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DMF News

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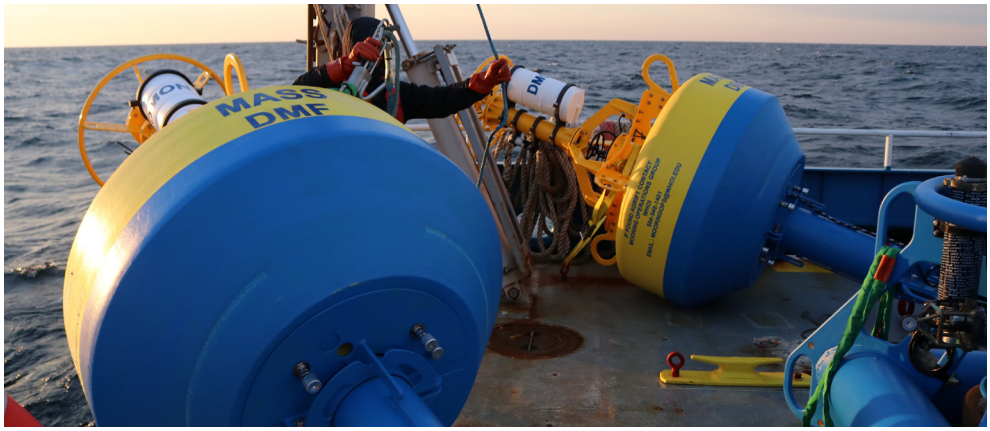


DMF collaborated with Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution to deploy two near real-time acoustic monitoring systems in Cape Cody Bay and near Cape Ann.

DMF's Large Whale Passive Acoustic Monitoring Program is Underway!

DMF's Protected Species Program has recently launched a passive acoustic monitoring (PAM) network in Massachusetts state waters and adjacent federal waters. The network consists of underwater hydrophones continuously recording sound. These acoustic data are analyzed for specific large whale vocalizations which provide information on the presence of different species, including North Atlantic right whales, humpback, fin, and sei whales. The primary goal of the monitoring effort is to improve our understanding of the spatial and temporal presence of right whales in Massachusetts coastal waters and inform current and future conservation measures to protect them.

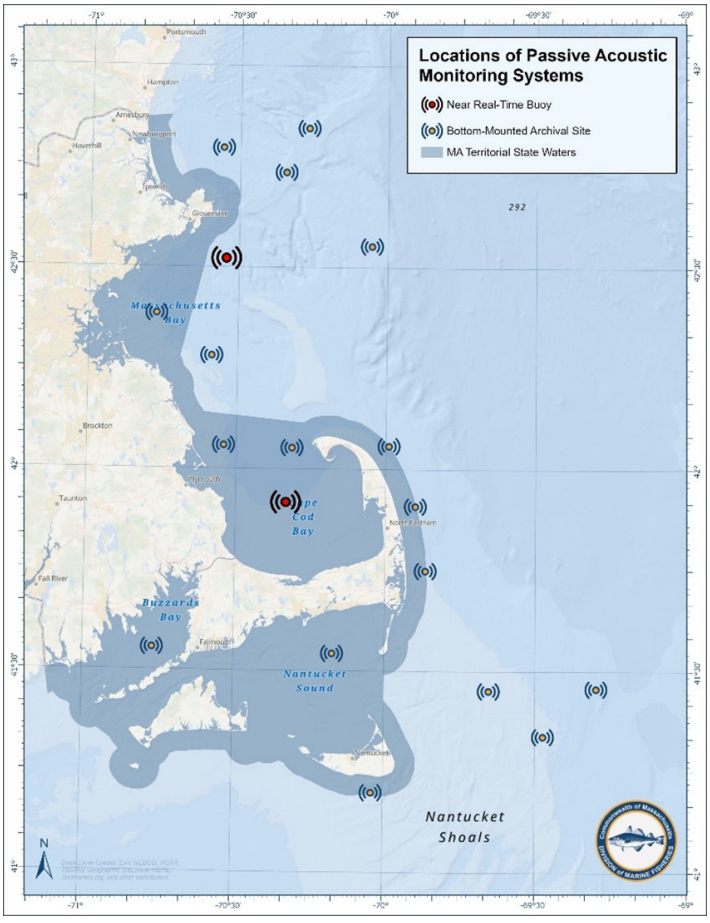
Our acoustic monitoring network has two manners of detecting whales: in near real-time and an archival approach. In partnership with the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (WHOI), two near real-time acoustic monitoring systems were deployed in February 2025 in Cape Cod Bay and off Cape Ann. Developed by WHOI, the two surface-moored systems record, detect, classify, and report vocalizations of large whales, with data transmitted via satellite to shore every two hours. Acoustic analysts review data to confirm detections.

DMF Holds First-Ever Marine Quest Festival!

This June, DMF hosted its first Marine Quest—a free, educational outdoor event to showcase DMF's interesting research, management strategies, and restoration projects with the public. The full story can be found on page 5.

Bottom-mounted archival passive acoustic monitoring systems consist of a short length of line with a float, a hydrophone to record sound, an acoustic receiver/release, and sacrificial anchor. The system measures roughly 10 feet in length at most sites except for shallower sites where the system is adjusted to about 6 feet.

This near real-time data helps DMF dynamically manage seasonal fishing closures and speed restrictions meant to protect right whales and will contribute to an improved overall understanding of right whale presence in Massachusetts. In addition, the acoustic detections are used by NOAA Fisheries to trigger voluntary, dynamic Slow Zones. Data from the near real-time buoys, which are part of a larger monitoring network along the East Coast, can be found at Robots4Whales.



Map of PAM locations where near-real time sites are represented by a red circle and archival sites correspond to a yellow circle.

To further explore how right whales use coastal Massachusetts waters, DMF deployed 17 archival passive acoustic monitoring stations in spring 2025. These bottom-mounted units record sound data that are retrieved from the systems every five months. Once back at the lab, the data are analyzed for specific whale vocalizations. The first retrieval and redeployment of the archival systems will take place in late August and early September 2025. These recorders are also part of a regional acoustic monitoring network for large whales in the Northeast in collaboration with NOAA's Northeast Fisheries Science Center and other New England states. This collective effort aims to build a more thorough understanding of large whale behavior and ecology, helping scientists determine spatial and temporal trends in New England waters.

Fully recoverable bottom mounted archival passive acoustic monitoring systems called TOSSITs are developed by Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution and are currently deployed in Cape Cod Bay. The TOSSIT system includes housing for the hydrophone and acoustic receiver/release, float rings, line, and a Dyneema spool that connects to a circular weight.

To help communicate locations of DMF's currently deployed monitoring systems, we launched a public-facing website regarding these efforts including an interactive map to visualize the monitoring network and provide positions for download. The map also provides information on current spatial management relevant to coastal Massachusetts, as well as positions of large whales and sea turtles sighted during deployment efforts. Additional resources can be found at this website (www.mass.gov/pam-app) related to DMF's acoustic study, visual and acoustic detections of large whales along the entire eastern seaboard of North America, links to DMF advisories, and Protected Species Program news.

By Erin Burke, Protected Species Program Manager

Building Capacity for Large-Scale, Seed-Based Eelgrass Restoration in Massachusetts

Eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) is a marine plant that grows predominately in shallow sandy areas along the coast where it forms lush, vibrant green meadows teaming with life only a few feet beneath the water's surface. Indeed, self-sustaining, resilient eelgrass beds are one of the most important coastal marine ecosystems because of the many valuable, well documented ecosystem functions they provide: not only creating habitat for numerous marine species including commercially and recreationally important fish and invertebrates, but also storing carbon, buffering wave energy, and stabilizing sediments. However, eelgrass's preference for estuaries and bays puts it in close proximity to humans, who likewise prefer to live and recreate in these same coastal areas. When human activities—from recreational boating to development to greenhouse gas emissions—result in physical disturbance of the seafloor (e.g., boat moorings), poor water quality (e.g., nitrogen loading), or ocean warming, these underwater meadows are among the first to suffer. Unfortunately, over the last 30 years, these stressors have resulted in half of Massachusetts' eelgrass meadows—roughly 18,000 acres worth—disappearing.

Given the extent of eelgrass degradation in Massachusetts, it is widely recognized that eelgrass restoration is necessary to recover lost ecosystem services. Yet, most eelgrass restoration efforts in Massachusetts have not resulted in self-sustaining, resilient eelgrass beds. The rare successes are limited to a few acres, orders of magnitude below the thousands of acres of eelgrass lost, and the resilience of these restorations to future impacts of climate change is uncertain. To date, restorations have predominately relied on transplanting eelgrass plants, a method that is time- and labor-intensive, and requires the ability to work underwater, making it inaccessible to many. Critically, in terms of success, transplanting is limited in scale and scope and is poorly suited to incorporating promising climate resilient management strategies such as "assisted migration" (i.e., strategic relocation of a species based on genetic traits that make it more likely to thrive in certain environmental conditions). This is because eelgrass plants are: 1) sensitive to handling and cumbersome to transport, and 2) difficult to clean of epibionts, parasites, and other hitch-hiking species that may pose a risk to natural eelgrass beds and other marine habitats when spread among locations.

The use of eelgrass seeds (i.e., seed-based restoration) offers an alternative approach with the potential to meet the scope and scale of restoration needed to counteract eelgrass loss in Massachusetts. Such restoration efforts in the mid-Atlantic have found that recovering large areas of eelgrass can be accomplished effectively by dispersing negatively buoyant eelgrass seeds. Further, the capacity to store eelgrass seeds for months, clean them of epibionts and parasites, and their small size and hardiness relative to eelgrass plants allows greater flexibility in adjusting planting schedules, minimizes the risk of spreading unwanted organisms among locations, and makes transport between relatively disparate sites manageable—all characteristics which make restoration with eelgrass seeds an ideal choice to incorporate climate resilient strategies and scale-up effort.

To recover even a fraction of the eelgrass meadows lost in Massachusetts, seed-based eelgrass restorations will need to plant many millions of seeds over a number of years. While efforts are ongoing to produce seeds through eelgrass nurseries, they are at a nascent stage and are not currently capable of supplying enough eelgrass seeds for restoration. Thus, seed-based eelgrass restoration, at least initially, will need to rely on seeds produced by natural eelgrass meadows. However, information that is necessary to implement seed-based eelgrass restoration successfully and sustainably here in the Commonwealth, such as how many seeds eelgrass meadow produce on an annual basis and when they can be collected, is currently lacking. To address this knowledge gap, DMF in partnership with eelgrass restoration practitioners and researchers across the state and region, funded by the Environmental Protection Agency's Southern New England Program and the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution Sea Grant Program, are diving under the water to document the timing and density of mature eelgrass seeds in eelgrass meadows from Cape Cod and the Islands to Salem Sound and Cape Ann and many locations in between. Ultimately, the findings of this effort will be used to guide how seeds produced by remaining eelgrass meadows can be best utilized to recover what has been lost.

By Forest Schenck, PhD, Habitat Program Biologist

The Massachusetts Saltwater Derby Reimagined: The Commissioner's Cup

For decades, Massachusetts anglers have competed to catch the largest saltwater fish in Massachusetts, dating back to the historic Governor's Cup. Now, in 2025, DMF's Recreational Fisheries Program is inviting anglers to celebrate this long tradition as they embark on a new chapter of the Derby: The Commissioner's Cup. With new rules, easier ways to enter, and a new showcase trophy, the reimagined derby should ignite a renewed spirit of competition and excitement for the 2025 season.

Earlier this year, the Recreational Fisheries Program unveiled a rebranding of the saltwater derby and a brand-new permanent trophy commissioned from the amazing Cape Cod artist, Steve Swain. The "Commissioner's Cup," a one-of-a-kind steel sculpture, was inspired by the diversity of popular saltwater fish in Massachusetts waters. The Cup started the season on tour at several fishing shows across New England and will soon be

The reimagined Commissioner's Cup trophy and logo.

on permanent display in Foxborough's Bass Pro Shop at Patriot Place. At the end of the derby season, the winning Angler of the Year and Junior Angler of the Year will have their names added to the Cup display, and they'll take home a personal trophy of their favorite species replicated from the Commissioner's Cup trophy.

Competing for a spot on the Derby Leaderboard is now easier than ever. The Derby has two divisions, a Catch & Release Division where you submit a length measurement, and a Weigh-in Division where you submit a weight. Starting this year, anglers can weigh fish themselves using one of the three approved digital scales. This change increases the opportunity for anglers and for-hire captains to participate. Submitting entries is also easier and more accessible, with new, shorter online forms. Each Division has more than 30 eligible species, giving everyone a great chance to get their name up on the leaderboard in the Adult and Junior (age 15 and younger) categories. Whoever enters the most winning species across both Divisions (Weigh-in, Catch & Release, or combined) will be honored as the overall Angler of the Year (both Junior and Adult) at the annual awards ceremony. During the ceremony, a Best Captain in the Business will be announced for the for-hire captain whose boat registers the most winning entries, and the tackle shop most voted for on derby entries will be named Top Shop.

Keep an eye out for an announcement of when the Commissioner's Cup display debuts in its permanent home at Bass Pro Shop, then come see it in person! In the meantime, enjoy the world-class fishing in Massachusetts, get your derby entries in, and try and claim a top spot on the leaderboard.

By Neil McCoy, Information and Education Coordinator

Commercial Fisheries Commission Meets for First Time

The Massachusetts Commercial Fisheries Commission (CFC) met for the first time on April 8, 2025. During the first meeting, leadership aimed to effectively concentrate the scope and goals of this new public body, and to develop strategies for implementation through feedback from Commission members. Areas of interest included economic development, port infrastructure, and economic sustainability of the industry, while increasing awareness within fishing communities and state government. With facilitation support from the Consensus Building Institute, the CFC determined several primary tasks during its first meeting, including (1) helping to inform DMF on an updated port profile assessment, (2) offering feedback on CZM's ResilientCoasts Draft Plan, (3) discerning the scope of the CFC from that of the Fisheries Working Group for Offshore Wind, (4) sharing individual written support of commercial fishery representation on the Commonwealth's Food Policy Council and comment on New England gas, oil, and minerals development proposals, and (5) addressing fishery science challenges given the anticipated limitation of federal surveys.

The CFC was established by the Massachusetts legislature in 2022 (Section 79 of the Chapter 179 of the Acts of 2022) – An Act Driving Clean Energy and Offshore Wind. The CFC will provide a forum in which stakeholders and commercial fishery representatives from across the Commonwealth's coast will discuss and prioritize strategies to increase sustainability of the commercial fishing industry and to address the responsible development of offshore energy projects. As a unified voice, commission members will recommend strategies to be brought to the state legislature and effect change.

The CFC is a 19-member body, including the Secretary of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, and the Directors of the Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF), Dan McKiernan, and the Office of Coastal Zone Management (CZM), Alison Brizius, who serve as co-chairs. The remaining 14 members are appointed by the Governor and represent stakeholders of the commercial fishing industry and research organizations, including members of Responsible Offshore Development Alliance, Massachusetts Fishermen's Partnership, Massachusetts Seafood Collaborative, Stellwagen Bank Charter Boat Association, New Bedford Port Authority, Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association, Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen's Alliance, Gloucester Fisheries Commission, Gloucester Fishing Community Preservation Fund, Fisheries Survival Fund, Center for Sustainable Fisheries, Northeast Seafood Coalition, Gloucester Fishermen's Wives Association, and the University of Massachusetts School for Marine Science and Technology. With its passionate, motivated, and knowledgeable members, the CFC will face its goals to strengthen collaboration across the state, advocate for industry sustainability, and create a unified voice for the industry head-on in the years to come.

By Bradlie Morgan, Communications and Policy Specialist

DMF Hosts First-Ever Marine Quest Festival in Salem

On June 14, DMF invited the public to their first-ever Marine Quest, a free, educational outdoor event for children and families at the Cat Cove Marine Laboratory in Salem. The festival, organized by DMF's Fish Biology Program Manager Gary Nelson, was an opportunity for the Division to showcase everything they do—from innovative research and managing sustainable fisheries to protecting endangered marine species and habitat restoration.

Morning rain showers and overcast skies didn't dampen the festive atmosphere or keep away the crowds. Hundreds of children, parents, and curious community members showed up ready to go on their marine quest. Visitors were waved in by a friendly lobster mascot and greeted by a live ukulele band as they wandered down to the festivities near the cove shore. Under the cover of tents, DMF biologists presented their research and delighted visitors with up-close looks at some local coastal species, including crabs, eelgrass, and American eels. In between exploring DMF programs and projects, chatting with biologists, and sampling local seafood, visitors sat in on science mini lectures about engaging Massachusetts topics such as striped bass genetics, horseshoe crab monitoring, and tracking white sharks off Cape Cod. It was a rare chance for the public to be introduced to the full breadth of everything that DMF works on in Massachusetts.

Visitors explored touch tanks full of local shellfish species.

"The Marine Quest event was a unique opportunity to showcase all the programs at DMF," said Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries Director Dan McKiernan. "We were able to bring the general public—including hundreds of kids—into our world of marine biology in Massachusetts. The positive response from the public was incredibly rewarding for the DMF biologists who got to demonstrate and explain how 'cool' our marine resources are. Kids got to touch and examine so many incredible sea creatures and learn from DMF's professional biologists. For us, marine fisheries research and management is a vocation, and the public really embraced it. We hope to learn from our successes and put this event on annually."

A common theme for many DMF projects is collaboration, and Marine Quest provided a great opportunity to feature work from other organizations. Several partners helped make the event a success, including NOAA's Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary, University of Massachusetts Boston, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Salem Sound Coast Watch, Essex County Sewerage District, and the Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association.

DMF staff interacted with visitors throughout the event to discuss the interesting marine science projects they work on.

Marine Quest was for everyone, but the highlights of the day came from the hands-on games and activities that connected children with the wonders of the natural marine world. Inside the marine station, excited kids flocked to the large touch tanks full of marine creatures such as lobsters, Jonah crabs, skates, bay scallops, and horseshoe crabs. At activities throughout the event, curious kids peered into microscopes, examined fish skulls, learned to cast, and put on diving gear to gaze underwater. There was inspiration everywhere for young kids and students to imagine themselves as a future marine biologist.

"Marine Quest is such an incredible way for the community to connect with the awe-inspiring marine world found right off our coasts," said Massachusetts Department of Fish & Game Commissioner Tom O'Shea. "From exhibits on DMF's cutting-edge research and sustainable fisheries management, to live touch tanks, fishing clinics, invasive green crab races, and delicious local seafood, there was really something for everyone. Thank you to our incredible staff for creating such a fun, educational day for children and families. We hope all who attended feel inspired to learn more about the unique marine biodiversity that makes Massachusetts so special."

By Neil McCoy, Information and Education Coordinator

Striped Bass Management Updates

In December 2024, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) Striped Bass Management Board initiated Draft Addendum III to Amendment 7 to consider management actions in response to the 2024 Stock Assessment for Atlantic Striped Bass. Since then, the Management Board has met twice more (in February and May) and provided additional direction on the range of alternatives for development (including some outside the scope of rebuilding). Draft Addendum III has the potential to change commercial and recreational fishery regulations coastwide beginning as soon as 2026.

As of May 2025, Draft Addendum III is being developed to consider four main management topics, as listed below. Note that the Management Board will be reviewing these issues and the specific alternatives again in August 2025 and still has the opportunity to remove or amend any of them, before (and if) approving Draft Addendum III for public comment.

- Changing the recreational and commercial management measures to increase the probability of achieving a rebuilt stock in 2029.
- Modifying the coastwide commercial tagging program to require point-of-harvest tagging.
- Standardizing the method for measuring the total length of a striped bass for compliance with size limits.
- Modifying the recreational fishing season in Maryland's portion of the Chesapeake Bay to increase fishing access without increasing fishery removals.

If Draft Addendum III is approved for public comment in August 2025, a comment period including coastwide state public hearings will most likely be held in late August to early October, so that the Management Board could take final action on the draft addendum at the ASMFC Annual Meeting in late October. This would allow states to then implement selected measures in time for the 2026 fishing season.

DMF has updated its online Striped Bass Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) to include a section on the 2024 Stock Assessment and Possible 2026 Management Changes. This FAQ includes key takeaways about the status of the stock, the rebuilding trajectory, the management measures being considered in Draft Addendum III, and the implications for Massachusetts. Previously published sections of the FAQ, which focuses on interstate management actions, also cover the 2023 Emergency Action and the 2024 Addendum II Measures.

There are some major changes on the table in Draft Addendum III—including the possible implementation of first-ever recreational fishing seasons that could keep anglers from harvesting or even targeting striped bass for portions of the year, differential size limits for recreational anglers based on how they access the fishery (i.e., for-hire vessel, private vessel, or shore), a commercial quota reduction, and programmatic requirements that could necessitate drastically limiting entry in the commercial fishery. (DMF has already amended its definition of striped bass total length to adopt most if not all of what it proposed for standardization along the coast, notably that the tail must be pinched. See Regulatory Updates, page 22)

Stakeholder involvement in fisheries management is critical, so please READ THE FAQ (and check back for updates!) and keep a look out for future public comment opportunities on Draft Addendum III. If you have additional relevant questions about what's going on with striped bass management that are not addressed in these FAQs, we encourage you to reach out to DMF at marine.fish@mass.gov so we can add them.

By Nichola Meserve, Interstate Fisheries Management Analyst

Updated MassFishHunt Permitting System

The MassFishHunt recreational fishing and hunting permitting system transitioned to an updated online platform in May. The most notable change is that customers now log into MassFishHunt using MyMassGov—a secure service that allows users to sign in to multiple Massachusetts state applications with a single account and password. After completing a one-time registration with MyMassGov, users will log into MassFishHunt—and other state applications with the same credentials (email and password). Go to massfishhunt.mass.gov to begin the login process and purchase your Recreational Saltwater Fishing or Non-Commercial Lobster Permit. For help with the login process, click here.

Improvements and new features will be added in the coming weeks. Stay tuned for commemorative hard cards that will be available to purchase later this year!

Permits will still be available for in-person purchase at DMF offices, MassWildlife offices, and authorized vendors. Click here for a license agent map.

By Story Reed, Assistant Director

The Closure of the DMF Shellfish Purification Plant: End of an Era or New Beginning?

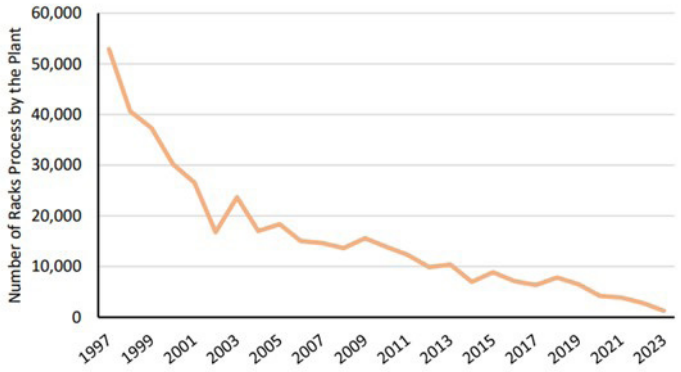
The Newburyport Shellfish Purification Plant c. 1938

In 1925, following several shellfish-related illness outbreaks including the nation-wide typhoid scare in 1924 where tens of thousands of people became ill following the consumption of oysters, the US Public Health Service closed shellfish growing waters around the country. These closures were implemented near every city and town where it was then the normal practice to dispose of our sewage—untreated—into the nearest waterway. In heavily populated and developed states like Massachusetts, these closures were particularly widespread and impactful.

Because it would be several decades before wastewater treatment became a common practice, attention focused instead on making shellfish harvested in contaminated waters safe to eat to help revive local shellfish industries. As filter feeders, molluscan shellfish can concentrate pollutants up to 100 times that of the level in the surrounding waters making them a perfect means to transmit pathogenic organisms found in sewage to people. Shellfish practitioners at the time wondered if this same biological process could be reversed by immersing them in purified water to naturally purge the contaminants until they were safe to eat. After a series of experiments validating the process known today as depuration, the first ever shellfish "purification" facility in the country was opened in 1928 on Plum Island by the City of Newburyport.

Following several decades of successful depuration of local softshell clams, the City of Newburyport transferred ownership of the Plant to the Division of Marine Fisheries in 1961 which has operated it ever since to treat clams from around the state. However, in November 2023, a severe coastal storm eroded nearly 300 feet of the coastal dune complex that protected the Plant and its saltwater well system, making the facility inoperable. With the primary dune no longer in existence, subsequent storms flooded the Plant itself causing further damage and uncertainty.

DMF responded by instituting an economic relief program for affected fishers to replace lost wages during the period of the Plant closure and commissioning an engineering study to investigate the feasibility of restoring operations of the Plant and assessing its long-term viability given its vulnerable location. Unfortunately, while the study did determine that its seawater system could be reconstructed and the plant re-opened at a cost of roughly $700,000, the extreme vulnerability of the Plant would make operations there highly uncertain and would likely require retreat from the location within the next 20–25 years. When coupled with the dramatic decline in the amount of clams processed at the Plant in recent years, the Commonwealth made the difficult decision to close the Plant permanently in December 2024.



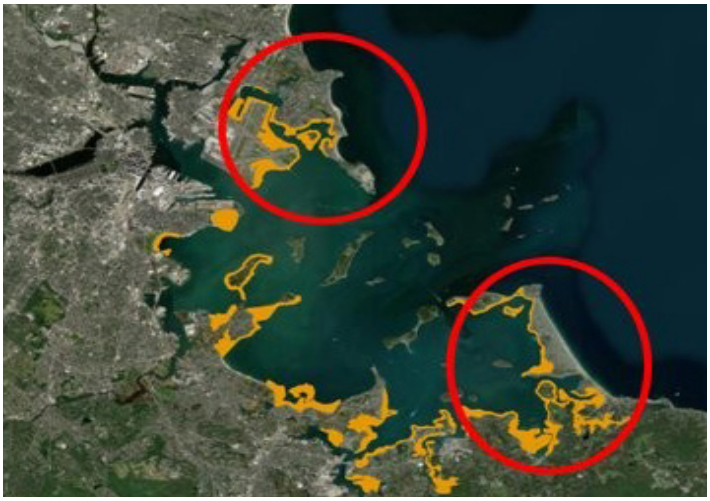
Number of bushels of shellfish (racks) processed by the DMF Purification Plant by year, 1997—2023.

A central consideration in the decision to close the Plant was the impact on the 100-year legacy of the contaminated softshell clam fishery of Massachusetts and the people dependent on it. Fortunately, the only other depuration plant in New England is located just 25 miles away operated by Spinney Creek Shellfish Company in Eliot, Maine. To help Massachusetts fishers switch to this alternate facility, DMF instituted a program to cover 100% of the cost and time differential between use of the two facilities which allowed the fishery to re-open in February 2025.

Another consideration regarding the future viability of contaminated harvest in Massachusetts is that with the continued enforcement of our laws against water pollution, there should be less need for depuration over time. Indeed, DMF is currently planning to re-classify large swaths of the areas that formally required depuration in the outer Boston Harbor region in the towns of Hingham, Hull and Winthrop which will allow clams to be sold directly into commerce. This upgrade will represent the final phase of the multibillion-dollar Boston Harbor cleanup which has been a major victory for the marine resources of the Commonwealth.

Although this trend will result in less contaminated shellfish growing areas over time, we anticipate that there will always be a need for some amount of depuration in certain coastal areas impacted by rivers and aging wastewater infrastructure so this unique fishery can continue. Having partners like Spinney Creek coupled with continued improvements in water quality represent a win-win for shellfishing in Massachusetts!

By Wayne Castonguay, Regional Shellfish Supervisor



Moderately contaminated shellfishing areas in greater Boston Harbor shown in yellow with areas slated for upgrade due to improving water quality highlighted in red.

A Few Ways You Can Help Striped Bass This Summer

As another season of striped bass fishing gets underway in Massachusetts, DMF is continuing our work to make the fishery as enjoyable, and sustainable, as possible. This year will likely be a great one for striped bass fishing. The remaining fish born in the late 2000s and early 2010s are providing excellent catch and release trophy opportunities. The 2015 year-class are nearing that status, likely between 35" and 40", and the 2018 year-class should provide lots of slot-sized fish for folks that cherish catching a "keeper". At the same time, it will also continue the trend of fewer people encountering constant action with schoolies throughout our waters. We are also likely to hear about places and times where the fish just aren't around like they used to be.

To help anglers succeed in our current fishery, and to prepare for what is likely coming in the future (see our Striped Bass Frequently Asked Questions for a deeper understanding of where we are and how we got here), DMF is launching the third phase of our post-release mortality research. We're kicking it off with a series of Striped Bass Tactics videos to help you boost your striped bass angling, while also teaching you how to maximize the survival of your catch after you put it back in the water.

As Massachusetts anglers know, DMF has been tackling the thorny issue of striped bass post-release mortality since late 2020, when the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission instituted a circle-hook mandate for live and dead baits.

This source of mortality is so important in the striped bass fishery because, in most years, recreational angling accounts for about 90% of all mortality and up to half of that can be attributed to fish dying after being released! In the first phase of our research, we used acoustic telemetry to determine what factors lead to a striped bass surviving or dying after being caught. Next, we conducted a two-year Striped Bass Citizen Science Project. With the help of anglers in Massachusetts and the entire east coast, we gained a better understanding of how angling practices and gear choices affect post-release mortality.

Armed with this information, we recently launched an extensive survey of angling practices to registered permit holders in Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, and Virginia. Together, these states account for more than 80% of striped bass trips and fish caught along the coast and represent the many ways anglers pursue fish along the striper coast. Roughly 5% of anglers in each state will be selected for the survey, along with all the participants of the Citizen Science Project. If selected, you will be contacted by email, a postcard, or both. The survey should only take about 10 minutes, and your responses will play an important role in creating a more accurate estimate of coast-wide mortality to guide management in the coming years.

Whether or not you are selected for the survey, there are plenty of ways you can contribute to increasing the survival of striped bass you catch and release. With over 8,000 striped bass catches reported to our Striped Bass Citizen Science Project, we can confidently tell you that one of the best things to do is switch out treble hooks on your lures and try to reduce the total number of hooks to just one. Replacing tail hooks with plug flags is a great way to keep that lure swimming right and bringing in the fish with just one hook. You should also try to keep your fight and handling time to a minimum by being prepared for the catch and using the proper gear. Remember, de-barbing your hook can reduce handling time!

To help out anglers and striped bass, DMF teamed up with Kevin Blinkoff and Jimmy Fee from On The Water, Ryan Callaghan from MeatEater, Bryan and Taylor Sears from Mass Bay Guides, and Nantucket surf fishing guide Tammy King to create a series of videos that offer plenty of tips and tricks from the professionals on how to be a better angler from a boat, kayak, or the surf. The videos also capture the lessons learned from our studies and how you can implement them in all these different settings. The actions of individual anglers, namely you, can make an impactful difference as we weather a coming downturn in striped bass abundance. Successful fisheries are a community effort, and we at DMF are proud of our fisheries, our anglers, and what we accomplish together.

By Ben Gahagan, Recreational Fisheries Program Manager

Creature Feature: Atlantic Halibut

Atlantic halibut (*Hippoglossus hippoglossus*) is the largest flatfish found in Massachusetts waters and one of the largest fish in the Gulf of Maine. Adults can reach lengths over 7 feet and weigh more than 600 pounds, though individuals this size are rare today. Like other flatfish, Atlantic halibut undergo a transformation early in life, migrating one eye to the opposite side of the head so both eyes end up on the right side of the body. This adaptation allows them to lie flat on the seafloor and remain camouflaged in the sediment.

Halibut have a diamond-shaped body and a broad, tooth-lined mouth built for ambushing prey. Their upper side ranges in color from dark brown to olive, while the underside is pale. They are powerful predators, feeding on fish like haddock, cod, and herring, as well as squid and crustaceans. Halibut typically occupy deeper habitats from the continental shelf to the slope, often in depths of 200 to 1,600 feet. Halibut have large home ranges, some even migrate between US and Canadian waters.

Atlantic halibut are long-lived and slow-growing. Some individuals can live for over 50 years, and may not reach full maturity until ten years old and nearly 50 inches long. This combination of slow growth and delayed reproduction makes the species especially vulnerable to overfishing. Atlantic halibut were once abundant in New England but experienced sharp declines due to intense fishing pressure throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Atlantic halibut abundance has been rebounding since the early 2000s, though key indicators find halibut biomass remains low compared to historic levels.

Today, Atlantic halibut are managed under strict conservation measures. In Massachusetts, commercial fishers are limited to retaining, possessing, or landing no more than one halibut per vessel per trip or 24-hour period, whichever is longer. Recreational fishers may retain, possess, or land only one halibut per person per day. Retained halibut must be at least 41 inches long.

Though landings are limited, Atlantic halibut remains a prized catch for its firm texture and mild, buttery flavor. It is typically sold fresh in fillets or steaks and featured on menus at high-end restaurants. If you're lucky enough to find it at a local seafood market, it makes an excellent choice for grilling or roasting.

With continued conservation efforts, scientists, fishers, and fisheries managers hope to continue rebuilding Atlantic halibut populations in the Northwest Atlantic. Until then, this flatfish giant remains a rare and fascinating resident of our deep offshore waters.

By Tara Dolan, PhD, Stock Assessment Specialist

New Regulations for Shore-Based Shark Fishing

DMF has adopted several new rules affecting shore-based shark fishing in Massachusetts for this coming season. These include constraining the use of certain heavy gear while shore fishing around Cape Cod Bay and the Outer Cape; prohibiting chumming from the shoreline during day-time hours when fishing heavy gear; and restricting the use of mechanized devices when setting bait from shore.

Shore-based shark fishing is growing in popularity along the coast and Massachusetts has become a desirable location to conduct this fishing. While DMF regulations already prohibit attracting and targeting great white sharks, it has become evident in recent years that these rules are difficult to enforce and in need of clarification to ameliorate user-group conflicts. Last year, there were several instances when anglers likely fishing for white sharks from shore caused public safety risks for other beach goers. In response, DMF has taken action to prevent the further expansion of this fishing activity and improve enforceability of existing regulations.

To better restrict the targeting of white sharks where they are most commonly found, DMF created an area (see red shoreline on map) where anglers are prohibited from fishing from shore with a baited hook that has an inside gap exceeding 5/8-inch (when measured straight across from barb to shank) coupled with a wire or metal leader that measures greater than 18-inches. The area where this activity is prohibited begins at the northernmost point of Plymouth Beach and follows the shoreline around Cape Cod Bay and the Outer Cape including all of Chatham Harbor and Monomoy Island. The use of this heavy gear remains authorized outside of the area and anglers may fish lighter tackle within the area to target other species. Additionally, if you are shore fishing and using this heavy hook and leader configuration outside of the prohibited area, you may not chum from sunrise to sunset.

Lastly, DMF has prohibited anglers from using mechanized, compressed propulsion, and remote-controlled devices to deploy baits when shore fishing for sharks or any other species. Common devices included in this prohibition are bait cannons, drones, and so-called "rc-boats" (radio- or remote-controlled boats). Deploying baits with manual devices such as kayaks and kites remains allowed. The purpose of this action is two-fold.

Areas where shore-based shark fishing is prohibited are shown in red.

First, it complements the above-described regulations to restrict the shore-based targeting of white sharks. By prohibiting the use of these devices when shore-based shark fishing, anglers will be constrained in setting bait beyond the surf where white sharks occur, thereby limiting the ability for anglers to target these animals and ameliorating resulting user group and public safety conflicts. Additionally, by prohibiting the use of these devices, DMF aims to reduce stresses on fish that can increase post-release mortality. These devices allow shore-based anglers to target fish at a greater distance and specific size classes of fish when conditions allow. Inevitably, this will increase the frequency that fish are caught, as well as the fight time and stress associated with the catch. This is of particular concern for striped bass which face conservation challenges and are a species commonly targeted from shore.

By Jared Silva, Fisheries Management Analyst

Celebrating Recreational Saltwater Fishing in Massachusetts

This spring, DMF's Recreational Fisheries Program collaborated with talented illustrator Jay Talbot to re-envision our "FishMA" sticker. In an effort to capture some of the amazing diversity of saltwater species and the thrill of saltwater fishing in Massachusetts, the team worked with Jay to create a series of stickers that celebrate our favorite fishes. Headlining the series is the iconic striped bass, full of fight and personality. The rest of the series has something for every angler across Massachusetts, including bluefin tuna, mackerel, fluke, black sea bass, haddock, and the small but mighty tautog! The first run of stickers has been incredibly popular at fishing shows, bait and tackle shops, angler education clinics, and other events, and a second print run is already underway. The stickers are a great way to celebrate the Massachusetts saltwater fishing community and help connect anglers with everything the Recreational Fisheries Program does, including the Commissioner's Cup derby, research and citizen science, and angler education.

Diadromous Fish Run Update: Spring 2025

River herring swimming in recently restored parts of Fore River Watershed in Braintree.

Diadromous, or sea-run fish, are the migratory fish that switch between marine and freshwater habitats to complete their life history. Most diadromous fish populations have declined sharply from historical periods when valuable fisheries were supported. Presently, minor fisheries occur for a few diadromous species and collectively these fish remain important forage for a wide range of fish and wildlife. The DMF Diadromous Fish Project constructs and repairs fishways and actively monitors river herring, American shad, American eel, and rainbow smelt spawning runs in coastal rivers to contribute to population assessment and management of these species and to inform restoration planning. After another busy spring season, we offer the following updates and highlights.

River Herring Counting Workshop

DMF hosted a river herring counting workshop at our New Bedford office on March 12, 2025. A year prior, DMF held a workshop on technical aspects of river herring counting with a small group of agency and local staff who manage counting stations. This time, we opened up the workshop to a larger group of volunteers and interested parties to share lessons learned, thank the many volunteer counters, and look to the future. With over 45 river herring counting efforts in coastal Massachusetts in recent years, interest was strong and the workshop attracted over 60 attendees who dug into the methods of volunteer visual counts and electronic and video counting. As part of this process, the Diadromous Fish Project prepared a guidance document on the three counting methods for publication in the DMF Technical Report Series.

Fish Passage Restoration

DMF's Q2 & Q3 2024 Newsletter reported on four large cooperative fish passage restoration projects under construction at that time. These projects remain in the news as regionally important diadromous fish restoration projects that either were completed since last fall or close to completion with positive related news from this spring's spawning run.

South River, Marshfield. An ongoing Town of Marshfield construction project on the South River removed a former mill dam and is building a nature-like fishway in its place to pass fish over the elevation rise at the Veterans Memorial Park. To allow work to continue during the spring river herring migration, a uniquely designed, temporary bypass channel was constructed through the park. To mitigate the inherent risk of shutting down the mainstem passage route, DMF's crew conducted weekly flow and depth measurements and looked for fish presence and egg deposition. These observations led to the addition of in-stream rock weirs to slow water velocity at key locations. Project goals and results were affirmed by the fish! A large movement of river herring moved through the bypass channel during the first week of May, reaching areas previously blocked to the species for 400 years.

Sesuit Creek, Dennis. Two culverts at Rt. 6A in Dennis on Sesuit Creek were replaced this winter under contract with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation. The prior culverts were undersized and prone to clogging with sediment, riprap stones, and Phragmites stems. These conditions routinely caused fish mortality from impingement and excessive predation mortality. Town of Dennis and DMF staff visited the site this spring and found no evidence of fish mortality as herring passed freely through the new culverts. Much appreciation is due to MassDOT for investing in this regionally important fish passage and transportation infrastructure site.

Stony Brook, Brewster. The Town of Brewster is working with the National Resources Conservation Services and Cape Cod Conservation District to rebuild the fishway at Stony Brook. This iconic mill site is one of the most visited "herring parks" in Massachusetts, with generations of families holding fond memories of seeing herring at Stony Brook. Construction started this past winter with four of the concrete in-stream weirs in the fishway being completed and will continue after the spring run to complete the project. The herring passed well through the new weirs, as the run experienced an above average count of about 200,000 fish this spring.

Fore River Watershed, Braintree. We reported last fall on the completion of the cooperative restoration effort to open passage for diadromous fish in the Fore River watershed. Two dams were removed and fishways installed at the Great Pond Reservoir and Rock Falls, giving migratory fish a chance to advance upstream to the native, 180-acre Great Pond spawning habitat for the first time in about 225 years (based on historic fishery records related to dam construction). Anticipation was high this spring to see how river herring would respond. Our crew first saw river herring at Rock Falls on April 30, and by the time that the Town of Braintree held its first river herring celebration on May 3, herring sightings were being reported throughout upstream locations. We watched hundreds of herring aggregate in the Cochato River and spawn in the stream along fairways at the Braintree Municipal Golf Course, to the surprise and thrill of golfers and citizens of Braintree. These fish represent pre-restoration recruitment, and the expectation is that the numbers of fish can only go up. Much appreciation is due to the Town of Braintree, Division of Ecological Restoration, NOAA Restoration Center and other state and federal partners who supported this long-term restoration effort. Recognition is also due to the less-known contribution of years of manual labor reclaiming the stream channel from debris jams, wetland plant overgrowth, and tree falls by the DMF Fishway Crew and super-volunteer, Mike Richardi.

DMF Diadromous Fisheries Project Leader, Brad Chase discusses the extensive collaboration and efforts put into the removal of two dams in Monatiquot River in Braintree. This restoration opened areas of the river system not accessible to river herring in over 200 years.

Diadromous Fish Monitoring

While data from this spring's counting stations are not yet fully processed, overall, the runs seem to have mixed results. Counts will be finalized later this year, but from preliminary data, the Herring Brook in Pembroke, the Monument River in Bourne, and Stony Brook in Brewster are three runs with electronic counts expected to post higher than average counts in 2025.

There is good news for monitoring of other diadromous fish species. Glass eel monitoring continues to show a recent trend of elevated counts at our monitoring stations. This trend began in 2023 and at least two sites will greatly exceed time-series highs in 2025. While rainbow smelt are a species that may struggle with climate change in Massachusetts, the Fore River smelt fyke net posted one of the highest catch-per-effort for smelt this spring in a 20+ year time series. Finally, the USFWS Attleboro Hatchery has been stocking American shad in the Taunton River since 2022 in a cooperative effort with DMF and DFW. This spring would have been the first year that spawning adults could have returned from the 2022 stocking. DMF and USFWS biologists have been angling to collect genetic samples this spring to confirm the origin of spawning run shad. Catch-per-effort has been high so far this spring. Stay tuned for genetic results and future recruitment to a potential new shad sport fishery in the Taunton River.

By Brad Chase, Diadromous Fisheries Project Leader

Angling for Success: New Gear for DMF Fishing Clinics

In 2024, the Massachusetts Office of Outdoor Recreation (MOOR) awarded DMF's Saltwater Angler Education Program an Inclusive and Accessible Event grant. The funding from MOOR provided the Angler Education Program a unique opportunity to improve the accessibility of their teaching materials and fishing clinics. DMF was able to purchase over a hundred rods, along with tackle and bait, for a special free saltwater fishing clinic event hosted at Fort Taber pier in New Bedford. After getting hands-on instructions from DMF staff on the basics of saltwater fishing, each registered participant went home with the new rod and tackle they used during the clinic. Sending new anglers home with both the knowledge and the right tools was a recipe for success. After the overwhelmingly positive feedback, we decided to build on what was accomplished at the Fort Taber clinic and requested and received $10,000 from sales of the Striped Bass Conservation License Plate for use in the 2025 season.

With the goal of getting rods and tackle into the hands of beginner anglers, the newly acquired funds went directly to the purchase of 200 new rods, along with 200 starter tackle kits that include hooks, sinkers, swivels, lures, and fishing rigs. This will give anglers an opportunity to try various tackle, explore different fishing techniques, and have the right gear to target various saltwater fish species in Massachusetts state waters. The Saltwater Angler Education Program will be distributing this gear and tackle at select free and open to the public saltwater angler education fishing clinics. Participants will learn basic saltwater angling skills such as knot tying, casting, fish measuring, fish identification, proper handling techniques, and catch and release fishing in a safe and enthusiastic environment. At these select clinics, registered participants get to keep the gear and tackle that they learned on during the clinic. They also leave with a beginner's fishing guide and other educational materials to keep learning. The opportunity to receive free tackle and gear in a positive fishing experience during a clinic will give attendees everything they need to recreate the experience on their own and become avid saltwater anglers!

The Saltwater Angler Education Program is also now offering a Rod and Reel Loan Program, connecting with town, scout, camp, and leadership organizations who are interested in teaching saltwater fishing clinics in their own communities. These programs are designed to teach staff and program leaders how to use and troubleshoot saltwater fishing gear and tackle. After completion, graduates of the program can borrow rods, tackle, and a saltwater angler education lesson plan. They also receive guidance on how to host their own clinics, with tips and suggestions on how to engage the public and what to expect. The lesson plan covers basic saltwater angling skills and is intended to be an extension of the DMF saltwater angler education fishing clinic experience.

Aspiring anglers in many coastal cities, including EJ communities, will have access to a free family clinic this year. DMF is scheduled to host, co-host, or sponsor at least 18 saltwater angler education fishing clinics across the state! Learn more about our clinics here.

By Kim Fine, Saltwater Angler Education Program Coordinator

The Inclusive and Accessible Event grant allowed DMF to purchase fishing gear for saltwater angler education fishing clinics.

Massachusetts Waters: Seasonal Right Whale Habitat

North Atlantic right whales return each year to feed in Cape Cod Bay and coastal Massachusetts waters in the early winter through late spring. The North Atlantic right whale is one of the most endangered large whale species and their recovery is currently threatened by entanglement in fishing gear and collisions with ships. As they annually return in high numbers to our waters, DMF implements seasonal conservation measures to protect right whales from entanglements and vessel collision, including fishing gear closures and a small vessel speed restriction in Cape Cod Bay. In addition, derelict gear removal efforts occur in the seasonal closure to remove any lost or abandoned gear from the area.

This year marked DMF's 27th year partnering with the Center for Coastal Studies (CCS) to conduct aerial surveillance and habitat monitoring. By the latest estimate, there are approximately 370 individual right whales remaining in the population, and approximately half of them (n = 178) were sighted in Cape Cod Bay between mid-November 2024 and the end of May 2025. The aerial surveys began this season on November 19 in Cape Cod Bay and right whales were sighted on that first flight. There were modest sightings through the end of January (2–5 individuals), with an increase to 63 individuals sighted in the month of February. The aerial team continued to see high numbers of right whales in Cape Cod Bay in March (98 individuals) and April (120 individuals) concurrent with reports of high densities of their copepod prey.

In April, the zooplankton composition was dominated by spe cies that tend to aggregate at the surface during the day. This meant the right whales were also often feeding at the surface making them more visible to researchers as well as beachgoers, especially at beaches in Provincetown. In May, 27 individuals were sighted in CCB with all sightings occurring within the first half of the month.

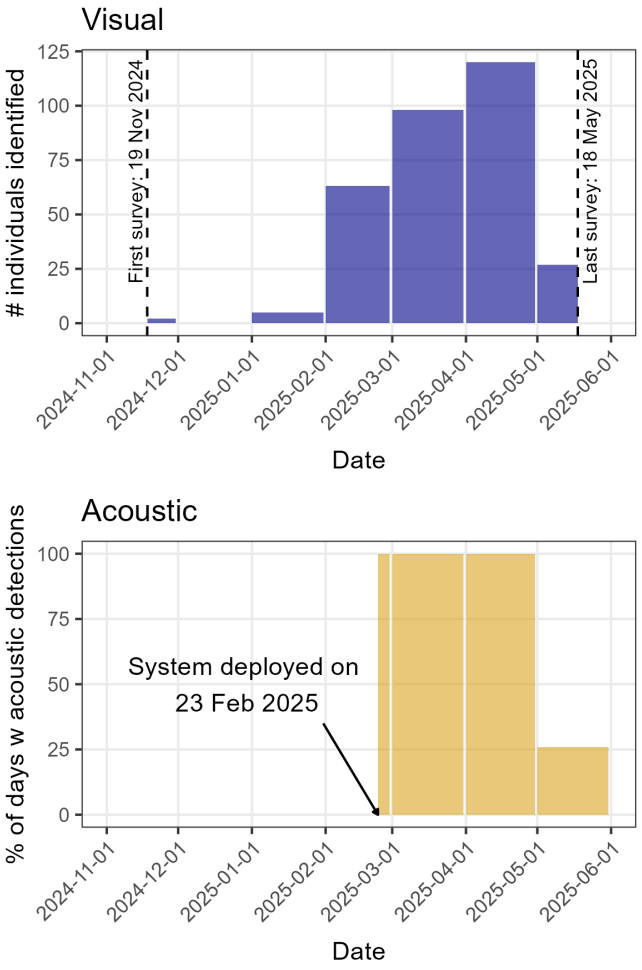
By the end of the 2025 calving season in the southeast United States, 10 mother/calf pairs were documented. There are approximately 70 reproductive females in the population, and in the last decade, the average has been 13 births per year. The first mother/calf pair was sighted in Cape Cod Bay on March 11, and on April 14, a female known as "Monarch" was sighted in Cape Cod Bay with a new calf in tow. This previously undocumented calf brought the total for the year to 11 and prompted some questions about where this birth may have occurred. By the end of the season, eight of the 11 known mother/calf pairs had been sighted in Cape Cod Bay.

The 2025 season also brought sightings of right whales outside of the dense aggregations seen in Cape Cod Bay. In April, right whales were also sighted around Nahant, the Boston Harbor Islands, and Hull. Some of these sightings triggered federal dynamic Slow Zones requesting large vessels to limit their speed to 10 knots or less. In addition, on two separate days (April 15 and 17) right whales were sighted in the Cape Cod Canal, temporarily closing this route to vessel traffic.

New Efforts

The aerial surveys routinely monitor Cape Cod Bay, and starting in 2022, the coverage areas expanded to include waters from the New Hampshire border to the shipping lane south of Nantucket. This season, 46 individuals were sighted in these other areas by the CCS aerial survey team, 13 of which the team did not capture in Cape Cod Bay this season—the CCS photo-identification efforts captured 191 individuals in total across all habitats!

With the addition of the two real-time acoustic monitoring systems in late February, we had a new tool this season to keep tabs on the whales (see page 1 for more information). At the Cape Cod Bay monitoring site, right whales were acoustically detected every day between when it was deployed and May 6, with positive detections also on May 8 and 10. At the Cape Ann buoy, right whale detections on April 20 and 29 triggered federal Slow Zones.



Visual and acoustic detections of right whales in Cape Cod Bay each month including the number of individuals identified between the first and last aerial survey, and the percentage of listening days per month when right whales were acoustically detected from the real-time acoustic monitoring system between 23 Feb and 31 May 2025.

Management of State Waters

DMF dynamically manages the lifting of seasonal fishing gear closure in state waters and the seasonal small vessel speed restriction in Cape Cod Bay. In 2025, both the fishing and vessel speed restrictions were lifted on May 14 based on low visual sightings of right whales and a sharp decline in acoustic detections from the real-time system.

Data collected during visual surveys provide important information on whale behavior, entanglements and injuries, and calving rates, but visual surveys cannot occur in all weather or at night. Passive acoustic monitoring can fill in some of the gaps in visual survey by providing information on the acoustic presence of whales year-round and around the clock. Together, these two methods of monitoring North Atlantic right whales can help to inform effective conservation of this species while they are present off our shores.

By Leah Crowe, Protected Species Science and Monitoring Lead

A North Atlantic right whale mother/calf pair in Cape Cod Bay. This mother whale is named "Accordian" for the scar on her back from a boat's propellor. She is estimated to be at least 14 years old, and this is her first documented calf.

Promising Signs for Horseshoe Crab in Massachusetts

Monitoring programs for horseshoe crabs in Massachusetts are showing promising signs of increasing abundance. 90% of Massachusetts spawning beach surveys show an increasing trend over the last decade. DMF's annual seine survey has seen above normal numbers of crabs each of the last ten years. The last two coastwide stock assessments conducted by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission in 2019 and 2024 showed abundance in Massachusetts has been increasing since horseshoe crab management started in 1998, citing data from DMF's semi-annual trawl survey.

The increase in abundance is likely due in part to lunar closures adopted in 2010 that prohibited the harvest of horseshoe crabs for five-day periods around the new and full moons of May and June. In 2013, this harvest prohibition was extended to include new and full moons during the latter half of April.

The intention of the lunar closures was to allow more crabs to deposit more eggs on Massachusetts beaches. A female horseshoe crab can lay as many as 88,000 eggs, depositing them in several different nests during a given tide, then returning to spawn over the course of multiple days. The lunar closures provided a period where crabs could come up on the beach to spawn and deposit a greater percentage of their eggs before being vulnerable to harvest. It was anticipated that the benefit of these regulations would first be visible on spawning beaches 9–11 years after they took effect, when juveniles resulting from these newly protected spawning periods would reach maturity and return to area beaches to spawn.

In 2024, Massachusetts again increased horseshoe crab spawning protections because of vocal support from the public and conservation groups. These new regulations replaced the lunar closures with an April 15–June 7 harvest prohibition applying to both bait and biomedical harvest. The new regulation results in 54 consecutive days that are closed to horseshoe crab harvest during the spawning season, compared to the 25 discontinuous closed days under the lunar closures. With these additional spawning protections in place, the population numbers should continue to increase. However, the full benefit of the new rule won't be seen on spawning beaches until 2033–2035.

The new spawning season closure did not prevent the bait and biomedical fisheries from fully utilizing state horseshoe crab quotas in 2024. There are two separate quotas for horseshoe crabs in Massachusetts, one for bait harvest and a different quota for biomedical harvest. Massachusetts fishers with a permit to harvest crabs for use as bait are collectively allowed to catch 140,000 crabs, annually. Fishers with biomedical permits are allowed to collectively harvest 200,000 crabs per year. Crabs caught with a biomedical permit must be returned to the water after the crabs are bled. In 2024, the 140,000-crab bait quota was reached by October 21, despite the delayed start to the season. The biomedical fishery also nearly filled their 200,000-crab quota.

DMF staff training spawning survey volunteers at Stage Harbor, Chatham

Spawning Beach Surveys

The Massachusetts Horseshoe Crab Spawning Beach Survey started in 2008 and relies heavily on partner organizations (Mass Audubon, North and South Rivers Watershed Association, Southeastern Massachusetts Pine Barrens Alliance, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Maria Mitchell Association, Nantucket Conservation Foundation) and volunteers to conduct surveys. In 2024, 271 different people got involved and collected data for these surveys. The public participation in this survey is a remarkable example of the enthusiasm for horseshoe crabs and provides an opportunity for people to connect with the resource and help gather data through citizen science. The survey is conducted at 16 different beaches, mostly on the Cape and Islands. The same beaches are surveyed each year two days prior, the day of, and two days after the new and full moons of May and June. The survey uses a design similar to what's been used in Delaware Bay since the 1990s.

In 2024, the number of female crabs observed was above the time series median in 74% of the surveys, meaning most beaches had more female crabs than a "normal" year (see table). The 2024 season was a continuation of positive longer-term trends. Seventy-five percent of surveys are showing positive trends over the last 15 years. All the sites in the Outer Cape Cod region (Pleasant Bay and Nauset Harbor) and Nantucket Sound were above their respective time series median and increasing over the last 10- and 15-year periods. This is particularly important because this is the region of the MA coast where most of the fishery takes place. The biomedical industry has been harvesting from the Outer Cape Cod region (e.g., Pleasant Bay) for 50 years, and 80–85% of the Massachusetts bait harvest comes from Nantucket Sound, annually.

Region	Beach	Time of Day	2024 vs Median	10-year trend	15-year trend
Cape Cod Bay	Duxbury	Day	below	decreasing	decreasing
	Duxbury	Night	below	increasing	decreasing
	Long Beach	Day	below	NA	NA
	Long Beach	Night	below	NA	NA
	Millway	Day	above	**increasing**	**increasing**
	Millway	Night	above	**increasing**	increasing
	Long Pasture	Day	above	**increasing**	increasing
	Sanctuary Beach	Day	above	increasing	increasing
	Indian Neck	Day	above	increasing	increasing
	Indian Neck	Night	above	increasing	increasing
	Great Island	Day	above	increasing	NA
Outer Cape Cod	Priscillas Landing	Day	above	**increasing**	NA
	Marsh 2-3	Day	above	**increasing**	**increasing**
	Erica's Beach	Day	above	increasing	increasing
Nantucket Sound	Stage Harbor	Day	NA	NA	NA
	Stage Harbor	Night	NA	NA	NA
	Bass River	Day	above	NA	NA
	Bass River	Night	above	NA	NA
	Monomoy	Day	above	increasing	increasing
	Monomoy	Night	above	increasing	increasing
	Warrens Landing	Day	above	**increasing**	NA
	Warrens Landing	Night	above	**increasing**	NA
	Tashmoo	Day	above	increasing	**increasing**
	Tashmoo	Night	NA	increasing	increasing
Buzzards Bay	Swifts Beach	Day	below	increasing	decreasing
	Swifts Beach	Night	below	decreasing	**decreasing**

Summary table from the 2024 Massachusetts Horseshoe Crab Spawning Survey by region, beach, and time of day. The "2024 vs Median" column shows whether the 2024 data point was above or below the time series median for a given survey. Cells are shaded red when the 2024 data point was below the time series median, green when it was above, and uncolored when there is insufficient data. Ten- and 15-year trends are shaded green if the trend is positive, red if negative, and uncolored when there is insufficient data. A Mann-Kendall test was used to test for statistically significant positive or negative monotonic trends over the last 10 years and 15 years. Text is bold and cells are bordered in yellow if the trend is statistically significant.

There are only two regions where spawning surveys have decreasing trends: Plymouth/Kingston/Duxbury Bay (PKD Bay) and Buzzards Bay. These areas have very little bait harvest (around 3.5% of the state total) and no biomedical harvest and are in two different regions of the Massachusetts coast. All harvest in these embayments has been by hand. The declines in PKD are very slight and not consistent across time of day or all the beaches in the area. In fact, the ten-year trend on nighttime surveys at Duxbury Beach is increasing slightly. In contrast, at Swifts Beach in Buzzards Bay the nighttime surveys are showing a clear decline; this is the only beach in MA with this clear negative signal. It seems likely that something other than fishing pressure is behind the patterns seen in these two locations.

Spawning horseshoe crabs during a nighttime survey at Bass River.

The 2025 Massachusetts Horseshoe Crab Spawning Survey will continue through June 27. Final survey results won't be available until later this year. We had unprecedented interest in the survey this year, for which we are grateful. Within 24 hours of soliciting for survey volunteers for the 2025 survey, we had over 500 responses from the public offering to help. Having more volunteers means more of the scheduled surveys are conducted, which decreases uncertainty in the survey results. Results from all Massachusetts horseshoe crab surveys and commercial fishery monitoring are presented annually at the Massachusetts Horseshoe Crab Science Meeting. The meeting is hosted by DMF, usually in March at the DMF office in New Bedford. For more information on the meeting, contact Derek Perry at derek.perry@mass.gov.

Overall, there are positive signs in horseshoe crab populations since the initiation of management plans for this species in 1998. In addition to the ASMFC stock assessment, a recent paper by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) also states that abundance coastwide has been increasing. We believe that the enhanced protections implemented by DMF in 2024 will continue to improve the population of this iconic species in our state waters.

By Derek Perry, Senior Biologist and Horseshoe Crab Specialist

Accolades

Jared Silva receiving recognition from Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association President, Arthur (Sooky) Sawyer.

This past winter, the Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association recognized Jared Silva for his years of dedication to the Commonwealth's marine fisheries management, regulation, and compliance. Jared began his career with DMF as an administrative law clerk, working closely with senior management to develop policies and regulations. Over his tenure, he has developed a deep familiarity with state and federal marine fishery regulation and dynamics. As a senior policy analyst with DMF, Jared has been instrumental in developing critical management strategies, collaborating closely with industry members and researchers alike. He acts as liaison to the Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission as well as DMF's representative for all adjudicatory proceedings regarding permit sanctions.

While not DMF employees, we would like to congratulate two of our partners in fisheries management enforcement at the Massachusetts Environmental Police for awards recently received. In late 2024, Lieutenant Jimmy Cullen was awarded the Eugene H. Rooney, Jr., Public Service Award for selfless commitment to serving the people of the Commonwealth through exceptional human resources learning, development, and training. Additionally, in May 2025, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission presented Lieutenant Colonel Chris Baker with an Award of Excellence in recognition of his strong leadership, impactful facilitation of collaboration across state agencies, and rigorous enforcement of fisheries regulations.

Supporting Local Seafood Through Outreach and Collaboration

DMF's Seafood Marketing Program aims to increase consumer demand and preference for local seafood products and support local fisheries through education and awareness. Part of the program's role is to attend local seafood, food, and outreach shows and conferences to share resources on local seafood, learn from industry members, and grow DMF's network of fishermen, seafood dealers, restaurants, educators, and more!

The Seafood Marketing Program has attended several seafood promotional events so far this year!

Local Food Trade Show. The Sustainable Business Network's 2025 Local Food Trade Show took place on January 28, 2025, at Russell's Garden Center in Wayland, MA, featuring nearly 100 local food exhibitors. The event connected wholesale buyers with New England-based farmers and food producers, and several seafood industry members were also in attendance. This event was a great opportunity for DMF to connect with industry members during networking sessions and learn more about building a resilient local food economy.

Seafood Expo North America. Seven seafood businesses made up Mass. Ave. at Seafood Expo North 2025. These local Commonwealth businesses are promoted by DMF's Seafood Marketing Program and received 50% cost-share for the show via MA Dept. Of Agricultural Resource (MDAR) and the US Dept. of Agriculture. MA Dept. of Fish and Game (DFG) Commissioner Tom O'Shea, Deputy Commissioner Sefatia Romeo-Theken and MDAR Commissioner Ashley Randle visited with those businesses and other Massachusetts businesses scattered throughout the show in March. A DMF grant-supported project by St. Ours was a finalist in the New Product Showcase using invasive green crabs for seafood broth.

New England Restaurant and Bar Show. More than a half dozen seafood businesses attended the New England Restaurant & Bar Show as part of the Massachusetts Seafood Pavilion March 30–31, 2025, at the Boston Convention & Exhibition Center. Over 300 exhibitors showcased the latest products, services, and technologies, and alongside local seafood businesses, DMF helped promote local seafood and connect industry members.

MA Library Association Conference. The Seafood Marketing Program attended this conference for the first time, May 30-31 at the Sea Crest Hotel in Falmouth. Libraries are a hub for all-ages education and DMF wanted to inform librarians of the resources available on our website as well as our printed educational material and programming opportunities. Librarians were very interested in speakers from DMF for both in-person and on-line programming.

DMF's Marine Quest. The Seafood Marketing Program was able to offer seafood sampling of over 100 pounds of Jonah crab at DMF's first Marine Quest Festival using recently earned certifications. The sampling was a huge success!

New Video Content

The Seafood Marketing Program is busy creating video content. We filmed fifteen cooking videos starring Laura Foley Ramsden, a fourth-generation fish mongress with nearly 40 years of experience in the seafood industry, who generously donated her time. Seven of these videos feature local flatfish species as we continue to promote these species, including the pan seared sole recipe below. We are filming four story-telling mini-documentaries with fishermen as well. All videos will be posted on our social media with media partners during 2025.

By Wendy Wills, Seafood Marketing Program Coordinator

Dish on Fish:

Pan-Seared Sole (Flounder) with Cherry Tomato and Caper-Shallot Toppers

Flaky, delicate flounder fillets meet two vibrant toppings in this quick, easy, and versatile dinner recipe. One sauce is sweet and bright with blistered cherry tomatoes, while the other is briny and rich with shallots, capers, and white wine. Serve with a side of rice or crusty bread to soak up the flavor!

Ingredients (serves 4):

For the Sole:
- 4 sole (or flounder) fillets (5-6 oz each)
- Salt and freshy ground black pepper
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour (for dredging)
- 2 tablespoons oil or butter (for pan-searing)

For the Tomato Topper:
- 1 pint cherry tomatoes
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- Salt and freshy ground black pepper

For the Caper-Shallot Topper
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 tablespoon vegetable or canola oil
- 2 medium shallots, finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons capers
- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice (about 1/2 lemon)
- 1/4 cup dry white wine

For Garnish:
- 2 tablespoons chopped herbs (parsley, dill, or chives)
- Optional: lemon wedges

Instructions

1. Make the tomato topper. Heat olive oil in a skillet over medium-high heat. Add the cherry tomatoes and season with salt and pepper. Cook for 5–7 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the tomatoes burst and form a chunky sauce. Set aside and keep warm.

2. Make the caper-shallot topper. In a separate pan, melt the butter with oil over medium heat. Add chopped shallots and sauté for 2–3 minutes until soft. Stir in lemon juice, capers, and white wine. Let simmer for another 2–3 minutes to reduce slightly. Set aside.

3. Cook the sole. Pat the fish fillets dry and season with salt and pepper. Lightly dredge each fillet in flour, shaking off the excess. Heat oil or butter in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Cook the fillets for 2 minutes on the first side, then flip and cook for 1 more minute, until golden and flaky.

4. Serve. Place the cooked fish on plates and spoon your choice of sauce on top - or serve both. Garnish and enjoy.

Recent Publications

The following publications are recent articles written or co-written by DMF staff and published in scholarly journals or the DMF technical series. A full list of publications can be found at mass.gov/marine-fisheries-publications.

Contributions

LeBlanc, N.M., **Gahagan, B.I.**, Anderson, E.C., Whiteley, A.R., and S.A. Pavey. 2025. Development of a high-throughput single nucleotide polymorphism panel for genetic stock identification of Striped Bass. Transactions of the American Fisheries Society. https://doi.org/10.1093/tafafs/vnaf010. DMF Contribution No. 192.

DMF Comings and Goings

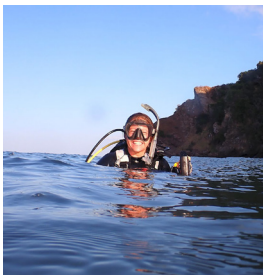
Comings

The Division welcomed **Leah Crowe** to DMF's Protected Species Program in January 2025 in the new role of Protected Species Science and Monitoring Lead. Positioned in the New Bedford office, she will oversee the Division's monitoring and research programs for large whales and sea turtles. This will include aerial and acoustic surveillance efforts, as well as managing and analyzing protected species data to inform management and policy decisions. Leah has a B.S. from Ohio University and recently returned to New England after living abroad in New Zealand where she attended the University of Otago as a Ph.D. student (she defended her thesis early this summer). With over 15 years of experience in research on whales, dolphins, and sea turtles, including a range of field and analytical methods, Leah is well-positioned to help the Division fulfill its expanding role in protected species monitoring, conservation, and management.

David Gauld joined DMF's Fisheries Research and Monitoring Project in January 2025. Working out of the Gloucester office, David is responsible for supporting the agency's port and sea sampling efforts, and other field studies. Armed with an undergraduate degree from the University of Maine and graduate degree from UMass Dartmouth, David has gained valuable experience employed as an at-sea fisheries monitoring, working as a research assistant supporting the offshore wind farm lease bottom trawl survey, and completing a thesis on fish attraction to light using underwater imaging sonar. David's fisheries knowledge and on the water sampling proficiency will be a great complement to the rest of the team.

The Division welcomed **Sean Terrill** to DMF's Fisheries Habitat Program in February 2025. Sean comes to DMF from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers where he worked as a Marine Ecologist, responsible for conducting benthic ecological research and field studies on both marine and freshwater habitats. He has an M.S. in Marine Science and Technology from UMass Boston and a B.S. in Wildlife Ecology and Conservation from UMass Amherst and brings extensive knowledge and hands-on field experience with aquatic habitat restoration and monitoring in the New England region. In his new role as a DMF Habitat Restoration Specialist stationed in Gloucester, Sean will be working closely with Habitat and Shellfish Program staff on planning, permitting, and monitoring collaborative restoration projects in Massachusetts.

Bradlie Morgan joined DMF's Policy and Management Program as a Communications and Policy Administration Specialist in February 2025. Bradlie brings with her a B.S. in Biology from Boston College, an M.S. in Marine Biology from Northeastern University, and experience gained in various marine research, monitoring, and public engagement positions during her academic career, including prior work as a fisheries technician for DMF's Diadromous Fisheries Project. In her new role, Bradlie will help to bolster our communications capacity and better tell the stories of all the great work the agency does, while simultaneously supporting our Management and Policy Team, particularly with regards to the administration of our various public bodies.



The Division welcomed **Ashley "Peach" Bueche**, as our new Dive Safety Offer working out of the New Bedford office in March 2025. In addition to having almost 10 years of experience as a Diving Safety Officer at the Catalina Island Marine Institute, she has a background in both marine research and education. She served as a Co-PI on a kelp restoration project the past several years, and previously taught students from elementary school through high school as a marine science instructor. With degrees from Boston College in both Environmental Geoscience and Early Childhood Education, Peach will be lending a hand on everything from habitat restoration projects to angler education programs in addition to the usual Dive Safety Officer duty.

Kate McGoldrick joined DMF's Permitting and Statistics Program in March 2025. She has primarily been working in agriculture for the last twelve years, including the start-up and operation of a small farm producing culinary and medicinal herbs, specialty vegetables, and flowers the past five years. Her business experience has brought Kate to appreciate the importance of good data and record keeping, skills well-attuned to her new position with DMF.

The Division welcomed **Catherine Barba** to the Diadromous Fish Project in June 2025 as an Aquatic Biologist. Cathy is no stranger to DMF having been a three-time seasonal technician for the project. She comes to us with a Bachelors of Science from UMass Amherst that included an independent study on river restoration and diadromous fish. As part of the DMF Fishway Crew, Cathy will put her passion for diadromous fish into supporting these fishes' migratory behaviors, focusing on fishway fabrication and repair.

Sarah Ferrara joined the DMF team in June 2025 as the Administration and Operations Manager working out of the Gloucester office. In this role, Sarah will help manage the day-to-day operations at the Annisquam River field station, including fiscal management, budgeting, capital planning, and general office logistics. Sarah earned her Masters in Public Administration from Suffolk University, and brings years of experience working as a legislative aide, research director, and most recently, as the Chief of Staff and Budget & Policy Director for former State Representative Sarah Peake. Sarah also served as the legislative proxy for Representative Peake on the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, so she has plenty of experience working with our fisheries management team.

Goings

Ivy Guyotte, a Permitting Clerk in Gloucester, parted ways with the Division in February. Ivy is planning on going back to graduate school to earn her Masters. During her time here she helped many fishermen through the permitting process and contributed to a variety of projects. Prior to joining the Division's permitting staff in 2023 she had also worked as an MRIP interviewer and completed a B.S. in Biology from Plymouth State University. We wish her the best in her future endeavors!

After more than four decades working for the Division of Marine Fisheries, **Vincent Malkoski** retired in February 2025. Vin began his career in 1981 as a Conservation Helper conducting assessments on the impact of power plant operations on local marine finfish and invertebrates in Cape Cod Bay. From there he advanced to the role of Senior Fisheries Biologist for DMF, often getting new projects off the ground, mentoring new employees to take over, then moving on to the next project that needed a leader. He was a staunch advocate for the marine environment and served on various ASMFC and NEFMC committees and Plan Development Teams. In addition to all his other assignments, Vin also served as DMF's Dive Safety Officer where he excelled at training countless biologists in SCUBA and scientific diving. A very accomplished instructor, Vin was recognized on the global level a few years ago when he was inducted into the NAUI Hall of Fame for outstanding contributions on the development of diving education. Vin's dedication, knowledge, and experience will be greatly missed, but we know he will enjoy retirement as he continues to travel the world with family and friends, and as he dives into new adventures both on and under the water.

In March 2025, **Darlene Pari** retired from DMF after almost 44 years of service. Darlene began her career with the Division in 1981 as an administrative assistant in the Boston Office. In this role, she was a stenographer, a typist, a licensing clerk, and began working in accounts payable. She assisted many programs over the years and was elevated to the head of accounts payable in 1995. Darlene was the backbone of DMF's accounting program for decades and was held in high regard for her work ethic and work performance by both her colleagues and management. She was the recipient of the Commonwealth's Pride and

Performance Award three times and was on a team that received the prestigious Carballo Award for Excellence for her tremendous work on the CARES Act Relief Program during COVID in 2021. Darlene served as a mentor to many employees over the years, and her willingness to help and incredible understanding of state finance will be sorely missed. We wish Darlene all the best in retirement as she spends time travelling to remote destinations and enjoying time with her family and friends.

Staff Transitions

Brad Schondolmeier, formerly of the Fisheries Research and Monitoring Project, took on a new role as DMF's Offshore Wind Analyst within the Fisheries Management and Policy Program in January 2025, bringing with him almost 20 years of experience working with the commercial fishing industry in various capacities and conducting fishery dependent and independent data collection and analysis.

Adjudicatory Proceedings

Under state law, DMF may sanction commercial and recreational fishing permits for violations of the state's marine fishery laws and regulations subject to a due process adjudicatory proceeding. These adjudicatory proceedings are held before a magistrate. They may be initiated by the agency, the Environmental Police, or municipal officials (constables) authorized to enforce the marine fishery laws of the Commonwealth.

During the period of January 1, 2025 through June 30, 2025, DMF initiated six administrative proceedings. Five of the six proceedings deal with commercial striped bass violations. Two of these proceedings have been resolved. In both matters, the renewal of the commercial fishing permit was denied for 2025. Additionally, one matter resulted in the permanent revocation of the individual's commercial fishing permit and all regulated fishery permit endorsements and the other resulted in the permanent revocation of the individual's regulated fishery permit endorsement for striped bass. The other three matters involving striped bass violations remain ongoing and have not yet been resolved. The sixth proceeding initiated in 2025 addresses the failure to comply with electronic vessel monitoring requirements for federal lobster and Jonah crab trap permit holders and this matter remains ongoing and has not been resolved.

Regulatory Updates

Below find the changes made to DMF fishing rules by regulation, emergency action, and in-season adjustment from January 1, 2025 – June 30, 2025. Regulatory changes follow an extensive public process and remain in effect permanently unless otherwise amended; emergency actions go into effect immediately upon adoption without public comment but for a period of 90 days only (unless extended on a permanent basis following the public process); and in-season adjustments go into effect immediately upon adoption after a truncated public process but affect that calendar year only.

Atlantic Bonito and False Albacore Limits (322 CMR 6.42). DMF has enacted a first-ever size and possession limit for both false albacore and Atlantic bonito. The minimum size limit for both species is 16 inches curved fork length and retention is limited to no more than 5 fish per person for both species combined. These new limits apply to all commercial and recreational fishers, except commercial weir and mechanized mackerel jig fishers. These commercial fishers may encounter some incidental catch of these species during their routine operations and sorting and discarding the bycatch would be unduly burdensome. This is a precautionary management action that constrains recreational harvest approximately at current levels and prevents the development of a directed commercial fishery given the local growth in popularity of these fisheries in Massachusetts occurring without the benefit of a population estimate, extensive understanding of life history, or fishery management plans to control fishing mortality. The minimum size limit reflects estimated size-at-maturity for both species.

Commercial American Eel Permitting (322 CMR 7.01 and 7.04). For 2026, DMF is limiting entry into the commercial American eel fishery. This will be done by establishing a December 31, 2024 control date for the American Eel Endorsement and limiting future issuance of this endorsement only to those permit holders who reported landing any eels between January 1, 2015 and December 31, 2024. Additionally, all remaining American Eel Endorsements will become owner-operator thereby requiring the named permit holder to be the person conducting the authorized commercial eel fishing. This action responds to persistent low American eel abundance and concerns about underreporting in the commercial fishery.

Commercial Menhaden Management and Permitting (322 CMR 6.43, 7.01, and 7.04). Beginning in 2025, DMF revised the trigger that drops the trip limit for the limited entry fishery from 25,000 pounds to 6,000 pounds so that it occurs if 98% of the quota is reached on or after September 1. Previously, the trip limit would be dropped if 90% of the quota was reached before September 1. Additionally, for 2025, DMF initiated the Harvester Partnership Pilot Program. This program allows similarly permitted vessels rigged for seining to share catch from their nets should a set exceed the trip limit or a vessel's capacity. For 2026, DMF will further limit access to the limited entry menhaden

fishery by restricting renewals of Menhaden Endorsements to only those permit holders with a minimum of one landing of at least 6,000 pounds of menhaden between January 1, 2014 and August 1, 2023 or hold a Menhaden Endorsement in conjunction with a Fish Weir Endorsement. Lastly, the Control Date for the CAP-Purse Seine Endorsement was amended so that any person issued the endorsement after December 31, 2024—whether by renewal or a new application—may be subject to eligibility criteria based on historic landings by the permit holder.

Commercial Summer Flounder Management (322 CMR 6.22). DMF made several adjustments to the commercial summer flounder management program. Beginning in 2025, DMF: (1) reduced the summertime (April 23–September 30) directed fishery trip limit from 600 pounds to 500 pounds for net fishers and 400 pounds to 325 pounds for hook fishers; (2) amended the trigger to reduce trip limits to 400 pounds for net fishers and 250 pounds of hook fishers so that it occurs if 75% of the quota is taken before August 15, rather than August 1; (3) added a new trigger to reduce the trip limit to 200 pounds for all gear types if 90% of the quota is taken before September 1; (4) prohibited the possession, retention, and landing of summer flounder on Saturdays; and (5) renewed the Consecutive Daily Limit program—effective June 10—to allow trawlers to land two daily limits of summer flounder, horseshoe crabs, whelks, black sea bass, and smooth dogfish taken over consecutive calendar days. Beginning in 2026, DMF will adjust the annual quota allocations so that the Period I fishery (January 1–April 22) receives only 15% of the annual quota (rather than 30%), and the Period II fishery (April 23–December 31) receives the remaining 85% of the quota (rather than 70%) and the Period I trip limit will be set at 2,000 pounds. The purpose of these actions was to shift the quota to the summertime fishery when the resource is more valuable to more permit holders and prevent an early season closure to allow some level of inshore fishing to continue into the early fall.

Constraints on Use of Certain Devices to Deploy Bait When Shore Fishing (322 CMR 4.09). DMF has prohibited anglers from using mechanized, compressed propulsion, and remote-controlled devices to deploy bait when shore fishing. This complements DMF's regulatory actions to restrict the shore-based targeting of white sharks by limiting the ability for anglers to set baits beyond the surf where white sharks occur. Additionally, it will limit anglers' ability to target fish at a greater distance and specific size classes when conditions allow, and in doing so, may reduce post-release mortality particularly for striped bass by limiting the fight-time related to stress placed on the fish. See page 10 for more information.

Documentation to Possess and Sell Dogfish Fins (322 CMR 6.37). DMF is now requiring businesses selling spiny or smooth dogfish fins in the Commonwealth to produce paperwork that documents the lawful origin of the product. This enhances enforcement of the shark fin prohibition in state law.

Groundfish Management and Permitting (322 CMR 6.03 and 7.04). DMF took two actions to amend its cod management regulations consistent with expected changes to the federal management plan. First, DMF amended it cod management area boundaries. All state waters north of Cape Cod and those waters down the backside of the Cape and east of Nantucket west of the 70th meridian are now the Western Gulf of Maine Cod Management Area; all other state waters are now part of the Southern New England Cod Management Area. Effectively, this moves that band of waters east of Cape Cod and Nantucket south of 42° 00' north latitude from the Southern New England Cod Management Area to the Western Gulf of Maine Cod Management Area. Second, DMF established a moratorium on the harvest and possession of cod by commercial and recreational fishers within the Southern New England Cod Management Area. Fishers who lawfully retain cod caught in another jurisdiction may transit state waters within the Southern New England Cod Management Area and land this cod catch in Massachusetts. To provide commercial fishing access to other non-cod species, DMF increased the yellowtail flounder trip limit from 350 pounds to 500 pounds; increased the monkfish trip limit from 536 pounds tail weight (1,560 pounds whole weight) to 1,000 pounds tail weight (2,910 pounds whole weight); and renewed the pilot program for trawlers and gillnetters to land two daily limits of Gulf of Maine winter flounder and yellowtail flounder that were lawfully caught and retained over consecutive calendar days. Lastly, DMF updated the Control Date for the Groundfish Endorsement from December 31, 2018 to December 31, 2024.

Lobster Management (322 CMR 6.02). Consistent with Addendum XXXII to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for American Lobster, DMF adopted emergency regulations to rescind those minimum and maximum carapace size standards and escape vent changes implemented in December 2024 for the upcoming 2025 fishing year under Addendum XXVII. This has the following effects: (1) for commercial Lobster Conservation Management Area 1 (LCMA1) permit holders and recreational fishers in the Gulf of Maine Management Area, the minimum carapace size standard will remain 3 ¼" and the escape vent size will remain 1 15/16" by 5 ¾" rectangular and 2 7/16" diameter circular; (2) the maximum carapace size for commercial LCMA 3 permit holders will remain 6 ¾"; (3) the maximum carapace size for commercial Outer Cape Cod (OCC) LCMA permit holders with a federal lobster permit will remain 6 ¾"; (4) there will remain no maximum carapace size for commercial state-only OCCLCMA permit holders and recreational fishers in the Outer Cape Cod Management Area; and (5) for seafood dealers, all pending changes to the minimum and maximum carapace size rules will be rescinded resulting in a state-wide minimum size of 3 ¼" and no maximum size. Final rule making remains ongoing at the time of this update.

Management of Conch Pots in the Federal Zone (322 CMR 6.12). DMF extended state permitting and effort control rules to Massachusetts commercial permit holders fishing conch pots for knobbed and channeled whelk ("whelk") in the federal zone. This requires any Massachusetts commercial permit holder possessing or landing whelks taken by conch pot gear in state or federal waters to: (1) hold a DMF-issued conch pot permit; (2) have all conch pots present on the vessel or set in the water to have a valid annual conch pot trap

tag affixed; (3) fish no more than 200 conch pots; and (4) adhere to the April 15–December 15 conch pot fishing season. Absent a federal fishery management plan for whelk, no federal controls govern the use of conch pots in these waters. In recent years DMF has observed an expansion of the traditional state waters conch pot fishery in the federal zone off Nantucket. This raises concerns about the potential proliferation of conch pot gear in federal waters increasing entanglement risks for protected whales and sea turtles.

Mandatory Reporting of Whale and Turtle Entanglements by Mariners (322 CMR 12.08). DMF now requires any mariner who observes sea turtles or whales entangled in fishing gear to report the entanglement to the Massachusetts Environmental Police, NOAA Fisheries, or the Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies. This action should enhance disentanglement efforts in Massachusetts waters.

Oceanic Whitetip Sharks (322 CMCR 6.37). DMF has prohibited the retention and landing of oceanic whitetip sharks. This conforms state rules to federal limits and ensures Massachusetts is in compliance with the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Coastal Sharks.

Prohibition on the Use of Pacific Lugworms as Bait (322 CMR 6.10). DMF has prohibited the possession, sale, and use of Pacific lugworms as bait. Over the past several years there have been reports of these non-native worms being sold at local bait and tackle shops and acquired by anglers through online purchases. These worms present biosecurity concerns particularly related to pathogen transmission—including White Spot Syndrome Virus, which is capable of infecting crustaceans, and Covert Mortality Nodavirus, which is capable of infecting a variety of shellfish, crustaceans, and finfish—as well as potential naturalization in our local waters.

Recreational Black Sea Bass Season (322 CMR 6.28). DMF adopted a recreational black sea bass season of May 17 – September 1. The 2024 season was May 18 – September 3. This is a conservationally equivalent action designed to maintain the opening day as a Saturday.

Shore-Based Shark Fishing (322 CMR 6.37). DMF took action to constrain shore-based shark fishing in Massachusetts to enhance the enforcement of the existing prohibition on capturing white sharks and address burgeoning user group conflicts between anglers presumably targeting white sharks and other beachgoers. First, DMF created an area where shore-based anglers are prohibited from fishing with a baited hook that has an inside gap exceeding 5/8 inch when measured straight across from barb to shank coupled with a wire or metal leader that measures greater than 18 inches. The area where this activity is prohibited begins at the northernmost point of Plymouth Beach and follows the shoreline around Cape Cod Bay and the Outer Cape including all of Chatham Harbor and Monomoy Island. The use of this heavy gear remains authorized outside of the area and anglers may fish lighter tackle within the area to target other species. If shore fishing with this heavier gear outside the prohibited area, DMF has restricted anglers from chumming from sunrise to sunset.

Striped Bass Total Length Measurement (322 CMR 6.07). DMF clarified that total length measurement for striped bass is to be taken by measuring the straight-line length from the anterior tip of the snout or jaw to the furthest extremity of the tail with the upper and lower forks squeezed together. This applies to the measurement of fish in both the commercial and recreational fishery. Previously, anglers had discretion to squeeze the forked tail or not; the lack of a clean and consistent standard was eroding the intended conservation and enforceability of the size limits.

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DMF News

Editor: Nichola Meserve, Bradlie Morgan
Layout: Bradlie Morgan

Maura T. Healey, *Governor*
Rebecca L. Tepper, *Secretary, EEA*
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Daniel J. McKiernan, *Director, DMF*