000	**28,241,290**	**5,648,258**	1,150,000	2,000,000	3,250,000	**6,400,000**	**2,133,333**
New Hampshire	0	3,373,592	2,300,000	2,686,318	3,070,000	**11,429,910**	**2,285,982**	0	-2,000,000	1,000,000	**-1,000,000**	**-333,333**
Massachusetts	0	1,300,000	2,350,000	2,492,791	3,020,000	**9,162,791**	**1,832,558**	-100,000	1,700,000	160,000	**1,760,000**	**586,667**
Rhode Island	0	-400,000	-1,800,000	1,240,675	-1,460,000	**-2,419,325**	**-483,865**	-300,000	-500,000	-410,000	**-1,210,000**	**-403,333**
Connecticut	-500,000	-2,400,000	-2,000,000	-2,000,000	-2,110,000	**-9,010,000**	**-1,802,000**	-750,000	0	-1,500,000	**-2,250,000**	**-750,000**
New York	-1,000,000	-1,900,000	500,000	0	0	**-2,400,000**	**-480,000**	0	0	-1,000,000	**-1,000,000**	**-333,333**
New Jersey	0	0	0	275,000	1,850,000	**2,125,000**	**425,000**	0	0	0	**0**	**0**
Pennsylvania	0	0	-500,000	-1,086,318	-1,300,000	**-2,886,318**	**-577,264**	0	0	0	**0**	**0**
Delaware	-150,000	0	-100,000	0	-870,000	**-1,120,000**	**-224,000**	0	0	0	**0**	**0**
Maryland	-1,500,000	-1,000,000	-1,350,000	-1,000,000	-2,500,000	**-7,350,000**	**-1,470,000**	0	0	-1,000,000	**-1,000,000**	**-333,333**
PRFC	0	0	0	-900,000	-1,000,000	**-1,900,000**	**-380,000**	-1,992,297	0	0	**-1,992,297**	**-664,099**
Virginia	-1,000,000	-1,000,000	0	0	4,310,000	**2,310,000**	**462,000**	1,992,297	0	0	**1,992,297**	**664,099**
North Carolina	0	-600,000	-1,800,000	-2,000,000	-2,950,000	**-7,350,000**	**-1,470,000**	0	0	-500,000	**-500,000**	**-166,667**
South Carolina	0	-2,347,184	-1,650,000	-1,775,000	-2,120,000	**-7,892,184**	**-1,578,437**	0	-700,000	0	**-700,000**	**-233,333**
Georgia	0	0	0	-1,971,164	-2,000,000	**-3,971,164**	**-794,233**	0	-500,000	0	**-500,000**	**-166,667**
Florida	-1,250,000	-1,600,000	-1,400,000	-1,400,000	-1,320,000	**-6,970,000**	**-1,394,000**	0	0	0	**0**	**0**

ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

REVIEW OF THE INTERSTATE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN

FOR ATLANTIC MENHADEN
(*Brevoortia tyrannus*)

2025 FISHING YEAR



Prepared by the Plan Review Team

Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

REVIEW OF THE ASMFC FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN AND STATE COMPLIANCE FOR ATLANTIC MENHADEN *(Brevoortia tyrannus)* FOR THE 2025 FISHERY

Management Summary

Date of FMP:	Original FMP: August 1981
Amendments:	Plan Revision: September 1992 Amendment 1: July 2001 Amendment 2: December 2012 Amendment 3: November 2017
Management Unit:	The range of Atlantic menhaden within U.S. waters of the Northwest Atlantic Ocean, from the estuaries eastward to the offshore boundary of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).
States With Declared Interest:	Maine – Florida, including Pennsylvania
Additional Jurisdictions:	Potomac River Fisheries Commission, National Marine Fisheries Service, United States Fish and Wildlife Service
Active Boards/Committees:	Atlantic Menhaden Management Board, Advisory Panel, Technical Committee, Stock Assessment Subcommittee, Plan Review Team, Plan Development Team, Ecological Reference Point Workgroup
Stock Status:	Not overfished, and overfishing is not occurring relative to the current ecological reference points (2025 Single-Species Stock Assessment Update)

I. Status of the Fishery Management Plan

Atlantic menhaden management authority is vested in the states because the vast majority of landings come from state waters. All Atlantic coast states and jurisdictions, with the exception of the District of Columbia, have declared interest in the Atlantic menhaden management program.

The first coastwide fishery management plan (FMP) for Atlantic menhaden was passed in 1981. The FMP did not recommend or require specific management actions, but provided a suite of options should they be needed. In 1992, the plan was revised to include a suite of objectives intended to improve data collection and promote awareness of the fishery and its research needs.

Amendment 1, implemented in 2001, provided specific biological, ecological and socioeconomic management objectives. Addenda I and V revised the biological reference points for menhaden and specified that stock assessments are to occur every three years. Although Amendment 1 did not implement any recreational or commercial management measures, Addenda II through IV instituted a harvest cap on the reduction fishery in Chesapeake Bay. Specifically, Addendum II implemented a harvest cap for 2006-2010 fishing seasons; before its first year of implementation, Addendum III revised the cap amount to be the average landings from 2001 to 2005 (or 109,020 mt); and Addendum IV extended the provisions of Addendum III through 2013.

Amendment 2, implemented in 2012, established a 170,800 metric ton (mt) total allowable catch (TAC) for the commercial fishery beginning in 2013. This TAC represented a 20% reduction from average landings between 2009 and 2011. This Amendment also used the 2009-2011 period to allocate the TAC among jurisdictions. Additionally, the Amendment established timely reporting requirements for commercial landings and required states to be accountable for their respective quotas by paying back any overages the following year. Amendment 2 also included provisions that allowed for the transfer of quota between jurisdictions and a bycatch allowance of 6,000 pounds per day for non-directed fisheries that operate after a jurisdiction's quota has been landed. Addendum 1 to Amendment 2 allows two licensed individuals to harvest up to 12,000 pounds of menhaden bycatch when working from the same vessel using stationary multi-species gear; the intent of this provision is to accommodate cooperative fishing practices that traditionally take place in Chesapeake Bay. The Amendment also reduced the Chesapeake Bay reduction fishery harvest cap by 20% to 87,216 mt.

Amendment 2 also enabled the Board to set aside 1% of the coastwide TAC for episodic events. Episodic events are times and areas where Atlantic menhaden are available in more abundance than they normally occur. Technical Addendum I to Amendment 2 established a mechanism for New England states from Maine to Connecticut[1] to use the set aside, which includes a qualifying definition of episodic events, required effort controls to scale a state's fishery to the set aside amount, and a timely reporting system to monitor the set aside. Any unused set aside

[1] At its May 2016 meeting, the Board added New York as an eligible state to harvest under the set aside.

quota as of October 31 is redistributed to jurisdictions on November 1 based on the Amendment 2 allocation percentages.

In 2015, the TAC was increased by 10% to 187,880 mt for the 2015 and 2016 fishing years. In 2016, the Board again increased the TAC by 6.45% to 200,000 mt for the 2017 fishing year.

Atlantic menhaden are managed under Amendment 3. Approved in November 2017, the Amendment maintained the management program's single-species biological reference points until the review and adoption of menhaden-specific ecological reference points (ERPs) as part of the 2019 benchmark stock assessment process. In doing so, the Board placed development of menhaden-specific ERPs as its highest priority and supported the efforts of the ERP Workgroup to reach that goal. Amendment 3 also changed commercial quota allocations in order to strike an improved balance between gear types and jurisdictions. The Amendment allocated a baseline quota of 0.5% to each jurisdiction, and allocated the rest of the TAC based on average landings between 2009 and 2011. This measure provides fishing opportunities to states that had little quota under Amendment 2, while still recognizing historic landings in the fishery. States also have the option to relinquish all or part of its quota which is then redistributed to the other jurisdictions based on the 2009-2011 landings period. The Amendment also prohibits the rollover of unused quota; maintains the quota transfer process; maintains the bycatch provision (which was rebranded as the 'incidental catch/small-scale fisheries' (IC/SSF) provision and applicable gear types were defined) and the episodic event set aside program (EESA) for the states of Maine – New York. Finally, the Amendment reduced the Chesapeake Bay cap to 51,000 mt, recognizing the importance of the Chesapeake Bay as nursery grounds for many species by capping recent reduction landings from the Bay at current levels.

State	Addendum 1 Allocations (%)
ME	4.80%
NH	1.19%
MA	2.12%
RI	0.81%
CT	0.33%
NY	0.84%
NJ	11.00%
PA	0.01%
DE	0.27%
MD	1.17%
PRFC	1.09%
VA	75.21%
NC	0.37%
SC	0.25%
GA	0.25%
FL	0.29%

Addendum I, implemented in 2023, modifies Amendment 3 by creating a three-tiered system for minimum allocations to the states, with Pennsylvania receiving 0.01%; South Carolina, Georgia, Connecticut, Delaware, North Carolina, and Florida receiving 0.25%; and the remaining states continuing to receive a minimum of 0.5%. Furthermore, the Addendum allocates the remainder of the TAC, excluding the 1% reserved for the EESA, on a state-by-state basis based on landings history of the fishery from 2018, 2019, and 2021. Regarding the IC/SSF provision, the Addendum codifies the ability for states to elect to divide their quotas into sectors, enabling individual sectors to enter into the provision at different times. Additionally, the Addendum removes purse seines as a permitted small-scale directed gear, thereby, prohibiting them from harvesting under the IC/SSF provision. Finally, the Addendum counts IC/SSF landings against the TAC and if IC/SSF

landings cause the TAC to be exceeded, then the Board must take action to modify one or both of permitted gear types and trip limits under the provision.

In August 2020, the Board formally approved the use of ERPs to manage Atlantic menhaden, with Atlantic striped bass as the focal species in maintaining their population. Atlantic striped bass was chosen for the ERP definitions because it was the most sensitive predator fish species to Atlantic menhaden harvest, so an ERP target and threshold sustaining striped bass would likely provide sufficient forage for other predators under current ecosystem conditions. For the development of the ERPs, all other focal species in the model (bluefish, weakfish, spiny dogfish, and Atlantic herring) were assumed to be fished at 2017 levels.

In November 2022, the Board approved a TAC for 2023-2025 of 233,550 mt, based on the ERPs. The new TAC represents a 20% increase from the 2021-2022 TAC level. Based on projections, the probability of exceeding the ERP fishing mortality target of 0.19 is 2% in 2023, 22% in 2024, and 28.5% in 2025.

II. Status of the Stock

In October 2025, the Board accepted the results of the Ecological Reference Point (ERP) Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review Report for management use, and the Board reviewed the 2025 Single-Species Stock Assessment Update. The benchmark assessment was peer-reviewed and approved by an independent panel of scientific experts through the 102nd SouthEast, Data, Assessment and Review (SEDAR) workshop. The single-species assessment acts as a traditional stock assessment using the Beaufort Assessment Model (BAM), a statistical catch-at-age model that estimates population size-at-age and recruitment and is an update to the 2020 Single-Species Benchmark Stock Assessment. According to the models, the stock is not overfished or experiencing overfishing relative to the current ecological reference points.

The ERP assessment evaluates the health of the stock in an ecosystem context and indicates the fishing mortality rate (*F*) reference points for menhaden should be lower to account for the species' role as a forage fish. The ERP assessment uses the Northwest Atlantic Coastal Shelf Model of Intermediate Complexity for Ecosystems (NWACS-MICE) to develop Atlantic menhaden ERPs. NWACS-MICE is an ecosystem model that focuses on four key predator species (striped bass, bluefish, weakfish, and spiny dogfish) and three key prey species (Atlantic menhaden, Atlantic herring, and bay anchovy). These species were chosen because diet data indicate they are top predators of Atlantic menhaden or are key alternate prey species for those predators.

The ERP assessment indicates the *F* reference points for menhaden should be lower than the single-species reference points, but it also concluded that the final ERP definitions, including the appropriate harvest level for menhaden, depend on the management objectives for the ecosystem (i.e., management objectives for both Atlantic menhaden and its predators). Accordingly, instead of proposing a specific ERP definition, the assessment recommends a

combination of the BAM and the NWACS-MICE models as a tool for managers to evaluate trade-offs between menhaden harvest and predator biomass.

Atlantic menhaden are now managed by menhaden-specific ERPs as indicated above. Fishing mortality, a measure of the intensity with which the population is being fished, is used to evaluate whether the stock is experiencing overfishing. The ERP fishing mortality target is the maximum *F* on Atlantic menhaden that sustains Atlantic striped bass at their biomass target when striped bass are fished at their *F* target. The ERP fishing mortality threshold is the maximum F on Atlantic menhaden that keeps Atlantic striped bass at their biomass threshold when striped bass are fished at their *F* target. Population fecundity (FEC), a measure of reproductive capacity, is used to evaluate whether the stock is overfished. The FEC target and threshold are the minimum population fecundities that maintain striped bass at their biomass target and threshold level, respectively, when striped bass are fished at their *F* target.

According to the 2025 single-species stock assessment update, terminal year fecundity was estimated to be above the ERP fecundity threshold but below the fecundity target and fishing mortality was estimated to be above the ERP *F* target but below the ERP *F* threshold. Although the change in natural mortality resulted in lower estimates of fecundity and higher estimates of fishing mortality in this assessment compared to the 2022 assessment update, the stock was neither overfished nor experiencing overfishing.

III. Status of the Fishery

Commercial

Total commercial Atlantic menhaden landings in 2025, including directed, incidental catch, and EESA landings, are estimated at fewer than 147,000 mt (324 million pounds), an approximate 22% decrease relative to 2024 and 63% of the coastwide commercial TAC of 233,550 mt (514.9 million pounds). There were no reported landings from the incidental catch fishery in 2025 (Table 1).

Reduction Fishery

The 2025 harvest for reduction purposes is estimated at fewer than 95,000 mt (210 million pounds), a 30% decrease from 2024 and 27% below the previous 5-year average of approximately 130,000 mt (285 million pounds) (Table 2; Figure 4). Omega Protein's plant in Reedville, Virginia, is the only active Atlantic menhaden reduction factory on the Atlantic coast.

Bait Fishery

The coastwide bait harvest estimate for 2025 from state compliance reports, including directed, incidental catch, and EESA landings, is 51,833 mt (114.3 million pounds). This represents a 0.12% increase from 2024 and a 7% decrease compared to the previous 5-year average (Table 2; Figure 3). New Jersey (41%), Maine (28%), Virginia (12%), and Massachusetts (11%) landed the four largest shares in 2025.

Incidental Catch and Small-Scale Fisheries Landings

There were no reported landings from the incidental catch fishery in 2025 (Table 4).

Episodic Events Set Aside Program
The 2025 EESA quota was 2,336 mt (5.15 million pounds). Maine began harvesting under the EESA program on August 28th and continued until September 21st when Maine exited the EESA to continue the directed fishery with quota transfers. Massachusetts also began harvesting under the EESA program on August 28th and continued until their EESA fishery closed on October 31st. The final EESA harvest was 4,876,537 pounds.

However, preliminary estimates reported landings of 4,754,082 pounds. Based on the preliminary estimate, 394,814 pounds of leftover set aside was redistributed to the states on November 6th. Late reporting in Maine resulted in 122,455 pounds of reported EESA landings after the leftover set aside was redistributed. In August 2026, Maine transferred 122,455 pounds of 2026 quota to cover the overage (see Table 7).

Chesapeake Bay Reduction Fishery Cap (cap)
Amendment 3 implemented a 51,000 mt harvest cap for the reduction fishery in the Chesapeake Bay. The cap for 2025 was set once again at 51,000 mt with harvest remaining under the limit in 2024. Reported reduction landings from Chesapeake Bay in 2025 were fewer than 35,000 mt and below the cap.

Recreational
Menhaden are important bait in many recreational fisheries; some recreational fishermen use cast nets to capture menhaden or snag them with hook and line for use as bait, both dead and alive. The Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) estimate for Atlantic menhaden harvest (A + B1) in 2024 is 999,750 pounds (PSE of 15.9) which is a 6% increase from 2024 (943,427 pounds).

Additionally, it is important to note recreational harvest is not well captured by MRIP because there is not a known, identified direct harvest for menhaden, other than for bait. MRIP intercepts typically capture the landed fish from recreational trips as fishermen come to the dock or beach. However, since menhaden caught by recreational fishermen are often used as bait during their trip, they are typically not part of the catch that is seen by the surveyor completing the intercept.

Quota Transfers
There were 7 state-to-state transfers in 2025 (Table 8), an increase from 3 in 2024. Quota transfers were generally pursued to ameliorate overages. One of the purposes of the commercial allocation changes in Addendum I to Amendment 3 was to reduce the need for quota transfers, and the PRT notes the significant decrease in transfers since 2022.

IV. Status of Research and Monitoring

<u>Commercial fisheries monitoring</u>

Reduction fishery - The NMFS Southeast Fisheries Science Center Beaufort Laboratory in Beaufort, North Carolina, continued to collect biological samples from the Atlantic menhaden purse-seine reduction fishery and processes and ages all reduction samples collected on the East Coast. Starting in 2025, the purse-seine reduction fishery provided Captains Daily Fishing Reports (CDFRs) to the Virginia Marine Resources Commission where staff enter data into a database for storage and analysis.

Bait fishery - Per Amendment 3, states are required to implement a timely quota monitoring system to maintain menhaden harvest within the TAC and minimize the potential for quota overages. The Standard Atlantic Fisheries Information System (SAFIS) daily electronic dealer reporting system allows near real time data acquisition for federally permitted bait dealers in the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast. Landings by Virginia's purse-seine for-bait vessels (snapper rigs) in Chesapeake Bay are tabulated at season's end using CDFRs maintained on each vessel during the fishing season. A bait-fishery sampling program for size and age composition has also been conducted since 1994. The Beaufort Laboratory, and some states, age the bait samples collected. See *Section VII* for more information on quota monitoring and biological sampling requirements.

Atlantic menhaden research

The following studies relevant to menhaden assessment and management have been published within the last few years:

- Anstead, K. A., K. Drew, D. Chagaris, A. M. Schueller, J. E. McNamee, A. Buchheister, G. Nesslage, J. H. Uphoff Jr., M. J. Wilberg, A. Sharov, M. J. Dean, J. Brust, M. Celestino, S. Madsen, S. Murray, M. Appelman, J. C. Ballenger, J. Brito, E. Cosby, C. Craig, C. Flora, K. Gottschall, R. J. Latour, E. Leonard, R. Mroch, J. Newhard, D. Orner, C. Swanson, J. Tinsman, E. D. Houde, T. J. Miller, and H. Townsend. 2021. The path to an ecosystem approach for forage fish management: A case study of Atlantic menhaden. Front. Mar. Sci. 8: 607657.
- Chargaris D., K. Drew, A. M. Schueller, M. Cieri, J. Brito, and A. Buchheister. 2020. Ecological Reference Points for Atlantic Menhaden Established Using an Ecosystem Model of Intermediate Complexity. Front. Mar. Sci. 7:606417.
- Deyle, E., A. M. Schueller, H. Ye, G. M. Pao, and G. Sugihara. 2018. Ecosystem-based forecasts of recruitment in two menhaden species. Fish and Fisheries 19(5): 769-781.
- Drew, K., M. Cieri, A. M. Schueller, A. Buchheister, D. Chagaris, G. Nesslage, J. E. McNamee, and J. H. Uphoff. 2021. Balancing Model Complexity, Data Requirements, and Management Objectives in Developing Ecological Reference Points for Atlantic Menhaden. Front. Mar. Sci. 8: 608059.
- Liljestrand, E.M., M.J. Wilberg, and A.M. Schueller. 2019. Estimation of movement and mortality of Atlantic menhaden during 1966-1969 using a Bayesian multi-state mark recapture model. Fisheries Research 210: 204-213.
- Liljestrand, E.M., M. J. Wilberg, and A. M. Schueller. 2019. Multi-state dead recovery mark-recovery model performance for estimating movement and mortality rates. Fisheries Research 210: 214-233.

- Lucca, B. M., and J. D. Warren. 2019. Fishery-independent observations of Atlantic menhaden abundance in the coastal waters south of New York. Fisheries Research 218: 229-236.
- Nesslage, G. M., and M. J. Wilberg. 2019. A performance evaluation of surplus production models with time-varying intrinsic growth in dynamic ecosystems. Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences 76(12): 2245-2255.
- Schueller, A.M., A. Rezek, R. M. Mroch, E. Fitzpatrick, and A. Cheripka. 2021. Comparison of ages determined by using an Eberbach projector and a microscope to read scales from Atlantic menhaden (Brevoortia tyrannus) and Gulf menhaden (B. patronus). Fishery Bulletin 119(1): 21-32.

Theses and Dissertations of Potential Interest:

- McNamee, J. E. 2018. A multispecies statistical catch-at-age (MSSCAA) model for a Mid-Atlantic species complex. University of Rhode Island.

V. Implementation of FMP Compliance Requirements

All states are required to submit annual compliance reports by August 1.

Quota Results

The Board set the TAC at 233,550 mt (514.9 million pounds) for 2023-2025 based on the adopted ERPs. 1% is set aside for episodic events. States may relinquish all or part of its annual quota by December 1st of the previous year. Delaware relinquished one million pounds of quota, which was redistributed to the states according to procedures outlined in Addendum I to Amendment 3 and is reflected in the 2026 Preliminary Quota in Table 7.

Table 7 also contains 2025 state-specific quotas and directed harvest. The final quotas for 2025 account for one million pounds of quota relinquished by Delaware, state-to-state transfers (Table 8), and transfers to the EESA. Based on preliminary 2025 landings, Maine incurred an overage of 572,270 pounds, which was deducted from their 2026 quota.

Quota Monitoring

The Board approved timely quota monitoring programs for each state through implementation of Amendment 3. Monitoring programs are intended to minimize the potential for quota overages. Table 6 contains a summary of each state's approved quota monitoring system.

Menhaden purse seine and bait seine vessels (or snapper rigs) are required to submit CDFRs. Maine, New York, and Virginia fulfilled this requirement in 2025. New Jersey did not require purse seine vessels to fill out the specific CDFR but did require monthly trip level reporting on state forms that include complementary data elements to the CDFR. Rhode Island purse seine vessels must call in daily reports to RI DMF and fill out daily trip level logbooks. New Hampshire also does not require the specific CDFR, but does require daily, trip-level reporting from dealers and monthly trip-level reporting from harvesters. Massachusetts requires trip level reporting for all commercial fishermen. Menhaden purse seine fisheries do not currently operate in all other jurisdictions in the management unit.

Biological Monitoring Requirements

Amendment 3 maintains biological sampling requirements for non *de minimis* states as follows:

- One 10-fish sample (age and length) per 300 mt landed for bait purposes for Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, and Delaware; and
- One 10-fish sample (age and length) per 200 mt landed for bait purposes for Maryland, Potomac River Fisheries Commission, Virginia, and North Carolina

Table 9 provides the number of 10-fish samples required and collected for 2025. These are based on the best available 2025 total bait landings data (including directed, incidental, and EESA landings) provided to the Commission by the states. In 2025, most states and jurisdictions met the requirement. New Jersey noted that fewer vessels participated in 2025 and those that did often fished together, and New Jersey attempts to exclude duplicate samples by day and area.

The PRT has regularly discussed whether a sufficient number of age and length samples are being collected from different commercial gear types as well as regions, and whether substituting samples from fishery-independent sources is appropriate for meeting the requirement. In September 2025, the Technical Committee reviewed the biosampling requirement. The TC did not recommend any reductions in sample size and will complete further analyses to develop a recommendation.

Age and length data from the Virginia purse seine bait industry are now being collected by Dr. Janeski's lab at Virginia Commonwealth University starting in 2025.

Adult CPUE Index Requirement

Amendment 3 requires that, at a minimum, each state with a pound net fishery must collect catch and effort data elements for Atlantic menhaden as follows; total pounds landed per day, number of pound nets fished per day. These are harvester trip level ACCSP data requirements. In May of 2013, the Board approved North Carolina's request to omit this information on the basis that it did not have the current reporting structure to require a quantity of gear field by harvesters or dealers. In recent years, NC DMF staff have worked to develop a proxy method to estimate effort but this approach likely would not work for developing an adult CPUE index.

De Minimis Status

To be eligible for *de minimis* status, a state's bait landings must be less than 1% of the total coastwide bait landings for the most recent two years. State(s) with a reduction fishery are not eligible for *de minimis* consideration. If granted *de minimis* status by the Board, states are exempt from implementing biological sampling as well as pound net catch and effort data reporting. The Board also previously approved a *de minimis* exemption for New Hampshire, South Carolina and Georgia from implementation of timely reporting. The states of

Pennsylvania, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida requested and qualify for *de minimis* status for the 2025 fishing season.

VI. Plan Review Team Recommendations and Notable Comments

Management Recommendations

- While not all states met the biological sampling requirement, we encourage all states to strive to acquire the necessary samples.
- The PRT recommends that the *de minimis* requests from Pennsylvania, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida, be approved.

VII. Literature Cited

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC). 2025. Atlantic Menhaden Stock Assessment Update. Prepared by the ASMFC Atlantic Menhaden Stock Assessment Subcommittee. 142 pp.

SEDAR. 2025. SEDAR 102 – ASMFC Atlantic Menhaden and Ecological Reference Points.. SEDAR, North Charleston SC. 425 pp. available online at: AtlMenhadenERPBenchmarkStockAssessment_PeerReview_SEDAR_Oct2025.pdf

Table 1. Directed, bycatch, and episodic events set aside landings in 1000s of pounds for 2025 by jurisdiction. Source: 2025 ASMFC state compliance reports for Atlantic menhaden. NA = not applicable.

State	Directed	Incidental Catch	EESA
ME	28,266	-	3,779
NH	6,593	-	-
MA	11,004	-	1,122
RI	360	-	-
CT	61	-	-
NY	727	-	-
NJ	47,341	-	NA
PA	0	-	NA
DE	38	-	NA
MD	459	-	NA
PFRC	169	-	NA
VA	221,683	-	NA
NC	458	-	NA
SC	C	-	NA
GA	0	-	NA
FL	44	-	NA

Table 2. Atlantic menhaden reduction and bait landings in thousand metric tons, 1991-2025.

	Reduction Landings (1000 mt)	Bait Landings (1000 mt)
1991	330	29.7
1992	270	33.8
1993	310	23.4
1994	260	25.6
1995	340	28.4
1996	293	21.7
1997	259	24.2
1998	246	38.4
1999	171	34.8
2000	167	33.5
2001	234	35.3
2002	174	36.2
2003	166	33.2
2004	183	34.0
2005	147	38.4
2006	157	27.2
2007	174	42.1
2008	141	47.6
2009	144	39.2
2010	183	42.7
2011	174	52.6
2012	161	63.7
2013	131	37.0
2014	131	41.6
2015	143	45.8
2016	137	43.1
2017	129	43.8
2018	141	50.2
2019	151	58.1
2020	125	59.6
2021	137	58.4
2022	134	60.1
2023	117	49.8
2024	134	51.8
2025	94	51.8
Avg 2020-2024	129	55.9

Table 3. Incidental fishery landings by state in 1000s of pounds, 2013-2022. There were no reported incidental landings from 2023-2025. Only states that have reported incidental catch landings are listed. Average total incidental catch landings for 2013-2022 was 8.6 million pounds.

State	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
ME		-	-	506	5,374	2,995	10,751	13,605	11,771	15,602
MA								49	174	595
RI	16	99	70	40	136	-	-	-	C	-
CT	0	-	10	-	124	-	-	-	C	-
NY	0	325	769	281	807	-	-	282	310	-
NJ	0	626	241	196	-	204,240	-	20	C	-
DE	76	112	92	21	29	-	-	-	-	-
MD	2,864	2,201	1,950	996	-	-	-	-	-	-
PRFC	1,087	1,112	455	106	670	-	-	-	-	-
VA	268	2,232	2,103	326	-	110,281	-	-	-	1,784
FL	65	126	302	111	264	-	-	-	-	-
Total	4,377	6,831	5,992	2,581	7,404	3,215	10,751	13,957	12,336	16,152

Table 4. Total incidental landings (1000s of pounds), number of trips, and number of states reporting landings in the incidental catch fishery, 2013-2024.

Year	Landings (1000s of pounds)	Number of Trips	Number of states landing
2013	4,377	2,783	6
2014	6,831	5,275	8
2015	5,992	4,498	9
2016	2,581	2,222	9
2017	7,407	2,108	7
2018	3,310	1,224	3
2019	10,751	3,113	1
2020	13,957	3,565	4
2021	12,336	3,099	6
2022	17,980	4,134	3
2023	0	0	0
2024	0	0	0
2025	0	0	0
Total	85,522	32,021	

Table 5. Episodic Events Set-Aside (EESA) fishery quota, landings, and participating states by year. *The 2022 overage was partially covered by a quota transfer and the remainder was deducted from the 2023 set aside.

Year	States Declared Participation	EESA Quota (MT)	Landed (MT)	% EESA Quota Used
2013		1,708	-	-
2014	RI	1,708	134	7.8%
2015	RI	1,879	854	45.5%
2016	ME, RI, NY	1,879	1,728	92.0%
2017	ME, RI, NY	2,000	2,129	106.5%
2018	ME	2,031	2,103	103.6%
2019	ME	2,160	1,995	92.4%
2020	ME, MA	2,160	2,080	96.3%
2021	ME, MA, RI	1,944	2,213	113.8%
2022	ME, MA	1,944	1,992	102.4%
2023*	ME	2,317	1,274	55.0%
2024	ME	2,336	1,389	59.5%
2025	ME, MA	2,336	2,223	95.2%

Table 6. State quota reporting timeframes in 2025. The **bold** text indicates which reporting program (dealer or harvesters) the states use to monitor its quotas. There were no changes from 2024.

State	Dealer Reporting	Harvester Reporting	Notes
ME	monthly	**daily/weekly**	Harvesters must report same day during directed and episodic event trips; harvesters report daily trips weekly for trips <6,000 lbs. Harvest reports are used for quota monitoring.
NH	**daily**	monthly	Exempt from timely reporting. Implemented daily, transaction level reporting for state dealers.
MA	**weekly**	monthly/daily	Harvesters landing greater than 6,000 lbs must report daily
RI	**twice weekly**	quarterly/daily	Harvesters using purse seines must report daily
CT	**weekly/monthly**	monthly/daily	CT operates as directed fisheries until 90% of the quota is harvested. Then operates at the 6,000 pound bycatch trip limit.
NY	**Weekly**	monthly	Capability to require weekly harvester reporting if needed
NJ	**weekly**	monthly	All menhaden sold or bartered must be done through a licensed dealer
DE	—	**monthly/daily**	Harvesters landing menhaden report daily using IVR
MD	monthly	**monthly/daily**	PN harvest is reported daily, while other harvest is reported monthly.
PRFC	—	**weekly**	Trip level harvester reports submitted weekly. When 70% of quota is estimated to be reached, then pound netters must call in weekly report of daily catch.
VA	—	**monthly/weekly/daily**	Purse seines submit weekly reports until 97% of quota, then daily reports. Monthly for all other gears until 90% of quota, then reporting every 10 days.
NC	**monthly (combined reports)**		Single trip ticket with dealer and harvester information submitted monthly. Larger dealers (>50,000 lbs of landings annually) can report electronically, updated daily.
SC	**monthly (combined reports)**		Exempt from timely reporting. Single trip ticket with dealer and harvester information.
GA	**monthly (combined reports)**		Exempt from timely reporting. Single trip ticket with dealer and harvester information.
FL	**monthly/weekly (combined reports)**		Monthly through the FWC Marine Fisheries Trip Ticket system until 75% of quota is projected to have been met, then weekly phone calls to dealers who have been reporting menhaden landings until the directed fishery is closed.

Table 7. Results of 2025 quota accounting in pounds. The 2026 base quotas account for the redistribution of relinquished quota by Delaware (600,799 pounds).

State	2025 Base Quota*	Returned Set Aside	Transfers^	Final 2025 Quota	Overages	2026 Base Quota*
ME	24,510,314	18,060	3,165,235	27,693,609	572,270	19,026,867
NH	6,052,530	2,881	1,000,000	7,055,412		4,840,570
MA	10,838,902	6,817	160,000	11,005,719		8,667,681
RI	4,147,882	1,315	(410,000)	3,739,197		3,317,642
CT	1,693,471	345	(1,500,000)	193,816		1,354,603
NY	4,298,217	1,439	(1,000,000)	3,299,656		3,437,847
NJ	56,172,891	44,098	-	56,216,989		44,916,059
PA	50,974	-	-	50,974		40,779
DE	375,998	84	-	376,082		500,000
MD	5,947,968	2,795	(1,000,000)	4,950,763		4,756,964
PRFC	5,547,544	2,466	-	5,549,910		4,436,710
VA	384,172,558	313,828	-	384,486,385		307,179,673
NC	1,892,146	508	(500,000)	1,392,654		1,513,460
SC	1,274,601	-	-	1,274,602		1,019,681
GA	1,274,352	-	-	1,274,352		1,019,481
FL	1,490,464	178	-	1,490,642		1,192,282
Total	**509,740,712**	**394,814**	-	**510,135,526**		**407,220,300**

*Includes redistributed relinquished quota for that year and any overages from the previous season.

^Includes inter-state transfers and transfers to the EESA quota.

Table 8. State-to-state transfers of menhaden commercial quota for the 2025 Fishing year.

Transfer Date	ME	NH	MA	RI	CT	NY	NJ	PA	DE	MD	PRFC	VA	NC	SC	GA	FL
8/14/2025		1,000,000			(1,000,000)											
9/10/2025	1,000,000					(1,000,000)										
9/18/2025	500,000												(500,000)			
9/18/2025	1,000,000									(1,000,000)						
9/19/2025	500,000				(500,000)											
11/13/2025			160,000	(160,000)												
12/12/2025	250,000			(250,000)												
Total	3,165,235	1,000,000	160,000	(410,000)	(1,500,000)	(1,000,000)	-	-	-	(1,000,000)	-	-	(500,000)	-	-	-

Table 9. Biological monitoring results for the 2025 Atlantic menhaden bait fishery.

State	#10-fish samples required	#10-fish samples collected	Age samples collected	Length samples collected	Gear/Comments
ME	48	41	410	410	32 from the directed fishery; 9 during the EESA / 36 samples from PS, 5 samples from gillnets
NH	10	10	100	100	Purse Seine
MA	18	23	250	250	All purse seine
RI	-	-	-	-	112 FI samples collected
CT	1	1	18	18	gill net
NY	2	13	132	132	cast net, seine net
NJ	73	65	650	650	Purse Seine
	9	8	80	80	"Other gear" grouped for confidentiality reasons
DE	1	3	25	25	Gill Net
MD	1	11	155	361	Pound net
PRFC	-	-	-	-	pound net
VA	1	1	7	10	Haul Seine
	1	1	9	10	Pound Net
	2	32	138	315	Gill Net
NC	1	2	20	122	gillnet
Total	**168**	**210**	**1994**	**2483**	

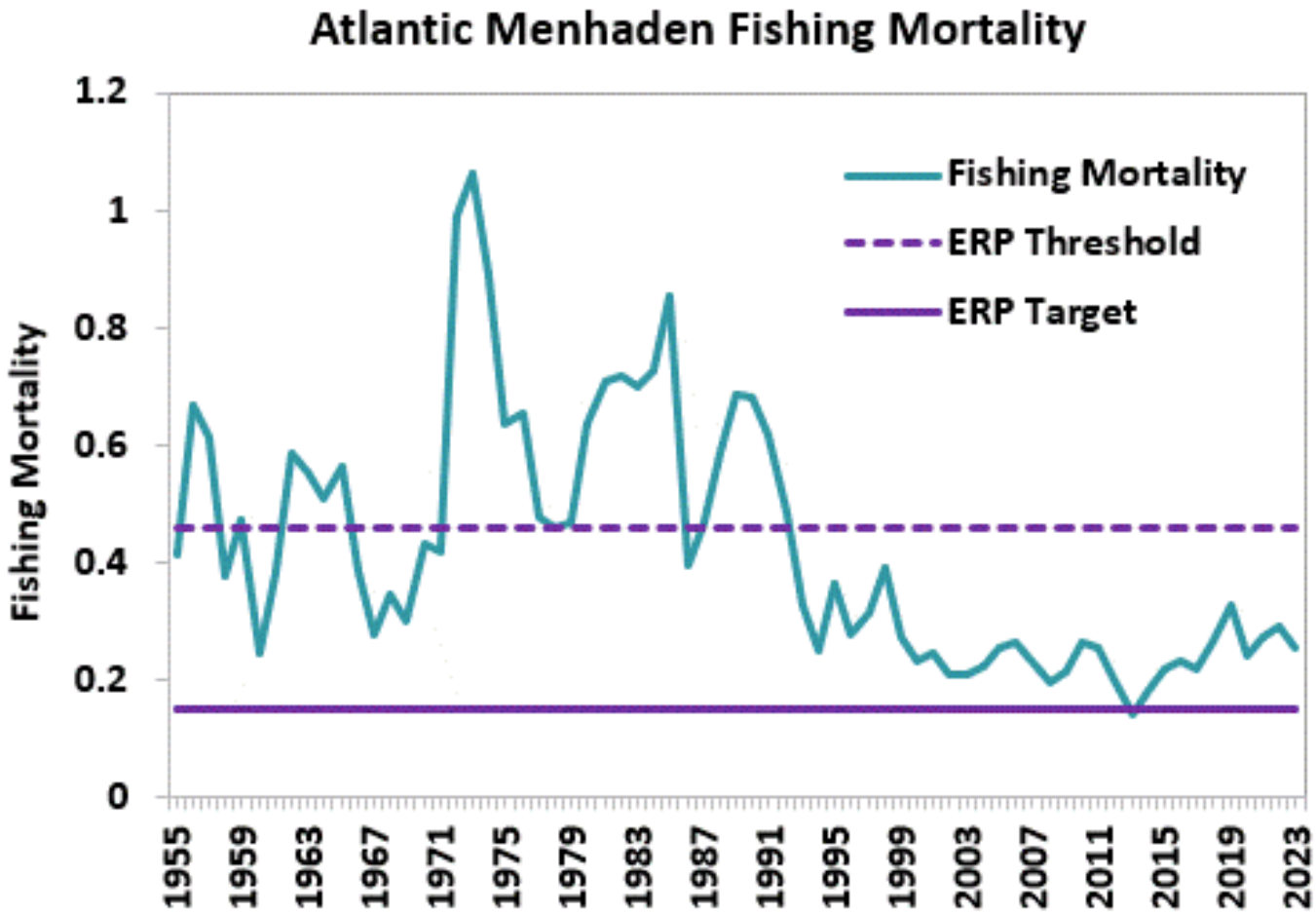


Figure 1. Fishing mortality, 1955-2023, compared to current ERP target and threshold. Source: ASMFC 2025 and SEDAR 2025.

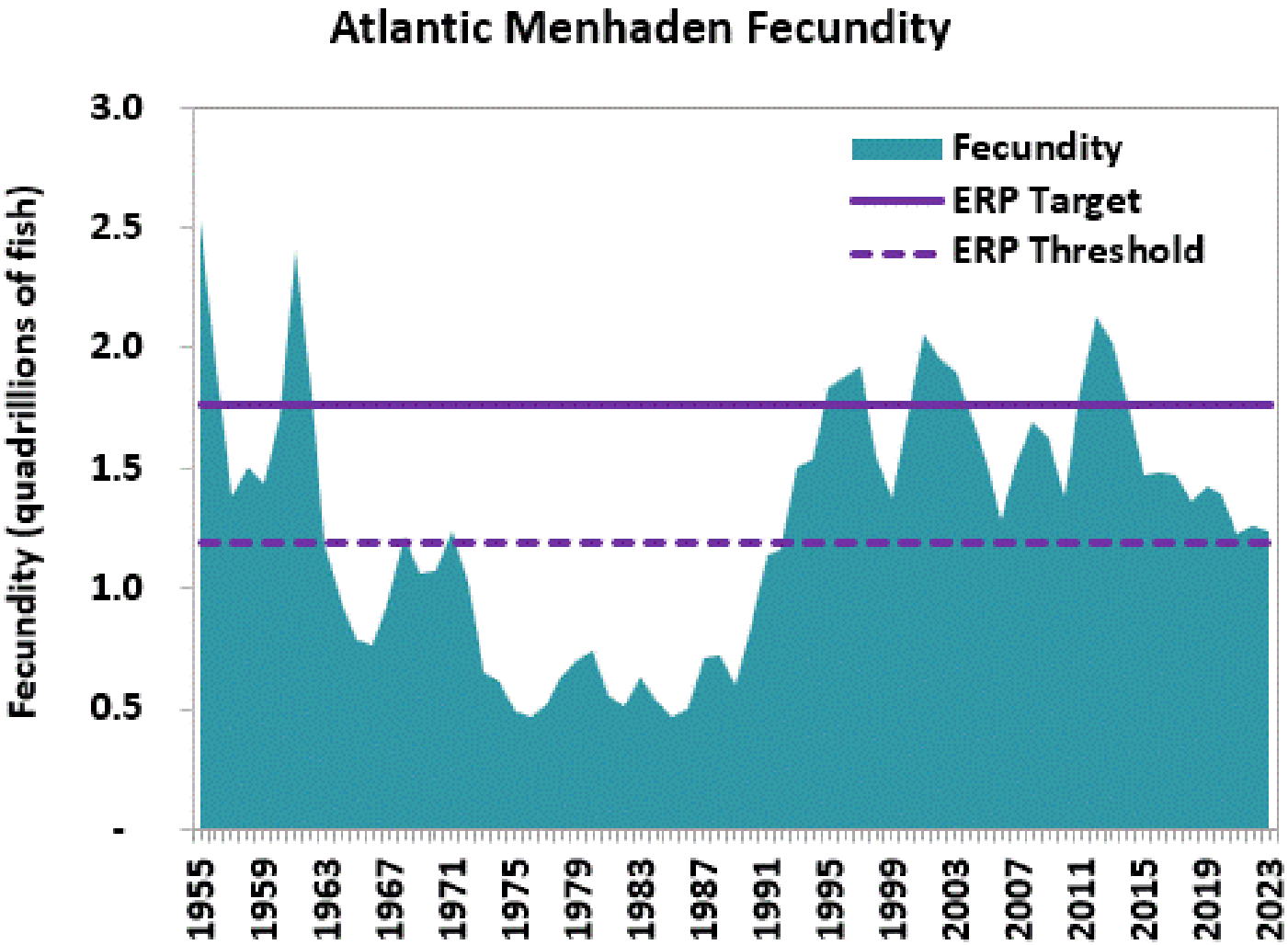


Figure 2. Atlantic menhaden fecundity, 1955-2023, compared to current ERP target and threshold. Source: ASMFC 2025 and SEDAR 2025.

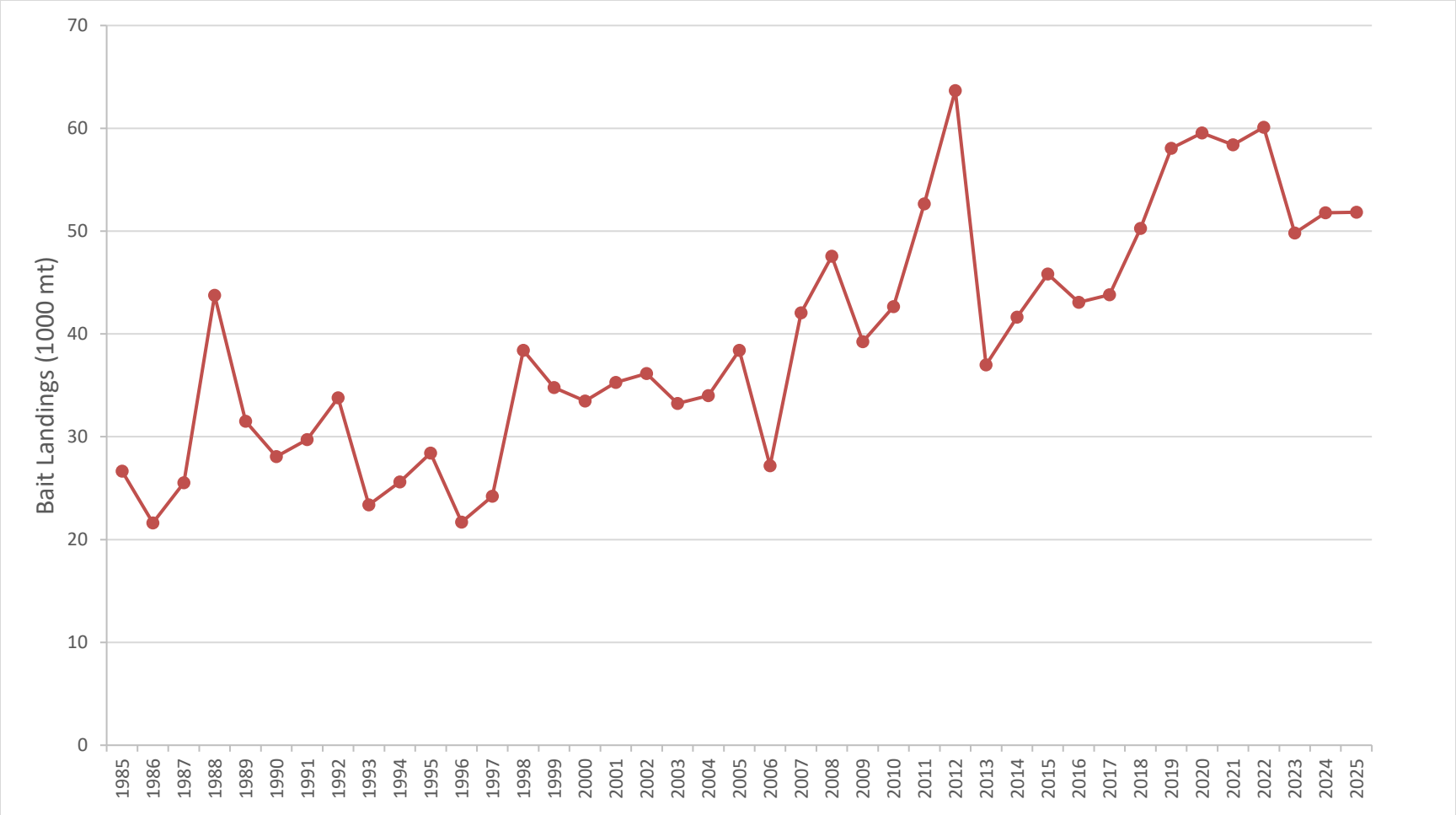


Figure 3. Landings from the bait fishery (1985–2025) for Atlantic menhaden.

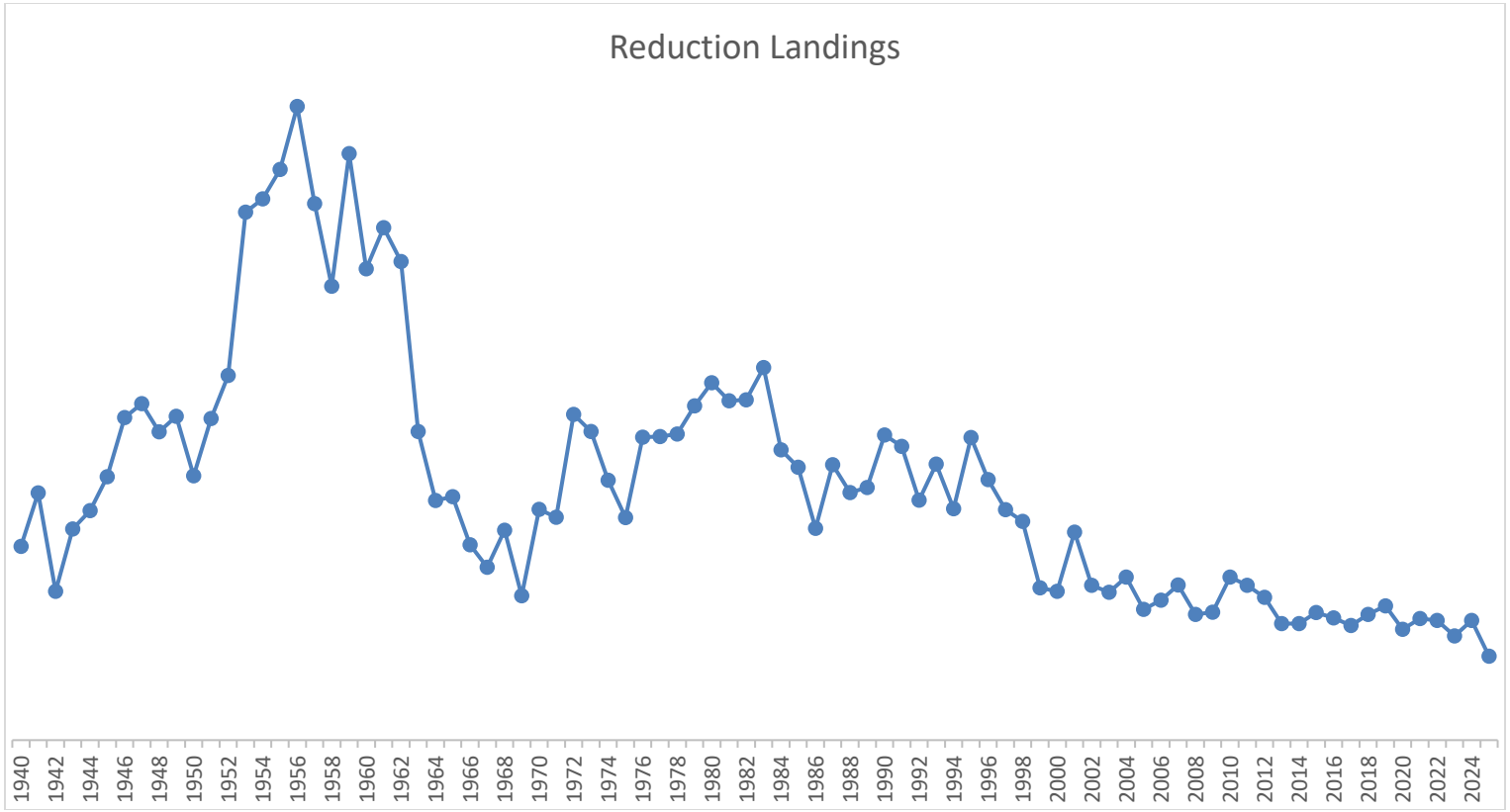


Figure 4. Landings from the reduction purse seine fishery (1940–2025). Note reduction landings values removed for confidentiality but are approximately an order of magnitude greater than bait landings.

James Boyle

From: Christopher Gale <chris@galestrategies.com>
Sent: Monday, October 19, 2026 4:52 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] Atlantic Menhaden 2027-2028 TAC

I'm a Virginia native, Virginia Tech grad now living in Darien, Connecticut, and have had the opportunity to introduce my son, and our family as a whole, to fishing the Long Island Sound, the Potomac and across the Atlantic seaboard, as well as boating and learning about our marine economy, heritage and national interests in a real and tangible way.

A good portion of our family have played a role in the U.S. Navy - as well as other branches of American service - dating back to the Navy's founding and have called these home waters for generations.

I am hopeful my son will find a career in that environment.

Those experiences have reinforced for me that healthy fisheries are an essential economic asset and strategic resource.

As you know, Atlantic menhaden are a foundational forage species that support commercial and recreational fisheries, and original cultures throughout the East Coast. Striped bass, bluefish, weakfish, ospreys, whales, and many other species who interlink with our economy and culture depend on abundant menhaden populations. When forage is scarce, the broader economic opportunity and ecosystem becomes less productive, reducing opportunities for cultures founded on the land and sea, marine communities, for anglers, charter operators, coastal businesses, even tourism, and obviously the broader commercial fisheries, as opposed to just one part of it.

From a national interest perspective, stronger menhaden conservation supports American economic growth by helping sustain jobs, businesses, and coastal communities across multiple sectors of the maritime economy. It builds up a reserve for future and extended use. A larger and more resilient forage base can create significantly greater long-term economic value than short-term extraction for cheap gain and a low return, particularly when considering the economic contributions of truly strong national marine ecosystems.

Maintaining abundant domestic fishery and marine resources is also consistent with broader national resilience and security objectives. Strong natural resource reserves provide greater flexibility and independence in the face of disruption, changing conditions, and future food and resource needs. As with many strategic assets, rebuilding and maintaining healthy reserves is more prudent and less costly than attempting to restore depleted resources later.

For these reasons, I urge the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board to reduce the coastwide menhaden catch limit by at least 40 percent from its 2026 level for both 2027 and 2028, or adopt an even stronger and nationally confident approach, if supported by the science, to reduce the catch further. Management should prioritize rebuilding and strengthening national menhaden abundance to support ecosystem dynamism, economic opportunity, and long-term American interests.

Please include my comment in the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board's meeting materials.

Regards,

Chris Gale
203.570.4681
The Definers Monthly
The Definers Quarterly



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James Boyle

From: David Irwin <dr.irwin.david@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, October 30, 2026 12:27 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] Save the Menhaden; improve water clarity

- **I support a TAC of 114,200mt in order to have a 50% probability of NOT exceeding the ERP Fishing Mortality Target to support the Atlantic coast ecosystem and all the species that depend on menhaden.**
- **No doubt there is concern about possible loss of jobs at Omega Protein. But the loss of a few dozen jobs pales in comparison to the thousands of Bay watermen jobs lost as Bay water clarity declined along with precipitous declines in oyster and crab populations.**
- **Clarity of Bay water has been dramatically impacted by algae and algal blooms. Menhaden feed on algae. Remove too many menhaden, algae proliferate disastrously.**
- **Omega protein should stay out of the Bay. Let spawning and growth of juveniles proliferate unabated. This could increase Omega's catch in the Atlantic.**
- **It really is a "No-Brainer"**

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James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Wednesday, October 28, 2026 11:17 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Richard Morgan

Email

richwtc@comcast.net

State

Delaware

Comment

The Atlantic Menhaden fish population is under siege ! The volume of manhaden taken by industrial fishing vessels is exorbitant & has major negative impacts to many in the food chain, but striped bass and osprey.
I implore the commission to immediately implement significant restrictions on manhaden harvesting so these fish can recover & so striped bass and osprey can recover. Similar restrictions were placed on striped bass fishing and they've come back. Please act immediately! Thank you.

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James Boyle

From: Carmelo DeFranco <cdefranco@nycbusinessgroup.com>
Sent: Wednesday, October 28, 2026 12:05 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] Please curb Menhaden fishing in NY & NJ waters

To our officials responsible for Menhaden quotas,

Please stop the over fishing of bunker in our local waters. We need those bait fish to provide food for all the predator fish we love to catch.

Carmelo DeFranco, CLCS
3971 Victory Blvd
Staten Island, NY 10314
Tel: 718-554-3425
Fax: 718-306-9657
cdefranco@nycbusinessgroup.com
www.NYCbusinessgroup.com
https://www.trustedchoice.com/agency-profile/738432/new-york-city-business-group/new-review

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James Boyle

From: BRUCE KINDSETH <bkindseth@cox.net>
Sent: Wednesday, October 28, 2026 6:48 AM
To: Comments
Subject: [External] Atlantic Menhaden TAC for 2027-2028

Dear Chairman Cimino and Members of the Menhaden Management Board,

Thank you again for allowing me to comment on behalf of Narragansett Surfcasters on a very important issue with Atlantic Menhaden and the future of the Atlantic Fishery.

I submitted comments previously that were all about biology and the ecosystem. Last year's decision to compromise on the recommendation of a 54% cut was based on the socio-economic impact of such a large cut on the bait fishery and their customers, the lobster and crab fisheries. So, let's look at the socio-economic issues.

ASMFC is now in a unique position of having to choose between 2 fisheries for which they are responsible, the menhaden reduction fishery and the stiped bass fishery. The economic impact of the striped bass recreational fishery is as follows: (LINK) (LINK)

Key 2016 figures for the recreational striped bass fishery (NC to ME):

- Total economic output (multiplier effect / total activity): ~$13.0 billion ($12.98 billion)

- Contribution to GDP: ~$7.7 billion ($7.73 billion)

- Jobs supported: ~104,900

- Income (salaries and wages): ~$4.7 billion

- Direct angler spending: roughly $6.3 billion (about $1.0 billion on trips + $5.3 billion on durable goods)

By state, the numbers are as follows:

State	GDP Contribution	Jobs Supported
Massachusetts	$1.68 billion	20,715
New Jersey	$1.61 billion	18,624
New York	$1.17 billion	13,810
Maryland	$803 million	10,193
Connecticut	$375 million	4,418
Rhode Island	$241 million	3,410
Maine	$183 million	3,110
North Carolina	$137 million	1,953

New Hampshire	$116 million	1,630
Virginia	$107 million	1,444
Delaware	$59 million	732

These numbers are 10 years old, and I could not find anything more recent. I could also not find any academic papers, NOAA review, or ASMFC documents that disputed these findings.

In contrast to the recreational fisery, the impact of the Omega Protein factory in Reedville VA is as follows:

About 260 direct employees for Reedville operations (Omega Protein processing plant + Ocean Harvesters fishing partner), plus roughly 250 indirect jobs. They generate over $100 million in annual economic activity, with about $23 million in payroll and benefits, which are concentrated in and around Reedville, VA. (LINK)

It seems that closing a $100 million factory would be a big deal, but it should be noted that the economic contribution from recreational fishing from VA alone is on par with that from the reduction factory, while employing nearly 3 times as many people.

Cooke Seafood is a family-owned international corporation based in New Brunswick, Canada. Cooke employs nearly 13,000 people, operates in 14 countries, and operates 800 vessels and 30 processing plans. They also have aquaculture facilities using their own hatcheries and feed plants.

Much of the product from the reduction factory goes to making feed for the aquaculture industry. The aquaculture industry has been growing and saw the need for increased amounts of feed that could not be satisfied by the reduction fisheries. In 2019, a company built a factory in Blair Nebraska for $200 million which reached their peak production of oil from algae that was equivalent to what could be obtained from 1.2 MT of menhaden. That is 6 times what could be produced from the Reedville plant. In addition, a biomedical company built plants in Texas and New Mexico that extracts omega 3 from algae for human consumption, which is available from CVS and Amazon.

The biology that I discussed in my previous comments are very simple and pretty much common sense. Fish need a balanced diet of lipids, which are fats, oils and waxes, for energy. They also need protein for growth. They need both lipids and protein for egg production. A fish's need for lipids varies with species and time of year. A striped bass, for example, needs an abundant lipid reserve to migrate upstream and still have the energy reserves to spawn. Flounder, on the other hand, can get by on lower energy reserves. The main sources of high lipid forage are menhaden, herring. mackerel and sand eels. Herring and mackerel have been overfished, and the numbers for menhaden and sand eels are low. Menhaden, even though their numbers are low, are still the only high energy content forage fish with a viable population, at 1.7 million MT.

There were a lot of comments submitted by the public at the 2025 Menhaden Board meeting. (LINK) (LINK) One was by Paul Eidman, charter boat operator and founder of Menhaden Defenders. His suggestion is to set the 2026-2028 TAC at 75,616 mt, the current TAC for the bait fishery, and reallocate all quota to the bait fishery to protect the bait, lobster and crab fisheries, and prohibit menhaden fishing for reduction purposes. His comment is on p.9 of the first link above.

To me, that seemed like the best solution and in nearly a year since, I have found a lot of information that supports this solution, with the exception that it should now say 2027-2028. It addresses the needs of the commercial fishery, especially the bait fishery, and the recreational fishery. Most of all, it would

reverse the 50-year decline in the Atlantic fishery, the menhaden population would grow larger every year, adding more energy to the Atlantic ecosystem, and everyone would benefit. I have not found any information that would support keeping the VA reduction fishery in business. By removing a badly needed high energy content forage fish, it is a net drain on the Atlantic fishery.

Sincerely.

Bruce Kindseth, Narragansett Surfcasters

Pt. Judith, RI

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James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Monday, October 26, 2026 11:13 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

C. Zupko

Email

cyananton@hotmail.com

State

New Jersey

Comment

Please distribute this comment to the appropriate Commissioners and Board members.

I am very concerned about how osprey young have frequently died of starvation this year.

As humans who have the means to protect our ecosystems or destroy it, I urge you to take a precautionary, ecosystem-based approach.

New Jersey's osprey recovery demonstrates what decades of sustained conservation can accomplish. But the reproductive failures we are now documenting remind us that protecting a species requires protecting the natural resources it depends on.

I urge you to adopt more precautionary menhaden management that considers the needs of wildlife and the broader marine food web.

Thank you,
C. Zupko

James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Monday, October 26, 2026 9:32 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Robin Jenks Vanderlip

Email

robinjenks@yahoo.com

State

Maryland

Comment

The osprey is an endangered bird. The fishing industry and boating industry needs captains and crew, which can be employees who have been reeducated. Don't allow the continuation of overfishing the Menhaden.

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James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Monday, October 26, 2026 11:27 AM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

John Morgan

Email

jmmorgan5@gmail.com

State

New Jersey

Comment

I support a stronger menhaden management that would provide more food for the osprey and maybe protect the menhaden from fisherman netting? I support reasonable measures to save our dwindling number of Ospreys.

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James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Sunday, October 25, 2026 7:22 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Anthony Betti

Email

axbetti@gmail.com

State

New Jersey

Comment

I'm writing as a Cape May County, NJ resident concerned about the declining breeding success of coastal ospreys in New Jersey and the Chesapeake Bay.

Recent research has documented serious reproductive failures and widespread food stress among the coastal osprey populations, with reduced menhaden availability identified as a major contributing factor. Meanwhile, commercial fishing continues to remove this essential forage fish from the marine ecosystem.

Managing menhaden responsibly requires recognizing their importance to the entire food web, not simply their commercial value.

At your November meeting, I urge the Board to adopt a more precautionary coastwide catch limit, substantially reduce the Chesapeake Bay industrial reduction fishery cap, strengthen seasonal harvest protections, and improve monitoring of local menhaden availability for coastal osprey populations.

Across the Mid-Atlantic, decades of conservation efforts have helped restore osprey populations. Protecting that progress means protecting the food sources these birds depend on.

We shouldn’t wait for further osprey reproductive failures before taking stronger action. The ecological importance of menhaden deserves greater consideration.

Thank you,
Anthony Betti
Cape May Court House, NJ

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James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Sunday, October 25, 2026 3:25 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Jill Macelhiney

Email

jillannmac@yahoo.com

State

New Jersey

Comment

It is critical to take the necessary drastic action to protect Ospreys now. It is our duty as citizens of this amazing planet.

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James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Sunday, October 25, 2026 3:14 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Mason Cain

Email

cainmason40@gmail.com

State

New Jersey

Comment

Although it would without a reasonable doubt be heartbreaking to lose a piece of Americas maritime heritage to regulation one can deny the absurdity of current harvest quota's. The current harvest of Menhaden is utterly unsustainable and must be curbed to not only ensure the longevity of this fisheries future, but also any other industries and wildlife reliant upon them.

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James Boyle

From: Diane Brown <deejbrown@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, October 25, 2026 12:40 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] Adaptive Management of Atlantic Menhaden

October 25, 2026

Mr. Joseph Cimino, Chair
Members of the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission
1050 North Highland Street
Suite 200 A-N
Arlington VA 22201

Dear Mr. Cimino:

Please distribute to the appropriate Commissioners and Board members regarding the management of Atlantic Menhaden and its effect on coastal wildlife.

I am deeply concerned about the collapse of the osprey population that has been exacerbated by overfishing of their main food source: Atlantic Menhaden. I am hereby submitting a passage from the essay written by Ben Wurst from “Speak Up for New Jersey’s Ospreys” posted on October 16, 2026 and respectfully request that the MENHADEN QUOTA FOR 2027-2028 BE MANAGED FOR ALL SPECIES that depend upon them as the main food source for their continued survival.

“As the ASMFC considers the 2027–2028 coastwide TAC, we urge the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board to take a precautionary, ecosystem-based approach.

Specifically, we recommend that the Board:

1. **Adopt a precautionary coastwide TAC** that prioritizes adequate menhaden availability for the marine food web, including ospreys and other dependent predators.
2. **Account for ecosystem needs and uncertainty** when setting harvest limits, treating persistent food stress and poor osprey reproductive performance as serious warning signs.
3. **Strengthen monitoring of menhaden availability and ecological impacts**, including the use of wildlife indicators such as osprey breeding performance alongside fisheries data.
4. **Apply adaptive management** that responds to emerging evidence of localized prey shortages, changes in prey availability, and ecosystem stress.
5. **Recognize the full ecological and economic value of menhaden**, including their importance to wildlife, recreational fisheries, wildlife viewing, and coastal communities.

New Jersey’s osprey recovery demonstrates what decades of sustained conservation can accomplish. But the reproductive failures we are now documenting remind us that protecting a species requires protecting the natural resources it depends on. Our goal is not to attribute the poor breeding performance observed in coastal nesting ospreys to the harvest of menhaden, but the persistent and widespread failures do warrant investigation of localized depletion and more precautionary management.

The ASMFC has an opportunity to make management decisions that reflect the ecological importance of Atlantic menhaden and the needs of the broader marine food web.

Leaving more menhaden in the water is an investment in healthy fisheries, abundant wildlife, resilient coastal ecosystems, and the communities that depend on them. We should not wait for another wildlife population to approach the brink before acting to protect the resources that sustain it."

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Diane J Brown
Middlebury, Vermont

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James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Sunday, October 25, 2026 12:16 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Anne Mauro

Email

amm1313@aol.com

State

New Jersey

Comment

Please ensure we are reducing the menhaden quota. We need to ensure we save the ospreys. We as tax payers have the right to save the ospreys of the east coast.

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James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Sunday, October 25, 2026 12:14 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Erin Connors

Email

174beach@comcast.net

State

New Jersey

Comment

Please adopt more precautionary menhaden management that considers the needs of wildlife and the broader marine food web

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Sunday, October 25, 2026 11:11 AM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Allison Berget

Email

abm0709@yahoo.com

State

New York

Comment

Save the ospreys. God put us in this planet to take care of it, not to destroy it.

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Sunday, October 25, 2026 8:30 AM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Brittany Hedrick

Email

brittanylhedrick@gmail.com

State

New York

Comment

The management of fisheries must be done with all species of the marine ecosystem in mind. Osprey's are failing to subsist on the dwindling populations of manhaden, resultant from over harvesting. I urge you to set conservative quotas such that the fisheries can recover and all dependent creatures can maintain their livelihood. Over harvesting for human profit has severe immediate and long term consequences on the local food web and sustaining the ecosystem must be a top priority in the management discussions.

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James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Sunday, October 25, 2026 7:33 AM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Christina Inhof

Email

inhoftrouba@hotmail.com

State

Pennsylvania

Comment

Dear Members of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission,

I am writing to urge the Commission to adopt a highly precautionary approach when setting the 2027–2028 coastwide Atlantic menhaden quota. As a vital forage fish, menhaden are the foundation of our marine food web. Management decisions must directly account for the dietary needs of marine predators, particularly coastal ospreys, which are currently signaling severe ecosystem distress.

For the second consecutive year, New Jersey's coastal ospreys have experienced devastating reproductive struggles due to widespread food stress. In 2026, coastal productivity plummeted to an average of just 0.74 young per active nest—well below the baseline required to sustain a stable population. Nearly 50% of active nests failed entirely.

The crisis is most visible at historic biological strongholds like Sedge Island. While this colony has produced an average of 41 fledglings annually over the past decade, only two young survived to fledge in 2026. This collapse is localized to our food-depleted coasts; by contrast, inland osprey colonies are thriving and producing young at more than twice the rate of their coastal counterparts.

Ospreys are highly sensitive to prey availability and serve as critical ecological indicators. Their sharp decline is an urgent

warning that the current availability of Atlantic menhaden is insufficient to support apex wildlife.
When the Commission meets early next month, I urge you to look beyond single-species models and implement a truly ecosystem-based management strategy. Please protect the long-term health of our coastal ecosystem by choosing a conservative, precautionary menhaden quota that leaves enough fish in the water to sustain the wildlife that depend on them.

Thank you for your time, leadership, and consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

Christina Inhof

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James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Sunday, October 25, 2026 4:15 AM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Allison Dews

Email

alidews@aol.com

State

Virginia

Comment

Please ban industrial fishing of Atlantic menhaden. They are a natural resource that has made the osprey's historic recovery possible after DDT, habitat loss, persecution and overfishing nearly wiped them out.

Atlantic menhaden evolved to be eaten. They filter our coastal waters, fuel predatory fish at every life stage, and sustain top-tier predators like eagles, ospreys, gannets, loon and other birds.

Please save them!
Thank you

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Saturday, October 24, 2026 11:04 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Marissa Hanrahan

Email

marissa_w@rocketmail.com

State

New Jersey

Comment

I am concerned about the Osprey this year. The nests have been worryingly unsuccessful. Please take proper precautions to ensure their continuous recovery.

Adopt a precautionary coastwide TAC that prioritizes adequate menhaden availability for the marine food web, including ospreys and other dependent predators.
Account for ecosystem needs and uncertainty when setting harvest limits, treating persistent food stress and poor osprey reproductive performance as serious warning signs.
Strengthen monitoring of menhaden availability and ecological impacts, including the use of wildlife indicators such as osprey breeding performance alongside fisheries data.
Apply adaptive management that responds to emerging evidence of localized prey shortages, changes in prey availability, and ecosystem stress.
Recognize the full ecological and economic value of menhaden, including their importance to wildlife, recreational fisheries, wildlife viewing, and coastal communities.

Thank you

James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Saturday, October 24, 2026 9:42 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Nancy Deutsch

Email

ndeutsch@comcast.net

State

New Jersey

Comment

Save the ospreys.

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Saturday, October 24, 2026 9:15 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Gina DiNunzio Kavanagh

Email

gina.m.kavanagh@gmail.com

State

New Jersey

Comment

I've been vacationing in Manahawkin, NJ my entire life and seeing the osprey on Barnegat Bay is one of the most majestic details of this beautiful coastal area. I'm writing to voice support and protection for these beautiful birds so they can continue to play their important ecological role and grace our bay.

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James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Saturday, October 24, 2026 6:05 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Tony Klock

Email

tonyklock813@gmail.com

State

New Jersey

Comment

I am extremely concerned about the struggles of our ospreys along the Maurice River and Delaware Bay. I urge you to please consider these magnificent raptors when crafting policy for menhaden and other the fish species that comprise critical links in our coastal food chains.

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Saturday, October 24, 2026 2:49 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Alex Dujmovich

Email

alexmario@dujmovich.net

State

Connecticut

Comment

Please help save these poor animals, as humans we must fight for the unspoken. Ospreys can't voice their concern, they will just be wiped out. We have a moral obligation to this planet, please adopt the best practices to save these poor animals.

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James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Saturday, October 24, 2026 1:20 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Laura Bishop

Email

lebishop77@gmail.com

State

Virginia

Comment

For the good of the Atlantic seaboard, Chesapeake Bay, and tributary ecosystems, please protect menhaden. The clear over-fishing of this essential fish has created potentially catastrophic effects, such as the osprey population collapse we are currently witnessing first-hand. To date, menhaden have received little protection. For our common good, the Commission must protect the fishery from greedy over-fishing by Omega Foods and others. If you don't, the second and third order effects could be disastrous for the ecosystem, while monetarily enriching a few private corporations.

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James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Saturday, October 24, 2026 12:36 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Melissa Love-Perrone

Email

melissalovedesign@gmail.com

State

New Jersey

Comment

It is our duty to find a way to manage and preserve the food supply for the sea birds. A way must be found.

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James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Saturday, October 24, 2026 11:53 AM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Cheryl Vaspory

Email

cavaspory@gmail.com

State

New Jersey

Comment

Adopt a precautionary coastwide TAC that prioritizes adequate menhaden availability for the marine food web, including ospreys and other dependent predators that are struggling to raise their young.
Account for ecosystem needs and uncertainty when setting harvest limits treating persistent food stress and poor Osprey reproductive performance as serious warning signs.
Strengthen monitoring of menhaden availability and ecological impacts including the use of wildlife indicators such as osprey breeding performance alongside fisheries data.
Apply adaptive management that responds to emerging evidence of localized prey shortages.
Please pass this along to other board members.
Thank you.

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Saturday, October 24, 2026 11:07 AM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Jean High

Email

jhigh49724@gmail.com

State

New Jersey

Comment

Protect the Ospreys and the health of the ecosystems they depend on to reproduce and thrive. Without your efforts, they are risk of extinction as well as other species.

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Saturday, October 24, 2026 10:07 AM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Arianna Tartaglia

Email

ariannatartaglia13@gmail.com

State

New Jersey

Comment

Dear Commissioners,

I'm a New Jersey resident writing to urge a precautionary approach to Atlantic menhaden management.

Ospreys are in trouble on our coast. Conserve Wildlife Foundation of NJ reports that coastal nests averaged just 0.75 young per active nest in 2026. At Sedge Island, normally one of our most productive colonies, only two young fledged. Ospreys depend on menhaden, and when the fish aren't there, chicks starve.

Menhaden aren't just a harvest number. They feed ospreys, striped bass, whales, and the coastal economy that depends on them. Please adopt management that:

• Accounts for predators' needs, not just the amount of fish available to harvest
• Strengthens monitoring of menhaden abundance and availability where predators actually forage

A healthy fishery and healthy wildlife can coexist, but only if we manage for both. Please don't wait for another failed season.

James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Saturday, October 24, 2026 9:25 AM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Andrew Ciok

Email

aciokssp@gmail.com

State

New Jersey

Comment

I remember my Mom telling me about ospreys and their struggles back in the late '60's, early 70's. And I was fortunate to witness their rebound first hand since then. Here we are 50+ years later and we see the ospreys struggling again because of greed and corruption. It's time for the powers that be to get their heads out of the sand and do the right thing.

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James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Saturday, October 24, 2026 7:01 AM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Linda Vultaggio

Email

muffler419@aol.com

State

New Jersey

Comment

Save the fish for its predators. A balance needs to be found.
We share this planet and need to always find ways to make better choices that are positive for all.
Share this with all members involved

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James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Friday, October 23, 2026 11:19 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Melissa Zikas

Email

mzikas682@comcast.net

State

New Jersey

Comment

Please use your positions on this board to protect all species that depend on healthy ecosystems. There is an obvious over fishing problem which needs to be curtailed for the sake of future generations of humans and wildlife alike.

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James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Friday, October 23, 2026 9:57 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Lisa Barrett

Email

lisa@lbdinteriors.com

State

New Jersey

Comment

For years and years I used to revel in the sight of the osprey swimming from bay to sea to fish and fly back to the bay. It was nonstop in Strathmere nj. An everyday affair that never disappointed. I even sat on my roof 3 stories high and they'd pass by with their catch. Once I saw a sweet lil puffer in the talons waving his fins as if he were flying….but no longer. I haven't seen an osprey catch a fish in a few years now. I watch them try to hunt with no success. It's heartbreaking knowing they have no food for the nests. Please do something about the menhaden. We cannot lose a crucial part of our ecosystem!! Please!!

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James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Friday, October 23, 2026 8:52 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Laurene Stanton

Email

stantonlp@msn.com

State

New Jersey

Comment

I live in coastal Ocean County,NJ and look forward to the ospreys returning every April. I love to watch them make their nests and start raising their young. When I was a young girl here at the shore, seeing an osprey was a special experience. I have loved seeing their numbers increase over the years but am now growing concerned. The ospreys seem to be struggling to find food. They fly over the ocean every afternoon and have difficulty finding any fish. They leave empty taloned. I hope that the commission will limit the overfishing of the manhaden fish and protect the ospreys.

It would be a tragedy if, just as the osprey population has recovered from DDT poisoning, it will be decimated by the overfishing of its main food source. Please protect the manhaden fisheries and the beautiful ospreys.

Regards,
Laurene Stanton

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Friday, October 23, 2026 7:21 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Christa Sangataldo

Email

csanga73@gmail.com

State

New Jersey

Comment

Atlantic menhaden are a vital forage fish that supply essential food for ospreys and many other marine predators while filtering coastal waters to improve water quality. Their importance extends well beyond the reduction fishery that processes them into fish meal and oil. By sustaining the marine food web, they support wildlife and recreational fisheries that strengthen both the ecological and economic health of coastal communities.

Thank you.

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Friday, October 23, 2026 5:20 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Keiran Price

Email

internet1234ok@proton.me

State

New Jersey

Comment

Ospreys are native to New Jersey. Canadian multinational corporations are not. Protect our local wildlife and regulate the overfishing of menhaden.

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Friday, October 23, 2026 4:50 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Lucas Slott

Email

lukeaaron93@hotmail.com

State

New Jersey

Comment

NO to more menhaden fishing! Ospreys are collapsing.

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James Boyle

From: Noah <noahmansoor12@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, October 22, 2026 11:58 AM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] Menhaden comments - please reduce the coast wide quota by at least 40% for 2027-2028

To whom it may concern,

I write to you as a recreational angler that has been fishing the shinnecock and moriches areas their whole life. I fish via surf, boat, and paddle board. The state of the Manhaden population concerns me greatly. Going back as little as 6 years ago I remember on any given day in late June, July, August and September the bunker stains would line the coast of the south shore of Long Island as far as the eye could see. For the past couple of years, I now see maybe one or two days a year where the bunker line the south shores of Long Island - and the schools are much more sparse than they once were. Bunker are the life blood of all the other species that rely on them: whales, dolphins, sharks, bluefin, bluefish, and striped bass (and let's not even go down that rabbit whole - the state of our striped bass fishery makes this grown man want to cry). We need to protect this fish that is so vital to our marine ecosystem on the north east coast.

Please reduce the coast wide quota by at least 40% for the 2027-2028 season to at least give these vital fish a fighting chance.

Thank you for your consideration,
Dr. Noah Mansoor

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James Boyle

From: Peter Glynn <peterglynn430@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, October 22, 2026 11:49 AM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] Atlantic Menhaden 2027-2028 TAC

Dear ASMFC Commissioners,

I am writing to request that the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) reduce the coastwide menhaden quota by at least 40% for the 2027–2028 fishing seasons.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

Peter Glynn
Peterglynnmusic.com

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Wednesday, October 21, 2026 8:10 AM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Jody Tatum

Email

jody1928@gmail.com

State

New Jersey

Comment

Dear Chairman Cimino,
I am writing as a member of the public and big fan of the osprey. The osprey comeback story is a remarkable one from the days of DDT. I live in NJ near Sandy Hook, and every spring look forward to their arrival, which almost without fail is March 17 or March 18. It is a trip I make to the Hook to see the first osprey of the year return from their long journey north from Central and South America.as well as to see them all summer fishing off the coast. I am deeply distressed in my reading as well as attending a seminar, to learn that there has been huge nest failures down the coast to include Sandy Hook, NJ and south to the Chesapeake Bay. My understanding is that there was close to a 50% nest failure rate largely due to lack of food and starvation. Osprey chicks have died due to starvation directly related to the depletion of bunker or menhaden. The comeback story of this incredible raptor is waning. I am hoping that there will be a comprehensive plan to address the domino effect of overfishing this essential food fish for the diet of the osprey and their chicks. The data is out there on failure rates, and the time to act is now. I hope you will consider my appeal and thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Jody Tatum
87 Apple Orchard Dr
Tinton Falls, NJ 07724

James Boyle

From: Bob Hobson <bobhob28@aol.com>
Sent: Tuesday, October 20, 2026 11:50 AM
To: Comments
Cc: Bob Hobson
Subject: [New] [External] Atlantic Menhaden 2027-28

Dear Sirs;

Are you kidding me!

Yet another example of the politics and bureaucracy that is killing this country. I can't believe we even have to be fighting this. Someone's pockets are getting stuffed with money at the expense of everyone else. I never written back to anyone on any matter in my lifetime on the computer, but I feel I have to on this.

I've lived on this Raritan Bay all of my 70 years, first on Staten Island and now in the Keyport NJ area. I lived near the water most of those 70 years, fished as early as I can remember and always had a boat. Never in those years have I ever experienced such a terrible fishing season. There were times you could attach a line to beer flip top and catch a bluefish. And there was always a variety of fishing you could do. Last year, but mostly this year, except for a snapper or two, we didn't catch a single fish. I've thrown more bait away this year than ever.

This year I have 7 grandchildren who I take on the boat to go fishing. They talk about it all winter, get their poles ready, and ask all the time when we can go. After so many skunked fishing trips, I can't even get them on the boat. Thank god for the crabbing or they would never have even seen the waterfront. (Please note the bunker we used for bait was either not available or 1/3 the size it was before). I would go into the bait shop and ask the owner to sell me the tackle or bait for anything I could get on a hook for the kids to catch, and he would say that he doesn't want to sell me anything as the Raritan Bay is dead and unless you plan to go 20-30 miles offshore, don't plan on catching any fish.

I know I am only one person with a boat, but I fish, I buy bait and tackle, I buy gas and food when we go out, I pay for a slip at the marina, etc, but there are many of us, and its too bad this is the only way to call attention to this matter.

Please, before you kill the whole eco-system up and down the coast, and a whole generation of recreational fishing, please consider the catch reduction before it is too late.

Let me add, to NOAA and the rest of the phoney baloney watch dog groups need to pop their head out of their A$$. Forget your formulas and calculations and go sit on dock and talk to the boaters as they return empty handed again. God knows we see you on the dock in years passed to make sure we didn't get one extra fish or undersize flounder or be fined, while these trawlers are off shore raping our fish stock. I hope you are pleased with yourself.

Sincerely
Robert Hobson

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

James Boyle

From: Dave Grant <grantjd418@aol.com>
Sent: Tuesday, October 20, 2026 11:21 AM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] Atlantic Menhaden 2027-2928 TAC

O**sprey nest failures in several states,** and our own observations of their light catches (and paucity of local menhaden populations), should encourage better management of the menhaden harvest and keep our coastal ecosystem in balance.

Dave Grant
Conservation Director - Shark Research Institute

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James Boyle

From: Joan Ferrelli <jferrelli@msn.com>
Sent: Tuesday, October 20, 2026 9:24 AM
To: Comments
Cc: The Zebra; Carlee Dunn; Judee Dunn
Subject: [New] [External] Atlantic Menhaden 2027-2028 TAC

Please reduce the coastwide menhaden catch limit by at least 40% from its 2026 level for 2027 and 2028, and set limits that leave enough food for the fish and wildlife that depend on menhaden. Please include my comment in the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board's meeting materials.

Overfishing has severely affected our seashore wildlife
The osprey numbers along the Jersey shore are dwindling
this is becoming a critical issue for wildlife
Regards
Joan Ferrelli
Belmar NJ

Get Outlook for iOS

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James Boyle

From: Debra Falk <dafalk213@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, October 20, 2026 9:06 AM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] Atlantic Mendhaden 2027-2028 TAC

Dear Commissioners,

As Jersey Shore resident, I've spent my whole life on and around the water: boating, walking and cleaning our beaches, and watching the wildlife that depends on a healthy ocean. Menhaden are at the center of that picture. Striped bass, ospreys, tuna and whales all rely on them.
I'm writing to ask you to cut the coastwide total allowable catch for Atlantic menhaden by at least 40% when you set the TAC this November. Leaving more bunker in the water is the surest way to support the predators that make our coast what it is, and the anglers, charter captains and local businesses that depend on them.

Please put the health of the whole ecosystem first as you consider TAC limits.

Thank you for hearing me out.

Sincerely,
Deb Falk
Middletown, NJ

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James Boyle

From: Wayne Lysobey <nequartz@aol.com>
Sent: Tuesday, October 20, 2026 6:41 AM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] Atlantic menhaden 2027-2028 TAC

I fish in Long Island Sound out of Norwalk, CT. The full grown bunker schools have pretty much disappeared. I have not snagged a full grown bunker in 3 years. The fall bluefish run is a thing of the past. I haven't caught a full size bluefish in 4 years. The osprey are on the decline. Anyone who argues on the side of the big companies taking so much of the bunker must have a personal/financial stake in this issue. The issue is clear and obvious. Stop the overfishing.

Wayne Lysobey

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James Boyle

From: jean nelson <jmnel123@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, October 20, 2026 12:00 AM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] atlantic menhaden tac 2027-28

you own numbers have been proven to be wrong for at least the last five years when overfishing was occurring and despite their best efforts to grab up every menhaden available took out anything they could find and still could not meet their numbers meaning that they likely devastated the stock.

new science shows that asmfc has overestimated the number of Manhattan available and the mortality number and that a correction of 50 to 54% is required at this point

I would ask that you do your job. You're here to base decisions on science not what's best for omega . it's unfortunate that the numbers were wrong but they have always said that they base t they base their catch on the most recent and best science and that science now shows that a correction is needed.
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James Boyle

From: Kevin Delorean-Jaker <kevinmdelorean@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, October 19, 2026 10:47 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] Menhaden

Please reduce the coast wide menhaden catch limit by 40% from 2026 for 2027 and 2028 and set limits that leave enough food for striped bass and osprey and other wildlife that depend on menhaden for food please include my comments in the menhaden management boards meetings.
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James Boyle

From: Kate Kubera <kkubera@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, October 19, 2026 10:35 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] Atlantic Menhaden 2027-2028 TAC

Dear Fisheries Managers:

Please reduce the coastwide menhaden catch limit by at least 40% from its 2026 level for 2027 and 2028, and set limits that leave enough food for the fish and wildlife that depend on menhaden. Please include my comment in the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board's meeting materials.

I have lived on the coast of New Jersey for over a decade now. I have been lucky enough to observe ospreys nesting on a pole outside my office window and fishing in local waters. But I realize that it wasn't always this way, and the population has recovered from threatened status since the mid-1970s. And now they are at risk of declining again.

As humans we need to recognize that we are part of nature and not above it. The health of all living things are interconnected, and if other living things are thriving, then so will we. Please consider reducing the coastwide menhaden catch limit for 2027 and 2028.

Sincerely,
Cathryn Kubera, PhD
Middletown, New Jersey

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James Boyle

From: Samantha <sampeters4190@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, October 19, 2026 9:44 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] Menhaden

Hello My name is Samantha Peters from New Jersey. Please reduce the coastwide menhaden catch limit by at least 40% from its 2026 level for 2027 and 2028, and set limits that leave enough food for the fish and wildlife that depend on menhaden. Please include my comment in the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board's meeting materials.

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James Boyle

From: Philip Maturi <philipmaturi@yahoo.com>
Sent: Monday, October 19, 2026 9:28 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] Atlantic Menhaden 2027-2028 TAC

Hello
Please reduce the coastwide menhaden catch limit by at least 40% from its 2026 level for 2027 and 2028, and set limits that leave enough food for the fish and wildlife that depend on menhaden. Please include my comment in the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board's meeting materials.

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James Boyle

From: Lauren Conner <laurenconner62@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, October 19, 2026 9:14 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] Atlantic Menhaden 2027-2028 TAC

Hello

My name is Lauren Conner from New Jersey. Please reduce the coastwide menhaden catch limit by at least 40% from its 2026 level for 2027 and 2028, and set limits that leave enough food for the fish and wildlife that depend on menhaden. Please include my comment in the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board's meeting materials.

Sent from my iPhone

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James Boyle

From: Taylor Ingraham <tayloringraham@tightlined.com>
Sent: Monday, October 19, 2026 8:52 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] Atlantic Menhaden 2027-2028 TAC

I am writing to submit my thoughts and comments regarding the ocean-wide TAC for menhaden in 2027 and 2028.

I am a life-long angler from Connecticut. My family owns property in Rhode Island, and I frequently fish in New York, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Florida and anywhere else I can find the time to do so. I credit much of who I am to fishing, and have four young sons who are passionate and budding anglers as well. I founded the Tightlined Slam and the Tightlined Conservation Coalition to help raise awareness and support efforts to fix the mismanagement of our fisheries.

Menhaden, as you know, help fuel ecosystems up and down the coast. The decline in the population over the past years has been alarming and drastic. This has been, clearly, a result of mismanagement, and it must stop now. Last year, your own science said that a 50% reduction was needed, and you chose to take 20%. That reduction comprised entirely paper fish, since the reduction fishery was not reaching its quota in the years leading up to 2026. Now, we're in an even worse place than we were then, and again your own science - despite factoring in a likely high number for natural mortality rates of the species - shows that a reduction of AT LEAST 39% will only give us a 50% chance of reaching appropriate levels.

We have removed far too many of these fish for far too long. There are no menhaden where there should be, the striped bass, bluefish, whales, ospreys and all other predators that prey on them are not where they should be as a result. This needs to stop now.

I urge the committee to make the necssary change and reduce the coastwide TAC by at least 40% in 2027 and 2028. Delaying this is not a choice - we cannot wait any longer. Reduce it now and keep it that way.

Sincerely,

Taylor Ingraham

Taylor Ingraham

James Boyle

From: Christine Harris <christine.m.harris11@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, October 19, 2026 8:54 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] Atlantic Menhaden 2027-2028 TAC

Hello,

My name is Christine and I am a resident of NJ submitting comment urging ASMFC to reduce the Atlantic Menhaden TAC by 50% coastwide for the 26-27 season. Specifically I am urging for a strict TAC reduction that does not fluctuate based on formula.

In NJ, 85% of Osprey chicks/nestling did not survive the breeding season this year. Our Osprey are starving to death. My family has property in Little Egg Harbor, NJ, and we have spent many summers observing the osprey nest platforms along the lagoons & Basses Bay. This year, I saw a noticeable lack of Osprey hunting & nesting activity. If ASMFC does not reduce the TAC, Osprey are sure to starve next year and essentially erase all of the conservation gains NJ has worked hard to achieve these past few decades. Ospreys serve as a bioindicator of our ecosystem's health, and right now they are calling out for help. We need to work as a coast to manage this crisis, it can not be managed on a state by state level. Please do not turn a blind eye to the severity of Osprey's suffering from food stress.

This situation is dire and will not improve without regulatory intervention. Please choose to preserve the health & sustainability of our precious ecosystem and reduce the TAC by 50%. We have to allow menhaden populations to recover. They are an important wildlife that benefit so many species.

Please do not delay reducing the TAC again this year. Our wildlife needs you. This might be our last chance to save Ospreys and change the trajectory of their demise.

Sincerely,

Christine Harris
205-807-8169

Christine Harris
205-807-8169

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James Boyle

From: Daniel Pennessi <danielpennessi@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, October 19, 2026 8:33 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] Atlantic Menhaden 2027-2028 TAC

Please reduce the Menhaden quota by 40% for the referenced period.

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James Boyle

From: paulyfish reeltherapy.com <paulyfish@reeltherapy.com>
Sent: Monday, October 19, 2026 8:14 PM
To: Comments
Cc: Paul Eidman
Subject: [New] [External] Atlantic Menhaden 2027-2028 TAC

10/19/2026
Chair Joseph Cimino
Vice Chair Nicole Lengyel Costa
Members of the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, 1050 North Highland Street, Suite 200 A-N, Arlington, VA 22201

Members of the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board-

According to the ASMFC's own Atlantic menhaden assessment brief from September 2026, the previous assessment contained a major error.

When natural mortality was corrected, the stock was shown to be **about 37% smaller** than previously estimated. Under the corrected science, the old TAC of **233,550 metric tons has a 100% probability of overfishing**. That is not a debate — that is a management failure.

And we are seeing the consequences **right now in New Jersey waters**. **There are no adult menhaden in our schools. The vast majority of the bunker along NJ are only 6-8 inches long — pre-spawn juveniles.**

This distorted age structure is a direct result of years of inflated quotas built on incorrect science.

Between 2023 and 2025, the fishery harvested **hundreds of millions of extra pounds** because the TAC was wrong.

Even with those inflated quotas, the fishery only landed **about 80% of the TAC in 2024**, and similar underperformance is expected in 2025.

The 20% ocean TAC cut for 2026 was a **paper cut**, not a real reduction. And the Bay Cap hasn't moved. One point keeps getting confused: **the Bay Cap is not extra quota** — it is a sub-limit inside the coastwide TAC. At 51,000 mt against a 186,840 mt TAC, it represents **27% of the entire allowable catch**. Adjusting it matters for Chesapeake Bay, but it does **not** fix the coastwide overfishing created by the assessment error.

The hearings have focused on Chesapeake Bay, but it is **directly connected** to the ASMFC's November 10 TAC meeting, where the Commission will set **2027–2029 specifications**, consider **Addendum II for final approval**, evaluate **quota reallocation**, and review **state compliance**. If we ignore the coastwide implications of the assessment error, we will lock in **three more years of mismanagement**.

We are witnessing the **failure to preserve the forage-fish base of the entire East Coast ecosystem**.

Atlantic herring collapsed. Alewife and blueback herring continue to be depleted and discarded at sea without being recorded. For decades, nature relied on **abundant menhaden** to fill those gaps to switch over to.

If menhaden collapse, there is no turning back. Ospreys have already shown us what happens when the forage base disappears — everything is connected.

To prevent further collapse, **the TAC needs to be well under 100,000 metric tons, be consistent with the ERPs**, and to ensure that all living creatures that depend on menhaden for survival can do so.

Reallocation is an additional danger. Maine's landings have surged as herring collapsed, and the lobster industry wants more bait. That is real economic pressure — and a **real conservation risk**.

The last three seasons show that the remaining adult, age-3-plus spawning stock is **migrating north faster than the rest**.

If quota is shifted to New England, those older fish — the brood stock — will be the first to be eliminated. If that happens, recruitment collapses, and there is no path back.

Reallocation without a meaningful TAC reduction is the wrong direction, and changing state allocations requires a full addendum under Amendment 3 — not a quick decision in November.

New Jersey's coastal economy depends on forage. Our anglers, charter fleet, bait shops, and wildlife observers are already seeing the impacts.

ASMFC made the error. **ASMFC must fix it.**

We urge the Board to: – **Reduce the coastwide TAC by at least 50%**, consistent with corrected ERP science; – **Maintain an independent Bay Cap**; – And ensure reductions are **real**, not paper cuts.

The science is clear. Now the Commission needs to act.

Submitting on behalf of our thousands of Defenders

Thank you

Paul Eidman

Founder and President of Menhaden Defender

Capt. Paul Eidman
732.614.3373
paulyfish@reeltherapy.com

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www.reeltherapy.com
www.menhadendefenders.org
Yes, ONE person can make a difference!

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James Boyle

From: Carolyn Richards <carolyn200713@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, October 19, 2026 6:13 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] Atlantic Menhaden 2027-2028 TAC

Hello~

The birdlife and marine life have been particularly stressed and struggling to survive with the food sources becoming scarce. Ospreys alone have had a heartbreaking year - the nesting pairs have not been able to feed the mothers and the young so they can thrive and survive. This is a result of overly extensive catch of menhaden, the primary source of food for coastal osprey. They are struggling along the entire coast. Other animals are struggling too and they are not able to fix the overfishing themselves or speak for themselves. We need to make adjustments on their behalf and be their voice.

Please reduce the coastwide menhaden catch limit by at least 40% from its 2026 level for 2027 and 2028, and set limits that leave enough food for the fish and wildlife that depend on menhaden. Please include my comment in the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board's meeting materials. Thank you so much for caring for our beautiful environment and protecting the inhabitants that are most vulnerable.

~Carolyn Richards
Delaware Bay, Cape May, New Jersey

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James Boyle

From: Chelsey M <cmaclaren007@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, October 19, 2026 5:55 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] Atlantic Menhaden 2027-2028 TAC

HI this is Chelsey MacLaren from Pennsylvania. I visit NJ, MD and DE often and know the menhaden numbers are too low for a sustainable ecosystem to survive. Please reduce the coastwide menhaden catch limit by at least 40% from its 2026 level for 2027 and 2028, and set limits that leave enough food for the fish and wildlife that depend on menhaden. Please include my comment in the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board's meeting materials.

1.

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James Boyle

From: gfrorer@comcast.net
Sent: Monday, October 19, 2026 4:33 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] Atlantic Menhaden 2027-2028 TAC

As a taxpayer and concerned citizen in New Jersey I submit the following comments for your consideration. I have been a volunteer with the State of New Jersey every year since 1993 on the Delaware Bay helping to protect and save migrating shorebirds and breeding horseshoe crabs.

I have witnessed declines in red knots along with other shorebirds corresponding to the over harvest of horseshoe crabs. I have seen the weakfish capitol of the world turn into a weakfish desert. I have witnessed the decline of drum, blowfish, ling, kingfish and sturgeon.

Now we are facing another potential environmental catastrophe, the destruction of the menhaden fishery and the aquatic and terrestrial species the depend upon a healthy, thriving population. Menhaden have been overfished; the science speaks for itself. Now is the time and opportunity to rescue this imperiled keystone species. Take action to help save the ecosystems of the Delaware and Chesapeake Bays.

Please take the responsible actions as stewards of our fisheries to ensure healthy future populations. Please reduce the coastwide menhaden catch limit by at least 40% or more from its 2026 level for 2027 and 2028 and set limits that leave enough food for the fish and wildlife that depend on menhaden. Please include my comments in the Atlantic Menhaden Board's meeting materials.

In Laudato Si', his letter to the Catholic Church on caring for the environment, Pope Francis covered a wide array of issues including our treatment and view of animals. "Every act of cruelty towards any creature is 'contrary to human dignity.'" "If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously."

I thank you in advance for the consideration of my comments.

John Gfrorer, 491 Hamilton Road, Wenonah, NJ 08090

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James Boyle

From: JOHN FERENZ <ferenzmj@comcast.net>
Sent: Monday, October 19, 2026 1:13 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] menhaden

please save the bunker feeder fish ... we have been bay people (reeds beach) for 6 generations and know what's important ! the weakfish were abundant ...they are gone .... the horseshoe crabs were almost gone too ... but conservation SAVED them .....SAVE the bunker from people that have FISHED OUT the supply where they are .... PLEASE ! laws of conservation work !

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James Boyle

From: Christopher Ang <cangsp@yahoo.com>
Sent: Monday, October 19, 2026 11:30 AM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] Public Comment on the 2027-2028 Coastwide Atlantic Menhaden Total Allowable Catch (TAC)

Dear Chair Cimino and Members of the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board,

My name is Christopher Ang. I am a wildlife conservation photographer and speaker, and a board member of the Jaguar ID Project. I photograph ospreys along the Atlantic coast, and what I have witnessed through my lens compels me to write.

This summer, Chesapeake Bay ospreys suffered the worst breeding season ever recorded: 81% of pairs in the saltier waters failed to fledge a single chick. In New Jersey — where the osprey was declared recovered just last year — coastal nests raised only 0.74 young each this summer, below the 0.9 needed to sustain the population. At Sedge Island, 18 pairs laid eggs; only 2 young fledged. The chicks are not dying of poison. They are starving, for lack of one small fish: the Atlantic menhaden.

I do not claim menhaden harvest alone is responsible. But persistent, widespread reproductive failure in a visible, fish-dependent predator is a warning sign we should not ignore.

I urge the Board to adopt a precautionary, ecosystem-based TAC for 2027–2028 — one that leaves enough menhaden in the water for the predators and food webs that depend on them.

Respectfully,
Christopher Ang
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James Boyle

From: Johnston, Gregory <gjohnsto@bu.edu>
Sent: Sunday, October 18, 2026 7:23 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] Atlantic Menhaden 2027-2028 TAC

Please reduce the annual quota for Atlantic Menhaden by at least 40% for 2027-2028

This is a crucial part of the ecosystem for striped bass, which are struggling, plus for other predators up and down the coast

Thank you
Gregory Johnston

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James Boyle

From: J Koontz <jlk21755@comcast.net>
Sent: Sunday, October 18, 2026 2:07 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] Menhaden Ocean TAC

I support the 50% reduction in TAC for Atlantic menhaden to save the ecological health of the Chesapeake!

Jennifer Koontz
4408 Holter Ct
Jefferson Md 21755
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James Boyle

From: njszabo@citlink.net
Sent: Sunday, October 18, 2026 12:23 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] Menhaden Ocean TAC

Dear ASMFC:

I support a 114,200 MT menhaden TAC, which provides a 50% probability of not exceeding the Ecological Reference Point (ERP) target, and urge ASMFC to reaffirm its commitment to science-based Ecological Reference Point (ERP) management.

Sincerely,

Nancy Carroll
Accomac, VA

Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone

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James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Sunday, October 18, 2026 11:54 AM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Debbie Gannon

Email

debbie@laricks.com

State

New Jersey

Comment

My husband and myself live locally have fished the back bays behind Sea Isle & Avalon and offshore up to approx. 5 miles out for over 20 years. The Osprey nests located behind these places have always been full of nesting couples (used to think Osprey's needed a lot more nesting boxes) these past few years, not so much. We have witnessed Osprey's flying a lot farther out into the ocean to search for menhaden. We have seen Osprey's calling for their mate for hours from the nest while waiting for them to return. So sad. This year seemed to start with less Osprey's coming back and leaving much earlier than usual - nests appear to be empty from afar. There has most DEFINATELY been a BIG decline in menhaden offshore - absolutely, NO question. This year being the worst. We used to always see many pods of menhaden while fishing. Now, we don't. Overfishing is definitely occurring and there is definitely NOT an abundance of menhaden!!
Debbie & Bill Gannon

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James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Sunday, October 18, 2026 10:04 AM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Freda Karpf

Email

marshhawk603@gmail.com

State

New Jersey

Comment

The menhaden population does not live in isolation and yet commercial and even governmental agencies often do not consider the ramifications of their actions when setting standards for fishing. Whether it is to protect the source of income for businesses, or to protect the chain of life all of whom are effected by overfishing - we should all recognize the need to address this situation with solutions - and profit or convenience should not be the priority. Stewardship and sustainability should win the day - and protecting the vibrancy, of this fish population, integral to the chain of life and livelihoods, should be done expediently and with the present and future in mind. Shortsightedness at this time is opening us to collapse of systems we all rely upon. Please be judicious and err, if you will, on the side of sustainability.

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James Boyle

From: Brandon Britton <virginiastair@gmail.com>
Sent: Saturday, October 17, 2026 12:40 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] Menhaden Ocean TAC

End mehaden reduction fishing in the chesapeake bay immediately

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James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Friday, October 16, 2026 5:55 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Angela Panetta

Email

angepanetta@gmail.com

State

New York

Comment

Please advocate for
Limits on commercial manhaden fishing. This is a trend around nyc as well.

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James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Friday, October 16, 2026 4:59 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Diane Salek

Email

dianesalek@yahoo.com

State

New Jersey

Comment

Please consider these recommendations for menhaden management:

1. Adopt a precautionary coastwide TAC that prioritizes adequate menhaden availability for the marine food web, including ospreys and other dependent predators.
2. Account for ecosystem needs and uncertainty when setting harvest limits, treating persistent food stress and poor osprey reproductive performance as serious warning signs.
3. Strengthen monitoring of menhaden availability and ecological impacts, including the use of wildlife indicators such as osprey breeding performance alongside fisheries data.
4. Apply adaptive management that responds to emerging evidence of localized prey shortages, changes in prey availability, and ecosystem stress.
5. Recognize the full ecological and economic value of menhaden, including their importance to wildlife, recreational fisheries, wildlife viewing, and coastal communities.

Thank you!
Diane Salek

James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Friday, October 16, 2026 4:37 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Clare Luisi

Email

claretl@comcast.net

State

New Jersey

Comment

I feel strongly that a complete moratorium on the harvesting of the Atlantic Menhaden should be put into effect immediately. At this point any more studies to show the effect that their loss has had on the Osprey is redundant. The empty nests, the emaciated bodies of the few chicks that have managed to survive should be enough proof that the loss of this fish has been catastrophic. After fighting back from near extinction just a few decades ago this beautiful bird deserves better from the human beings that literally hold the strings to their survival.

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James Boyle

From: Natalie Menage <fmenage@verizon.net>
Sent: Friday, October 16, 2026 3:43 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [External] Atlantic Menhaden 2027-2028 TAC

"I support a 114,200 MT menhaden TAC, which provides a 50% probability of not exceeding the Ecological Reference Point (ERP) target, and urge ASMFC to reaffirm its commitment to science-based Ecological Reference Point (ERP) management."

Frederick C. Menage, Jr.
1260 Beach Road
Edgewater, MD 21037
(667)646-1736

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James Boyle

From: Joe Aversano <seacilian@verizon.net>
Sent: Friday, October 16, 2026 3:05 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [External] Atlantic Menhaden 2027-2028 TAC

Gentlemen
As a former Marine Combat Veteran and a World Trade Center survivor I have to speak my peace on this sickening serious matter. I have been fishing on Long Island since the early 70's and noticed the decline in bunker activity starting in the early 90's and each year it got progressively worse due to overharvesting of the Menhaden. it is hutting so many businesses, so the financial impact is devastating.

This last bluefish tournament the town of Oyster Bay ran (The 40th) was a disaster with only three bluefish entered for prizes. No bunker no fish!!!! First place was an 8+pound fish second place, 7+ and third place a 5+ pound fish. normally 10 spots on the board are filled with fish ranging in size from 15 to 19 pounds. what the hell is happening.

Guys are not buying boats and spending money on gear to get skunked all the time. The town even made the parking lot smaller since not that many guys are launching boats to go fish?

The bottom line is it is our fault for letting this happen and it makes me sick. Thank you Joe 516-297-5133

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James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Friday, October 16, 2026 2:28 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Sean McFarland

Email

seanmcfarland105@gmail.com

State

New Jersey

Comment

We live in Normandy Beach. As an avid boaters on Barnegat Bay and an ocean beach goers my family and I have seen the depletion of ospreys first hand.For the past two summers we have witnessed much less fishing activity in ocean waters at times when the birds would usually be active. the fish that are caught are all very small. We have even witnessed much less bunker and baitfish activity when swimming in the ocean. On the bayside we saw many empty and nonproductive nests where in prior years the nests were nearly all active with often 2 fledglings . It is clear that there is inadequate food source for these valuable birds. Please limit the catch appropriately .
Respectfully
Sean McFarland

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James Boyle

From: ASMFC <info@asmfc.org>
Sent: Friday, October 16, 2026 10:58 AM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] New public comment for 2026 Annual Meeting

2026 Annual Meeting

Action Title

2026 Annual Meeting

Action URL

https://asmfc.org/events/2026-annual-meeting/

Name

Nancy Harrigan-James

Email

ospreyguardian@gmail.com

State

Connecticut

Comment

As an extremely passionate Osprey Monitor for the past 11 years I am very concerned about rhe declining menhaden population which directly affects the eco system including Ospreys. OurCT group Osprey Stewards of CT/ CT Audubon has been closely monitoring the decline in the osprey population from Virginia to New Jersey and this year we in CT are seeing dramatic evidence of decline in our nests. The number of nest failures and documented deaths due to starvation is unsettling. As usual mankind's selfish , financially driven habits upset the balance of nature. The commercial vessels are completely disrupting the balance of nature for personal profit.
Making matters worse are the following facts...
The fishing vessels are based out of Canada.
Many of the products produced from the menhaden are sent to China and other countries.The United States does not need to profit off the products , nor should itcstand by while wildlife is decimated.In addition, its also a fact politics is playing a major role in the whole operation.
Groups like Osprey Stewards East Coast Alliance are taking a stand for the ospreys and other species affected by the omega fishing industry. We are growing in numbers and will not back down in protecting our waters and wildlife.

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James Boyle

From: Jamie Capelli <capelli.jamie@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, October 15, 2026 8:14 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] Atlantic Menhaden TAC 2027-28

Good evening,
I'm writing to express my support for reducing the TAC of Atlantic Menhaden for 2027-28 by 50%. As a birder who frequents coastal waterways, I have personally noticed a significant decrease in Osprey population this year. There is evidence to suggest that Osprey chicks are starving on the Atlantic coast. In my lifetime I have witnessed the miraculous recovery of this species and to see that progress reversed is heartbreaking. Please do the right thing for the future of our coasts and reduce the TAC.
Thank you,
Jamie Capelli

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James Boyle

From: camwyn@megaloceros.net
Sent: Thursday, October 15, 2026 4:16 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [External] Atlantic Menhaden 2027-2028 TAC

As a resident of coastal Massachusetts with a lifelong fondness for fishing and shorebird observation, I support a 50% coastwide Total Allowable Catch (TAC) reduction for the Atlantic menhaden. The Massachusetts coastal waters are not as badly hit as many parts of the Atlantic coast in terms of menhaden numbers, but the local recreational fishermen have had a harder time catching baitfish or bunker- menhaden by any other name- for their own angling than in prior years. It has not been easy for the commercial fishermen to bring in baitfish, either. A 50% reduction in TAC would greatly ease the pressure on the baitfish population and allow it to begin recovery, thus allowing the fishermen a better chance of recovering their own livelihoods and recreation as well.

It is not only the fishermen and recreational anglers who need the reduction in TAC. For the past several years I have been monitoring an osprey nest off Snake Island in Boston Harbor, a common tern nest in the same part of the harbor, and the least tern nesting grounds along Winthrop Beach in Suffolk County, Massachusetts. The ospreys in the Snake Island nest have been doing reasonably well. The ospreys in nearby Belle Isle Marsh, on the other hand, have not. The terns have been scrambling to catch enough appropriately sized menhaden for their chicks in a harbor full of other birds who also want the menhaden. Parent birds of all three species have had to spend more time hunting than protecting their nests, making it difficult for the chicks to survive to fledging even when there is enough food.

Both human and animal life in the Massachusetts coastal region rely on menhaden. I need to know that you will act on behalf of future generations of anglers, commercial fishers, and wildlife. Issue a 50% reduction in TAC and keep it strict rather than fluctuating according to formula; until the Atlantic menhaden population returns to truly sustainable levels, increasing the take will only do harm to the fishing fleet and to every osprey nest along our shores.

Thank you.

Jessica McGeary
19 Seymour St
Apt 3
Winthrop MA 02152
(973) 714-9205

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James Boyle

From: Ross Kushner <kross081957@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, October 15, 2026 3:50 PM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] Menhaden Ocean TAC

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to comment on the proposed 40% reduction to the ocean TAC for menhaden. This would reduce the TAC to approximately 112,200 metric tons.

Here in New Jersey the current harvest level has nearly eliminated our menhaden, including both adult and juvenile fish. This in turn has devastated marine life - striped bass, tuna, summer flounder, bluefish, ospreys, cormorants, whales and dolphins were all impacted as well as the businesses and recreation that depend on them.

Sport fishing, charter boats, boating and boat sales, marinas, tackle shops, whale watches, motels, gas stations and much more feel the effects as the ripple of loss spreads outward. Too much is being sacrificed to support a single industry. Even for that industry this is not sustainable.

For these reasons I urge you to lower the menhaden harvest by as much as possible using all means at your disposal. It is already too late.

Sincerely,

Ross Kushner

11 Sherwood Road

Red Bank, NJ 07701

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James Boyle

From: Kris Suplee <thewinyahangler@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, October 15, 2026 9:19 AM
To: Comments
Subject: [New] [External] Atlantic Menhaden 2027-2028 TAC

I support and encourage the reduction of Menhaden catch by at least 40% for 27-28.
Let's get Canadian fishing companies out of our US coastal waters and preserve our fishing heritage at home.
The Winyah Angler
Outfitter and Trading Company
Georgetown SC

www.thewinyahangler.com

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James Boyle

From: Roberta Kellam <Roberta.Kellam@outlook.com>
Sent: Tuesday, November 3, 2026 1:01 PM
To: James Boyle
Cc: Joseph Grist
Subject: [New] [External] Comment to Atlantic Menhaden Management Board
Attachments: Watts Menhaden Report News Advisory Atlantic Coast 9-18-26.docx

Importance: High

TO: Atlantic Menhaden Management Board of the
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission
FROM: Roberta A. Kellam, Franktown, Virginia
DATE: November 3, 2026
RE: Coastwide TAC for 2027-2029

To the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board:

A Coast-wide Total Allowable Catch for 2027 – 2029 of greater than 114,200 MT would violate the requirement for an Ecological Reference Point-Based Management system adopted by the ASMFC.

The ASMFC has long recognized that the entire coastal population of Atlantic Menhaden is below historical levels (see, e.g. **October 2004 ASMFC Atlantic Menhaden Workshop**), and that the Atlantic Menhaden should be managed with respect to its ecological role rather than merely fishing mortality and reproductive capacity. The ASMFC directed the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board to establish values and goals for population utilization that acknowledge ecosystem service and fisheries support provided by the menhaden population. Out of this arose the ERP process currently in place.

In November 2025, the Menhaden Technical Committee advised the Board that a **54% reduction** was needed to provide a 50% chance that striped bass, the ERP species, would have enough menhaden to recover their populations. The Board did not adopt the Technical Committee's recommendation; instead adopting a 20% reduction for one year which guaranteed that striped bass would not recover. Furthermore, data shows that the 20% reduction was merely a paper exercise because the menhaden reduction fishery has been unable to meet even 65% of their quota due to the crash of the menhaden population.

Further evidence of the coast-wide depletion of Atlantic Menhaden has now been uncovered through osprey nest surveys revealing a coastal reproductive crisis of historic proportions. What was once thought of as a problem confined to the Chesapeake Bay has now been shown to be occurring almost everywhere that osprey historically relied upon Atlantic Menhaden as a primary food source for the breeding season. (See attached September 18, 2026 report from Dr. Bryan D. Watts, Center for Conservation Biology, William and Mary).

A precautionary approach for protecting the menhaden population and providing a chance for the osprey and the striped bass populations to recover requires, at a minimum, that this Board adopt

the TAC at 114,200 mt as recommended by the Technical Committee and proscribed by the ASMFC's own rules. Thank you very much for your time. Sincerely, Roberta Kellam

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News Advisory

FROM: Center for Conservation Biology, William & Mary

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 18 September, 2026

MEDIA CONTACTS: Dr. Bryan D. Watts, Director
Center for Conservation Biology
William & Mary
bdwatt@wm.edu
(757) 221-2247

2026 osprey breeding performance along the Atlantic Coast

Some populations are reproducing below limits for sustainability

(Williamsburg, VA)--- The Center for Conservation Biology at William & Mary has compiled the 2026 breeding performance results for osprey populations along the Atlantic Coast of North America. Within the Chesapeake Bay, breeding performance in ospreys has been poor for several years due to extreme food stress during the nesting season. Productivity has declined to critical levels that now threaten the stability of the largest osprey breeding population in the world. The primary objective for compiling osprey monitoring results for the broader Atlantic coast is to visualize breeding performance at scale and address the question "Are ospreys experiencing reproductive deficits in waters beyond the Chesapeake Bay?" The 2026 effort includes monitoring results for 2,886 pairs from 65 study areas across 10 states (Table 1, Figure 1).

Maintenance Reproductive Rates for Osprey

On a global scale, the annual breeding performance required to maintain a stable osprey population ranges from 0.8 to 1.3 young/pair depending on the specific location. We adopt the most optimistic (0.8 young/pair) reproductive rate as the "break even" threshold. The monitoring effort compiled here includes data from a wide variety of sources including academic institutions, government agencies, NGOs and private citizens (Table 1). Our focus is on breeding outcomes of the 2026 season rather than on clutch sizes, hatching rates, etc. Although nest visitation schedules varied somewhat between monitoring programs, we included only data sets that provided clear season outcomes. Estimates of reproductive rates should be considered optimistic. We have only monitored the survival of young to fledging and there is increasing evidence that post-fledging survival may be low. In addition, some programs only monitored pairs that made breeding attempts which in some populations may underestimate the population size and by doing so overestimate reproductive rates (Table 1).

Breeding Performance

The coast-wide sample of 2,886 pairs collectively produced 1,936 young resulting in an average reproductive rate of 0.67 young/pair. Success rate (portion of pairs that fledged at least 1 young) was 44.5%. Breeding performance was influenced by salinity. Fifteen study areas (405 pairs) were located within freshwater or tidal fresh systems and 50 study areas (2,481 pairs) were located within tidal waters (coastal marine) with salinities above 5 parts per thousand (ppt). Pairs nesting within freshwater systems produced an average of 1.15 young/pair compared to only 0.59 young/pair in salty or marine systems. More importantly for population stability, all but one (93%) of the freshwater study sites produced more young than needed for population maintenance (minimum 0.8 young/pair, see below) compared to only 28% (14 of 50) of saltier sites. Regions along the coast that are experiencing reproductive deficits include the Chesapeake Bay, the Atlantic coasts of Delaware and New Jersey, outer Long Island, the Connecticut coast north of the Quinnipiac River and coastal systems between Narraganset Bay Rhode Island through Buzzards Bay Massachusetts (Figure 2). The Atlantic Coast of the Delmarva Peninsula in Virginia is not shown because the population has collapsed by more than 90% over the past 20 years.

Several regions along the coast stand out for producing either very high or very low productivity. Regions reporting large deficits (<50% of requirement for population maintenance) in productivity include the Chesapeake Bay, the outer coast of Delaware and the area from the mouth of Long Island Sound to Westport River in Massachusetts (Figure 3). If these deficits continue, populations are expected to decline at an average rate of ~10%/year. Regions on the outer coast that reported good productivity include the Hilton Head Island in South Carolina, the southern coast of Connecticut and the offshore islands of Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts.

Chesapeake Bay continues to be ground zero

Sixteen study areas experienced extreme deficits (below 25% of maintenance levels) in reproduction during the 2026 breeding season (Figure 4). Fifteen of these sites were located in the saltier portions of the Chesapeake Bay. Based on the current demographics, we would expect the breeding populations within these study areas to decline at an average rate of 14%/year. This annual loss rate is dramatic and without a change in course would be expected to result in a 50% decline in these population over the next decade. Ospreys within the Chesapeake Bay have been experiencing low reproductive rates for several years. Documentation of extreme reproductive deficits elsewhere along the Atlantic Coast is more recent.

Causes of Nesting Failures

Many factors may cause nest failures in ospreys including storms, predation, human disturbance and heat stress. The contribution of individual factors to nest losses varies from year to year. Many of these factors have recognizable signatures in the field. Within the Chesapeake Bay

food stress is driving low reproductive rates. Broods are starving in the nest. The extreme food stress documented in recent years appears to be caused by changes in the availability of Atlantic menhaden to nesting ospreys in the Chesapeake Bay. For decades, menhaden have been considered to be a keystone prey species for the osprey population due to their high abundance, high energy density and schooling behavior. In some parts of the Chesapeake, the rate of delivery of menhaden to nests has declined by more than 80% since the 1980s. The shift in diet away from menhaden has resulted in a 50% decline in the energy content of osprey diets. The combination of a reduced rate of menhaden delivery to nests and lower energy content of the diet has resulted in an increased rate of nest failure and reduced mean brood size. The underlying causes of reduced availability of menhaden to osprey are not clear. Although the underlying cause of low reproductive rates for other study areas along the Atlantic Coast is less clear, observations in numerous study areas implicate food stress and starvation as an important driving factor.

Imperiled Species vs Ecosystem Indicator

We should view ospreys as sentinels for the marine ecosystem rather than a species imperiled. Most osprey breeding populations throughout the world have recovered from lows driven by the DDT pesticide crisis. The North American' population has surpassed historic benchmarks largely because pairs have colonized reservoirs created within inland areas. Ospreys appear to be secure throughout much of their range but are struggling within some coastal sites. Many of these sites have been considered to be important global strongholds for many decades. Ospreys are apex predators and are considered to be effective indicators of aquatic ecosystem health. Recent declines in reproductive rates raises a red flag on the health of marine ecosystems along portions of the Atlantic Coast.

Figures

Figure 1. Distribution of study areas with available osprey monitoring data for the 2026 nesting season. Monitoring was conducted by a wide range of contributors. Data presented includes 2,886 nesting pairs within 65 study areas across 10 states. Colors denote whether or not pairs exceeded the reproductive rate (0.8 young/pair) required for population maintenance.

Figure 2. Distribution of study areas within waters above 5 ppt salinity. Colors denote whether or not pairs exceeded the reproductive rate (0.8 young/pair) required for population maintenance.

Figure 3. Distribution of study areas with large (<50% of maintenance levels) deficits in reproductive rate.

Figure 4. Distribution of study areas with large (<50% of maintenance levels) deficits in reproductive rate.

Table 1. Results of osprey monitoring results along the Atlantic Coast for the 2026 breeding season. Reproductive rate values are means ± standard errors.

State	Study Area	Salinity	Pairs	Reproductive Rate	Contact Person	Organization
NH	Lakes Region	Fresh	20	1.65±0.26	Iain MacLeod	Squam Lakes Natural Science Center
MA	Westport	>5ppt	101	0.42±0.06	Alan Poole Gina Purtell	South Coast (MA) Osprey Project
MA	Buzzards Bay	>5ppt	33	0.88±0.12	-----	OspreyWatch (Mass south coast)
MA	Nantucket	>5ppt	41	1.41±0.13	Libby Buck	Linda Loring Nature Foundation
MA	Martha's Vineyard[1]	>5ppt	125	1.50±0.08	Rob Bierregaard	None
RI	Narragansett Bay	>5ppt	150	0.78±0.06	Sydney Brown	Audubon Society of Rhode Island
RI	Inland Rhode Island	Fresh	22	1.09±0.16	Sydney Brown	Audubon Society of Rhode Island
RI	Southern Coast	>5ppt	31	1.13±0.16	Sydney Brown	Audubon Society of Rhode Island
CT	Hammonasset Beach	>5ppt	56	0.23±0.07	Matt Joyce	The Connecticut Audubon Society
CT	Lower Connecticut River	>5ppt	51	0.29±0.08	Matt Joyce	The Connecticut Audubon Society
CT	New London	>5ppt	60	0.52±0.10	Matt Joyce	The Connecticut Audubon Society
CT	Pine Orchard	>5ppt	74	0.61±0.07	Matt Joyce	The Connecticut Audubon Society
CT	Upper Connecticut River	T Fresh	28	0.71±0.16	Matt Joyce	The Connecticut Audubon Society
CT	Inland North	Fresh	29	0.86±0.15	Matt Joyce	The Connecticut Audubon Society
CT	Southport	>5ppt	31	1.16±0.17	Matt Joyce	The Connecticut Audubon Society
CT	Southwest Coast	>5ppt	42	1.17±0.13	Matt Joyce	The Connecticut Audubon Society
CT	Inland South	Fresh	52	1.27±0.12	Matt Joyce	The Connecticut Audubon Society
CT	Silver Sands	>5ppt	25	1.36±0.17	Matt Joyce	The Connecticut Audubon Society
NY	Gardiners Island[1]	>5ppt	77	0.29±0.06	Mike Scheibel	None
NJ	Ocean County[1]	>5ppt	151	0.51±0.06	Ben Wurst	Conservation Wildlife Foundation, NJ
NJ	Cape May[1]	>5ppt	99	0.61±0.07	Ben Wurst	Conservation Wildlife Foundation, NJ
NJ	Atlantic County[1]	>5ppt	82	0.61±0.10	Ben Wurst	Conservation Wildlife Foundation, NJ
NJ	Sandy Hook[1]	>5ppt	70	0.90±0.11	Ben Wurst	Conservation Wildlife Foundation, NJ
NJ	Monmouth[1]	>5ppt	63	1.06±0.11	Ben Wurst	Conservation Wildlife Foundation, NJ
NJ	Meadowlands[1]	T Fresh	21	1.29±0.14	Ben Wurst	Conservation Wildlife Foundation, NJ
NJ	Maurice River[1]	>5ppt	58	1.41±0.13	Ben Wurst	Conservation Wildlife Foundation, NJ
NJ	Red Bank – DE River[1]	T. Fresh	9	1.89±0.39	Ben Wurst	Conservation Wildlife Foundation, NJ
NJ	Harmony – DE River[1]	Fresh	11	2.09±0.21	Ben Wurst	Conservation Wildlife Foundation, NJ
DE	South Rehobeth	>5ppt	71	0.31±0.07	Jodi McLauphlin	OspreyWatch Delaware
DE	North Rehobeth	>5ppt	39	0.36±0.09	Jodi McLauphlin	OspreyWatch Delaware
DE	Assawoman Bay	>5ppt	21	0.52±0.15	Jodi McLauphlin	OspreyWatch Delaware
DE	Lewes	>5ppt	17	0.59±0.17	Jodi McLauphlin	OspreyWatch Delaware
DE	Milford	>5ppt	6	0.83±0.31	Jodi McLauphlin	OspreyWatch Delaware
DE	Nanticoke	T Fresh	8	1.50±0.50	Francie Davis	OspreyWatch Delaware
MD	Lower Choptank	>5ppt	26	0.00±0.00	Barnett Rattner	United States Geological Survey
MD	Poplar Island	>5ppt	10	0.00±0.00	Bobby Callahan	United States Fish & Wildlife Service

Table 1. Continued

State	Study Area	Salinity	Pairs	Reproductive Rate	Contact Person	Organization
MD	Severn[1]	>5ppt	35	0.09±0.05	Tom Guay	Eco-Ed Endeavors
MD	Kent Island	>5ppt	16	0.19±0.10	Judy Wink	Chesapeake Bay Environmental Center
MD	Lower Patuxent	>5ppt	44	0.20±0.07	Greg Kearns	Patuxent River Park
MD	Lower Chester	>5ppt	89	0.67±0.08	Barnett Rattner	United States Geological Survey
MD	Jug Bay	T Fresh	47	0.81±0.14	Greg Kearns	Patuxent River Park
MD	Upper Chester	T Fresh	31	1.19±0.19	David Kramar	CES, Washington College
VA	Bowlers Wharf	>5ppt	46	0.02±0.02	Bryan Watts	Center for Conservation Biology, W&M
VA	Mattox Creek	>5ppt	37	0.05±0.04	Bryan Watts	Center for Conservation Biology, W&M
VA	Urbanna	>5ppt	31	0.10±0.05	Bryan Watts	Center for Conservation Biology, W&M
VA	Lower York	>5ppt	51	0.12±0.06	Bryan Watts	Center for Conservation Biology, W&M
VA	Mobjack Bay	>5ppt	63	0.17±0.05	Bryan Watts	Center for Conservation Biology, W&M
VA	Elizabeth River	>5ppt	26	0.19±0.08	Bryan Watts	Center for Conservation Biology, W&M
VA	Poquoson River	>5ppt	29	0.21±0.10	Bryan Watts	Center for Conservation Biology, W&M
VA	Piankatank River	>5ppt	39	0.23±0.09	Bryan Watts	Center for Conservation Biology, W&M
VA	Middle York	>5ppt	33	0.24±0.09	Bryan Watts	Center for Conservation Biology, W&M
VA	Eastern Shore Bayside	>5ppt	61	0.25±0.08	Bryan Watts	Center for Conservation Biology, W&M
VA	Lynnhaven River	>5ppt	40	0.28±0.09	Keriann Spiewak Reese Lukei, Jr	VA Aquarium & Marine Science Center Center for Conservation Biology, W&M
VA	Lower James	>5ppt	25	0.32±0.11	Bryan Watts	Center for Conservation Biology, W&M
VA	Upper York	>5ppt	17	0.35±0.12	Bryan Watts	Center for Conservation Biology, W&M
VA	Upper Rappahannock	>5ppt	33	0.42±0.14	Bryan Watts	Center for Conservation Biology, W&M
VA	Middle James	>5ppt	44	0.45±0.12	Bryan Watts	Center for Conservation Biology, W&M
VA	Colonial Beach	>5ppt	38	0.53±0.14	Joanie Millward	Virginia Osprey Foundation
VA	Dahlgren Naval Base	>5ppt	21	0.81±0.20	Joanie Millward	Virginia Osprey Foundation
VA	Upper James	T Fresh	52	1.04±0.16	Bryan Watts	Center for Conservation Biology, W&M
VA	Dyke Marsh	T Fresh	28	1.07±0.18	Dan Rauch	Wildlife Division, Washington D.C.
VA	Pohick Bay	T Fresh	38	1.18±0.15	Bryan Watts	Center for Conservation Biology, W&M
VA	Back Bay	T Fresh	9	1.67±0.47	Reese Lukei, Jr.	Center for Conservation Biology, W&M
SC	North Hilton Head	>5ppt	30	1.07±0.14	Joanne Voulelis Carol Clemens	OspreyWatch Hilton Head Island
SC	South Hilton Head	>5ppt	23	1.13±0.16	Joanne Voulelis Carol Clemens	OspreyWatch Hilton Head Island

[1]Reproductive estimates were based on active nests (pairs making breeding attempts) rather than all pairs in the population. These study areas underestimate breeding populations and by doing so overestimate reproductive rates.

In Dr. Bryan Watts second Osprey research paper (attached), “Are ospreys experiencing reproductive deficits in waters beyond the Chesapeake Bay?”, he covered the 2026 breeding season for 2,886 pairs from 65 study areas across 10 states along the Atlantic coast. Pairs nesting within freshwater systems produced an average of 1.15 young/pair compared to only 0.59 young/pair in salty or marine systems. The latter rate signifies

population decline. These saline areas are where menhaden dominate Osprey food supplies as found in Chesapeake Bay.

“Ospreys within the Chesapeake Bay have been experiencing low reproductive rates for several years. Documentation of extreme reproductive deficits elsewhere along the Atlantic Coast [outside of Chesapeake Bay] is more recent. Although the underlying cause of low reproductive rates for other study areas along the Atlantic Coast is less clear, observations in numerous study areas implicate food stress and starvation as an important driving factor.”

So, the lack of menhaden in these saltier areas could also be driving the nest failures and Osprey chick starvation elsewhere, just as in the Chesapeake.

“Regions along the coast that are experiencing reproductive deficits include the Chesapeake Bay, the Atlantic coasts of Delaware and New Jersey, outer Long Island, the Connecticut coast north of the Quinnipiac River and coastal systems between Narraganset Bay Rhode Island through Buzzards Bay Massachusetts (Figure 2). The Atlantic Coast of the Delmarva Peninsula in Virginia is not shown because the population has collapsed by more than 90% over the past 20 years.”

James Boyle

From: Peter McLean <pmclean2700@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, October 27, 2026 5:19 PM
To: Comments
Cc: Watts, Bryan D
Subject: [New] [External] Menhaden and Ospreys
Attachments: IMG_1841.jpeg

Dear Commissioner,

As you consider the management of menhaden, please keep in mind the critical importance of this nutritious fish to often tenuous populations of wildlife, especially Osprey and Striped Bass.

Field data from my graduate work on Ospreys at William and Mary indicate that menhaden constitute three quarters of the Chesapeake Bay Osprey diet (McLean and Byrd 1991, please see attached); in other words, menhaden is essential to the health of these beautiful and majestic animals, a keystone species.

Little doubt that the menhaden population of the Chesapeake Bay needs further study, and I'm heartened to see plans to do so; however, the dramatic decline in Chesapeake Bay Osprey population in recent years, well below replacement level, indicates that we must significantly reduce the take of menhaden so that the Osprey and other wildlife populations have a chance to recover.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Peter

Peter Kleppinger McLean, Ph.D.
518 East Cape Shores Drive
Lewes, Delaware 19958
302-312-4528

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able 2. The diet of Ospreys in southwestern Chesapeake Bay based on the mean weight of fish delivered to the st.

SPECIES	WEIGHT (g)[a]	% OF DIET
Menhaden (*Brevoortia tyrannus*)	152.5 (134.4, 255)	74.69
White perch (*Morone americana*)	290.0 (366.0, 13)	7.24
Atlantic croaker (*Micropogonias undulatus*)	185.9 (117.2, 11)	3.93
Oyster toadfish (*Opsanus tau*)	133.7 (52.8, 13)	3.34
American eel (*Anguilla rostrata*)	93.0 (90.6, 16)	2.86
Hogchoker (*Trinectes maculatus*)	120.5 (68.8, 8)	1.85
Summer flounder (*Paralichthys dentatus*)	82.0 (82.2, 11)	1.73
White catfish (*Ictalurus catus*)	223.2 (17.82, 4)	1.71
Spotted seatrout (*Cynoscion nebulosus*)	410.0 (278.6, 2)	1.58
Harvestfish (*Peprilus alepidotus*)	228.8 (—, 1)	0.44
Butterfish (*Peprilus triacanthus*)	222.8 (—, 1)	0.43
Needlefish (*Strongylura marina*)	54.6 (—, 1)	0.10
Cutlassfish (*Trichiurus lepturus*)	22.9 (25.0, 2)	0.09
Sunfish (*Lepomis macrochirus*)	15.2 (—, 1)	0.03
Spanish mackerel (*Scomberomorus maculatus*)	45.7 (—, 1)[b]	—
Unknown	32[c]	—
	Total	100.02

[a] Mean (SD, *N*).
[b] Length (cm); uncertain of length–weight relationship.
[c] Total number of unidentifiable species.

when they were more abundant and Shad (*Dorosoma* spp.) when Sunfish abundance declined.

In terms of fish size and the average number of fish delivered daily, our findings are consistent with some others' (Stinson 1978, Hakkinen 1977, Prevost 1982, Henny 1988). In an earlier study of Chesapeake Bay Ospreys, Stinson (1978) reported a mean fish size of 237.1 g (SD = 160.0). Prevost (1982) observed African Ospreys with fish as large as 740 g, though most fish generally weighed between 200 and 400 g. In Finland, Hakkinen (1977) found that 5.2 (SD = 1.0) fish were delivered per day.

It is likely that the Ospreys' impact on a fishery insignificant. Hakkinen (1977) calculated that the sprey population in Finland consumed 0.6% of the al Finnish freshwater fish catch. In the Chesake Bay, Ospreys consume 5.4 fish/d per breeding r including young. Given a mean fish weight of 9 g, the Chesapeake Bay Osprey population mated at 3000 breeding pairs) would be ed to eat approximately 132 171 kg of fi 2-d nestling

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Steve Smith and Paul Gerdes helped us identify comm fish species of the bay. Dr. Tom Monroe guided us thro prey-remains identification. Chris McLean assisted v data collection. Ralph Dimmick, Chris Stinson, Steve F zanghera, Carol Ann Pala, and several referees comme on earlier drafts of this manuscript. The project was fu ed by the Virginia Commission of Game and Inland F eries, Non-game and Endangered Species Program, Williamsburg Bird Club, and the College of William Mary.

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November 2, 2026

Via Electronic Mail
Mr. Joseph Cimino, Chair
Atlantic Menhaden Management Board
c/o Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission
1050 N. Highland St., Suite 200 A-N
Arlington, VA 22201

RE: Comments on TAC Setting

Dear Chairman Cimino,

Ocean Harvesters urges the Menhaden Management Board to maintain the current total allowable catch (TAC) for the Atlantic menhaden fishery for the next two years, when the results of the next stock assessment will be available. There is no new information to support a different decision and the socioeconomic concerns relating to impacts on the menhaden bait and reduction, as well as the lobster, fisheries from further TAC cuts remain just as dire.

Projections by the Menhaden Technical Committee (TC) show that at the current TAC there is no chance of overfishing and that menhaden fecundity will remain above its ecological reference point (ERP) target over the next three years. According to the 2025 update assessment, the stock's age-1+ biomass is about twice the level of the early 1970s, and about a third higher than average levels during the 1980s. Both menhaden biomass and recruitment have been trending upward since 2020. *Id.* (Figs. 11, 12). Just as last year, it remains true that maintaining harvest at 2026 levels results in a zero probability of achieving the target fishing mortality rate (F). However, the ERP F target is based on striped bass being fished at its target F, and, like menhaden, striped bass is also above its target F, but unlike menhaden, is very close to its threshold.

Any additional TAC reductions will not help striped bass rebuild any more quickly. Depletion in the striped bass population is due to eight years of well below average recruitment, which followed many years of overfishing. Meanwhile, menhaden recruitment over the past few years is at its highest levels since 1990. Striped bass in Maryland waters appear to be well-fed. The Maryland Department of Natural Resources reports that while "the relative availability of ages 1+ Menhaden to Striped Bass was uncertain," the "recruitment, availability of age 0 Menhaden to Striped Bass, and Striped Bass condition were good (green)."

The men, women, and fisheries from New England to the Mid-Atlantic that depend on the Atlantic menhaden fishery deserve the same consideration the Commission grant those who depend on striped bass. The only meaningful difference in the status of the two stocks is that striped bass are overfished. Yet when the Striped Bass Board was presented last year with the

need for a 12 percent reduction to keep the stock track for rebuilding by 2029, it declined to do so, in part, due to "the severe economic consequences of the proposed reduction." Objectively, precaution would warrant acting more conservatively when such an important stock is undergoing rebuilding, compared to a stock like menhaden that is above its abundance threshold and for which the possibility of overfishing does not exist.

When the Menhaden Management Board considers the appropriate TAC level for the next couple years, such consideration of the impacts of further cuts is absolutely appropriate, just as they were for the striped bass fishery. The Interstate Fisheries Management Program Charter states that "[s]ocial and economic impacts and benefits must be taken into account." *Id.* Sec. Six(a). The principle management concern is to "prevent overfishing," *id.* Six(a)(1); the current TAC is extremely conservative in that it has no chance of overfishing.

Finally, "management measure shall be based on the best scientific information available." *Id.* Six(a)(2). As the next benchmark assessment will not be available until 2029, the 2025 update assessment, upon which the current TAC is based, remains the best science on which to base this decision. The only new information are the updated projections, which show that the menhaden stock is above its abundance target and will mostly likely remain so under current harvest levels. The sheer abundance of adult menhaden in the Gulf of Maine confirms that this migratory stock is healthy.

In sum, the fundamentals of the menhaden stock are sound, its primary predator is depleted which reduces demand, and the very serious economic and social impacts of further reductions in allowable menhaden harvest all support maintaining the status quo TAC.

We appreciate your attention to these comments.

Sincerely,

/s/ Ben Landry
Ben Landry
Vice President of Public Affairs
Ocean Fleet Services

cc: Members of the Menhaden Management Board

November 2, 2026

James Boyle
Fishery Management Plan Coordinator
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission
1050 N. Highland Street
Suite 200 A-N
Arlington, VA 22201

Re: RAE Comments on Menhaden Draft Addendum II

Dear Mr. Boyle and members of the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board:

On behalf of Restore America's Estuaries, a nationwide organization dedicated to restoring and preserving our coastal regions, we thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on Atlantic menhaden management, specifically Total Allowable Catch (TAC) specifications for 2027-2029. We support a TAC of 114,200 metric tons, which adheres to the best available science and ensures adequate menhaden are left in the water to support a healthy Atlantic coast ecosystem.

Atlantic menhaden are foundational to productive, healthy estuarine and marine ecosystems throughout the Atlantic Coast. As a forage fish, menhaden provide critical nutrients to many species of fish and wildlife, such as striped bass, bluefish, bluefin tuna, humpback whales, coastal sharks, osprey, gannets, and many more.

In recent years, menhaden management has grappled with serious, and in many cases intensifying, challenges. The 2025 coastwide menhaden stock assessments utilized improved data, which resulted in a much smaller estimate of the menhaden population and indicated significant catch reductions were needed to maintain ecosystem-based fisheries management objectives. And finally, widespread on the water observations point to noticeable declines in adult menhaden abundance by commercial and recreational fishermen alike.

Adopting and implementing Ecological Reference Points (ERPs) for Atlantic menhaden was widely celebrated as a breakthrough advancement for fisheries management and ecosystem-based science. However, effective ERP management requires consistent adherence to management strategies that achieve those ERPs. In response to a new stock assessment, the Board's TAC decision at the 2025 Annual Meeting represented a departure from ERP Management. The Board approved a 20% reduction for a 2026 TAC of 186,840mt, which had a 100% probability of exceeding the ERP fishing mortality target, whereas a 54% TAC reduction was projected to have a reasonable probability of achieving that target.

With that decision, the best available scientific information available was essentially ignored, and failed to account for the ecological role of menhaden for predator fish, birds, and marine mammals.

This Board cannot make that same mistake again. Approving a TAC that is projected to exceed the ERP F Target would represent a complete abandonment of ERP management.

For these reasons, Restore America's Estuaries and our undersigned Atlantic Coast member organizations urge the Menhaden Management Board to approve a 114,200mt TAC which is associated with a 50% probability of not exceeding the ERP F Target.

Thank you for consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

Daniel Hayden
President and CEO
Restore America's Estuaries

Chris Dodge
Narragansett Baykeeper
Save The Bay - Narragansett Bay

Danielle McCulloch
Executive Director
American Littoral Society

Alison Hooper Prost
Senior Vice President for Programs
Chesapeake Bay Foundation

Denise Stranko
Executive Vice President of Programs
Save the Sound

November 3, 2026

James Boyle
Fishery Management Plan Coordinator
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission
1050 N. Highland St., Suite 200
Arlington, VA 22201

Re: Atlantic Menhaden 2027–2028 TAC

Dear Mr. Boyle and Members of the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board,

On behalf of the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), we write to comment on the urgent need for an updated coastwide menhaden total allowable catch (TAC). To sustain the menhaden stock and the coastal ecosystems and economies that rely on it, we urge the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board (Board) to implement an **immediate 41% cut to the TAC, to 110,200 mt for 2027–2028.**

The Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act requires that coastal fishery management plans "promote the conservation of fish stocks throughout their ranges and are based on the best scientific information available." 16 U.S.C. § 5104(a)(2). Conservation is defined as "the restoring, rebuilding, and maintaining of any coastal fishery resource and the marine environment, in order to assure the availability of coastal fishery resources on a long-term basis," 16 U.S.C. § 5102(4). The Atlantic Menhaden Interstate Fishery Management Plan likewise directs the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) to:

- maintain the menhaden stock at levels that sustain viable fisheries and support predators that depend on the forage base;
- ensure sufficient spawning stock biomass to prevent stock depletion and recruitment failure; and
- implement regulations based on the best available science.

Amendment 3 to the Atlantic Menhaden Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) implements these requirements with an ecosystem-based management strategy. The Board initiated Amendment 3 in 2015 specifically to develop ecological reference points (ERPs). It recognized that single-species reference points may not adequately account for the ecological role menhaden play. The Amendment's goal is to share the resource's ecological and economic benefits equitably among all user groups, including menhaden predators and those who depend on them.

ERPs serve those objectives by building predators' need for menhaden directly into the reference points. That lets managers weigh the impact of menhaden harvest quantities "within a broad ecosystem context."

The ERP fishing mortality (F) target of 0.151 is the maximum fishing rate on menhaden that sustains Atlantic striped bass at their biomass target when striped bass are fished at their own F target. The current TAC carries a 99.5% probability of failing this goal in each year from 2027 to 2029. A 30% cut still carries a 72% chance of exceeding the ERP F target in 2027. Reaching even odds—a 50/50 chance of leaving enough menhaden in the water to support predators like striped bass—requires a 39% cut. The most precautionary option the Atlantic Menhaden Technical Committee (TC) analyzed is 110,200 mt, a 41% cut at 40% risk.

We urge the Board to choose this most precautionary end of the analyzed range because these projections almost certainly understate the actual risk of exceeding the target. The TC acknowledged that its probabilities are "not true risk." They exclude both structural uncertainty and scientific uncertainty around the reference points themselves. Additionally, the projections assume that future environmental and fishery conditions will resemble those of the past. Recent evidence suggests they will not; the Commission's Draft Addendum II documents a dramatic drop in the Choptank River adult menhaden index in 2024 that persisted into 2025, along with 2024 declines in pound net catch rates in Maryland, Virginia, and the Potomac River. In 2023, the year of the most recent assessment, fishing mortality was already 69% above the ERP target and fecundity 29% below its target. Fecundity was also only 5% above its threshold. Given these uncertainties, the Board should choose the most precautionary option to preserve this critical forage base for the Atlantic coastal ecosystem.

When the Board set the 2026 TAC last October, the Commission's own analysis indicated that a reduction of 50% or more was needed to achieve the ERP target. NRDC commented in 2025 that ERP science indicated a 54% reduction in the TAC was needed to stay in line with management objectives. The Board instead adopted a 20% reduction as a one-time compromise to inform 2026 only.

Atlantic menhaden are the forage base for some of the Atlantic coast's most valuable species. Many of those species are already struggling: striped bass are overfished, weakfish are depleted, and bluefish are still in the rebuilding stage. The ERP framework exists so that menhaden harvest accounts for these predators. The Board has its own TC's projections in hand, and they leave little room for optimistic interpretation. We urge the Board to act without delay at the 2026 Annual Meeting to set a fixed TAC of 110,200 mt for 2027 and 2028, a 41% reduction from 2026.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions.

Sincerely,

Molly Masterton
Senior Attorney, Fisheries
Natural Resources Defense Council
Email: mmasterton@nrdc.org
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Advocacy Disguised as Journalism: Sierra's One-Sided Attack on Virginia's Menhaden Fishery

Thursday, 12 March 2026 05:00 PM

Topic: Environmental, Social and Governance

WASHINGTON, DC / ACCESS Newswire / March 12, 2026 / The *Sierra* magazine March 8 article "Will Osprey Chick Deaths Inspire Conservation Action on Menhaden?" by Amy Brecount

White is not a work of balanced journalism, but an advocacy piece masquerading as reporting.

At the most basic level, the story fails the simplest test of fairness. It quotes five individuals aligned with the narrative that menhaden fishing is responsible for osprey reproductive problems, yet it does not quote a single scientist or expert with a dissenting view, nor a single fisherman, union fishermen, or member of the menhaden industry whose livelihood is at stake. That is not balance. It is message amplification.

A more truthful story would have told readers that there is no scientific consensus that menhaden fishing is even related to osprey nesting failure in the lower Chesapeake. External reporting and official USGS material show that scientists have identified multiple environmental stressors affecting osprey reproduction and that even researchers involved in the work have cautioned against claiming conclusive proof from the existing evidence.

The article's central premise is that industrial menhaden fishing is starving ospreys. But that claim is presented as if it were settled fact when it is anything but. Publicly available rebuttal material quoting VIMS scientist Dr. Robert Latour states that localized depletion has not been demonstrated and that claims to that effect are speculative based on existing data. A peer-reviewed *Frontiers* commentary by Dr. Latour and coauthors also challenged the statistical basis for drawing such strong conclusions from the osprey-menhaden linkage.

The article also leans heavily on the familiar activist refrain that the fishery is overharvesting a foundational forage species. But the Atlantic menhaden fishery has repeatedly been found by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission to be neither overfished nor experiencing overfishing, and the fishery is

managed with ecological reference points specifically designed to account for predator needs. It is also certified as sustainable by the Marine Stewardship Council, the global gold standard for fisheries sustainability.

The piece further suggests that current science is so deficient that sweeping new restrictions or even an end to the fishery are justified until more is known. That framing is misleading. The Atlantic menhaden fishery is perhaps the most studied on the East Coast. There is active scientific work underway to develop a more Bay-specific management foundation, including ongoing ASMFC and related scientific work on ecological reference points and the Chesapeake Bay cap.

The article recycles the idea that Virginia's fishery is uniquely out of step with the rest of the coast. But the fishery is already constrained by an unscientific and precautionary Chesapeake Bay cap and coastwide quota management, and recent ASMFC action cut the 2026 coastwide TAC by 20 percent while also initiating a process to review the Bay cap.

The story also indulges the familiar insinuation that Omega Protein is somehow a foreign operator exploiting Bay resources. That too is misleading. Even reporting sympathetic to the fishery's critics acknowledges that Omega Protein is based in Reedville, Virginia, and that harvesting is performed by Ocean Harvesters, an American company based in Reedville.

Just as important, the article ignores the people who would bear the cost of the policies it encourages. Rural Virginia cannot easily replace these jobs. A Virginia Marine Resources Commission economic assessment found that the direct effects of the menhaden reduction operation are heavily concentrated in Northumberland County: 217 of 299 employees resided there, including 55 in Reedville. The report also described the

operation as providing health care, paid holidays, retirement programs, paid life insurance, vacation days, and union representation, and it noted that most direct impacts occur in Northumberland County.

We urge readers to visit the UFCW Local 400 website and watch this video featuring the union fishermen describing their jobs in their own words.

That point matters. This is not an abstract policy debate to the people who live in the Northern Neck. The same VMRC/VIMS assessment found that employees interviewed said they would have difficulty finding other work at or near the same pay level and with similar benefits if the fishery were closed.

A properly reported story following legitimate journalistic principles would have told readers all of this. It would have noted that there are credible scientific disputes over causation. It would have acknowledged that the fishery is already heavily regulated and managed under ecosystem-based reference points. It would have included the voices of watermen, union workers, and local communities whose futures are tied to Reedville and Northumberland County. Instead, *Sierra* delivered a one-sided narrative built to advance a policy outcome.

Sierra is the national magazine of the Sierra Club. It describes itself as "an independent journalistic enterprise."

This article is advocacy. It is not journalism.



About the Menhaden Fisheries Coalition

The Menhaden Fisheries Coalition (MFC) is a collective of menhaden fishermen, related businesses, and supporting industries. Comprised of businesses along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, the Menhaden Fisheries Coalition conducts media and public outreach on behalf of the menhaden industry to ensure that members of the public, media, and government are informed of important issues, events, and facts about the fishery.

Press Contact

Menhaden Fisheries Coalition
(202) 595-1212
www.menhaden.org

SOURCE: Menhaden Fisheries Coalition

American Saltwater Guides Association "Menhaden Math" Leaves Out Half the Equation

Monday, 02 November 2026 04:05 PM

Topic: Environmental, Social and Governance

WASHINGTON, D.C. / ACCESS Newswire / November 2, 2026 / The American Saltwater Guides Association's podcast, The

Guide Post, opens its latest attack on the menhaden fishery under the title "Menhaden Math Ain't Mathin'." The episode features Dr. Jerald Ault promoting a mortality estimate substantially lower than the revised estimate the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission adopted after considering his work during its 2025 stock assessment.



Promoting the episode, ASGA asks: "What if one of the most important numbers in East Coast fisheries management was wrong, and the people in charge didn't want to hear it?" ASGA leaves out that the people in charge **did hear it** . Ault formally presented his analysis to the ASMFC twice in 2024, and scientists continued to consider his work during the 2025 stock assessment. That review contributed to a revised mortality estimate, although scientists did not adopt Ault's substantially lower figure.

Host Tony Friedrich presents the discussion as an indictment of fisheries managers and the science behind Atlantic menhaden

management. What listeners do not get is a clear account of the technical objections to Ault's work-or that his work was considered.

The research was considered

Ault presented his analysis to the ASMFC's Stock Assessment Subcommittee on September 25, 2024, and appeared again at its November 2024 methods workshop . Scientists examined his interpretation of historical tagging data alongside the analysis by Liljestrand and colleagues, including differences in the datasets, fishing effort, tag-recovery efficiency, and modeling assumptions.

That review continued into 2025 and produced a different natural-mortality estimate. The ASMFC revised the estimate used in its assessment from approximately 1.17 to 0.92 , contributing to lower estimates of stock size and to the Commission's decision last year to reduce the 2026 coastwide catch limit by 20% . The ASMFC did not adopt the substantially lower estimate of approximately 0.50 advocated by Ault and co-author Jiangang Luo.

The revised estimate was incorporated into the 2025 assessment and underwent independent peer review. The ASMFC explains the review and revision in its Atlantic menhaden FAQs.

Ault and Luo's paper was not published in the peer-reviewed journal Fisheries Research until September 16, 2026-less than eight weeks before the ASMFC's November meeting. But Ault had presented the underlying analysis to the ASMFC twice in 2024, and the Commission's scientists examined it during the 2025 assessment. The journal publication was new; the research was not.

The Technical Committee had significant concerns

In an October 21, 2026 memorandum, the ASMFC's Atlantic Menhaden Technical Committee and Stock Assessment Subcommittee told the Menhaden Management Board that the Technical Committee and the SEDAR 102 Review Panel had reviewed an unpublished draft of the Ault and Luo paper during the 2025 assessment.

That review contributed to the revised mortality estimate. The Technical Committee also reported "significant concerns about the methods and assumptions" Ault and Luo used to produce their still-lower estimate. The memorandum distinguished its review of the unpublished draft from a committee review of the final publication, which had not yet occurred.

The record does not support treating Ault's lower estimate as a finding that managers must immediately insert into the assessment.

A University of Maryland professor identified serious flaws

During the podcast, Ault says he was given no substantive explanation for the objections to his work. Professor Michael Wilberg's comments to the Menhaden Board tell a different story.

Wilberg, a fisheries scientist at the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science and a co-author of the Liljestrand analysis, reviewed the published Ault and Luo paper and identified what he called "several fatal flaws." He reported that:

- The models failed standard diagnostics. After rerunning Ault and Luo's publicly available models, Wilberg found they did not meet standard tests used to determine whether Bayesian model results are statistically valid.

- The analysis ignored empirical tag-recovery data. Wilberg said Ault and Luo did not use the results of experiments in which nearly 100,000 tagged menhaden were introduced directly into reduction plants to measure how many tags were recovered.
- The paper mischaracterized menhaden longevity. Wilberg said the authors' description of fish regularly reaching ages 10 or 11 was misleading. He reported that no Atlantic menhaden had been aged nine or older since 1964, despite extensive sampling.

Wilberg said these concerns were similar to those identified by the Technical Committee and to comments he had previously provided to Ault and Luo, including in March 2025. He concluded that their paper should not be considered the best available science and recommended that managers continue using the 2025 assessment.

Friedrich's suggestions of collusion and industry protection do not answer those scientific objections.

The fishery deserve a factual debate

The ASMFC's current assessment finds that the coastwide Atlantic menhaden stock is not overfished and that overfishing is not occurring. Predator needs are already incorporated into management through ecological reference points. The Commission reduced the 2026 coastwide catch limit by 20%.

Near the end of the episode, Friedrich says that additional restrictions carry "no risk" because the result would simply be more fish. Ault speaks broadly about sustaining economies, jobs, and people, but neither addresses what further restrictions would mean for the men and women who harvest and process menhaden.

The Virginia NAACP, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and UFCW Local 400 have warned lawmakers and

regulators about the consequences for the predominantly minority, unionized workforce and the families and rural communities that depend on these jobs. The SCLC's letter to Maryland Governor Wes Moore calls attention to economic justice, wages, benefits, and the dignity of work. The Virginia NAACP has emphasized health insurance, retirement, family stability, and the scarcity of comparable replacement jobs.

UFCW Local 400 has urged lawmakers and the ASMFC to refrain from additional Chesapeake Bay menhaden restrictions until ongoing research establishes their necessity. Working people, the union says, must have a voice in decisions affecting their livelihoods, and conservation and workers' rights belong together.

A foreign ownership double standard

The American Saltwater Guides Association has criticized menhaden processor Omega Protein's Canadian ownership. In one attack on the company, ASGA emphasized that it was "a foreign company." Yet ASGA's podcast is sponsored by Costa Sunglasses , a brand of the foreign-owned EssilorLuxottica group, headquartered in Paris.

The distinction for American workers is what happened to their jobs. The menhaden fishery continues to support fishing and processing jobs in Virginia's Northern Neck, including union jobs held by African American workers and generations of local families. Costa, meanwhile, announced plans in 2019 to eliminate 295 of its 350 Daytona Beach jobs as it was integrated into Luxottica.

ASGA is willing to accept sponsorship from a foreign-owned company that announced the elimination of hundreds of American jobs while criticizing a fishery that supports union

and minority working families in a rural community with few comparable opportunities.

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About the American Small Pelagics Network

The American Small Pelagics Network represents fishermen, processors, suppliers, and coastal communities connected to fisheries such as menhaden, mackerel, herring, squid, and butterfish. ASPN advocates for sustainable fisheries management that supports critical fish species, while maintaining economic opportunities for fishermen and fishing communities.

PRESS CONTACT

ASGA's Attack on Menhaden Science Exposes Its Own Double Standard

Monday, 02 November 2026 01:10 PM

Topic: Environmental, Social and Governance

Saltwater guides question the credibility of industry-supported scientists while accepting environmental funding and overlooking conservation advocates' longstanding relationships with fisheries researchers.

WASHINGTON, D.C. / ACCESS Newswire / November 2, 2026 / The American Saltwater Guides Association (ASGA) set out to expose what it called "tainted influence" over scientific research used to manage Atlantic menhaden. Instead, its own investigation produced an admission that undermines its attack: "We found no evidence that industry money changed a result."

That finding matters more than ASGA's insinuations. ASGA reviewed 12 Atlantic menhaden and forage projects and papers it could tie to the Science Center for Marine Fisheries (SCEMFIS). By ASGA's own count, eight were not used in the assessments, three were cited, and one became a base-model input. The one direct input - a fecundity study - disclosed its SCEMFIS funding, went through the assessment and independent review process, and did not change whether the stock was classified as overfished.

In other words, ASGA went looking for evidence that industry funding had corrupted menhaden science and reported that it found none.

What ASGA's Own Review Found

SCEMFIS is a member of the National Science Foundation's Industry-University Cooperative Research Centers program, in which participating companies help select research priorities and provide funding. Its bylaws spell out the membership and voting structure. That relationship is not hidden, and neither was the funding of the fecundity research that ASGA singled out.

The Atlantic menhaden assessment and peer-review record identifies the SCEMFIS support. ASGA itself acknowledges that the independent review accepted the work and that the

change did not alter the stock status determination. Its article cites no manipulated finding, no suppressed result and no example in which an industry payment changed a scientific conclusion.

Disclosure is useful, but disclosure is not the same thing as evidence of scientific misconduct. And a standard based on who provided money has to be applied consistently.

ASGA's Own Funding and the Conservation-Research Connection

ASGA is itself funded by organizations with strong conservation policy agendas. The Natural Resources Defense Council's 2020 IRS filing reports a $30,000 grant to ASGA for "ENV. ADVOCACY." The Nature Conservancy's IRS filing reports a $65,000 grant to ASGA for "CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES."

ASGA also directly supports scientific research. A 2026 peer-reviewed study of postrelease survival in little tunny states that the work was "primarily supported by the American Saltwater Guides Association," alongside support from NOAA and other organizations. Advocacy organizations, industry groups, foundations and government agencies all fund research. The relevant questions are whether the funding is disclosed, whether the methods withstand scrutiny and whether the work survives scientific review.

That is exactly why ASGA's treatment of SCEMFIS is so selective. It treats commercial industry support as a reason to cast suspicion on scientists, while treating conservation funding and advocacy relationships as ordinary.

Ault, Chiles and a Standard That Should Work Both Ways

The same inconsistency appears in the broader conservation

research network surrounding Dr. Jerald Ault. A 2017 Marine Stewardship Council assessment identifies Ault and conservation advocate W. Benson Chiles as participants representing the Menhaden Conservation Project and describes the project as funded by the Sustainable Markets Foundation, a network of recreational fishers on the U.S. East Coast.

A separate 2022 peer-reviewed paper coauthored by Ault and Jiangang Luo acknowledged research support from the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, Chiles's Founding Fish Network, the Buchanan Family Foundation and other governmental, nonprofit and private funders for research on southern Florida coral reef fisheries.

While that was not the 2024 Atlantic menhaden mortality paper, the relationship is nevertheless relevant to ASGA's claimed principle. The ASMFC's November 2024 Methods Workshop summary on menhaden lists both Ault and Chiles among the public attendees while the Stock Assessment Subcommittee examined Ault's reanalysis of historical menhaden tagging data.

Ault and Luo's 2026 Atlantic menhaden paper declares no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work. And we make no suggestion that that conservation funding improperly influenced Ault's research.

But neither does commercial fishing industry support establish that SCEMFIS researchers compromised their scientific work. ASGA cannot reasonably demand that industry relationships be treated as a cloud over the science while treating comparable advocacy and funding relationships as irrelevant when they point in the opposite policy direction.

Respected Scientists, Necessary Research

The credibility of scientific research should be judged by its methods, evidence, transparency and independent review - not by whether its financial supporters are commercial fishermen or conservation advocates.

That standard protects everyone. Industry-supported research should be disclosed and scrutinized. So should research and advocacy relationships involving conservation groups. Funding is context; it is not a substitute for examining the science.

ASGA is free to argue for broader disclosure rules across the scientific community. What it cannot credibly do is use disclosed industry support to insinuate compromised science while ignoring the funding and organizational relationships on its own side of the policy debate. That is precisely the double standard ASGA's attack exposes.

ASGA's own investigation found no evidence that industry funding changed a scientific result. That should have been its headline.



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About the American Small Pelagics Network

The American Small Pelagics Network represents fishermen, processors, suppliers, and coastal communities connected to fisheries such as menhaden, mackerel, herring, squid, and butterfish. ASPN advocates for sustainable fisheries management that supports critical fish species, while maintaining economic opportunities for fishermen and fishing communities.

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Ten TRCP Videos, One Incomplete Picture of the Menhaden Fishery

Tuesday, 03 November 2026 04:25 PM

Topic: Environmental, Social and Governance

10-part series repeats false claims of overfishing, overlooks ASMFC scientific findings, existing ecosystem-based management, and the workers whose livelihoods depend on the fishery.

WASHINGTON, D.C. / ACCESS Newswire / November 3, 2026 / The Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership's 10-part video series gets an important point right: Atlantic menhaden matter.

They are an important food source for striped bass, bluefish, ospreys, whales, and other wildlife. They support charter fishing, recreational fishing, and coastal tourism. They provide bait for commercial crabbers, other watermen, and anglers. They are also the foundation of a fishing and processing industry that has supported Chesapeake Bay communities for generations.

The people who work in that industry understand the value of a healthy Bay. Their families' future depends on it.

But several people featured in the series go beyond describing the importance of menhaden. They assert that the fishery is overfishing the stock, taking more fish than the Chesapeake Bay can sustain, or causing ecological and economic damage. Others make sweeping claims about menhaden research, water quality, predator diets, and the value of the fish.

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's latest assessment found that Atlantic menhaden are not overfished and are not experiencing overfishing. The ASMFC manages the fishery using ecological reference points that account for predators' needs, with striped bass serving as the focal predator. For 2026, the commission reduced the coastwide catch limit by 20 percent. Its scientists projected a 0 percent probability of overfishing under that limit.

Here is what the speakers said-and what the evidence shows.

1. Gaelin Rosenwaks: "The biggest threat ... is obviously overfishing right now"

Rosenwaks is a marine scientist and underwater filmmaker based on Long Island.

Her statement that the biggest threat facing menhaden is "overfishing right now" conflicts directly with the ASMFC's assessment: overfishing is not occurring.

Rosenwaks also describes seeing fewer menhaden and whales near shore in recent years. Those sightings do not establish that the coastwide menhaden population is declining or that fishing caused a change in the number of whales visible from shore.

2. John Henry Wehner: The fishery is taking "more than the bay can handle"

Wehner works for Tidewater Charters on the Chesapeake Bay.

Wehner says the reduction fishery's quota is "way too high," that it is taking "more than the bay can handle," and that the fishery is "not sustainable."

The science says otherwise. Under the 2026 coastwide quota, the ASMFC projected a 0 percent probability of overfishing. The quota was established using ecological reference points that account for predators' needs. Wehner's assertion that the fishery is unsustainable is not supported by the ASMFC's coastwide stock assessment.

Wehner also says that without menhaden, striped bass "starve." Striped bass eat a variety of prey. A peer-reviewed paper summarizing Chesapeake Bay diet research reported that bay anchovy made up 22.2% of the diet by weight for striped bass 150-500 millimeters long in the Bay's main stem, compared with 8.7% for menhaden. The ASMFC also states that ending all menhaden fishing would not, by itself, rebuild striped bass to their biomass target. Sustainable striped bass fishing mortality

is essential to rebuilding the stock.

Wehner refers to the harvesting operation as "Omega." Omega Protein processes the fish; Ocean Harvesters operates the Atlantic harvesting vessels.

3. Will Poston: "We really have no menhaden science specific to the Chesapeake Bay"

Poston is a forage campaign manager for the Chesapeake Bay Foundation.

His assertion that there is essentially no Chesapeake-specific menhaden science is wrong. VIMS has conducted or participated in research on Chesapeake menhaden abundance, juvenile recruitment, feeding, reproduction, and the fishery's social and economic importance. NOAA also identifies published research on juvenile menhaden abundance in the Chesapeake Bay.

More research is already underway, and substantial additional research has been funded. The industry-funded Science Center for Marine Fisheries (SCEMFIS) has brought together scientists from VIMS, the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science, and NOAA to develop a research roadmap for a scientifically based Chesapeake Bay harvest cap. The project is laying the groundwork for additional research as Virginia has committed $2 million over two years and the federal government has provided $2.5 million for Bay-specific menhaden research, VIMS reports.

Poston says managers need a "drastic" catch reduction to leave enough menhaden for the ecosystem. The ASMFC's assessment found the stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring; its 2026 coastwide quota was projected to produce a

0 percent probability of overfishing.

The ASMFC already manages Atlantic menhaden coastwide using ecological reference points that account for predator needs. Striped bass is the focal predator used to set the reference points; osprey were included in the full ecosystem model that supports the management model.

The decision followed years of work involving the ASMFC, scientists, the menhaden industry, recreational fishing representatives, and conservation organizations. A 2015 ASMFC workshop brought those interests together to establish ecosystem-management objectives that guided the development of the reference points adopted five years later. The Chesapeake Bay Foundation also participated in the collaborative process.

The approach was welcomed when it was adopted in 2020. TRCP President Whit Fosburgh called it a "landmark decision," while the American Sportfishing Association praised quotas that account for predators as science-based management. Chesapeake Bay Foundation President William C. Baker called it "a historic day for fisheries management."

4. Steve Atkinson: Menhaden left in the water are worth twice as much

Atkinson represents the Virginia Saltwater Sportfishing Association.

Atkinson says economists have determined that menhaden left in the water are worth twice as much as menhaden harvested and processed. He does not identify the economists or study in the video.

The claim resembles a figure promoted in the 2012 Lenfest

report Little Fish, Big Impact. Lenfest's figure was a global estimate comparing the modeled value that forage fish provide to commercial predator fisheries with the direct catch value of forage fisheries worldwide. It was not a finding that an Atlantic menhaden left in the Chesapeake Bay is worth twice as much as one harvested by the Virginia fishery. Lenfest reported that its estimates varied substantially among ecosystems.

The report's assumptions and broad recommendations have since been challenged. In peer-reviewed research, University of Washington fisheries scientist Ray Hilborn and his coauthors argued that the effects of forage fishing on predators depend on the species and ecosystem and should be evaluated case by case.

Two members of the original Lenfest task force, Timothy Essington and Éva Plagányi, also published research examining limitations in ecosystem models, including whether those models represented predators in sufficient detail to evaluate their sensitivity to changes in forage fish.

Atkinson also cites approximately 112 million pounds that may be harvested under the Chesapeake Bay reduction cap. That is a rounded conversion of the 51,000-metric-ton cap. It is a maximum limit on Bay reduction harvest, not a statement that the fishery catches that amount in the Bay every year.

5. Steve Atkinson and Remy Montcrieffe: Osprey claims

Montcrieffe is identified with the National Audubon Society in Virginia.

Atkinson says osprey in the main stem of the Chesapeake Bay are "basically failing due to a lack of menhaden." Montcrieffe describes poor osprey reproduction and malnourished chicks,

while the video title asks whether the Bay's osprey population is collapsing.

The Mobjack Bay experiment involved researchers adding menhaden directly to osprey nests. The nests given extra fish were more successful than nests that did not receive the supplemental food. In other words, the experiment found that providing osprey families with additional food improved their nesting success. It did not measure the local menhaden population or demonstrate that the menhaden fishery caused the food stress.

A separate study of 571 nests found substantial differences between higher- and lower-salinity study areas. Together, these studies do not establish that restricting the menhaden fishery would solve the problems observed at particular nests. A reproductive problem in selected areas is not proof that the entire Chesapeake Bay osprey population has collapsed.

Montcrieffe's assertion that "every seabird" eats menhaden and that birds "just eat menhaden" is also far too broad. Bird diets differ by species, location, and season. Menhaden are important prey; they are not the only prey available to every seabird.

6. Paul Dixon and Nathan Richardson: Menhaden "clean" the water

Dixon operates To The Point Charters in Montauk, New York. Richardson is associated with Bailey's Bait and Tackle in Cape Charles, Virginia.

Both describe menhaden as cleaning the water. Menhaden feed by filtering plankton and other particles, but filtering food from the water is not the same as demonstrating a substantial net improvement in water quality.

A Virginia Institute of Marine Science study found that menhaden filter feeding had little net effect on overall Chesapeake Bay water quality after accounting for the nutrients they consume and release. The Bay study does not measure every Atlantic water body, but it challenges the claim that menhaden function as a large-scale Chesapeake Bay cleanup system.

7. Paul Dixon: The data showed the fishery was taking more than expected

Dixon says "the data was wrong" and that the fishery had been taking "a lot more than ... anticipated." He does not identify the data or explain which finding he means.

Dixon appears to be referring to a revision of the estimate of natural mortality-the number of menhaden that die from causes other than fishing. The ASMFC's Technical Committee considered Dr. Jerald Ault's work, along with other analyses, when it revised that estimate for the 2025 assessment. The committee also identified concerns about the methods and assumptions behind Ault's substantially lower estimate, which it did not adopt. The committee's October 2026 memorandum describes those concerns. The revision did not mean that fishermen had been catching more menhaden than they reported.

Dixon also says historical fisheries repeatedly netted menhaden "until there were no more." The video provides no evidence that the coastwide population disappeared on the occasions he describes.

8. Chris Moore and Nathan Richardson: Claims of a Bay-wide decline

Moore is the Chesapeake Bay Foundation's Virginia executive director.

Moore says people are seeing fewer schools and anticipates that a reduced menhaden population in the Bay is driving ecological and economic consequences. Richardson says there is a "very, very low amount of menhaden in the bay." Neither establishes a Bay-wide adult abundance estimate or demonstrates that the reduction fishery caused a shortage.

The ASMFC reports that coastwide menhaden bait landings averaged approximately 50,000 metric tons after the quota was introduced, compared with about 44,600 metric tons in 2005-2012. The commission also documented lower pound-net catch rates in Maryland, Virginia, and the Potomac River in 2023 and 2024. Those data do not establish that the reduction fishery caused the decline or that cutting it would restore local bait catches.

Maryland's juvenile survey provides another part of the picture: its menhaden index was strong in each year from 2023 through 2026.

9. Joanna Steidle and Gaelin Rosenwaks: Sightings are not a stock assessment

Steidle is a drone photographer and videographer based on eastern Long Island.

Steidle says she saw menhaden on 76 days in 2023 and 24 days in 2025. Rosenwaks also says she has seen fewer menhaden near shore.

Neither count is a scientific estimate of the Atlantic menhaden population. The videos do not establish that observation locations, time spent looking, weather, water conditions, or the

distribution of schools were comparable from year to year. A change in what someone sees from shore or from a drone does not establish a coastwide population decline or show that fishing caused it.

10. Kate Wilke: Local availability and the size of the fishery

Wilke is a fisheries scientist with The Nature Conservancy in Virginia.

Wilke recognizes that the ASMFC uses ecological reference points to manage menhaden and says she thinks the management is good. Those reference points already account for the needs of predators, including striped bass. She also says fish need to be available where and when predators need them, and that population trends should be tracked over time.

Wilke describes menhaden as the target of one of the nation's largest fisheries. NOAA confirms that Atlantic menhaden have the largest commercial landings by weight on the Atlantic Coast. The size of a catch must be evaluated against the size and productivity of the population and the science-based limits used to manage it. The ASMFC's assessment found the stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring.

The people missing from the picture

The series describes the people whose livelihoods depend on recreational fishing, bait sales, photography, and tourism. The menhaden fishermen and processing families whose livelihoods also depend on the Bay deserve the same consideration.

The menhaden fishery has supported generations of families in Virginia's Northern Neck, including a predominantly minority workforce and union fishermen whose jobs provide wages,

health insurance, and retirement benefits.

The Virginia NAACP, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and UFCW Local 400 have warned about the consequences further restrictions could have for workers and their families. The Virginia NAACP has emphasized health insurance, retirement, family stability, and the scarcity of comparable jobs. The SCLC has raised issues of economic justice and the dignity of work.

UFCW Local 400, which represents menhaden fishermen, has urged lawmakers and the ASMFC to refrain from additional Bay restrictions until ongoing research establishes their necessity. The union says conservation and workers' rights belong together and that working people must have a voice in decisions affecting their livelihoods.

The ASMFC has already incorporated predator needs into menhaden management, and additional Bay-specific research has begun or been funded. Decisions should be based on what that work establishes, not on unsupported declarations that the fishery is overfishing the stock or has caused every change someone observes on the water.



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SOURCE: American Small Pelagics Network

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Chesapeake Bay Foundation Continues Spreading False Claims in Latest Attack on Atlantic Menhaden Fishery

Tuesday, 05 May 2026 08:40 PM

Topic: Environmental, Social and Governance

WASHINGTON, DC / ACCESS Newswire / May 5, 2026 / Just

over a month ago, Will Poston of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation once again published false and misleading claims about Virginia's menhaden fishery. Just as CBF did in a March email falsely connecting natural fish die-offs to the menhaden fishery, Poston presents advocacy as science, speculation as fact, and political talking points as settled biology.

Poston's piece is built around a series of assertions that cannot stand up to the actual record.



Start with his effort to portray Virginia's 2026 legislative session as proof that industry influence defeated "meaningful conservation measures." What lawmakers rejected were proposals that would have imposed sweeping new restrictions without first establishing any biological basis for them. Atlantic menhaden are not unmanaged, and they are not being harvested in some regulatory vacuum. The Atlantic States

Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) manages this stock under ecological reference points specifically designed to account for the species' forage role, and the Commission continues to report the stock is not overfished and that overfishing is not occurring. The fishery is also certified as sustainable by the Marine Stewardship Council, the international gold standard for seafood sustainability.

Then there is Poston's claim that "new coastwide science found the population of menhaden is nearly 40 percent smaller than previously estimated." This is one of the most misleading lines in the entire article. It invites readers to think scientists discovered a dramatic new collapse in the stock. This is not the case. The ASMFC responded directly to this talking point and explained that the difference between the earlier and later estimates is "primarily due to a change in the estimate of natural mortality." Importantly, the ASMFC stated, "the 2025 update indicates total biomass has actually slightly increased since 2021. The lower estimate of biomass from the current assessment compared to the previous assessment is a result of a change in our understanding of the stock rather than a change in the stock itself." Poston is taking a technical model revision and selling it to the public as a conservation crisis.

Poston also points to osprey chick mortality and implies that menhaden harvest is to blame. That claim goes well beyond what the underlying science supports. As the U.S. Geological Survey has stated, many factors affect osprey productivity, including contaminants, disease, predation risk, parental condition, brood size, and weather conditions, as well as prey abundance and access to prey. Current research has not explored all the possible causes of osprey issues in the Bay. It is one thing to say more research is warranted. It is another to

repeatedly tell the public that the case is already closed when it is not.

A similar problem appears in Poston's claim that bait fishermen have seen catches decline and that this somehow proves the Bay is being emptied of menhaden by the reduction fleet. That is an anecdote dressed up as population science. Catch levels in local bait fisheries can reflect a range of factors, including effort, participation, market conditions, gear, weather, and location. Poston presents this as if it were hard evidence, when science continues to point to a healthy stock.

Poston's charge that scientific research "has repeatedly been delayed by Omega Protein and their Richmond lobbying firm" is also false. There is a legitimate policy debate over what kind of Chesapeake-specific research should be done, how quickly, by whom, and for what management purpose. But that is very different from claiming the industry has simply blocked science. In fact, the industry has supported a Science Center for Marine Fisheries (SCEMFIS) project to produce a research roadmap for menhaden in the Bay as a long-overdue opportunity to ground Bay management in sound science. SCEMFIS, a member of the National Science Foundation's Industry-University Cooperative Research Program, brings scientists and industry together to fund and conduct applied marine fisheries research.

Last Fall, SCEMFIS funded a team of Atlantic menhaden researchers from the Batten School of Coastal and Marine Sciences & VIMS at William & Mary, the Chesapeake Biological Laboratory at UMCES, and NOAA to identify the research needed to support a scientifically defensible Chesapeake Bay harvest cap. Since then, the team has worked collaboratively online, met in person in February in Solomons Island, Maryland,

and presented its progress at the SCEMFIS spring meeting in Nashville. The current focus is on advancing a PIT-tagging pilot study, including controlled holding studies at VIMS and field-planning work starting May 12 with Ocean Harvesters to determine how tagged fish could be detected and recovered during commercial fishing and processing operations.

Poston wants readers to believe that one side supports research and the other side fears it, but that caricature is not an accurate description of the actual debate. One side is helping science progress, while the other side is raising money via fear-mongering.

A broader look at the data only further undermines Poston's narrative. The ASMFC's 2025 Atlantic menhaden assessment update shows that recent coastwide age-1+ biomass remains roughly twice the depressed levels seen in the early 1970s, even after the revised natural-mortality assumption in the 2025 model. At the same time, the ASMFC says coastwide reduction landings today are only about one-third to one-half of what they were in the 1970s and 1980s, and the Chesapeake Bay reduction fishery is already tightly constrained by a 51,000-metric-ton Bay cap that is far below historic Bay harvest levels.

And Maryland's own survey work continues to show strong juvenile menhaden presence in the Bay: Maryland DNR reported that menhaden abundance in 2024 was nearly equal to the previous year, "which was the highest measured since 1990," and in October 2025 stated that "Atlantic menhaden and bay anchovies were widespread in the Bay for the third consecutive year."

The truth is much simpler than Poston would like readers to

believe. Atlantic menhaden are managed under one of the most ecosystem-conscious fisheries frameworks on the Atlantic coast. The ASMFC says the stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. The ASMFC says the latest update shows total biomass has actually slightly increased since 2021. And the ASMFC says the lower biomass estimate relative to the earlier model reflects "a change in our understanding of the stock rather than a change in the stock itself." Poston's effort to turn that into proof of collapse is not honest science communication. It is advocacy masquerading as analysis.

About the Menhaden Fisheries Coalition

The Menhaden Fisheries Coalition (MFC) is a collective of menhaden fishermen, related businesses, and supporting industries. Comprised of businesses along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, the Menhaden Fisheries Coalition conducts media and public outreach on behalf of the menhaden industry to ensure that members of the public, media, and government are informed of important issues, events, and facts about the fishery.

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SOURCE: Menhaden Fisheries Coalition

Forage Fish Campaign Demands Immediate Action on "New" Science Reviewed Two Years Ago

Monday, 02 November 2026 06:35 PM

Topic: Environmental, Social and Governance

The ASMFC examined the research in 2024 and incorporated a revised natural mortality estimate into its 2025 stock

assessment

WASHINGTON, D.C. / ACCESS Newswire / November 2, 2026 / When University of Miami scientists Jerald Ault and Jiangang Luo published *Investigation of Atlantic Menhaden Mortality Rates* in the peer-reviewed journal Fisheries Research in September 2026, the Forage Fish Campaign presented it as "new research" requiring immediate action by fisheries managers.

But what was new was the journal publication - not the underlying scientific work.

Ault had presented the analysis to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Stock Assessment Subcommittee on September 25, 2024. The Commission's scientists subsequently examined the competing natural mortality analyses, revised the mortality assumption used in the 2025 stock assessment, and subjected that assessment to independent peer review.



Dr. Ault makes a point to the Atlantic Menhaden Stock Assessment Subcommittee (SAS) and Ecological Reference Point Workgroup (ERP) during his presentation on November 4, 2024

The Forage Fish Campaign's October 23 article acknowledges that scientists revised the natural mortality estimate in 2025. But it presents the 2025 revision and the 2026 Ault-Luo publication as separate developments - first a correction by the ASMFC, then "new" research identifying additional problems. What it does not explain is that Ault and Luo's underlying analysis had already been reviewed as part of the 2025 assessment and had raised significant methodological concerns among the ASMFC's technical advisers.

What the ASMFC Actually Did

Ault presented the paper to the Stock Assessment Subcommittee on September 25, 2024. The analysis was publicly posted as a preprint the following month. Dr. Ault appeared again at the Methods Workshop for Atlantic Menhaden Single-Species and Ecological Reference Point (ERP) Stock Assessments in November 2024. The Workshop Summary documents a detailed review of Ault's reanalysis of historical menhaden tagging data and its comparison with earlier research by Liljestrand and colleagues.

Scientists examined differences in datasets, fishing effort information, tag recovery efficiency, and modeling assumptions, and assigned specific tasks to investigate the competing estimates and determine which natural mortality assumption should be used in the assessment.

That review continued into 2025. As the ASMFC subsequently explained, the subcommittee consulted researchers involved in both analyses, corrected an error identified during the review, and developed a revised natural mortality estimate.

The subcommittee adopted a revised natural mortality rate of approximately 0.92, down from the 1.17 used in the previous assessment, but did not adopt Ault and Luo's substantially lower estimate of approximately 0.50. The revised natural mortality rate was incorporated into the 2025 assessment and underwent independent scientific peer review.



Dr. Ault presents his research to the Atlantic Menhaden Stock Assessment Subcommittee (SAS) and Ecological Reference Point Workgroup (ERP) on November 4, 2024

Because natural mortality affects the estimated scale of the stock, the lower rate produced substantially lower estimates of historical menhaden biomass. The ASMFC has emphasized that the approximately 37% difference between the 2022 and 2025 assessment estimates was not an actual population decline. Rather, it reflected a change in how the model estimated the size of the stock; the 2025 assessment estimated that total menhaden biomass had actually increased slightly since 2021.

In an October 21, 2026 memorandum to the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board, the Atlantic Menhaden Technical Committee stated: "**The TC and the SEDAR 102 Review Panel reviewed an unpublished draft of that paper as part of the**

2025 assessment." The committee said that review contributed to the revised natural mortality estimate used in the 2025 update. It also said the TC had "**significant concerns about the methods and assumptions**" Ault and Luo used to produce their still-lower estimate.

Professor Michael Wilberg of the Chesapeake Biological Laboratory at the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science, a co-author of the Liljestrand analysis, subsequently described concerns in comments to the Board. Wilberg said the models used by Ault and Luo do not produce statistically valid estimates; that they ignore empirical tag-recovery-efficiency data from experiments in which tagged menhaden were introduced directly into reduction plants and researchers measured whether the tags were recovered; and that they mischaracterize the scientific literature on the maximum age of Atlantic menhaden. He concluded that the paper contained what he called "several fatal flaws" and that "the information in that paper should not be considered best available science."

Wilberg recommended that the 2025 stock assessment continue to be used as the best available science and said he and his co-authors intend to submit a formal rebuttal to the Ault and Luo paper.

A New Publication Is Not the Same as New Research

If Fosburgh and the Forage Fish Campaign believe the final publication contains new evidence that warrants another change to the stock assessment, they should identify what that evidence is, why the earlier review was insufficient, and how the published paper addresses the methodological objections already raised. Instead, they repeatedly describe the work as "new science" requiring immediate incorporation.

This scientific dispute is not merely academic when demands for additional fishing restrictions affect the livelihoods of hundreds of working families. UFCW Local 400 has urged lawmakers and the ASMFC to refrain from imposing further Chesapeake Bay restrictions until ongoing research establishes their necessity, while the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the NAACP have also raised concerns about the impact additional restrictions could have on the predominantly African American workforce and their families.

The journal publication was new. The underlying analysis was not.

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About the American Small Pelagics Network

The American Small Pelagics Network represents fishermen, processors, suppliers, and coastal communities connected to fisheries such as menhaden, mackerel, herring, squid, and butterfish. ASPN advocates for sustainable fisheries management that supports critical fish species, while

Forage Fish Campaign Misrepresents NOAA Scientist's Research

Tuesday, 03 November 2026 04:00 PM

Topic: Environmental, Social and Governance

Dr. Jason Link's ecosystem overfishing study did not establish that menhaden reduction fishing or midwater trawling caused the problems alleged by the campaign

WASHINGTON, D.C. / ACCESS Newswire / November 3, 2026 /
In an October 26 article, Forage Fish Campaign executive director Whit Fosburgh cites NOAA scientist Dr. Jason Link's 2021 study, Evidence of Ecosystem Overfishing in U.S. Large Marine Ecosystems, to support accusations against the menhaden reduction fishery and the Atlantic herring and mackerel fisheries.



Fosburgh accurately reports Dr. Link's central findings: the study identifies strong evidence of ecosystem overfishing in the Northeast U.S. Continental Shelf and evidence suggesting the Gulf of Mexico has also experienced ecosystem overfishing. But he then draws conclusions about particular fisheries that Dr. Link's research does not establish. Dr. Link, p. 3192

Pointing to two charts of historical commercial landings showing that menhaden account for a substantial share of landings in both regions, Fosburgh declares, "So, it is no wonder that ecosystem overfishing is occurring."

That is Fosburgh's conclusion, not Dr. Link's. Dr. Link examined aggregate fishing pressure across entire marine ecosystems. His charts show historical commercial landings by species, not which fisheries caused ecosystem overfishing. Large landings do not, by themselves, establish that a particular fishery is responsible for ecological damage. Dr. Link, Figure 10, p. 3190 and Figure 11, p. 3191

In fact, Dr. Link's discussion on page 3192 describes decades of fishing pressure in the Northeast primarily on cod and other groundfish, flatfish and other demersal species, followed by shifts in targeted fisheries. That history is more complicated than Fosburgh's implication that the volume of menhaden landings explains the region's ecosystem overfishing.

Dr. Link also identifies a qualification Fosburgh omits. On page 3194, he explains that because menhaden and other lower-trophic-level species are harvested, the ecosystem's total catch potential, and thus its overfishing thresholds, could be somewhat higher than standard thresholds suggest. Dr. Link maintains that other indicators still show excessive overall fishing pressure, but expressly recognizes that catch composition matters when interpreting the results.

Fosburgh further claims that the midwater trawl industry "has collapsed herring and mackerel populations." Dr. Link's paper does not analyze midwater trawling as a fishing method, investigate the causes of those stocks' declines, or attribute responsibility to that industry.

Nor does Dr. Link prescribe the fishery-specific restrictions Fosburgh advocates. On page 3196, he recommends monitoring ecosystem indicators and considering ways to reduce overall fishing pressure where ecosystem overfishing is strongly indicated. But he declines to recommend particular restrictions,

explaining that management must account for regional circumstances and fisheries governance.

The distinction is fundamental. Evidence of ecosystem-wide overfishing does not establish that any one fishery caused it. Dr. Link's research provides a framework for assessing cumulative fishing pressure; it does not show that menhaden reduction fishing caused ecosystem overfishing, that midwater trawling collapsed herring and mackerel populations, or that eliminating those fisheries would remedy the ecosystem-wide problems identified.

Fosburgh is advocating restrictions on particular fisheries while citing a study that does not establish the scientific basis for singling them out. Those are his policy conclusions, not findings of Dr. Link's research.

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Figure 10, Northeast U.S. historical commercial landings (p. 3190).

Figure 11, Gulf of Mexico historical commercial landings (p. 3191).

Northeast fishing-pressure history and Gulf findings (p. 3192).

Lower-trophic-level catch and ecosystem threshold qualification (p. 3194).

"Considerations if EOF is detected": management recommendations (p. 3196).

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SOURCE: American Small Pelagics Network

WASHINGTON, D.C. / ACCESS Newswire / March 6, 2026 / The Menhaden Fisheries Coalition strongly criticizes the Chesapeake Bay Foundation's Will Poston for exploiting the recent fish wash-up from Cape Henry, Virginia to Nags Head, North Carolina to promote yet another misleading attack on Virginia's menhaden fishery.

The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) is using this natural event to make false accusations and continue the campaign of anti-menhaden misinformation it has employed in numerous fundraising appeals, both online and in direct mail. It is another shameless attempt by CBF to make villains of the menhaden fishery, while failing to put the same focus on current environmental disasters, such as the vast amounts of raw sewage flowing into the Bay from the Potomac River. CBF's effort to use this beach wash-up to smear the menhaden fishery fits a broader pattern: blame menhaden harvest first, oversimplify the science second, and ignore every other environmental stressor that is harder to politicize.

Mr. Poston falsely stated that efforts to fund research to better understand the Chesapeake Bay menhaden population have "been needlessly delayed by Omega Protein and their McGuireWoods lobbyists in Richmond." There is no truth to that statement. Neither Omega Protein, nor Ocean Harvesters, nor McGuireWoods are standing in the way of any funding of a Bay survey.



The industry supports science. Over the past two decades, Ocean Harvesters and Omega Protein have supported at least 15 scientific studies and have regularly provided detailed landings and operational data to NOAA and ASMFC scientists. The industry is currently working collaboratively with researchers day in and day out on menhaden tagging and other studies.

Through the Science Center for Marine Fisheries (SCEMFIS), a National Science Foundation (NSF) Industry-University Cooperative Research Center (IUCRC) that includes the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, the Marine Stewardship Council, and researchers from NASA, the industry has funded a project designed to identify the research needed to finally develop a scientifically defensible and ecologically meaningful Chesapeake Bay harvest cap for Atlantic menhaden. Led by scientists from the Chesapeake Biological Laboratory, the

Virginia Institute of Marine Science, and NOAA, it will review existing menhaden science, identify key data gaps, and recommend specific study designs, analytical methods, timelines, and costs for future Bay-focused research, including tools such as tagging, hydroacoustics, spatial modeling, and analysis of existing datasets like landings and spotter pilot reports.

When CBF says research has been "needlessly delayed" by the industry, it is distorting the record. The real issue has been making sure research is done with credible methods and defensible study design, not blocking research.

The fish die-offs are unfortunate. But as reported by WTKR News 3, Virginia Marine Resources Commission public information officer Zach Widgeon stated this was "not a result of a fishing spill or a net bust." It was a natural cold-weather occurrence tied to a sudden temperature drop offshore.

The current die-off is not evidence of a collapsing forage base. It is evidence that menhaden remain abundant in Bay waters. As Mr. Widgeon noted, "There are so many menhaden out on the East Coast that you're going to see them affected and washing up more than any other species." CBF's statements continually ignore this most basic scientific reality: Atlantic menhaden are not overfished and overfishing is not occurring, according to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's current benchmark assessment. ASMFC's management framework explicitly uses ecological reference points designed to account for menhaden's role as forage for predator species.

CBF also ignores recent state survey data. In October 2025, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources reported that Atlantic menhaden were widespread in the Chesapeake Bay for the third consecutive year.

These attacks are aimed at real people in a real working community. The Reedville-centered menhaden industry provides the kinds of jobs that rural Virginia cannot easily replace. A Virginia Marine Resources Commission economic assessment found that the direct effects of the operation are heavily concentrated in Northumberland County, with 217 of 299 employees residing there, including 55 in Reedville. The report also describes the jobs as stable employment with benefits and union representation, and notes that most direct impacts occur in Northumberland County.

CBF is not just criticizing a fishery. It is attacking one of the most economically important sources of unionized working-class employment in Virginia's Northern Neck, while presenting itself as the sole voice of the public interest. It is easy to issue inflammatory press releases, it's much harder to create well-paying jobs with full benefits.

Anyone who wants to understand what is really at stake should hear directly from the union fishermen themselves. Readers should visit the UFCW Local 400 website and watch this video featuring the union fishermen describing their jobs in their own words.

About the Menhaden Fisheries Coalition

The Menhaden Fisheries Coalition (MFC) is a collective of menhaden fishermen, related businesses, and supporting industries. Comprised of businesses along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, the Menhaden Fisheries Coalition conducts media and public outreach on behalf of the menhaden industry to ensure that members of the public, media, and government are informed of important issues, events, and facts about the fishery.

Press Contact

Menhaden "Miss the Target" Soundbite Leaves Out the Full Story

Monday, 02 November 2026 10:45 AM

Topic: Environmental, Social and Governance

Projections show no chance of overfishing menhaden, but recreational advocates apply a different standard to overfished striped bass

WASHINGTON, DC / ACCESS Newswire / November 2, 2026 /
The latest misleading soundbite from what is obviously a coordinated, multi-organization effort involving the Forage Fish Campaign is that the menhaden quota set last year had no chance of "meeting the ecosystem target."



Throughout October, the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership (TRCP), the American Saltwater Guides Association, and the Forage Fish Campaign have promoted versions of this message.

TRCP describes a "100% probability of exceeding the ecosystem-based fishing mortality target." The Forage Fish Campaign says in a dramatic Instagram post that the quota had a "0% chance of meeting the ecosystem target." Campaign executive director Whit Fosburgh makes the same argument in his October 26 post.

The Instagram video features Mike Waine of the American Sportfishing Association (ASA), who says that passing the

motion would mean the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (ASMFC) Menhaden Management Board had "essentially abandoned ecosystem-based fisheries management." It then pans across commissioners voting for the motion, shows it passing 12-6, and says the governors of nine states were responsible for "protecting industrial fishing." It closes: "Warned, ignored, again."

What the soundbite leaves out is the other finding in the same projections: a 0% projected probability of overfishing in 2026 under the adopted quota. The ASMFC's projection table puts both results side by side. And Atlantic menhaden's ecological reference points already account for predator needs. Striped bass is the focal predator, but the ASMFC also included osprey in the full ecosystem model.

In everyday English, missing a target sounds like failure. In fisheries management, the fishing mortality target is a conservative objective below the overfishing threshold. Fishing can safely exceed the target while remaining below that threshold. Exceeding the more conservative target does not establish overfishing or ecological damage, nor does it require corrective management action. The ASMFC explains the distinction.

Striped bass is currently being managed in an analogous manner. The 2024 striped bass assessment estimated fishing mortality in 2023 at 0.18-above its target of 0.17, but below its overfishing threshold of 0.21. This is the same as the latest menhaden assessment. In both species fishing mortality is above the target and below the threshold. Although the two species use different reference point systems, both demonstrate that exceeding the target does not mean overfishing is occurring.

However, the difference between menhaden and striped bass is the condition of the populations. Menhaden is not overfished, and overfishing is not occurring. Striped bass fishing mortality was at or above the overfishing threshold in 13 of the 15 years from 2003-2017, and the population remains overfished and under a rebuilding program. Overfishing of striped bass was not ended until 2023. The striped bass assessment and the menhaden assessment thus show the same relationship to their respective targets and thresholds, but very different histories and population conditions.

The latest assessment's historical estimates show that overfishing of Atlantic menhaden did not occur from 2008 through 2023, the last year assessed. (A 2012 assessment mistakenly calculated that menhaden was experiencing overfishing, but the ASMFC's 2015 benchmark assessment corrected that finding.) Equally, if not more, important, the Menhaden Technical Committee's projections show that the menhaden stock is above its target abundance level and will stay at that high level even at current harvest levels.

Yet last year, the Striped Bass Board rejected a proposed 12% reduction in removals. The ASMFC's projections indicated the reduction would increase the probability of rebuilding striped bass by 2029 from 30% to 50%. The Board cited economic consequences, low fishing mortality in 2024 and preliminary indications of lower catch in 2025. The Menhaden Board, meanwhile, reduced the quota for a fishery that was not experiencing overfishing by 20%.

ASA praised the striped bass decision, with Waine saying it avoided "significant economic harm" from proposed closures. The association pointed to lower striped bass fishing mortality and criticized the menhaden reduction as inadequate. Yet

striped bass remained overfished, and the rejected reduction was intended to improve its chance of rebuilding. ASA said the Board voted to maintain status quo measures until the next benchmark assessment, expected in 2027. Menhaden crews, plant workers, union families and the communities that depend on them deserve the same consideration.

Now TRCP is demanding another 39% cut to the menhaden quota. Yet the Striped Bass Board's work group's recommendation memo for its November meeting contains no proposed reduction comparable to the 12% cut it rejected last year.

Where is TRCP's outrage? Why isn't it demanding that the Striped Bass Board reconsider that reduction? If rebuilding striped bass is urgent enough to demand deeper cuts to a menhaden fishery that is not overfished, why isn't TRCP applying the same pressure to the fishery that directly catches striped bass?

The ASMFC itself says that ending all menhaden fishing would not, by itself, rebuild striped bass. Repeating an alarming statistic about the menhaden target does not change that finding-or justify applying different standards to the two fisheries.

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About the American Small Pelagics Network

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SOURCE: American Small Pelagics Network

Recreational Fishing Groups Must Stop Blaming Menhaden Fishing for Striped Bass Problems

Wednesday, 21 October 2026 07:00 PM

Topic: Environmental, Social and Governance

Petition for emergency federal fishing ban ignores scientific findings, abundant juvenile menhaden and recreational

fishing mortality

WASHINGTON, D.C. / ACCESS Newswire / October 21, 2026 / Eight fishing organizations and businesses have filed a petition with U.S. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick seeking an immediate emergency prohibition on menhaden reduction fishing in the New York-New Jersey Bight and a permanent seasonal closure from May 1 through December 31 each year.

The Forage Fish Campaign published the petition and an accompanying October 21 press release on its website, with the campaign's spokesperson named as the media contact. The petition, submitted by Roger Fleming of Blue Planet Strategies, seeks sweeping restrictions on an American commercial fishery without demonstrating that reduction fishing caused the problems alleged or that the proposed closure would remedy them.

The petition's claim of an imminent October fishing emergency relies partly on reports from organizations opposed to the reduction fishery. On petition page 26, the authors allege increased fleet activity indicating preparations to return to Bight waters. The supporting footnotes cite Facebook posts attributed to Chesapeake Bay Defenders, most linked posts inaccessible to the public, and personal communications with Menhaden Defenders. The petition supplies no verified October landings or documented fishing plans establishing the predicted surge in harvest.

Ben Landry, spokesperson for Ocean Harvesters, said: "We have only fished above Atlantic City one day during the 2026 fishing season." On that occasion, reduction vessels traveled as far as Ambrose Channel while remaining in federal waters. Spotter aircraft routinely survey fish migrations; their presence is not proof that harvesting has occurred or is imminent. The fleet has

not found fishable concentrations north of Atlantic City.

Fluctuations in local menhaden availability are a recognized feature of the fishery. The ASMFC recognizes this reality and defines episodic events as times and places where Atlantic menhaden are more abundant than usual and has established a management program to accommodate such occurrences, including in New York waters. Variations in where menhaden appear do not establish that fishing caused a reported local shortage.

The petitioners seek emergency action under circumstances that do not demonstrate an imminent conservation crisis. NOAA Fisheries' Policy Guidelines for the Use of Emergency Rules require recent, unforeseen events or newly discovered circumstances, a serious conservation or management problem, and immediate benefits sufficient to outweigh the normal public rulemaking process. NOAA's own explanation of those criteria and the underlying Federal Register guidance (62 FR 44421-44422) make clear that an emergency finding requires an evidentiary record. Their supposed October emergency rests on conjecture about fishing that has not been documented, not evidence of the immediate harm asserted. The emergency they describe appears to exist only in the petitioners' minds.

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (the ASMFC) has determined that Atlantic menhaden are not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. Since 2020, menhaden harvest has been managed using ecological reference points that account for the forage needs of predators, particularly striped bass. Ospreys are also included in the supporting ecosystem model.

The ASMFC's conclusion directly contradicts the petition's central premise: Even ending all menhaden fishing would not,

by itself, rebuild striped bass to their biomass target. The agency identifies sustainable recreational and commercial striped bass fishing mortality as essential to rebuilding.

Nor does the evidence support claims that Atlantic menhaden are disappearing. Figure 12 of the ASMFC's 2025 stock assessment shows that estimated coastwide menhaden biomass in 2023 was roughly twice what it was 50 years ago.

The latest Maryland survey provides further evidence. The Maryland Department of Natural Resources' October 19, 2026 juvenile striped bass survey documented another year of abundant juvenile Atlantic menhaden. Analysis of the agency's historical data shows that 2023-2026 produced the strongest four-year average of juvenile menhaden abundance since 1988-1991, even as striped bass spawning success remained below average for the eighth consecutive year.

Meanwhile, recreational fishermen continue to account for most striped bass fishing mortality. According to the ASMFC's latest figures, recreational fishing accounted for approximately 82% of all striped bass removals in 2025. The ASMFC describes recreational striped bass fishing as predominantly catch-and-release and states: "In 2025, recreational anglers released alive an estimated 11.6 million fish, of which 1.0 million are assumed to have died."

Recreational fishing groups and the recreational fishing industry need to stop blaming the menhaden fishery for striped bass problems that years of excessive fishing mortality helped create. Striped bass remain overfished, and recreational fishing continues to account for most removals. Yet in October 2025, the ASMFC declined to adopt a proposed 12% reduction in commercial and recreational striped bass removals. The Board cited sharply divided public comments and other management

considerations. Recreational fishing interests demanding new restrictions on menhaden should explain why they have opposed reducing mortality in the still-overfished striped bass fishery.

American fishermen, union workers, processing employees and coastal communities depend on the menhaden fishery. Their livelihoods should not be jeopardized by unsupported allegations and speculative promises of ecological benefits.

The petitioners need to address the documented mortality in their own fishery before demanding new restrictions on another.

The petition was filed on behalf of the Jersey Coast Anglers Association, Hudson River Fishermen's Association, Hi-Mar Striped Bass Club, Tackle Box Fishing Company, Karen Ann Charters, My Joyce Fishing Charters, Captain Ron's Fishermen and Moran's Dockside.



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Respected Recreational Fishing Advocate Finds Menhaden Petition "Legally and Factually Faulty"

Tuesday, 03 November 2026 01:45 PM

Topic: Environmental, Social and Governance

WASHINGTON, D.C. / ACCESS Newswire / November 3, 2026 /
Respected recreational fishing writer and longtime

conservation advocate Charles Witek has delivered a detailed rejection of the petition seeking emergency restrictions on menhaden reduction fishing in the New York-New Jersey Bight.



In an October 25 post on his blog, One Angler's Voyage, Witek finds that the petition promoted by the Forage Fish Campaign mischaracterizes the science it cites, fails to establish an emergency and offers no evidence that its selective closure would accomplish its stated ecological goals. He also observes that the petition's own economic figures support protecting Reedville, Virginia-a coastal fishing community whose workers and families could be affected by the proposed restrictions.

Witek describes the petition's arguments as "legally and factually faulty." His critique carries particular weight coming from a recreational fishing advocate whose writing emphasizes strong conservation laws and effective fisheries management.

The petition was submitted on behalf of the listed fishing organizations and businesses by Roger Fleming, director and

attorney at Blue Planet Strategies. Witek also questions where it originated. He notes that the Forage Fish Campaign posted links to the petition but is not listed among the petitioners. Witek says it is unclear whether the petitioners developed it independently or were recruited by the campaign or another entity. He considers the latter more likely, but says it cannot be determined with certainty.

The scientific sources do not say what the petition claims

Witek's most damaging finding comes from examining the documents in the petition's own footnotes.

The petition claims that the most recent stock assessment concluded that, to rebuild striped bass, "significant reductions in the catch of menhaden are required so more are left in the water as food for striped bass growth, survival, and reproduction."

Witek points out that the assessment does not say that. Instead, it found that, at the striped bass fishing mortality rate used in the model, striped bass did not reach their biomass target under any of the menhaden fishing scenarios examined.

The assessment also found that, even if striped bass were fished at their own mortality target, rebuilding depended on future recruitment. If recruitment remained at the very low levels observed since 2019, striped bass did not reach their biomass target even with abundant menhaden.

Witek further notes that the model projected a 6% increase in striped bass biomass if menhaden fishing ended entirely coastwide. In his view, that finding provides no basis for claiming that closing the reduction fishery in the New York-New Jersey Bight would rebuild the striped bass population.

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, or the ASMFC, confirms the central point in its menhaden FAQ: Ending all menhaden fishing would not, by itself, rebuild striped bass to their biomass target.

Predator needs are already incorporated into menhaden management through ecological reference points. The petition's references to ecosystem science do not establish that closing the reduction fishery in the Bight would rebuild striped bass.

Witek also examines the petition's claim that "NOAA and ASMFC ecosystem science concluded that more menhaden must be left in the water as bait to help striped bass grow, survive, and achieve healthy population levels." The petition cites an October 2025 ASMFC press release as support. But Witek points out that the release says no such thing. Instead, it explains that the ecological reference points are designed to account for striped bass forage needs while managing menhaden fishing.

For Witek, the petition's mischaracterization of both the assessment and the press release is evidence that its request is not supported by the best scientific information available-the requirement of National Standard 2 of the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA).

The petition fails to establish an emergency-or justify its chosen remedy

Witek notes that the assessment on which the petition relies was released approximately a year before the petition was filed. It found Atlantic menhaden neither overfished nor experiencing overfishing.

The ASMFC's analysis also projected a 0% probability of overfishing in 2026 under the adopted catch limit.

With the ASMFC preparing to consider future management measures in November, Witek questions the basis for bypassing that process through emergency federal action.

He also challenges the connection between the petition's allegations and its proposed solution. Broad claims about menhaden's ecological importance do not demonstrate that closing one fishery in one area would deliver the promised benefits. The petition, he argues, has not supplied that missing evidence.

Reedville is the kind of coastal fishing community National Standard 8 is intended to protect

Witek turns the petition's economic argument against it.

The petition itself cites estimates of approximately 500 full- and part-time jobs and as much as $29 million in annual payroll and benefits associated with the Reedville-based reduction operation. Witek argues that those figures establish Reedville as one of the fishing communities contemplated by the MSA's National Standard 8.

As NOAA Fisheries explains, that standard requires managers, consistently with the law's conservation requirements, to account for fishing communities' dependence on fishery resources, support their continued participation and minimize adverse economic impacts where practicable.

The community behind those figures is substantial. UFCW Local 400 describes a Northern Neck fishery sustained by generations of local families, family-supporting union jobs and one of Northumberland County's largest minority workforces. Its

fishermen describe livelihoods that support healthcare, college and local businesses, alongside their commitment to the waters that sustain them.

Yet, Witek finds, the petition offers no data demonstrating its claim that the reduction fishery causes significant economic harm to fishing communities in the Bight.

The petition therefore documents Reedville's dependence on the fishery while failing to substantiate its claim that the reduction fishery causes significant economic harm to fishing communities in the Bight. Witek concludes that National Standard 8 provides a reason to minimize adverse impacts on Reedville and reject the requested emergency closure.

Bycatch allegations do not supply the missing evidence

Witek likewise finds that the petition neither documents nor quantifies reduction-fishery bycatch. Its reliance on the MSA's National Standard 9 assumes the existence of a problem sufficient to justify emergency action without demonstrating it.

His conclusion is a forceful challenge from within the recreational fishing community: The petition has not made the scientific, legal or economic case for the closure it seeks. Instead, Witek writes, the debate is being muddied by "trumped-up claims" aimed at a particular industry.

Read Charles Witek's full column.

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Steve Atkinson Overlooks the Science, and the Workers, Behind Virginia's Menhaden Fishery

Thursday, 08 October 2026 04:15 PM

Topic: Company Update

WASHINGTON, D.C. / ACCESS Newswire / October 8, 2026 / Steve Atkinson, chairman of the Virginia Saltwater Sportfishing Association, argues in his September 15 *Virginian-Pilot* column ("Reduced menhaden fishing will help protect the bay") for additional menhaden fishing restrictions. But his interpretation of the stock science is contradicted by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC), and his proposal gives inadequate attention to the people whose livelihoods depend on the fishery.

Atkinson says scientists recently "admitted" the coastwide menhaden stock had been "overstated by a whopping 37%." In its FAQ, under "Has the menhaden population re

says total menhaden biomass has actually increased since 2021. In fact, adult Atlantic menhaden biomass is nearly twice the size it was in the early 1970s, while landings are now precautionarily regulated at less than half their historical levels.

Atkinson is wrong to claim that the coastwide menhaden assessment has "nothing to do with the Chesapeake Bay."

Atlantic menhaden are migratory, and the ASMFC has been clear and consistent: its 2010 assessment, 2017 stock assessment update, and 2019 benchmark stock assessment all concluded that Atlantic menhaden are a single stock or population. They move through coastal and estuarine waters, including the Chesapeake Bay, and are assessed and managed as a coastwide stock. The absence of a Bay-specific abundance estimate does not transform that migratory stock into an isolated Chesapeake population. In short, there is no such species as a Chesapeake Bay menhaden.

Maryland's October 2025 young-of-year survey reported that Atlantic menhaden and bay anchovies were widespread in the Bay for the third consecutive year. Those observations concern juvenile fish, not a Bay-wide estimate of adult menhaden abundance.

Atkinson also says "leaving more menhaden in the water would help the recovery of striped bass." Yet the best available Bay-wide condition-factor analysis does not show starving striped bass. An April 2025 ASMFC Work Group report evaluated Fulton's Condition Factor-a length-to-weight measure of body condition-for 298,232 Chesapeake Bay striped bass across eight datasets from Maryland DNR, the Potomac River Fisheries Commission and the Virginia Marine Resources Commission. Annual values remained above the 0.8 stress threshold. The Work Group concluded that the sampled fish "are not starving and would be considered healthy." Body condition does not independently measure prey availability at every location or season.

The ASMFC's November 2025 Atlantic Menhaden FAQ is equally clear: even if all menhaden fishing suddenly stopped, that alone would not rebuild striped bass to their biomass target. The Commission identifies sustainable recreational and commercial striped bass fishing as the important management factor.

Recreational fishing accounted for the overwhelming majority of striped bass removals in the 2022-2023 assessment period: 49% from recreational harvest and another 40%

The ASMFC has also expressly weighed economic consequences when deciding whether to restrict striped bass fishing. In October 2025, its Striped Bass Management Board declined a proposed 12% reduction in fishery removals and retained existing recreational measures and commercial quotas. It cited the severe economic consequences of the reduction, low 2024 fishing mortality and preliminary evidence of lower 2025 catches. The economic effects on menhaden workers warrant equally serious consideration.

The Reedville fishery supports a blue-collar, unionized workforce in rural Northumberland County, including African American workers and multigenerational fishing families. Vessel crews, plant employees, mechanics, electricians and other skilled workers depend on the fishery.

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference raised those concerns, urging policymakers to consider African American workers, union families and rural communities that could be disproportionately affected by additional restrictions. SCLC called for policy guided by "balance, sound science, environmental stewardship, economic justice, and a recognition of the workers and families whose lives may be directly affected."

The Chesapeake Bay is a shared resource. Recreational advocates can argue for their preferred policies, but commercial fishermen and their families also deserve serious consideration of what restrictions would mean for jobs, wages, benefits and rural communities.

Recreational fishing matters and supports businesses, but there is a difference. Recreation is discretionary. For commercial fishermen, the Bay and surrounding waters are where they earn their living and support their families.

As one former union leader put it, ***"It's their playground, but it's our workplace."***

The Chesapeake Bay has long supported both recreational and commercial users. Reedville families should not have their livelihoods treated as expendable so another constituency can claim a greater share of the resource. One group's desire for greater recreational access should not outweigh blue-collar working families. Our goal has always been to "Share the Bay"-it shouldn't only be for one user group.

To learn more about the people and jobs supported by Virginia's commercial menhaden fishery, visit the **YouTube page of United Food and Commercial Workers Union Local 400.**



About the American Small Pelagics Network

The American Small Pelagics Network represents fishermen, processors, suppliers, and coastal communities connected to fisheries such as menhaden, mackerel, herring, squid, and butterfish. ASPN supports sustainable fisheries management that supports critical fish species, while maintaining economic opportunities for fishermen and fishing communities.

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SOURCE: American Small Pelagics Network

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The Fisherman's Jim Hutchinson Misrepresents Key Evidence and Attacks Respected New Jersey Scientist's Objectivity

Tuesday, 29 September 2026 05:25 PM

Topic: Company Update

WASHINGTON, D.C. / ACCESS Newswire / September 29, 2026

/ In *The Fisherman's* September 24, 2026 NJ/DE Bay Region Fishing Forecast, New Jersey/Delaware Bay Edition Editor Jim Hutchinson, Jr. pressed for deeper Chesapeake Bay menhaden restrictions while repeating a broader narrative about the fishery that leaves out or conflicts with key parts of the scientific and management record. His report encourages viewers to see the reduction fishery as the cause of Maryland's bait fishery problems and as a central answer to striped bass concerns, while giving little weight to the current menhaden stock assessment, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (ASMFC) ecological reference points, the history of the Bay Cap, the Commission's own scientific uncertainty, or analyses that challenge the so-called "gauntlet" theory.



He questioned fisheries scientist Peter Himchak's objectivity without noting that his own publication had honored Himchak in 1987 with *The Fisherman* magazine's Sportsman of the Year award for his work on striped bass restoration and conservation.

The video was published on YouTube and promoted on Facebook, in addition to appearing on TheFisherman.com as part of the magazine's September 24 report.

We spoke directly with Himchak for his response. He rejected the suggestion that leaving New Jersey's Division of Fish and Wildlife for industry work changed his scientific standards.

Himchak's response

"I am first and foremost a scientist," Himchak said. He described examining data sets, graphs, trends, statistics, correlations, confidence and error bars-the same approach he used in state service. "Science must be objective."

Himchak also questioned the selective use of affiliation as a credibility test, noting that individuals affiliated with recreational fishing and environmental organizations serve on ASMFC Management Boards and its committees. His objection is that an employer's identity cannot substitute for examining the evidence.

Asked about the 50 percent hypothetical, Himchak said his position would change if the data justified it. If an assessment showed fishing mortality well above the overfishing threshold, he said, he would give Omega Protein and Ocean Harvesters that news and explain that restrictive measures were needed.

A record of delivering unpopular management news

Himchak noted that he has never feared delivering unpopular recommendations. During the striped bass rebuilding effort, he recalled explaining progressively higher minimum size requirements at New Jersey public information meetings in the 1980s and receiving criticism from fishermen for doing so.

Those measures were part of the broader effort to protect and rebuild the stock. ASMFC identified protection of the 1992 year class as central to the restoration program. As that rebuilding effort progressed, *The Fisherman* recognized Himchak in 1987 with its Sportsman of the Year award for his "outstanding contributions in helping to restore the striped bass fishery in New Jersey, the conservation of game fish, and the protection of our natural resources." ASMFC records that the restoration effort ultimately succeeded, declaring Atlantic coastal striped bass stocks fully recovered in 1995.

He said he earned that recognition while remaining objective and facing criticism from fishermen. "My mindset as a scientist has not changed from those years to current times," he said. "It remains objective, as it should."

What the Bay Cap record establishes

Draft Addendum II presents alternatives, including the status quo and a 50 percent reduction, alongside coastwide quota linkage, seasonal limits and periodic review. These are management choices under consideration, not an assessment finding that a 50 percent cut to the Chesapeake Bay Cap cut is required.

The Bay Cap was reduced by 20 percent for 2013 and then to 51,000 metric tons for 2018, roughly another 41 percent reduction. The current draft acknowledges insufficient data to comprehensively characterize Bay-wide menhaden abundance,

distribution and fishing effects. It contains data, but does not establish a quantified biological requirement for the proposed 50 percent cut.

When the Cap was first imposed in 2006, it was a political compromise between Virginia, Maryland, and environmental groups, not a conservation measure grounded in a scientific justification. As ASMFC's Executive Director at the time, Vince O'Shea, testified before Congress in 2008, the Bay Cap was established "in response to a political problem" and "there was not a science basis for the Cap."

That view was echoed by ASMFC's scientific staff. In 2012, the Menhaden Plan Development Team concluded, "The annual Chesapeake Bay harvest cap is not based on a scientifically quantified harvest threshold, fishery health index, or fishery population level study."

In a follow-up report that same year, the ASMFC Technical Committee stated: "The TC stands by its previous recommendation that, given the current fishery and history of landings, there has not appeared to be any biological benefit to the Chesapeake Bay Reduction Cap since it was implemented."

The Technical Committee reinforced this position during the Commission's December 2012 meeting, with the then-chairperson noting that, "Given the current structure of the industry right now, and the fish that they harvest, and the biological information that we're collecting, there doesn't seem to be any benefit" from the Bay Cap.

ASMFC leadership previously said the evidence was not there

This is not a new scientific question. In a July 30, 2026 letter to

the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board, Ocean Harvesters reproduced language from then-ASMFC Chairman James J. Gilmore Jr. addressing Virginia's appeal of the reduction of the Chesapeake Bay Cap from 87,216 metric tons to 51,000 metric tons.

Gilmore wrote: "There is no evidence in Amendment 3 to support the view that lowering the Bay Cap was necessary to protect the Bay as a nursery area for menhaden and there is no evidence to suggest the Bay Cap is necessary to protect the Bay as a nursery for other species. Leadership agrees the Amendment does not provide sufficient evidence to support such claims."

That statement addressed the specific nursery protection rationale in Amendment 3. It matters now because the current 51,000 metric ton cap already reflects substantial prior reductions, while Draft Addendum II again considers cuts of up to 50 percent and acknowledges that sufficient scientific information is still not available to comprehensively characterize menhaden abundance, distribution and fishing effects throughout Chesapeake Bay. Hutchinson does not grapple with that history when attacking Himchak for saying the scientific case for another 50 percent reduction has not been demonstrated.

Independent analyses undercut the "gauntlet" claim

Hutchinson relayed the claim that Virginia's reduction fishery is preventing menhaden from reaching fishermen farther up Chesapeake Bay. But the available analyses do not support that simple cause-and-effect story. ASMFC's own review indicated little reduction fishery influence on Maryland pound net catch rates in 2023; for 2024, it identified only a possible effect and said finer-scale information on fishery dynamics and menhaden

movement would be needed.

A January 2026 Georgetown Economic Services analysis (Exhibit B, p. 16) tested the interception theory directly. If Virginia purse seine activity were blocking menhaden from reaching Maryland, Maryland pound net catch rates should fall sharply during the relevant period. Instead, the analysis found that pound net catch rates continued on a relatively steady seasonal increase. It also found that months with Virginia reduction purse seine sets above the 10-year average tended to coincide with Maryland pound net harvest above its 10-year average, while below-average Virginia activity tended to coincide with below-average Maryland harvest.

A separate analysis in Dr. Arnoldo Valle-Levinson's actual report, Menhaden Catches in Mid-Chesapeake Bay, examined the physical and environmental conditions in the Chesapeake Bay alongside the Maryland fishery data. His analysis found a consistent relationship between Maryland catches and catch rates and changes in hypoxia depth over annual cycles. When low-oxygen water rises and compresses usable habitat, fish can become concentrated in a smaller oxygenated layer, changing their availability and catchability.

A summary of Valle-Levinson's analysis explains that Maryland catches and fishing trips declined together, while catch per unit effort did not show the sustained collapse that would be expected if the upper Bay were being systematically deprived of menhaden. His analysis points to fishing effort and Bay conditions, including dissolved oxygen, salinity, temperature, habitat compression, plankton and other environmental factors, as important influences on where menhaden occur and how catchable they are. Those findings directly challenge the "gauntlet" narrative Hutchinson repeats.

The data behind Himchak's position

Himchak cites stable-isotope chemistry research by Kristen Anstead and colleagues, published in *Transactions of the American Fisheries Society,* which challenges older assumptions about the Chesapeake Bay's contribution to the coastwide menhaden population. Their 2016 four-region analysis estimated that an average of about 31 percent of age-1 recruits from the 2009-2011 cohorts originated from Chesapeake Bay nurseries, far below the historical, unvalidated estimate of 69 percent. Their 2017 study produced a similar result, estimating that about 30 percent of sampled age-2 to age-4 fish from the 2008-2010 cohorts originated from Chesapeake nurseries. These studies do not measure current Bay abundance, but they do show that the long-used assumption that Chesapeake Bay supplies nearly 70 percent of the coastwide menhaden population was not supported by the sampled cohorts.

Maryland's long-term juvenile seine survey provides a measure of the relative abundance of young-of-year menhaden in Chesapeake Bay. The Maryland Department of Natural Resources' 2023 survey reported that menhaden abundance was the highest measured in more than 30 years. The 2025 survey found a third consecutive year of the highest Atlantic menhaden recruitment in the Bay since 1990. These results document several recent years of strong juvenile occurrence, indicating that the Chesapeake Bay continues to serve its function as an important nursery for menhaden.

Stock status, predator needs and striped bass

The 2025 menhaden assessment classified the coastwide stock as not overfished and not experiencing overfishing. Estimated fishing mortality was below the overfishing threshold, although

above the lower management target. Ecological reference points already account for predator needs; the American Sportfishing Association and Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership praised their adoption in 2020.

ASMFC's April 2025 review evaluated 298,232 striped bass across eight data sets. Its body condition analysis indicated the fish "are not starving and would be considered healthy." Body condition does not, however, measure population recovery or establish a direct relationship with menhaden availability.

The 2024 striped-bass assessment attributed 49 percent of coastwide fishing removals in 2022-2023 to recreational harvest and another 40 percent to recreational release mortality. ASMFC's menhaden FAQ states that ending menhaden fishing alone would not rebuild striped bass to their biomass target. Local feeding observations and coastwide rebuilding are different questions.

New Jersey bait fishermen are part of the same working coast

New Jersey's bait fisheries connect commercial harvesters with commercial and recreational customers. New Jersey's fisheries agency documents menhaden's bait and chum uses, while the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) identifies its role in crab and lobster fisheries. The reduction sector supplies fishmeal, fish oil and other marine ingredients.

Cape May-based Lund's Fisheries and Omega Protein participate in the U.S. Atlantic menhaden purse-seine fishery, which holds Marine Stewardship Council certification. These sectors serve different markets - bait and marine ingredients - within a shared coastwide management system. Their economic contributions do not depend on casting one group of

fishermen against another.

Hutchinson's account of supportive webinar comments describes the opinion of the recreational fishermen who made them. It does not resolve biological questions.

Sources and Supporting Documents

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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Atlantic Menhaden Amendment 2 - Plan Development Team discussion, p. 63 - States that the annual Chesapeake Bay harvest cap was not based on a scientifically quantified harvest threshold, fishery health index, or fishery population-level study.

Atlantic Menhaden Management Board Proceedings - December 2012, p. 21 - Technical Committee statement that there had not appeared to be a biological benefit to the Chesapeake Bay Reduction Cap under the fishery conditions then in place.

Atlantic Menhaden Management Board Proceedings - December 2012, p. 22 - Jeffrey Brust's response that, given the industry structure, harvested fish and biological information being collected, there did not seem to be a benefit from the Bay Cap.

Atlantic Menhaden Draft Addendum II - 2026 - Bay Cap history, proposed management alternatives including a 50% reduction, Maryland pound-net analyses, and acknowledged

Chesapeake Bay data limitations.

Atlantic Menhaden Management Board Supplemental Materials - Exhibit B, p. 16 - Georgetown Economic Services, "Analysis of Maryland Harvest Sizes and the Number of Virginian Nets Set."

Atlantic Menhaden Management Board materials - 2018 Gilmore statement - Contains the statement attributed to then-ASMFC Chairman James J. Gilmore Jr. that Amendment 3 did not provide evidence supporting the specified nursery-protection rationale for lowering the Bay Cap.

2025 Atlantic Menhaden Single-Species Stock Assessment Update - Current coastwide stock status and fishing mortality.

ASMFC adoption of ecological reference points for Atlantic menhaden - 2020 - Commission announcement establishing ecosystem-based reference points that account for predator needs.

Chesapeake Bay Precautionary Management Work Group Report - April 2025 - Includes the striped-bass body-condition analysis based on 298,232 fish and the finding that the fish examined "are not starving and would be considered healthy."

2024 Atlantic Striped Bass Stock Assessment Update - Reports the shares of coastwide fishing removals attributable to recreational harvest and recreational release mortality.

ASMFC - Atlantic Menhaden FAQs - Explains that ending menhaden fishing alone would not rebuild striped bass to the biomass target.

ASMFC - Atlantic Striped Bass species history - Background on striped-bass restoration and the importance of the 1982 year

class.

Chesapeake Bay and Maryland analyses

Arnoldo Valle-Levinson - Menhaden Catches in Mid-Chesapeake Bay (original report) - Original analysis of catch, effort, catch-per-unit-effort, hypoxia depth, habitat compression and other environmental influences.

Public summary of the Georgetown and Valle-Levinson analyses - Summary discussing both analyses and their implications for the interception or "gauntlet" theory.

Maryland DNR - 2024 Young-of-Year Survey results - Reports 2024 juvenile menhaden abundance nearly equal to 2023, when the index was the highest measured since 1990.

Maryland DNR - 2025 Young-of-Year Survey results - Reports menhaden as widespread for the third consecutive year.

Peer-reviewed menhaden research

Anstead et al. - 2016, Transactions of the American Fisheries Society - Otolith-chemistry analysis estimating Chesapeake Bay contribution to sampled age-1 Atlantic menhaden cohorts and comparing it with the historical 69% estimate.

Anstead et al. - 2017, Transactions of the American Fisheries Society - Follow-up analysis of nursery contributions to older menhaden cohorts.

New Jersey, fishery uses and sustainability

New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife - Atlantic menhaden bait-fish information - Documents menhaden's use as bait and chum.

NOAA Fisheries - Atlantic Menhaden - Background on Atlantic menhaden and its use as bait in commercial fisheries including crab and lobster fisheries.

Marine Stewardship Council - U.S. Atlantic Menhaden Purse Seine Fishery: client listing - Identifies client-group participants including Lund's Fisheries and Omega Protein.

Marine Stewardship Council - U.S. Atlantic Menhaden Purse Seine Fishery - Current certification record for the fishery.

Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership - 2020 statement on ecological reference points - Recreational/conservation response praising ASMFC's adoption of ecological reference points.

About the American Small Pelagics Network

The American Small Pelagics Network represents fishermen, processors, suppliers, and coastal communities connected to fisheries such as menhaden, mackerel, herring, squid, and butterfish. ASPN advocates for sustainable fisheries management that supports critical fish species, while maintaining economic opportunities for fishermen and fishing communities.

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TRCP Misrepresented Key Menhaden Facts on the Tom Rowland Podcast

Friday, 23 October 2026 04:40 PM

Topic: Environmental, Social and Governance

WASHINGTON, D.C. / ACCESS Newswire / October 23, 2026 / Jaclyn Lunaas and Chris Macaluso of the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership gave listeners a materially misleading account of menhaden science and management across both

the Atlantic and Gulf fisheries. This ranges from Atlantic menhaden and Chesapeake Bay issues to Gulf menhaden in the Gulf of Mexico, along with claims involving striped bass, osprey, red drum, spotted seatrout, king mackerel, tarpon and other species. Host Tom Rowland largely accepted their claims rather than testing them against readily available fisheries data and the published record of the relevant management agencies. The result was a discussion in which advocacy was repeatedly presented as settled science.

Lunaas said scientists had been overestimating coastwide biomass by about 40% and implied the catch limit had therefore been "way too high." But the ASMFC says the revision primarily reflected a new estimate of natural mortality that rescaled the historical population; it was not a 40% population collapse. Total biomass "has actually slightly increased since 2021," and Atlantic menhaden remain not overfished, with overfishing not occurring .

Lunaas and Macaluso also misrepresented the claim that ASMFC scientists "recommended a 50% cut" in the coastwide menhaden harvest. The ASMFC's Menhaden Technical Committee and ERP Work Group analysis shows that the Board asked scientists to model a range of catch scenarios and calculate the risk of exceeding the Ecological Reference Point (ERP) target and threshold. A reduction of roughly 50% or more was one modeled scenario, not a singular scientific recommendation. The target is a conservative objective below the threshold that defines overfishing. The Board adopted a 20% reduction for 2026 , projected to have a 0% chance of exceeding the ERP overfishing threshold in 2026 . Calling a 50% reduction simply "what the science said" misstates both the process and the result.

The episode's "running out of food" premise also omitted a central ASMFC finding: the ERP framework already incorporates predator needs, and even ending all Atlantic menhaden fishing would not, by itself, rebuild striped bass to their biomass target . Sustainable recreational and commercial striped bass fishing mortality remains necessary. Maryland's newest data further undercut the simple food-shortage narrative: the 2026 juvenile striped bass survey recorded an eighth consecutive year of below-average striped bass reproduction while finding young Atlantic menhaden in abundance and Atlantic silversides at their highest level in more than a decade. Menhaden indices for 2023-2026 were 3.78, 3.66, 2.54 and 2.49; every one exceeded every annual index from 1992 through 2022, and the four-year average was the highest since 1988-1991.

The osprey discussion blurred observation and causation. The 2026 peer-reviewed osprey study found serious reproductive deficits and food stress in higher-salinity areas and identified reduced menhaden availability as a primary driver there, but it did not establish that commercial menhaden harvest caused that reduced availability. USGS is continuing research on the relationship among menhaden availability, osprey reproduction, commercial harvest and environmental conditions. Food stress is not proof of fishery causation.

Macaluso likewise emphasized approximately 140-160 million non-target fish, roughly 30,000 red drum and about 250,000 spotted seatrout without the proportional context. The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries reported total bycatch of about 3.6% of catch by weight in the 2024 study. Over 2015-2024, menhaden fishery dead bycatch accounted for 9.9% of red drum fishery removals by weight and 2.7% of spotted seatrout removals, with directed fisheries accounting for the overwhelming majority. Raw totals without those

denominators give a distorted picture of the study.

Macaluso also claimed that rebuilding Gulf king mackerel requires leaving 40% more menhaden in the water, while Rowland asserted that tarpon migrating from South Florida to Louisiana "have to have" menhaden. The peer-reviewed Gulf ecosystem model does not support that 40% prescription: its king-mackerel ERP target was 0.964 of 2016 menhaden fishing mortality, and NOAA currently lists the Gulf king mackerel stock as not overfished and not subject to overfishing. The model includes tarpon among many predators of juvenile menhaden, but it does not establish Rowland's claim that tarpon migrate to Louisiana because food is insufficient off Key West. Newer Gulf diet research likewise found nearshore predators to be generalists using a diverse prey base, with no single menhaden-dependent predator.

Macaluso also called the slower pace of catching the Virginia quota "a pretty clear indication there's something wrong with that population." That is not a stock assessment. The ASMFC says its coastwide model cannot determine menhaden stock status within Chesapeake Bay or provide quantitative advice on separate Bay and ocean harvest levels. Those are precisely the questions additional research is intended to answer. Management should establish the problem, connect it to the fishery and show that a proposed restriction would improve the outcome before imposing additional costs on working families.

Rowland should have challenged these claims: whether the 40% revision was an actual population decline; whether 50% was a recommendation or one modeled scenario; what the ASMFC's striped-bass model says; whether the osprey research established harvest causation; and what Macaluso's Gulf bycatch figures mean in proportion. He did not. Lunaas and

Macaluso are free to advocate for lower quotas, different allocations and additional restrictions, but nobody has the right to mislead the public about what the science says.

Nobody has a more direct stake in healthy Chesapeake Bay, Gulf and Atlantic fisheries than the people whose livelihoods depend on them. UFCW Local 400 has put the fishermen themselves on record ; the NAACP Virginia State Conference has urged Virginia's governor to protect working families while state-funded science is completed; and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference has warned that these decisions affect African American workers, union families and rural communities. Their future depends on healthy fisheries just as surely as their jobs do. The debate should rest on the complete scientific record, not selective claims presented as settled fact.

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• NOAA Fisheries - King Mackerel stock status

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• UFCW Local 400 - Members Spotlight the Real Faces of the Menhaden Fishery in New Video

• UFCW Local 400 - Ocean Harvesters Members Ratify Strong New Agreement

• Southern Christian Leadership Conference - Letter to Governor Wes Moore concerning the menhaden fishery



About the American Small Pelagics Network

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TRCP Video Series Is Latest Campaign to Spread Falsehoods About Atlantic Menhaden Fishery

Tuesday, 05 May 2026 03:00 PM

Topic: Environmental, Social and Governance

WASHINGTON, D.C. / ACCESS Newswire / May 5, 2026 / A recent video series from the Teddy Roosevelt Conservation Partnership continues the organization's near decade-long

practice of spreading misinformation about the Atlantic menhaden fishery. From substituting anecdotes for real science to misidentifying the companies involved in the fishery to mischaracterizing the state of the stock, the videos paint a misleading picture of a sustainable and economically vital fishery.

Menhaden Are Important - But the "Most Important Fish in the Sea" Claim Is Misleading

The videos repeatedly refer to menhaden as "the most important fish in the sea," which also serves as the title for the series. This phrase comes from the title of a 2007 book by H. Bruce Franklin, a former Rutgers University English professor. While menhaden are an ecologically and economically important species, the moniker of "most important fish in the sea" has historically been misused by industry opponents to suggest that menhaden play an outsized role in the ecosystem compared to other forage species. This is not borne out by the science.

A 2015 analysis of the diets of five major predator species in the Chesapeake Bay found that Atlantic menhaden was not one of the top four most important prey species. Menhaden was found to be significant for just one predator, striped bass, while bay anchovy was significant for four of the species and was even more important for striped bass than menhaden. Similarly, a 2025 study of Gulf menhaden using cutting-edge stable isotope analysis found that they do not play an outsized role in predator diets and that there is no "most important" prey species in the Gulf.



Anecdotes Are Not a Substitute for Science

Besides misleading monikers, the videos frequently use anecdotes as stand-ins for real science. In one video, a drone operator states that she saw menhaden on 76 days in 2023, and just 24 days in 2025. In another, a filmmaker states that she is seeing fewer menhaden inshore, while a few years ago there were "acres and acres of menhaden all summer long" and "you could almost walk on [them]." She also falsely states that the "biggest threat facing menhaden is overfishing."

While the observations of those on the water can in some cases guide sound science, individual anecdotes are not a substitute for the work of numerous scientists and fisheries managers who have found the menhaden population is healthy and sustainable. The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

(ASMFC) has repeatedly found that menhaden are not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. Moreover, the fishery is certified sustainable by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), the international gold standard for seafood sustainability.

The Videos Misidentify the Companies Involved in the Fishery

Another video featuring a charter captain is replete with falsehoods. In it, the captain accuses an "industrial company, Omega [Protein]" of "taking more than the Bay can handle - it's not sustainable." This is not only incorrect on the merits - again, the fishery is managed for sustainability by the ASMFC and has been certified sustainable by MSC - but also misidentifies the company that harvests fish. Fishing is conducted by Ocean Harvesters, an American company based in Reedville, Virginia; Omega Protein is a processing company that does no fishing.

Sustainability Is Measured by Science, Not Visual Impressions

The charter captain further states, "you can sit out here and watch them pull up a gigantic net full of [menhaden] and you look at it and it's like 'how is that sustainable?'" The size of the net has nothing to do with the sustainability of a species that is measured in millions of metric tons. The menhaden fishery adheres to quotas set by federal managers and states based on the best available science. That is how sustainability is measured - not by the size of individuals nets.

The Osprey Narrative Ignores Scientific Complexity

The video series also features frequent fishery detractor Chris Moore of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation continuing to drive the narrative that menhaden fishing is responsible for problems with osprey productivity in the Bay. This claim is echoed by

Remy Moncrieffe of the National Audubon Society, who states that a "lack of science in regards to the menhaden population, especially in the Bay, is one of the biggest deterrents we have towards effectively managing menhaden."

Menhaden is one of the most studied fish species on the Atlantic coast. Menhaden fishery members have partnered with the Science Center for Marine Fisheries for the past decade, leading to numerous scientific publications and graduate-level theses. Landings data from the industry is used by NOAA scientists and the ASMFC in their menhaden stock assessments. And the industry is supportive of a new effort to produce a research roadmap for menhaden in the Chesapeake Bay.

There is no scientific consensus that menhaden fishing is related to osprey issues in the Bay. U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) scientists have pointed out that osprey populations have leveled off in numerous areas around the country, including places like California and Washington where there are no menhaden, and that there are numerous environmental factors that impact osprey productivity. Fisheries scientists have also questioned the statistical basis that some avian researchers used to draw a link between menhaden fishing and osprey.

Menhaden Is Already Managed With Extraordinary Precaution

The videos call for "more precautionary management" of menhaden "while we get more science," ignoring the fact that menhaden are already managed with extraordinary precaution, including the use of ecological reference points specifically designed to account for predator needs. This call echoes a TRCP petition to remove the fishery from the Chesapeake Bay, which would effectively lead to its shutdown. The idea of shuttering a

fishery that has operated continuously for nearly 150 years, is not overfished nor experiencing overfishing, and is certified sustainable by the world's preeminent seafood certifier flies in the face of all traditional fisheries management. Advocacy videos from TRCP using anecdotes, mischaracterizations, and straight up falsehoods do not change the truth about this fishery.

About the Menhaden Fisheries Coalition

The Menhaden Fisheries Coalition (MFC) is a collective of menhaden fishermen, related businesses, and supporting industries. Comprised of businesses along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, the Menhaden Fisheries Coalition conducts media and public outreach on behalf of the menhaden industry to ensure that members of the public, media, and government are informed of important issues, events, and facts about the fishery.

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SOURCE: Menhaden Fisheries Coalition

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OCEAN HARVESTERS

Union Warns Congress and the ASMFC Against Menhaden Cuts that Threaten Working Families

Maryland-Based Union Pushes Back Against Maryland Lawmakers' Call for More Chesapeake Bay Menhaden Cuts



REEDVILLE, Va. -- October 28, 2026 -- United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 400 is calling on lawmakers and fisheries regulators to protect the livelihoods of hundreds of working families in Virginia's Northern Neck as they consider additional restrictions on Atlantic menhaden fishing in the Chesapeake Bay. The union, headquartered in Landover, Maryland, is pushing

back against an October 9 congressional letter led by Maryland Senator Chris Van Hollen and Congresswoman Sarah Elfreth urging the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) to impose further restrictions before ongoing scientific research has been completed.

In its October 27 statement, UFCW Local 400 warns that additional cuts threaten well-paying union jobs that have supported generations of Northern Neck families, including many African American fishermen. The union emphasizes that Atlantic menhaden are not overfished, overfishing is not occurring, and the ASMFC has already reduced the coastwide catch limit by 20 percent for 2026. Its message is clear: working families should not bear the economic consequences of additional restrictions imposed before the science establishes their necessity. The fishermen whose livelihoods depend on the Chesapeake Bay have a direct stake in its long-term health, and conservation and workers' rights should not be treated as competing priorities.

Read the full statement on the UFCW Local 400 website.

UFCW Local 400 Statement on Proposed Chesapeake Bay Menhaden Cuts

United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 400 is calling on lawmakers and fisheries regulators to protect the livelihoods of hundreds of working families in Virginia's Northern Neck as they consider additional restrictions on Atlantic menhaden fishing in the Chesapeake Bay.

This call comes after an October 9 congressional letter, led by Senator Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) and Representative Sarah Elfreth (D-MD), urged the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) to impose further restrictions on the fishery before ongoing scientific research into Chesapeake Bay's menhaden populations has been completed.

UFCW Local 400 represents the fishermen working in the menhaden fishery who depend on the industry for stable union jobs, wages, and benefits. These workers, many of whom are African American, have long been part of the social and economic fabric of Virginia's Northern Neck.

According to the ASMFC's latest stock assessment, Atlantic menhaden are not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. The Commission has already reduced the coast-wide catch limit by 20 percent this year, while additional research remains underway.

Working families should not be forced to bear the economic consequences of decisions made without a full understanding of their impact. UFCW Local 400 members recognize the importance of protecting the Chesapeake Bay and maintaining sustainable fisheries for generations to come. Environmental stewardship must go hand in hand with economic justice and meaningful consideration of the communities whose livelihoods are at stake.

Our members have demonstrated their commitment to responsible fishing practices and the long-term health of the Bay. As documented in Local 400's reporting on Ocean Harvesters, members have worked within regulatory catch limits and supported the sustainable management of menhaden populations. In our 2025 video featuring union fishermen, workers spoke about their responsibility to the ecosystem and the importance of preserving the fishery for future generations.

Their commitment extends beyond environmental stewardship to protecting lives on the water. In 2020, UFCW Local 400 members rescued six people after their boat caught fire in the Atlantic Ocean near the Maryland-Virginia line. Their actions reflect the deep connection these workers have to the waters they navigate every day and the communities they call home.

For generations, union fishing jobs have provided a pathway to economic stability in Virginia's Northern Neck. Further restrictions could threaten not only individual livelihoods, but also the economic security of families that have long depended on the industry.

Conservation and workers' rights should not be treated as competing priorities. Any decisions about the future of Menhaden must be grounded in rigorous research that is informed by the workers whose lives will be affected and accountable to the communities that depend on these jobs.

UFCW Local 400 urges lawmakers and the ASMFC to refrain from imposing additional Chesapeake Bay menhaden restrictions until ongoing research can

establish their necessity. Working people should have a voice in decisions that shape their livelihoods, their communities, and their futures.

United Food & Commercial Workers Local 400 Union represents approximately 35,000 workers in the grocery, retail, cannabis, health care, food processing, service, and other industries in Maryland, Virginia, Washington, D.C., West Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee. ufcw400.org

About Ocean Harvesters

Ocean Harvesters owns and operates a fleet of more than 30 fishing vessels in the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of America. The company's purse-seine fishing operation is exclusively engaged in the harvest of menhaden, a small, nutrient-dense fish used to produce fish meal, fish oil, and fish solubles. Both its Atlantic and Gulf Menhaden fisheries are certified sustainable by the Marine Stewardship Council. Committed to responsible fishing operations, Ocean Harvesters is proud to be heir to a fishing legacy that extends nearly 150 years.



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WASHINGTON, D.C. / ACCESS Newswire / September 30, 2026 / *The Washington Post* on September 27 published a story by Mark Robichaux under the headline "Ospreys are disappearing along the East Coast. Scientists think they know why."

The osprey breeding failures reported in the story are serious and warrant further study. The reporting, however, repeatedly places the commercial menhaden fishery at the center of a causal question that the scientists themselves say remains unresolved, while omitting key details on menhaden management and the fishery's economic impact.

The article does acknowledge that Dr. Bryan Watts of William & Mary's Center for Conservation Biology describes the evidence as an association rather than proof that commercial menhaden harvest caused osprey nesting failures. That critical limitation should have guided the rest of the account.

The headline blurs what scientists know and what remains uncertain

Researchers have identified food stress as the immediate cause of many Chesapeake Bay osprey nesting failures. They have also associated that food stress with reduced delivery of menhaden to some nests. But the Center for Conservation Biology says the underlying causes of reduced menhaden availability are not clear. It lists commercial harvest as one possible factor, alongside climate change, changing distribution and delayed entry of forage species into the Bay. The headline attempts to draw in readers on a false premise.

The distinction is even more important beyond the Chesapeake. In its 2026 compilation of monitoring from 65 study areas, the center says the underlying cause of low reproductive performance at other Atlantic Coast sites is less clear. It says,

"we should view ospreys as sentinels for the marine ecosystem rather than a species imperiled." It also states, "ospreys appear to be secure throughout much of their range but are struggling within some coastal sites." The *Post's* coastwide headline is broader than those findings.

The article treats an unmeasured Bay-wide condition as a premise

The story states, without attribution, that menhaden are not present when birds and fishermen need them. Researchers have documented reduced menhaden deliveries at some osprey nests, and fishermen describe difficulty finding dependable concentrations in some locations, while abundant concentrations are observed elsewhere and mass fish kills involving mostly juvenile menhaden have occurred in North Carolina. Those contrasting observations do not measure adult menhaden abundance throughout the Chesapeake Bay or establish a uniform coastwide shortage.

The article also calls menhaden the principal prey of Chesapeake ospreys. Menhaden are an important prey species, particularly in saltier parts of the Bay, but the peer-reviewed study cited in the story says osprey diet composition shifts with salinity: pairs in higher-salinity waters appear to rely on menhaden, while pairs in low-salinity waters depend primarily on catfish and gizzard shad. A USGS study of osprey diets across Chesapeake Bay sites and a USGS presentation to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) summarizing the site-specific results provide the underlying geographic detail. Catfish and gizzard shad accounted for 77 percent and 20 percent of the diet reported for the Susquehanna, respectively, and 52 percent and 28 percent in upper-Bay estuarine areas. At Poplar Island, striped bass accounted for 48 percent and

menhaden 44 percent; in lower-Bay estuarine areas, spotted seatrout accounted for 29 percent and menhaden 24 percent. Those data do not support a single Bay-wide description of menhaden as the principal prey.

The 2026 peer-reviewed osprey study says there is no fishery-independent monitoring of adult menhaden in the Bay. According to the authors, that information gap prevents a direct assessment of the relationship between local menhaden abundance and osprey reproduction. They also say the effect of harvest on adult menhaden abundance in the Bay remains unresolved.

The Louisiana passage leaves out regulatory and scientific context

The article also turns to Louisiana's separate Gulf menhaden fishery. It reports the 2023 net failures and later enforcement improvements, but omits existing rules governing coastal buffers, release reporting, gear retrieval, vessel tracking and penalties. Following those incidents, the fishery also moved toward stronger purse seine nets and standardized improved bycatch excluder devices intended to keep larger fish out of the pumping system.

Robichaux also omits the Louisiana wildlife agency's summary of a state-commissioned, season-long study of the 2024 fishery, which estimated total bycatch at approximately 3.6 percent of catch by weight. In its 2015-2024 comparison, the agency reported that dead menhaden fishery bycatch accounted for 9.9 percent of red drum removals by weight and 2.7 percent of spotted seatrout removals; directed recreational anglers accounted for the remainder, 90.1% and 97.3%, respectively. The aggregate rate does not resolve every species-specific concern, but the results are material context for evaluating the fishery.

Claims from advocates and fishermen are observations and policy positions

Robichaux quotes Virginia Saltwater Sportfishing Association chairman Steve Atkinson asserting that the Bay no longer contains enough menhaden to support the current reduction fishery and a healthy ecosystem. While there is little doubt that Atkinson made that statement, the scientific record cited in the story does not establish it, and it is presented without challenge.

The ASMFC's Chesapeake work group expressly did not determine whether the supply of menhaden is sufficient to meet predator demand in the Bay. Nor has the commission determined that a 50 percent reduction in the Bay cap - the policy Atkinson supports - would improve osprey reproduction. The range from no reduction through 50 percent consists of management options under consideration, not measured biological remedies. At no point has the ASMFC provided any scientific rationale for a reduction in the Bay harvest.

Anecdotal accounts like charter captain Chris Newsome's about difficult fishing deserve to be heard, but Robichaux takes that one named Chesapeake captain's experience and turns it into an unsubstantiated coastwide conclusion. The story cites no coastwide survey, abundance index, standardized fishing data, additional named fishermen or geographic examples to support its assertion that anglers and fishermen throughout the Atlantic Coast are seeing the same pattern. An unspecified collection of anecdotes is not evidence of a coastwide biological trend. By presenting it that way, Robichaux seeks to create the appearance of broad corroboration while giving readers no way to assess how many people were consulted, where they fish or whether their experiences are representative.

The article omits important evidence of sustainable

management

Robichaux reports that the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission finds Atlantic menhaden not overfished, with overfishing not occurring, but he does not tell readers that the ASMFC already uses ecological reference points designed to account for menhaden's role as prey or that it reduced the coastwide catch limit by 20 percent for 2026. It also omits that the U.S. Atlantic menhaden purse seine fishery is certified by the Marine Stewardship Council, following independent assessment against the MSC Fisheries Standard.

The economic figures are not comparable measures

The article compares an estimated **$804 million** spent on Atlantic recreational fishing trips involving menhaden with roughly **$300 million** in reported annual sales from Omega Protein's combined Atlantic and Gulf operations and approximately **260 direct Virginia jobs** reported by the companies in the Atlantic menhaden fishery. But it does not explain that the ASMFC's 2026 Committee on Economics and Social Sciences review expressly describes historical modeling showing that direct harvesting and processing jobs sustain additional non-fishing employment in mechanics, logistics and local services including fuel and lubricants, repairs and maintenance, shipping, vehicle operations, supplies and food, utilities and telephone service, insurance and security, real estate rent, county property taxes and healthcare benefits.

But when it came to the recreational fishing contribution, the story cited a Southwick Associates study commissioned by the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership that casts a very wide net in its economic assumptions, counting all tangential spending on entire fishing trips on which an angler used menhaden as bait, chum or scent. This means they counted

anything including transportation, fuel, food, hotels and other purchases as an economic contribution of recreational fishing.

In short, the story's comparison of the industries' economics is apples and oranges.

Robichaux mentions the direct Virginia jobs but says nothing about the workers who hold them. UFCW Local 400 says Ocean Harvesters' crews are overwhelmingly local and unionized and that the operation employs one of the largest minority workforces in Northumberland County. The union has documented collectively bargained increases in base pay, incentive rates and bonuses, as well as health-and-welfare benefits. These are family-supporting union jobs that provide strong wages and full benefits to workers, including many without college degrees - opportunities that no other employer in the Northern Neck provides on a comparable basis. The bigger issue remains that the article never illustrates how a reduction in the Bay Cap would benefit recreational anglers, but reductions would almost certainly result in economic harm to menhaden fishermen and their families.

The ASMFC's Committee on Economics and Social Sciences identifies the reduction industry as an important part of the Reedville-area economy. It also warns that high fixed costs mean a small reduction in fishing quota could cause larger unemployment effects. That analysis is relevant to any discussion of workers and communities affected by additional restrictions.

The ASMFC's economic advisers warn that job losses in the reduction sector could be lasting because comparable work may be hard to find locally.

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference raised that

concern directly with Maryland Governor Wes Moore. SCLC urged Maryland to consider how additional restrictions could disproportionately affect African American workers, union families and rural communities, and to weigh environmental stewardship together with economic justice and the consequences for workers and their families. Robichaux does not mention the union workforce or the civil rights organization's intervention.

The February 18 letter does not show opposition to research

Robichaux introduces a February 18, 2025 letter from an industry government relations professional to Virginia Del. Betsy Carr and then immediately quotes Chesapeake Bay Foundation executive Chris Moore alleging that the industry is using scientific uncertainty to stall restrictions. CBF has repeatedly used this letter out of context to allege that the industry opposed research funding.

The companies explained to Robichaux that by February 18, the General Assembly was no longer considering the roughly $2 million needed for the full study; discussion had shifted to whether a reduced amount of funding could support useful interim work. The letter responded by proposing a two-year pilot to test aerial and hydroacoustic survey methods that had not yet been validated for estimating Chesapeake Bay menhaden abundance. It also called for a plan and budget for a peer reviewed research program and, as an alternative, recommended returning to the General Assembly in 2026. Read in full and in context, it proposed research under constrained funding and raised concerns about methodology.

What followed after February 2025 undercuts CBF's characterization. When the 2025 Virginia session ended without funding the proposed comprehensive study, industry

participants helped fund a Science Center for Marine Fisheries research roadmap involving VIMS, the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science and NOAA; supported a tagging feasibility study; and opened commercial vessels and processing operations to researchers. That record is inconsistent with Moore's false claim about the industry's motive.

The research effort gained substantial public funding in 2026: Virginia committed $2 million over two years, and Congress appropriated $2.5 million for Bay-specific research.

Commercial menhaden fishermen and processing workers support coastal communities and supply fishmeal, fish oil, nutritional products and bait to recreational and commercial fishermen from Maine to Louisiana. They deserve coverage that distinguishes observed osprey food stress from an unproven allegation of fishery causation, and that compares harvest and economic figures on an accurate basis.



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About the Menhaden Fisheries Coalition

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SOURCE: Menhaden Fisheries Coalition

What The Washington Post and Mark Robichaux Got Wrong About Menhaden

Thursday, 20 August 2026 06:40 PM

Topic: Environmental, Social and Governance

WASHINGTON, D.C. / ACCESS Newswire / August 20, 2026 / The *Washington Post* today published an opinion column by Mark Robichaux which misleadingly portrayed Atlantic and Gulf menhaden fisheries as ecologically destructive, weakly regulated and headed toward crisis. Readers unfamiliar with these fisheries may likely come away believing that menhaden stocks are collapsing, predators are being starved by commercial fishing, and regulators have largely failed to act. Which was Mr. Robichaux's point.

That is not what the record shows. But just as troubling is that Mr. Robichaux and *Washington Post* opinion editors were provided with substantial information prior tc

publication addressing the menhaden stock, menhaden management, and the latest menhaden science. Nevertheless, the final column still contains factual errors, misleading source use and conclusions that go beyond what the cited science establishes.

This is not the first time Mr. Robichaux has used the *Washington Post's* opinion pages to advance a crisis narrative about menhaden. In a November 20, 2025 column, he wrote that menhaden were "disappearing," warned that striped bass could be "next to vanish," and said the ecosystem was being pushed toward collapse. Today's column repeats much of that same argument and adds new claims about osprey, Maine bait supply, Chesapeake Bay harvest and Gulf management. Both columns repeatedly blur the line between advocacy and what the underlying science actually establishes. Despite the *Post* prominently noting Mr. Robichaux's tenure at the *Wall Street Journal* from twenty-five years ago, this most recent piece has the tone of a special interest group press release rather than the work of a journalist.

1. Atlantic menhaden are not a stock on the verge of disappearing.

According to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) Atlantic menhaden are not overfished and overfishing is not occurring, based on the Commission's 2025 stock assessment update. Even with this finding, managers still reduced the 2026 coastwide allowable catch by 20 percent to ensure a 0 percent chance of overfishing. While some argue that management should be even more precautionary, that is very different from suggesting the coastwide stock is in crisis.

2. The column misstates what the ecosystem target means.

Mr. Robichaux emphasizes that a harvest cut of roughly 50 percent or more would be needed to move fishing mortality toward the ecosystem-based target. That is true, and it sounds terrible, but only because he leaves out half the story. As is explained on the ASMFC FAQs, fisheries managers receive both an ecological target and an ecological threshold from their scientists. The target is a more conservative management objective; the threshold is the ecological overfishing line. Fishing between the two does not constitute overfishing, and the adopted 2026 catch level was projected to have a zero percent probability of exceeding the ecological overfishing threshold. The lower target may be a policy preference for some observers, but it is not accurate to describe it as the minimum level predators simply "need." Had the ASMFC done nothing at its October 2025 meeting, the stock would still continue to be healthy, and overfishing would not be occurring. Mr. Robichaux either didn't understand this or ignored this to drive home his flawed personal opinion.

3. Osprey science doesn't show commercial harvest caused the problem.

The peer-reviewed osprey study documents serious reproductive deficits and food stress in parts of the Chesapeake Bay and suggests reduced menhaden availability as a primary driver of this stress in high-salinity areas. But the study also says that the data needed to determine the effect of commercial harvest on adult menhaden abundance in the Bay do not exist. The ASMFC likewise says its coastwide assessment cannot determine the status of the menhaden stock at the Bay level. Mr. Robichaux acknowledges that the study does not establish harvest causation and then argues that the pattern is "hard to read any other way." That is his inference, not the study's conclusion.

That research gap is precisely why Bay-specific work is so important and why the industry has supported new research initiatives. Virginia has now funded a dedicated Bay menhaden study, and there is ongoing work involving the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, NOAA and the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science aimed at identifying the data needed for a science-based Bay harvest cap. Treating the unanswered local abundance question as already settled undermines the purpose of the research now underway.

4. The Maine bait story points in the opposite direction.

Mr. Robichaux cites tightening bait supplies for Maine lobstermen as part of a broader menhaden scarcity narrative. Yet the article he links is primarily about reduced Atlantic herring quotas. It says menhaden helped replace lost herring supply, describes a strong return of pogies (another term for menhaden) and quotes a bait dealer saying there was "no lack of bait" and "there's too many pogies!" A source about herring scarcity in which menhaden helped fill the gap should not be used to leave readers with the impression that Maine is experiencing a menhaden shortage. In fact, Maine has fully harvested their menhaden quota for 2026, which would be impossible if you believe Mr. Robichaux's claims of a scarcity.

5. "Rudderless" ignores the management and regulatory record.

Atlantic menhaden are managed through a coastwide quota, state allocations, ecological reference points, accountability provisions and a separate Chesapeake Bay cap. The ASMFC recently cut the coastwide quota and is currently considering further Bay measures. Even the much-cited 2019 Chesapeake compliance dispute was more complicated than presented: the ASMFC had lowered the Bay cap to 51,000 metric tons while Virginia law still contained the older, higher statutory limit. The ASMFC found Virginia out of compliance with the interstate plan, but the episode reflected a conflict between state law and interstate requirements, not the absence of rules.

Louisiana has likewise adopted buffers, spill reporting rules, retrieval requirements, tracking measures and penalties. The industry has gone above and beyond the regulations on paper. KPLC reported the move toward stronger purse seine nets after the 2023 spills, while The Advocate later reported stronger nets and standardized improved excluder devices designed to keep larger fish, including redfish, out of the pumping system.

A Louisiana state-funded study adds important context to the bycatch issue: for 2015-2024 removals by weight, the menhaden fishery's red drum bycatch accounted for 9.9 percent of total fishery removals, compared with 90.1 percent from recreational harvest and dead discards. For spotted seatrout, the menhaden share was 2.7 percent. Those numbers show that the column presents an incomplete picture when it treats spills and commercial bycatch as if they define the entire fishery.

6. Commercial use is not evidence of biological unsustainability.

NOAA's Atlantic menhaden page explains that the menhaden reduction fishery produces fishmeal, fish oil and solubles used in aquaculture, animal feeds and human nutritional supplements. Those are important products, and the fishery supports vessels, processing and waterfront jobs. The ASMFC has also evaluated the economic and employment effects of quota reductions; management decisions affect not only vessels and plants, but also shoreside suppliers, transportation, maintenance and communities built around commercial fishing. Whether a fish becomes meal or oil does not determine whether the harvest is sustainable; stock assessments and management reference points do.

The *Post* had the opportunity to get these distinctions right.

Before publication, Mr. Robichaux was provided detailed information explaining that Atlantic menhaden are not overfished; that the ecological target and threshold mean different things; that the osprey research does not show commercial harvest causation; that Bay-specific science remains incomplete; and that substantial management, compliance and mitigation measures are already in place. *Washington Post* opinion editors were separately provided those concerns before the column appeared.

The final piece nevertheless leaves readers with several of the same misleading impressions. These disputed points were not obscure details discovered only after publication but were among the central factual distinctions raised in advance.

Menhaden should be managed carefully. Bay-specific research should continue. Gulf operators should keep reducing bycatch and preventing spills. But precautionary management does not require overstating what the evidence shows. This issue is too important to treat advocacy and science as one and the same.



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SOURCE: Menhaden Fisheries Coalition

Whit Fosburgh Misstates Menhaden Science on Qualified Captain Podcast and Overlooks American Fishing Families

Tuesday, 06 October 2026 04:50 PM

Topic: Company Update

WASHINGTON, D.C. / ACCESS Newswire / October 6, 2026 /

The Qualified Captain is a North Carolina-based boating and maritime interview podcast hosted by Aaron Stasiak. On the podcast, Stasiak interviews captains, marine industry participants and people who have survived incidents at sea, discussing their experiences and lessons for others on the water.



In episode 55, published on Oct 1, 2026, Stasiak interviewed Whit Fosburgh, executive director of the Forage Fish Campaign and former president and CEO of the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership. Their conversation addressed menhaden and other forage fish, industrial reduction fishing and proposals to restrict or end that fishing. Fosburgh made statements about menhaden science, fisheries management and the American businesses and workers the fishery supports that conflict with the documented record. The following twelve factual corrections present the corrected facts and supporting evidence.

1. Striped bass recovery

Fosburgh said the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (the ASMFC) concluded that reducing the menhaden quota from about 233,000 to 108,000 tons, a cut of almost 60%, would give striped bass only a 50-50 chance of recovery.

Facts: The assessment does not say that. The probabilities in the stock projections concern exceeding a menhaden ecological fishing mortality target. They are not probabilities of rebuilding striped bass. The ASMFC has explained that eliminating all menhaden fishing would not, by itself, rebuild striped bass to their biomass target. Sustainable striped bass management is also necessary.

2. Menhaden age assumptions

Fosburgh said scientists know menhaden can live to 11 years but assumed they would never live beyond about 4½ years and therefore concluded that "they will die anyway," so the fishery could "catch just as much."

Facts: There is no evidence that Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission scientists made that assumption or used that rationale. The assessment does not impose a maximum lifespan of 4½ years. It applies age-specific natural mortality rates, a measure of deaths from causes other than fishing, and separately models menhaden at ages zero through five and in an age-six-and-older group. NOAA Fisheries has collected menhaden age data for decades, and NOAA-published research has documented fish older than 4½ years.

Fosburgh's statement inaccurately portrays both the assessment and the work of the ASMFC scientists. Natural mortality estimates can affect modeled biomass, fishing

mortality and reference points, but that does not mean scientists assumed that older fish do not exist or concluded that catching them does not matter because they would "die anyway." By attributing that rationale to scientists without evidence, Fosburgh makes an inaccurate disparagement of the scientific work underlying the assessment.

3. Products and American economic benefits

Fosburgh said menhaden are processed and shipped to Canada, North Africa or Southeast Asia for aquaculture, and that almost all the material goes abroad.

Facts: The product sales claim conflicts with Omega Protein's reported figures. According to the company, 70% of its 2025 sales were to U.S. customers, 83% were within the United States, Canada and Mexico, and only 17% were overseas. Omega Protein also reports that none of its Atlantic menhaden products supply Cooke Seafood operations in Canada. The fishery's American benefits include wages and healthcare for the workers, as documented by UFCW Local 400.

4. Osprey nest outcomes

Fosburgh said 90% of osprey nests fail in the Chesapeake Bay and along the New Jersey and Connecticut coasts because the birds have nothing to eat.

Facts: Local findings do not establish that approximately 90% of nests throughout the Chesapeake Bay fail because industrial fishermen have removed their food. The 2026 Chesapeake study found successful reproduction at 33.1% of high-salinity nests and 65.5% of low-salinity nests. Results at individual locations varied substantially. The study does not demonstrate that industrial harvest caused the observed reproductive deficits, and its

Chesapeake findings cannot substantiate the same blanket claim for New Jersey and Connecticut given that no reduction menhaden fishing occurs in those estuarine waters.

5. Official stock status and ecosystem management

Fosburgh described the official finding of no overfishing as a defense advanced by paid industry representatives, then said the issue is protecting the ecosystem and that managers acknowledge they are not doing that.

Facts: NOAA's finding that Atlantic menhaden are not overfished and are not undergoing overfishing is an official scientific conclusion. Menhaden management uses ecological reference points accounting for predator needs. Characterizing the finding as merely an industry defense, or suggesting that the management framework omits the ecosystem, misrepresents the assessment and is disrespectful of the expertise of the ASMFC scientists who conduct the scientific assessments. It is a well-known fact that menhaden stocks in both the Atlantic and Gulf are not overfished, overfishing is not occurring, and the species are certified sustainable by the Marine Stewardship Council. Given Mr. Fosburgh's long-time work in this subject matter he certainly must be aware that menhaden stocks on both coasts are healthy and sustainable harvested.

6. Natural mortality and assessment revisions

Fosburgh said managers increased the quota after changing scientific assumptions, refused to reconsider the research when warned, and later admitted a mistake. He said the natural mortality assumption was shifted so harvest could increase.

Facts: The assessment record documents a correction and

scientific review. The ASMFC's FAQ describes a tagging data correction and peer-reviewed reanalysis that lowered estimated natural mortality. The resulting revision lowered biomass estimates across the historical series; it did not demonstrate a sudden equivalent population decline. The ASMFC states that the 2025 update indicates total biomass actually increased slightly since 2021. The documented correction does not establish that the assumptions were changed to benefit industry.

7. Predator losses attributed to menhaden harvest

Fosburgh said science shows current coastwide menhaden harvest reduces striped bass by about 30%. He also attributes reductions of about 15% for Gulf king and Spanish mackerel and about 10% for red drum to the removal of their bait.

Facts: Fosburgh is restating a 30% allegation that the sportfishing lobby has repeatedly advanced through use of an altered graph from a 2017 study. This is not what the study shows. The allegation is a gross oversimplification of one forward-looking simulation, and the study's lead author criticized that use. Since 2017, regulators have switched to ecosystem-based management of the menhaden fishery, reduced the Chesapeake Bay quota by 41% and reduced the coastwide quota by 10%. The study compared long-term simulated striped bass biomass and fishery yield under hypothetical menhaden fishing mortality rates with a zero-menhaden-fishing baseline; it did not measure a 30% decline in the striped bass population caused by the reduction fishery. The paper also said strong broad-scale evidence tightly coupling menhaden and striped bass population dynamics was lacking. The ASMFC now says that even ending all menhaden fishing would not, by itself, rebuild striped bass to its biomass target;

sustainable recreational and commercial fishing on striped bass remains necessary.

Fosburgh's 15% figures for Gulf king and Spanish mackerel and 10% figure for red drum do not follow from the available feeding evidence, which does not show that these predators depend on menhaden alone. NOAA reports that king mackerel eat fish, squid and shrimp, while Spanish mackerel feed on herring, menhaden, sardines, mullet, needlefish, anchovies, shrimp, crabs and squid. A 2024 peer-reviewed University of Southern Mississippi analysis integrating stomach content and stable isotope data for 41 predators and 173 prey categories found that northern Gulf predators are generalists and identified no single menhaden-dependent predator. Red drum had 46 observed prey types; the study estimated Gulf menhaden at 2.2% of its diet and the broader Brevoortia category at 2.1%.

Nor are Fosburgh's Gulf percentages measured population losses. They are conditional outputs from a Gulf ecosystem model, not observations that current menhaden harvest reduced those predator populations by the stated amounts. Independent technical reviews by Emeritus Professor Doug Butterworth, director of the Marine Resource Assessment and Management Group at the University of Cape Town; Professor Ray Hilborn of the University of Washington's School of Aquatic and Fishery Sciences; and Professor Steven Cadrin of the Department of Fisheries Oceanography at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth's School for Marine Science & Technology found too many technical problems to justify the model's management conclusion, including uncertain diet inputs, inadequate fits to observed data and performance below conventional stock-assessment standards. The evidence may support examining possible food web tradeoffs, but it does not establish that menhaden harvest caused the 15% and 10%

population reductions Fosburgh stated.

8. Claims that menhaden are absent

Fosburgh said menhaden are no longer seen along the entire coast. Later, he described people asking him about there being no striped bass and no menhaden in the Chesapeake Bay.

Facts: The claim that menhaden are no longer seen along the entire East Coast is contradicted by official fishery data and observations from several regions. The ASMFC reports that 2024 commercial landings, including reduction, bait, bycatch and episodic-event landings, totaled 186,155 metric tons, while bait and recreational landings alone totaled 52,200 metric tons. It also states that adult and juvenile menhaden form large, near-surface schools from Nova Scotia to northern Florida. Maryland DNR found juvenile menhaden widespread in the Chesapeake Bay for the third consecutive year in 2025. Recent reporting likewise documented nearshore menhaden aggregations off New York feeding humpback whales. Large die-offs further confirm the species' presence in areas Fosburgh described as empty. Maryland's official 2025 fish-kill report recorded three Baltimore Harbor events totaling about 206,000 fish; two were almost exclusively Atlantic menhaden and about 99% of the third were menhaden. In March 2026, hundreds to thousands of menhaden washed ashore from Cape Henry to Nags Head following a cold-stun event; a Virginia fisheries spokesman said menhaden have a "huge population" offshore and that there are "so many menhaden out on the East Coast" that they were the most visibly affected species. In September 2026, Public Radio East reported a massive Neuse River kill consisting mostly of juvenile menhaden. Catch data, observed schools and repeated die-offs directly contradict an assertion that menhaden are absent from the coast or Chesapeake Bay.

9. Ownership and regulatory review

Fosburgh said Cooke bought Omega Protein and then established Ocean Harvesters to break rules prohibiting foreign companies from fishing in American waters.

Facts: Fosburgh is repeating accusations that were at the core of the failed False Claims Act lawsuit brought by W. Benson Chiles and Chris Manthey against Ocean Harvesters, Cooke Inc., Omega Protein and related defendants. The U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York dismissed the amended complaint in its entirety, and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit affirmed that dismissal in August 2026. Reporting on MARAD's separate review states that the agency found the company's documentation satisfactory and compliant with fishery-endorsement requirements.

10. The effect of the quota reduction

Fosburgh said the reduced quota of about 186,000 tons was the same as the industry's previous catch, so not a single fish was saved. He later calls it a paper reduction.

Facts: That conclusion confuses a harvest ceiling with realized landings. The ASMFC reduced the allowable catch from 233,550 to 186,840 metric tons. The reduction limits subsequent permitted harvest. Comparing the new ceiling with an earlier year's actual landings does not establish that the reduction saves no fish.

11. Gulf bycatch numbers

Fosburgh said Louisiana's research found about 150 million non-target fish are caught and killed every year. He said the percentage is small but the practical number is significant.

Facts: Fosburgh turned one season's sample-expanded estimate into a recurring annual death count. The LGL study observed 3.2% of Louisiana menhaden-fishery effort in 2024 and expanded those samples to estimate total bycatch for that season; it did not establish that the same number is killed every year. The study estimated total bycatch at about 3.6% by weight, and its accounting distinguishes retained bycatch, released bycatch and estimated post-release mortality. LDWF's official comparison shows where red drum and spotted seatrout fishery removals actually came from over 2015-2024, measured by weight. For red drum, recreational harvest accounted for 78.9% of total removals and recreational dead discards another 11.2%-90.1% combined-while dead menhaden fishery bycatch accounted for 9.9%. For spotted seatrout, recreational harvest accounted for 93.3%, recreational dead discards 3.9%, and commercial harvest 0.1%-97.3% from directed fisheries-while dead menhaden fishery bycatch accounted for 2.7%. A raw count of small individuals, detached from weight, species composition, disposition and comparison with directed fisheries, does not support Fosburgh's characterization.

12. Employment and economic losses

Fosburgh said the Virginia plant employs 260 people in good jobs, but thousands of jobs are being lost in the bait, recreational fishing, small commercial fishing and whale-watching sectors because of the fishery.

Facts: Fosburgh offered no economic analysis establishing that the menhaden fishery is responsible for job loss in the thousands. He compared the direct headcount at one processing plant with an undefined claim spanning bait, recreational fishing, small commercial fishing and whale watching, expressed no concern for the minority and union jobs

sustained by the menhaden fishery, and relied on measures that are not comparable and do not support attributing thousands of job losses to it.

The menhaden fishery itself has a substantial, documented economic footprint. The ASMFC's Committee on Economics and Social Sciences reviewed the fishery's broader footprint and cited historical modeling of approximately 519 full- and part-time reduction-sector jobs in Maryland and Virginia, including 347 in Northumberland County. The committee also warned that high fixed costs and minimum operating volume can make job losses nonlinear: crossing the break-even threshold could cause structural unemployment and potentially a complete plant shutdown, not a proportional reduction in a 260-worker headcount.

UFCW Local 400's account and accompanying workforce video describe hundreds of union jobs, an overwhelmingly local workforce, one of Northumberland County's largest minority workforces, and benefits that support healthcare, college and local businesses. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference separately warned that additional restrictions could disproportionately affect African American workers, union families and rural communities, and urged full recognition of affected workers and families. Together, this record documents substantial employment tied to the fishery and its economic importance to Northumberland County and surrounding rural communities.

About the American Small Pelagics Network

The American Small Pelagics Network represents fishermen, processors, suppliers, and coastal communities connected to fisheries such as menhaden, mackerel, herring, squid, and butterfish. ASPN supports sustainable fisheries management

that supports critical fish species, while maintaining economic opportunities for fishermen and fishing communities.

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