



ASMFC

FISHERIES *focus*

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

Preston P. Pate, Jr. Receives Prestigious David H. Hart Award

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission presented Preston P. Pate, Jr., former Director of the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries, the David H. Hart Award, its highest annual award, at the Commission's 66th Annual Meeting in Annapolis, Maryland.

The Commission instituted the "Captain David H. Hart Award" in 1991 to recognize individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the betterment of marine fisheries on the Atlantic coast. The award is named for one of the Commission's longest serving members, who was dedicated to the advancement and protection of marine fishery resources.

Mr. Pate has exemplified the ideals of the award throughout his career in fisheries management. As Director of the North Carolina



From left: ASMFC Chair George D. Lapointe, Hart Award Award Recipient Preston P. Pate, Jr., and ASMFC Executive Director John V. O'Shea

Division of Marine Fisheries, he oversaw the full implementation of the Fisheries Reform Act, totally restructuring fisheries management within North Carolina. He guided the development and implementation of fisheries management plans for all of the state's significant fisheries, as well as the development of coastal habitat plans protecting critical fisheries habitat. By working directly with the state legislature, he helped ensure that funds raised by North Carolina's recreational saltwater fishing licensing program are reinvested in the state's marine resources.

During his tenure as Commission Chair, Mr. Pate deftly steered the Commission through several especially contentious issues, including the establishment of a cap on menhaden fishing in the Chesapeake Bay, balancing the needs of widely varied user groups of horseshoe crab, and ensuring the rebuilding of summer flounder. He also strengthened precedents of strong support for science-based management, the precautionary approach in the absence of sufficient data, and the use of species-specific disincentives to minimize delayed implementation of required management measures.

Obviously comfortable working with others, Mr. Pate approached difficult issues with an open mind, a calm demeanor, a commitment to hearing all views, and a firm belief that most issues can be resolved provided that all available information is sought and considered, all of which led him to accomplishments that are in keeping with the values and principles reflected in the Hart Award.

Inside This Issue

Species Profile: Atlantic Herring Page 4

Spiny Dogfish Board Sets 08/09 Quota at 8 Million Pounds Page 6

Shad Board Initiates Amendment 3 & Releases River Herring PID for Public Comment Page 7

Lobster Board Develops Addendum on Trap Transferability Page 8

Atlantic Striped Bass Board Approves Addendum I Page 8

Science Highlight: Stock Status Overview of Small Coastal Sharks Page 9

ACCSP Funds 2008 Projects Page 10

ASMFC Employee of the Quarter Named Page 11

ASMFC Presents AAE to Dr. John Merriner Page 11

ASMFC Comings & Goings Page 12

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission was formed by the 15 Atlantic coastal states in 1942 for the promotion and protection of coastal fishery resources. The Commission serves as a deliberative body of the Atlantic coastal states, coordinating the conservation and management of nearshore fishery resources, including marine, shell and anadromous species. The fifteen member states of the Commission are: Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida.

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Upcoming Meetings

11/26 - 30:

Atlantic Striped Bass Peer Review Workshop, 46th Stock Assessment Workshop/Stock Assessment Review Committee, National Marine Fisheries Service Northeast Fisheries Science Center, Woods Hole Massachusetts.

12/3 - 7:

ASMFC Basic Stock Assessment Training Workshop, Sheraton Oceanfront Hotel Virginia Beach, 36th & Atlantic Avenue, Virginia Beach, Virginia.

12/3 - 7:

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Sheraton Atlantic Beach Ocean Front Hotel, 2717 W. Fort Macon Road, Atlantic Beach, North Carolina; 800-624-8875.

12/11 - 13:

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Holiday Inn Harmon Meadows, 300 Plaza Drive, Secaucus, New Jersey; 201-348-2000.

2008

1/29 - 31:

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Embassy Suites, Hampton, Virginia.

2/4 - 7:

ASMFC Winter Meeting, Crowne Plaza Old Town Alexandria, 901 N. Fairfax Street, Alexandria, Virginia; (800) 333-3333.

2/12 - 14:

New England Fishery Management Council, Sheraton Harborside, Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

3/24 - 28:

ASMFC Technical Meeting Week, location to be determined.

4/8 - 10:

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Sheraton Annapolis, 173 Jennifer Road, Annapolis, Maryland; 410-266-3131.

4/15 - 17:

New England Fishery Management Council, Providence Biltmore, Providence, Rhode Island.

5/5 - 8:

ASMFC Spring Meeting, Crowne Plaza Old Town Alexandria, 901 N. Fairfax Street, Alexandria, Virginia; (800) 333-3333.

Summer flounder, also known as fluke, were propelled into the national spotlight last year when recreational fishermen convinced Congress to make a one-species exception to the law requiring federal fishery management plans to rebuild stocks within a specific time period, generally within 10 years. Fishermen argued the extension was needed to avoid the devastating economic impacts tighter regulations would have on recreational harvesters and related businesses. The new deadline to rebuild fluke is 2013.

The extension is a mixed blessing. It allows a temporary delay in the tough measures that would have been needed to meet the 2010 deadline, but it has increased pressure on fishery managers to implement rebuilding measures that work. As the debate on this continues, it is important to keep some fundamental facts in mind.

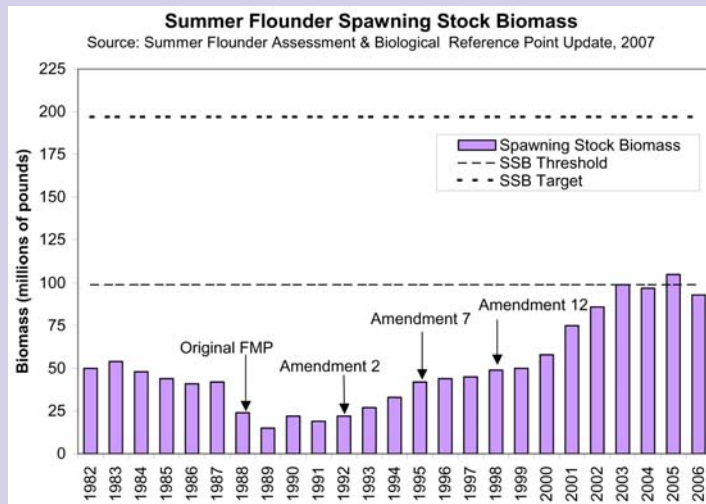
The quality of the scientific data on fluke is among the best for mid-Atlantic species. State and federal scientists work together to prepare fluke assessments. Their results and the current modeling approach have been peer-reviewed by independent fisheries scientists 16 times in the last 23 years. (Most species are peer-reviewed every five years.) The next peer review will be in 2008 and will respond to scientific questions posed by scientists with NOAA Fisheries Service and the states.

The current science-based management plan is showing results. The downward trend of the late 1980s/early 1990s towards depletion has been reversed and spawning stock biomass has increased fourfold. In addition, unpopular and painful increases in minimum sizes have helped expand the age/size structure, as evidenced by the increased abundance of large fish. (Fluke reproduce by 18 months of age and can live for nearly 20 years.) The current age structure includes fish out to age seven, a big improvement over a few years ago, when few fish survived past two years (~14") due to intense fishing pressure.

These improvements are consistent with what fishermen report — more and larger fluke than ever before.

However, recently stock rebuilding appears stalled. The scientific explanation is straightforward. Management action, first implemented in the 1990s, reduced fishing mortality (F) and allowed the stock to improve, while several years of high recruitment (an infrequent event for fluke) further aided progress. But while managers have succeeded in lowering F from the levels of the 1980s, F has yet to be lowered to the level determined necessary to rebuild the stock.

Simply put, removals due to commercial and recreational landings, discards, and unreported landings exceed the capacity of the stock to rebuild. The fact that the stock appears stalled while F is high is consistent with what scientists would expect to see. In order to rebuild the stock it is necessary to implement quotas and regulations that result in an actual F that is at or below the rebuild F.



Skeptics feel that the rebuilding target is unachievable. They cite the lack of progress in recent years as evidence the stock might be constrained by habitat loss or overcrowding, and conclude it is not worth trying to reach the rebuilt target biomass even though both sectors say they need more fish. Scientists say the

target is realistic based on the production capacity of the stock demonstrated by its expansion despite heavy fishing pressure.

If there has been one lesson to be taken from fluke management, it should be the recognition that too little action, too late, has resulted in the need for more drastic cuts in subsequent years. As the 2010 deadline approached, and before Congress acted, managers and some fishermen began to realize that without deep and painful cuts a moratorium might be necessary in 2009 to meet the deadline.

The extension has bought important time for fishermen and managers to work together to rebuild the stock. Both recreational and commercial fishermen have said they need more fish. Successful rebuilding would double their shares, a good thing for all. Let's hope the fishermen decide to use the congressional extension wisely.



Atlantic Herring
Clupea harengus

Common Names: sea herring, sardine, herring

Species Range: Virginia to Labrador

Fish Fact: Atlantic herring are sometimes confused with river herring. Sea herring spend their entire life at sea, while river herring migrate annually to freshwater to spawn.

Age/Length at Maturity: Age 3/9.1 inches

Age/Length at Recruitment: Age 2/7.9 inches

Stock Status: Not overfished and overfishing is not occurring

FMP Rebuilding Goals:
Biomass threshold ($1/2 B_{MSY}$) = 314,500 mt
Biomass target (B_{MSY}) = 629,000 mt

Species Profile: Atlantic Herring Amendment Aims to Maintain High Abundance While Balancing Stakeholder Needs & Ecosystem Functions

Introduction

Atlantic herring may be the most important fish in the North East United States because of its vast role in the ecosystem and its importance to the fishing industry. Herring form the base of the food web as a forage fish for marine mammals, seabirds, and many fish throughout the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast. Herring also provide effective yet affordable bait to lobster, blue crab, and tuna fishermen, and sardines for fish canneries. Whale watching/ecotourism and salt processors are indirectly dependent on a steady supply of herring because whales migrate inshore following schooling herring and salt plants sell the salt to herring canneries. Overseas, frozen and salted herring are a valued commodity.

The Commission regulates herring in state waters, while the New England Fishery Management Council (Council) regulates herring in federal waters. Complementary state and federal amendments were developed in 2006 overwriting previous management documents. Both Amendments seek to maintain the resource's currently high abundance level while also maintaining traditional use patterns in the fishery, allowing for an expanded bait fishery, and protecting herring's role as forage in the northwest Atlantic ecosystem.

Life History

Atlantic herring are oceanic plankton-feeding fish that occur in large schools, inhabiting coastal and continental shelf waters from Virginia to Labrador. Juveniles (called sardines) undergo seasonal inshore-offshore migrations and are abundant in shallow, inshore waters during the warmer months of the year. Adults (age three and older) migrate south from summer/fall spawning grounds in the Gulf of Maine and Georges Bank to overwinter in southern New England and the Mid-Atlantic.

Herring spawn as early as August in Nova Scotia and eastern Maine, and during October and November in the southern Gulf of Maine, Georges Bank, and Nantucket Shoals. Spawning habitat consists of rock, gravel, or sand bottoms, ranging in depth from 50 to 150 feet. Females produce 30,000 to 200,000 eggs each. Schools can produce so many eggs the ocean bottom is covered in a dense carpet of eggs several centimeters thick. Eggs hatch in 10 to 12 days depending on water temperature. Hatchlings are about 1/4 inch long. Surviving larvae transform into juveniles, about 1 1/2 inches long, in the spring. The fish grow to three to five inches in the fall, 10 inches by the fourth year, and may eventually grow to about 15 inches (1 1/2 pounds) at ages 15 to 18 years.

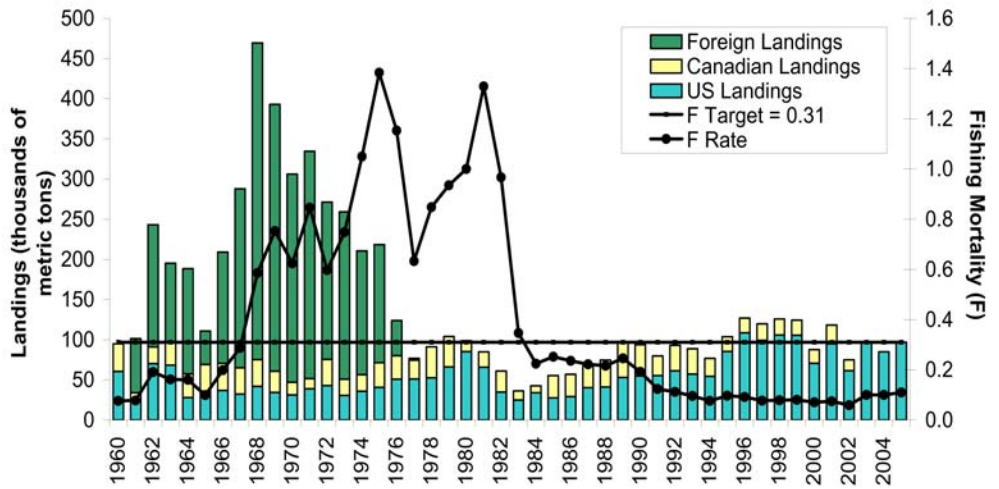
Commercial Fisheries

The herring fishery in New England developed in the late 19th century, spurred by the development of the canning industry. The lobster fishery developed about the same time, creating a market for herring as bait. Landings averaged 60,000 metric tons throughout the late 1890s and early 1900s, and again in the late 1940s and 1950s. An aggressive foreign fishery developed on Georges Bank in the early 1960s, with landings peaking at 470,000 metric tons in 1968. This excessive harvest led to a collapse of the herring stock offshore. Since 2000, landings have averaged 90,000 metric tons, the majority being taken from the Gulf of Maine (see Figure 1).



Herring are caught commercially using trawls, purse seines, weirs and stop seines. The weir, a fixed net used in shallow water with strong currents, was the predominant gear until the 1940s. From the 1940s to the early 1960s, weirs and stop seines were the gears of choice, after which time purse seines began to predominate the fishery. Today, U.S. fishermen almost exclusively use purse seines and mid-water trawls to catch herring. Current uses of herring are canned sardines, steaks and kippers, and bait in the blue crab, lobster and tuna fisheries. In addition, some are processed as frozen or salted fish by foreign ships that purchase herring from U.S. fishermen and shore-based domestic plants. Since 2000, the ex-vessel value of commercial herring landings has averaged about \$15 million/year.

Figure 1. Fishing Mortality and Landings for Atlantic Herring (1959-2005)
Source: Personal communication from NOAA Fisheries Statistics Division, Silver Spring, MD

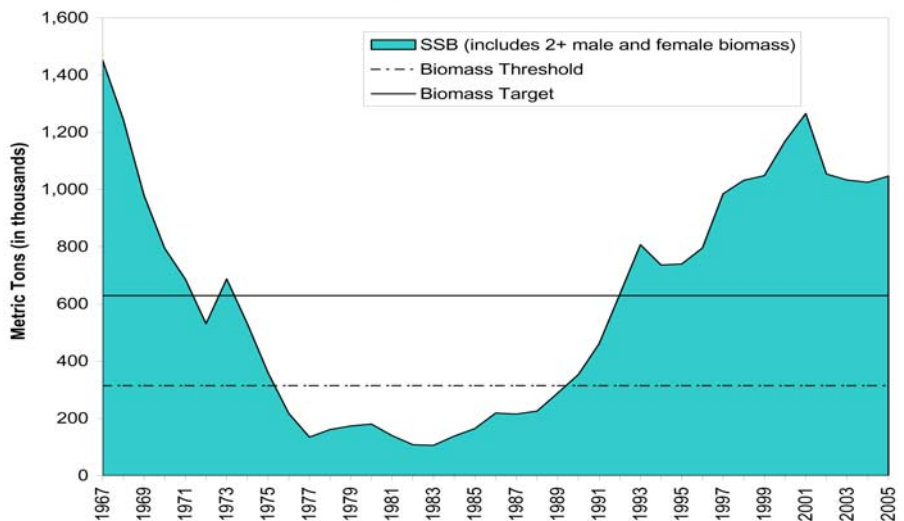


Stock Status

Original biological reference points were set based on the 2003 Transboundary Resource Assessment Committee (TRAC) report. TRAC provides a forum for U.S. and Canadian scientists to collaboratively recommend biological reference points and biomass levels based on updated stock assessment information.

The 2006 TRAC provided an updated biomass estimate, reference points, and target fishing mortality rate (F_{target}) based on a surplus production model. The Commission's Atlantic Herring Section approved the recommended biological reference points while setting specifications in 2006. Current reference points based on the 2006 recommendations are $F_{MSY} = 0.31$, $MSY = 194,000$ metric tons, B_{target} (BMSY)= 629,000 metric tons, $B_{threshold}$ ($1/2 B_{target} = 314,500$ metric tons), and $F_{target} = 0.31$.

Figure 2. Atlantic Herring Spawning Stock Biomass
Source: Transboundary Resource Assessment Committee, 2006



TRAC 2006 estimated spawning stock biomass (SSB) at 1.04 million metric tons in 2005, with the stock well above its target and threshold biomass levels (see Figure 2). Herring is not considered overfished nor is overfishing occurring. The TRAC report did caution, however, that the assessment model has a significant retrospective pattern that tends to overestimate SSB. This pattern has persisted for several years and is expected to continue in the future.

Atlantic Coastal Management Considerations

Atlantic herring are managed by the Commission's Atlantic Herring Section (Section) in state waters and by the New England Council in federal waters. The Section's adoption of Amendment 2 and the Council's adoption of Amendment 1 were vital steps towards the creation of a complementary and comprehensive herring management program between state and federal waters. 2007 is the first full year under all the amendments.

Management in state and federal waters is identical in most respects. The four management areas boundaries are identical with both the Commission and the Council allocating a total allowable catch (TAC) to each area (see Table 1 on next page).

continued on page 6

Species Profile: Atlantic Herring (continued from page 5)

The TAC is essentially a quota, or fixed amount that can be landed in a given year. The definition of the management area boundaries is based on knowledge of the seasonal distribution and availability of juvenile and adult fish within the management unit, regional differ-

ences in the nature and degree of harvesting and processing activity, differences between the inshore and offshore fishing grounds and habitat, and the location of known spawning grounds. The TACs for these areas are set based on maximum sustainable yield (MSY) allowing fishermen to harvest as many fish as possible while leaving enough for fish, birds, and marine mammals who depend on herring for food. Research set asides (RSA) allow designation of up to three percent of the TAC in each area for research. Proposals are selected based on their usefulness and relevance to management needs. Currently, reviewers from NOAA Fisheries Service, the Council, and the Commission are considering RSA proposals for 2008 and 2009. Biological reference points, used to determine if a stock is overfished and if overfishing is occurring, are also identical for state and federal waters.

There are differences between state and federal management as well. The Council implemented a mid-water trawl ban from June 1 – September 30 beginning in 2007 while no such regulation exists in state waters. The Commission has implemented month long spawning closures in the Gulf of Maine and ‘days out’ of the fishery in Area 1A. The days out provision prohibits directed commercial herring fishing during certain days of the week that are chosen by Section members from Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts (the states adjacent to Area 1A, which is inshore Gulf of Maine). Days out is the primary effort control measure of this fishery and is intended to prolong the entire TAC for times of the year when herring is typically in peak demand. This November, the Council voted to begin development of Amendment 2 to the Federal Herring FMP to address catch and bycatch monitoring, annual catch limits and accountability measures, as well as sector allocations. Amendment development will be initiated in 2008. For more information, please contact Christopher Vonderweidt, Fisheries Management Plan Coordinator, at (202)289-6400 or cvonderweidt@asmfc.org.

Table 1. Summary of ASMFC and NMFS Atlantic Herring Specifications for 2008-2009.

SPECIFICATIONS	ASMFC Specifications	NMFS Specifications
ABC	194,000	194,000
U.S. OY	145,000	145,000
TAC Area 1A	45,000 (5,000 available Jan-May)	45,000 (5,000 available Jan-May)
TAC Area 1B	10,000	10,000
TAC Area 2	30,000	30,000
TAC Area 3	60,000	60,000
Research Set-Aside	3% from each area TAC (2008 and 2009 FY only)	3% from each area TAC (2008 and 2009 FY only)

ASMFC Spiny Dogfish Board Sets 2008/2009 Fishing Year Quota at 8 Million Pounds

The Commission’s Spiny Dogfish and Coastal Shark Management Board approved an eight million pound quota for the 2008/2009 fishing year (May 1, 2008 – April 30, 2009), with 58% of the quota allocated to states from Maine through Connecticut and 42% allocated to New York through North Carolina. A trip limit of up to 3,000 pounds was also established.

The 2007 assessment update indicates that the spiny dogfish biomass has continued to increase. Though the stock has not rebuilt to its target spawning

stock biomass, it is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. The Technical Committee recommended a precautionary quota of six million pounds with a 600-pound trip limit due to continued poor pup recruitment that will cause the stock to decline after 2010.

In mid-October, the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council approved and will recommend to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) a spiny dogfish quota of eight million pounds to be suballocated into two six-month periods (4,632,000 pounds for May 1



through October 31, and 3,368,000 pounds for November 1 through April 30). A trip limit of 600 pounds for both periods was approved and will likewise be recommended to NMFS. For more information, please contact Christopher Vonderweidt, Spiny Dogfish Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, at [<cvonderweidt@asmfc.org>](mailto:cvonderweidt@asmfc.org).

ASMFC Shad Board Initiates Development of Amendment 3 to the Shad & River Herring Plan

In response to the findings of the 2007 benchmark stock assessment for American shad, indicating that American shad stocks are currently at all-time lows and do not appear to be recovering, the Commission's Shad and River Herring Management Board voted to initiate development of Amendment 3 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Shad and River Herring.

The first step in the amendment process is the creation of a Public Information Document (PID), presenting a broad overview of the issues facing the American shad resource, as well as a range of potential management measures af-

fecting the stock and dependent fisheries. Specific issues to be addressed in the PID are (1) incorporating the biological reference points and stock rebuilding goals identified in the 2007 benchmark stock assessment; (2) restricting fisheries operating on stocks where total mortality is increasing and relative abundance is decreasing; and (3) limiting the expansion of directed American shad fisheries unless a state or jurisdiction with management oversight can demonstrate that an increase in harvest will not jeopardize the rebuilding or sustainability of the stock in question. The Shad Plan Development Team was also given the flexibility to include other

options in the PID that it deems necessary (i.e., research needs, habitat restoration and enhancement, data collection) as it proceeds with the development of the PID.

The Draft PID will likely be presented to the Management Board at the Commission's Spring Meeting in May 2008. Upon its approval, it will be made available for public review and comment. It is anticipated that most states will also be conducting public hearings on the PID. For more information, please contact Erika Robbins, Fisheries Management Plan Coordinator, at erobbins@asmfc.org.

ASMFC Shad Board Releases River Herring PID for Public Comment

The Commission's Shad & River Herring Management Board has approved the Public Information Document (PID) for Amendment 2 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Shad and River Herring for public review and comment. As the first step in the development of an amendment, the PID presents a broad overview of the issues facing river herring. It provides the public with the opportunity to tell the Commission about changes observed in the fishery; things that should or should not be done in terms of management, regulation, enforcement, research, development, and enhancement; and any other concerns about the resource or the fishery. It is anticipated that the majority of coastal states will be conducting public meetings on the PID; information on those meetings will be released once they become finalized.

The PID and subsequent amendment are being developed in response to concerns regarding the status of river her-

ring stocks. While many populations of blueback herring and alewife, collectively known as river herring, are in decline or remain depressed at stable levels, lack of fishery-dependent and independent data makes it difficult to ascertain the status of river herring stocks coastwide. Between 1985 and 2004, commercial landings of river herring dropped by 90% from 13.6 to 1.33 million pounds. In 2006, Commission member states reported river herring landings of approximately 1.4 million pounds. In response to declining stocks within their own waters, four states—Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and North Carolina—have closed their river herring fisheries. River herring stocks are a multi-jurisdictional resource occurring in both rivers and coastal waters. The PID has been developed to address these concerns by seeking public comment on whether the management program is adequate to ensure survival and enhancement of depressed stocks or the maintenance of presently stable stocks.

Following the initial phase of information-gathering and public comment, the Commission will evaluate potential management alternatives and develop a draft amendment for public review. Following that review and public comment, the Commission will specify the management measures to be included in the final amendment. A tentative schedule for the completion of the Amendment 2 is included in PID.

Fishermen and other interested groups are encouraged to provide input on the PID, either through attending public hearings or providing written comments. Copies can be obtained via the Commission's website at www.asmfc.org under Breaking News. Public comment will be accepted until **5:00 PM on January 28, 2007** and should be forwarded to Erika Robbins, Fisheries Management Plan, 1444 'Eye' Street, NW, Sixth Floor, Washington, DC 20005; (202) 289-6051 (FAX) or at comments@asmfc.org (Subject line: River Herring).

ASMFC American Lobster Board Initiates Draft Addendum on Trap Transferability

The Commission's American Lobster Board approved the initiation of Draft Addendum XII to Amendment 3 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for American Lobster. The Draft Addendum will propose the establishment of protocols for the consistent application of trap transferability programs for the plan's lobster conservation management areas (LCMAs). The goal of the Addendum is to provide for fair implementation of individual trap transferable (ITT) programs that allow for flexibility to the fishery, meet the conservation objectives of the plan, and ensure that effort does not increase as a result of trap transfers.

Since the implementation of the first ITT program for LCMA 3 in 2003, a

number of issues have come to light regarding the effective implementation of any ITT program. These issues include assignment of fishing history, especially for individuals who hold both a state license and federal permit (dual permit holder); the potential for fishing effort to increase with trap transfers of multi-area trap allocations; and the application of the "most restrictive rule." The Area 3 Lobster Conservation Management Team also proposed options for changes in its plan's trap cap and conservation tax. All of these issues will be addressed in the Draft Addendum.

In addition, the Board approved initiation of Draft Addendum XIII, which will propose replacement of the Outer

Cape Cod's previously effort control plan with the plan that has been modified, adopted, and implemented by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The Draft Addendum will also explore whether further trap reductions currently scheduled for Outer Cape Cod in 2008 are warranted, given improved stock conditions.

Both addenda will be prepared for Board consideration and approval for public comment during the Commission's Winter Meeting Week in February 2008. For more information, please contact Toni Kerns, Senior Fisheries Management Plan Coordinator for Management, at (202)289-6400 or <tkerns@asmfc.org>.

ASMFC Striped Bass Board Approves Addendum I

The Commission's Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board approved Addendum I to Amendment 6 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Striped Bass. The Addendum establishes a bycatch monitoring and research program to increase the accuracy of data on striped bass discards, as required by Amendment 6. More accurate discard mortality estimates will improve our understanding of stock status and provide for more effective striped bass management. The Addendum also recommends that states, through the Commission if possible, develop a web-based angler education program on fishing techniques known to reduce post-release hooking mortality.

The bycatch program establishes a suite of mandatory and voluntary data collection standards, discard mortality studies, and technical committee analyses for commercial, recreational, and for-hire fisheries. The states from Maine through North Carolina are required to collect commercial data elements consistent with ACCSP standards and recreational quantitative data as reported by interviewed fishermen. Further, the states are to review existing discard mortality studies to develop gear-specific discard mortality estimates. The Striped Bass Technical Committee will be required to analyze any newly collected at-sea observer data, and review temperature-specific estimates of recreational discards and post-release mortality rates.

The Addendum is effective immediately and will be available in early November. Copies can be obtained by contacting the Commission at (202) 289-6400 or via the Commission's website at www.asmfc.org under Breaking News. For more information, please contact Nichola Meserve, Fisheries Management Plan Coordinator, at (202) 289-6400 or nmeserve@asmfc.org.

Maryland Modifies 2008 Spring Trophy Fishery

At its October 31st meeting, the Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board approved a proposal from Maryland for its 2008 spring fishery in the Chesapeake Bay. During this fishery, anglers are permitted to harvest large migratory, "trophy" striped bass for a short season. Since 1993, the spring trophy fishery has been constrained by a quota ranging from 3,000 fish to nearly 42,000 fish, and any overage in one year has been subtracted from the subsequent year's quota. In 2007, the Board permitted Maryland a one-year 30,000 fish target with complementary regulations projected to restrict the harvest to the target. At its last meeting, the Board approved a one-year, non-quota based management program for the 2008 trophy season with the following regulations: one fish, 28" minimum from April 19 - May 13; and two fish, 18" minimum with one fish allowed over 28" from May 16 - May 31.

Science Highlight: Status of Small Coastal Sharks – A Summary of the 2007 Stock Assessment

An assessment of the small coastal shark (SCS) complex of species was recently conducted and reviewed using the Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) process. SEDAR 13 included the assessments of four species with similar life history characteristics, namely Atlantic sharpnose (*Rhizoprionodon terraenovae*), blacknose (*Carcharhinus acronotus*), bonnethead (*Sphyrna tiburo*), and finetooth (*C. isodon*) sharks. These sharks range across the South Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico.

The SCS complex was previously assessed for the National Marine Fisheries in 2002 (Cortés 2002). However, individual species assessments were not possible at the time due to a lack of species-specific catch and catch-per-unit-effort data collection. This approach was not ideal because status of the complex as a whole may not reflect the status of individual species within the complex. In particular, the status of individual shark stocks may not be well represented by that of the SCS complex because bonnethead and Atlantic sharpnose sharks comprise approximately 94% of SCS catches. Over the last few years, datasets have been obtained that included species-specific catch information. Also, new research projects have provided much-needed information on trends in relative abundance. In response to the availability of new data sources, individual species assessments were conducted for SEDAR 13, as well as an assessment of the entire SCS complex.

Stock status summaries for the complex and individual stocks are provided below. An independent peer

review panel supported the single-species assessments approach in place of the SCS complex assessment for use in providing scientific advice.

SCS Complex

Status of the SCS complex in the last year of the assessment (2005) was determined not to be overfished and overfishing is not occurring. The complex as a whole appears to have experienced very little depletion with respect to virgin levels.

Atlantic sharpnose

Status of the Atlantic sharpnose stock in the last year of the assessment (2005) was determined not to be overfished and overfishing was not occurring. The peer review panel noted, however, that the threshold F (fishing mortality) has been exceeded several times in recent years. While there was no overfishing of Atlantic sharpnose sharks in 2005, the status could easily change for 2006 and 2007 when the model is next updated.

Blacknose

Status of the blacknose stock in the last year of the assessment (2005) was determined not to be overfished, however, overfishing was occurring. The peer review panel cautioned that the status of the blacknose shark stock could change significantly with the next assessment due to uncertainties in life history, catch, and abundance index data.

Bonnethead

Status of the bonnethead stock in the last year of the assess-

ment (2005) was determined not to be overfished and overfishing is not occurring. The peer review panel noted, however, that the threshold F has been exceeded several times in recent years, indicating that overfishing could occur in 2006 and 2007 when the model is next updated.

Finetooth

The status of the finetooth stock in the last year of the assessment (2005) was determined not to be overfished and overfishing is not occurring. The peer review panel suggested cautious management of the stock given the paucity of appropriate species-specific fishery-dependent and independent data for finetooth.

Reports from the SEDAR 13 Data, Assessment, and Peer Review workshops are available at <http://www.sefsc.noaa.gov/sedar/Index.jsp> (select SEDAR 13). For more information, please contact Genny Nesslage, Senior Stock Assessment Specialist, at (202) 289-6400 or gnesslage@asmfc.org.

Reference

Cortés, E. 2002. Stock assessment of small coastal sharks in the U.S. Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico. March, 2002. NOAA/NMFS/Panama City Laboratory. Sustainable Fisheries Division Contribution SFD-01/02-152.



ACCSP Funds Marine Fisheries-Dependent Data Projects for Year 2008



ACCSP Announces Funding for Year 2008 Marine Fisheries-Dependent Data Projects

The Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) has allocated approximately \$3.5 million to its state and federal partners for thirteen new and ongoing projects to improve fisheries-dependent data for Atlantic coastal fisheries in 2008. Ten state, including a joint program between several states, one federal, and two ACCSP Committee proposals were recommended for funding. The ACCSP Administrative Grant was recommended for funding as well.

Improvement of commercial catch and effort data collection projects in Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Jersey, Delaware and Maryland, as well as the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) were allotted over one million dollars.

With these funds, Maine will continue to implement mandatory dealer reporting, and begin developing a harvester reporting program that meets ACCSP standards.

Maine also received funding for a joint program with New Hampshire and Massachusetts to develop and test a method for updating conversion factors. Conversion factors are a means for transforming reported landings weights of a particular species to a standard weight that all states can use.

Massachusetts received additional funding to implement trip-level reporting for at least ten percent of lobster harvesters in its state. This project will help Massachusetts comply with Addendum X to Amendment 3 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for American Lobster.

With its funds, Rhode Island will continue to implement dealer reporting through SAFIS, and develop data feeds to provide Rhode Island data to the ACCSP Data Warehouse.

New Jersey, Delaware, and Maryland have all been awarded funds to implement dealer reporting using SAFIS and to transfer data to the ACCSP Data Warehouse.

New Jersey's commercial funds will also be directed to implement electronic Vessel Trip Reporting, an online system for harvesters to input their landings data, and to implement a state landing license.

ACCSP provided a total of \$650,000 for continued improvements to recreational and for-hire fisheries data collection on the Atlantic coast. It is the hope that the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP), an initiative to improve the National Marine Fisheries Service's recreational marine fisheries survey, will fund future recreational data projects.

The North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries will continue to collect recreational trip and catch data for Wave 1 (January – February) 2008. Funds were also allocated to two ACCSP Recreational Technical Committee proposals: (1) reduce catch and effort variances for important managed fisheries on the Atlantic coast; and (2) increase intercept sampling levels for the for-hire survey of the charter boat and headboat fishery on the Atlantic coast.

Nearly \$240,000 was allocated to biological and bycatch sampling projects that will continue to provide critical management information on several important Atlantic coast fisheries. The ACCSP Coordinating Council approved continuation of work conducted by the Maine Department of Marine Resources that samples Atlantic herring and Atlantic mackerel fisheries from Maine to New Jersey.

The South Carolina Department of Natural Resources will continue sampling for hard part/aging from the commercial fishery for snapper/grouper complex in South Carolina.

The Commission received funding to migrate current lobster data into the ACCSP Data Warehouse so that it is available for end-users.

New Jersey's biological component to its grant is to continue biological sampling practices and improve biological data collection for lobster, tautog and spiny dogfish.

The remainder of the funding was allocated for administrative activities. The administrative grant supports continued travel for partner participation in the development and evolution of program standards, ACCSP personnel and administration, and operation of the ACCSP Data Warehouse, and SAFIS.

A summary of actual project proposals and specific funding amounts will be available soon on the ACCSP website at www.accsp.org under Document Archives—Funding—FY08 RFP.

About the ACCSP

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

Nichola Meserve Awarded ASMFC Employee of the Quarter

From the start, Nichola Meserve clearly established herself as an exceptional employee and an important contributor to the Commission's vision of "healthy, self-sustaining populations for all Atlantic coast fish species or successful restoration well in progress by the year 2015." In recognition of her accomplishments, Nichola was named Employee of the Quarter for the fourth quarter of 2007. The award is intended to recognize contributions and qualities in the areas of teamwork, initiative, responsibility, quality of work, positive attitude, and results.

Within Nichola's first couple of weeks at the Commission she demonstrated her ability to work under tight deadlines and effectively communicate complex subjects by drafting the Commission's congressional testimony on striped bass. Since then, she has helped to keep the striped bass management program well on track, while

also coordinating the development of the species' upcoming benchmark stock assessment, which is due to be peer-reviewed in November. Always willing to lend a hand, especially when it is for the betterment of fisheries, Nichola participated in last year's SEAMAP Cooperative Winter Tagging Cruise, and hopes to do so again this year.

Nichola's efforts have also resulted in an updated weakfish management program based on the latest assessment information and an reinvigorated South Atlantic species management program.

Nichola has a Master's in Environmental Management from Duke University and a Bachelor of Arts in Biology from Hamilton College in New York. As an Employee of the Quarter, she received



a \$500 cash award, a small gift, and a letter of appreciation to be placed in her personnel record. In addition, her name will be engraved on the Employee of Quarter Plaque displayed in the Commission's lobby. Congratulations, Nichola!

ASMFC Presents Annual Award of Excellence to Dr. John Merriner



Dr. John Merriner, formerly of the National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) Beaufort Laboratory, was presented the Commission's Award of Excellence at its Annual Meeting in Annapolis, Maryland.

"Every year a great many people contribute to the success of fisheries management along the Atlantic coast. The Commission's Annual Awards of Excellence recognize outstanding efforts by professionals who have made a difference in the way we manage and conserve our fisheries," said ASMFC Chair, George D. Lapointe, of Maine. "We honor Dr. Merriner for his contributions to the management and conservation of Atlantic coast fisheries."

For over thirty years, Dr. John Merriner has worked to improve our understanding and management of important South Atlantic species. His career began at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS), where he was responsible for organizing and disseminating environmental data on striped bass abundance and habitat attributes, as well as overseeing a multitude of research projects that dealt with early life histories of fish. This research included investigations on the impacts of power plant entrainment on fish eggs and larvae, the use of submerged aquatic vegetation as habitat for juvenile fish, and the distribution of larval fish in Chesapeake Bay.

After joining NMFS in the late 1980s, Dr. Merriner oversaw fisheries research programs for Atlantic and Gulf menhaden,

continued on page 12

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Dr. John Merriner Receives AAE (continued from page 11)

coastal pelagics, and reef fish. He also served as liaison for the NMFS Southeast Fisheries Science Center to the Commission, and the South Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and the Caribbean Fishery Management Councils.

Passionate about clearly communicating the work of fisheries scientists to fisheries managers and the public, Dr. Merriner played an important role in the development and application of the Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review process, the federal stock assessment review for South Atlantic marine fish. Dr. Merriner served with the Commission on several species management boards and technical committees, including the Management and Science Committee and the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board. He was best known and respected on the Commission for his encyclopedic knowledge of fish and fisheries and his clarity of recall on fisheries management and research history. Over the years, his expertise and institutional knowledge on a host of Atlantic coast species proved invaluable.

The Commission established the Annual Awards of Excellence in 1998 to recognize the important contributions of individuals to the success of the organization.

ASMFC Comings & Goings

Jim Gilmore – With his recent promotion to the New York Department of Environmental Conservation's Chief of the Bureau of Marine Resources, Jim Gilmore joins the Commission as New York's Administrative Commissioner. Mr. Gilmore had previously served as the Natural Resources Supervisor for a region including New York City, and brings more than thirty years of experience in natural resources management and environmental assessments to the Commission. He has also served as a Emergency Response Coordinator and was integral in helping to coordinate the agency's response on many events, including September 11th and the recent Con Edison steam pipe explosion. He resides with his family in Amityville, New York. Welcome aboard, Mr. Gilmore!

