



The Council Report summarizes major actions approved at NEFMC meetings or highlights items of interest to stakeholders.

At its January 28-29, 2015 meeting in Portsmouth, NH, the Council:

- ◆ Approved several actions related to the management of Atlantic herring
- ◆ Worked on recommendations related to the development of an Omnibus Industry-Funded Monitoring Amendment
- ◆ Approved groundfish recommendations for the recreational fishery for Gulf of Maine haddock and cod
- ◆ Added to its list of groundfish research priorities

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**Next Council  
Meeting  
April 21-23, 2015  
Mystic, CT**

# Council Report

January/February 2015

## Atlantic Herring

The New England Council's Atlantic Herring Fishery Management Plan (FMP) took center stage during the Council's late January meeting in Portsmouth, NH. Members voted unanimously to approve a list of additional research priorities and initiate Amendment 8 to the Herring FMP.

### Research Priorities

In amending its 2014-2015 herring priorities, the Council agreed to: 1.) maintain priorities for portside sampling and river herring bycatch avoidance; 2.) include electronic monitoring as a priority; and 3.) address the need for better research to support the Atlantic herring stock assessment. It also eliminated a research priority that addressed exploring net sensor technology.

Each priority will have equal ranking and serve as the basis for awards made during the NEFMC's research set-aside or RSA process. The Council is scheduled to consider the inclusion of an RSA allocation (a portion of the catch that is dedicated to funding herring fishery-related research) when it sets the Atlantic herring specifications for 2016-2018 at the end of this year.

### Amendment 8 to the Atlantic Herring FMP

Approving a scoping document at the January meeting, the Council signaled its intent to begin gathering information, including suggestions and input, on the development of alternatives to establish a long-term acceptable biological catch (ABC) control rule, which provides guidance on how to set annual fishing levels for Atlantic herring. Notably, the Council also agreed through a formal motion last November that the control rule amendment should consider herring's role as forage in the ecosystem.

### River Herring and Shad - Stocks Managed through the NEFMC's Herring FMP?

A clear, but more complicated outcome accompanied a vote on whether to add two stocks of river herring (alewife and blue back) and two stocks of shad (American and hickory) to the NEFMC's Herring Plan, potentially making them subject to the same rules accorded any federally managed species.

Substantial consideration was given to the legislative mandates of the various federal and state agencies who manage these stocks, stock status, current fishing activities, and the available scientific information on which to base future actions.

As the result of a thirteen yes, three no vote with zero abstentions, the Council will maintain the current conservation measures for river herring and shad, and not add these stocks to the existing Atlantic Herring Plan or initiate a separate fishery management plan.

*Atlantic Herring, River Herring, and Shad - continued, p.2*

## Atlantic Herring, River Herring, and Shad - *continued*

Learn more about efforts underway to protect stocks of river herring and shad.

[www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/stories/2013/rhupdate.html](http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/stories/2013/rhupdate.html)

[www.asmfc.org/species/shad-river-herring](http://www.asmfc.org/species/shad-river-herring)

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See details about two new river herring research projects funded by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and NOAA Fisheries to better understand the coast wide abundance of river herring and population health.

[www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/protected/riverherring/tewg/rfp/rh\\_cons\\_proposal\\_abstracts\\_vs4.pdf](http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/protected/riverherring/tewg/rfp/rh_cons_proposal_abstracts_vs4.pdf)

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Shad and river herring were among the first fish to be exploited commercially by early settlers along the eastern seaboard because their oily flesh allowed them to be preserved without refrigeration.

Credit: NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service

While expressing serious concerns about the condition of shad and river herring, several Council members outlined their rationale for not tackling federal management at the present time. Chief among them were the following:

1. Two of the largest east coast fisheries that take river herring and shad incidental to their operations, the Atlantic herring fishery and the Mid-Atlantic Council's Atlantic mackerel fishery, already contain caps that directly limit the river herring and shad catch that may be taken annually.
2. The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) and by association the east coast states from Maine to Florida, requires sustainable management plans and monitors any directed fisheries for shad and river herring. As a result, some states have moratoria in place to protect these stocks. Given that historically, shad and river herring spawned in virtually every river and tributary along the coast, the states are also required to submit habitat plans to the ASMFC which outline current and historical spawning and nursery habitat, threats to those habitats, and habitat restoration programs in each of their river systems.
3. Although ASMFC is planning a stock assessment update in 2017 (river specific), there is currently no coast wide assessment of river herring and shad at the home stream level or when they are in residence (and mixed with Canadian stocks) in their marine habitat.

Following receipt of a report on the extensive activities of the NOAA/ASMFC sponsored Technical Expert Working Group, [www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/protected/riverherring/tewg/index.html](http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/protected/riverherring/tewg/index.html), and because of the data gaps described above, particularly as they impact setting annual catch limits and accountability measures, the Council determined that it would revisit the issue of federally managing shad and river herring within three years, when more comprehensive and useful information should be available.



## Observer Policy Committee

### ***Industry-Funded Monitoring Amendment Moves Ahead***

The Observer Policy Committee continued work on an omnibus amendment that would modify all New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council plans. In addition to defining the provisions for industry-funded monitoring programs that could be adopted for Council-managed fisheries, the finished product would specify coverage targets for the herring and mackerel fisheries.

To this end the Council approved a number of detailed motions to further develop the Industry-Funded Monitoring Amendment, including approval of additional monitoring options (at-sea, portside, electronic monitoring) that would affect the herring and mackerel fisheries. The Council also unanimously agreed that the Omnibus Industry-Funded Monitoring Amendment is not ready to move forward for public comment at this time and identified several specific elements of the document that require further development prior to approval of the amendment for public comment.

Just prior to the end of the industry-funded monitoring topic, the following motion was proposed and carried unanimously.

That the NEFMC prepare a policy and design a multi-element system for monitoring commercial fisheries which addresses information needs for stock assessments, enforcement, quota monitoring, and other purposes (e.g., other scientific needs, gear testing, exempted fisheries, response to public concerns). The system should take account of the Northeast Fishery Observer Program, the Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology, seafood dealer reporting, vessel reporting, and the vessel monitoring system (VMS). It should include an option for industry funded and managed system elements that deliver information to fulfill Council specified information needs in accordance with Council established processes for information quality assurance. The Observer Policy Committee should take the lead in fulfilling this motion.

## Groundfish

### ***AMs Recommended for the 2015 Gulf of Maine Cod and Haddock Recreational Fishery***

Framework 48 to the Northeast Multispecies FMP made changes to the process for setting accountability measures (AMs) for Gulf of Maine (GOM) cod and haddock caught in recreational fishery.

Rather than wait until the recreational fishery exceeded either of its sub-annual catch limit (sub-ACL) to make a revision to management measures, the NOAA Fisheries Regional Administrator, in consultation with the Council, may proactively adjust recreational measures for the May 1 start of the fishing year so the fishery may achieve, but not exceed, a specific sub-ACLs that is allocated to the recreational fishery.

Such was the case this year when the Recreational Advisory Panel (RAP) met on January 22 to discuss proposals prior to the late January Council meeting. In turn, the Council recommended the following RAP measures to be considered by NOAA Fisheries. The Council's guidance does not restrict the agency's discretion in selecting management measures that would best achieve, but not exceed, the recreational sub-ACL. The agency is required to explain why it approved such measures or others, which should publish this spring.

1. In order to reduce discard mortality on GOM cod, the Council recommended "prohibiting the use of more than two hooks per line while fishing for groundfish in the Gulf of Maine. Only inline circle hooks would be baited. When using a jig or artificial lure, only single point J-hooks would be used (e.g., no treble hooks). Teasers, feathers, flies etc. could be used but would count toward the limit two hooks per line."
2. In light of the current zero possession on cod and expected declines in effort, the Council recommend to NOAA Fisheries that proactive AMs for GOM haddock in fishing year 2015 consist of a bag limit of at least four fish, a 17-inch minimum fish size, and closed seasons during wave 2 (March 1 to April 30) and wave 5 (September 1 to October 31).

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The New England Fishery Management Council is one of eight regional organizations created by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, initially enacted in 1976.

The Council develops rules for both commercial and recreational fisheries that operate between three and 200 miles off the region's coastline. NEFMC management authority extends to fishing grounds in the Gulf of Maine, Georges Bank and southern New England and overlaps with the Mid-Atlantic Council for some species.

## **Collaborative Research**

At its late January meeting, the Council passed a motion that identified improving the understanding of groundfish spawning as new research priority following on others it outlined in 2014.

The action allows the Council to transfer additional funds to the Northeast Consortium (NEC) for the purpose of soliciting additional groundfish-related collaborative research projects. The Council's intent is to improve the understanding of spawning activity that could, for example, help it to better protect spawning groundfish.

As in 2014, the NEC will develop and distribute a supplemental Request for Proposals that will address this issue and oversee the process to select final projects. Once projects have been selected, the NEC also will monitor ongoing project activities which must involve partnerships between fishermen and scientists.

Further details about the new RFP will be announced by the Director of the Northeast Consortium, Dr. Chris Glass of the University of New Hampshire. He may be reached at [cwt5@cisunix.unh.edu](mailto:cwt5@cisunix.unh.edu).

## **NEFMC Website**

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