



New England Fishery Management Council

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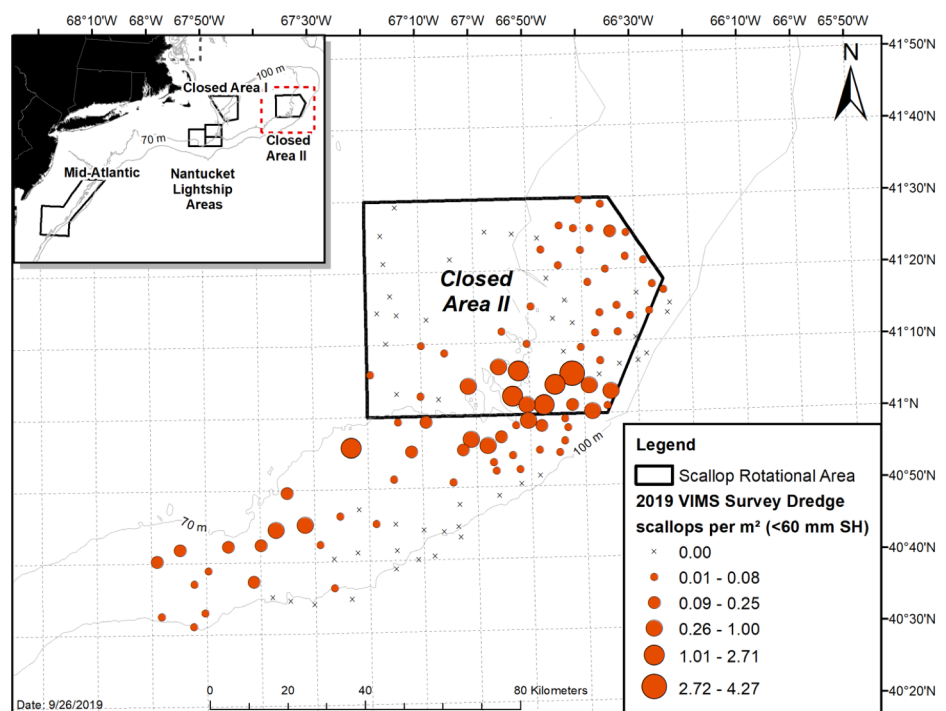
Atlantic Sea Scallops: Council Receives Overview of 2019 Surveys and Progress Report on Framework Adjustment 32

During its late-September meeting in Gloucester, MA, the New England Fishery Management Council received a presentation on 2019 scallop survey results and a progress report on the alternatives that are under development for Framework Adjustment 32 to the Atlantic Sea Scallop Fishery Management Plan. The framework contains: (1) specifications for the 2020 fishing year; (2) default specifications for 2021; and (3) measures to mitigate impacts on Georges Bank yellowtail flounder.

Six institutions were involved in five different surveys in 2019 that collectively covered the range of the resource. Here are the key take-aways from the survey results.

- Total biomass remains high, and dense concentrations of harvestable scallops are still available in rotational management areas.
- The surveys found evidence of new recruitment on Georges Bank in-and-around Closed Area II, as well as a large recruitment event on Stellwagen Bank.
- The surveys also discovered thumbnail-size scallops in the Elephant Trunk Area in the Mid-Atlantic, which survey teams plan to monitor carefully in the future.
- While exceptions like the ones above exist, the fishery overall has not seen strong incoming year classes

since 2012 and 2013. The fishery next year will continue to focus on the exceptional 2012 and 2013 cohorts, which are made up of seven- and eight-year-old scallops that are harvestable with dredge gear.



The 2019 surveys found noteworthy recruitment in the southern portion of Closed Area II and, to a lesser extent, directly south and to the west in areas known as the Closed Area II Extension and Southern Flank. The map above shows aggregations of small scallops with shell heights of less than 60 millimeters (mm).



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In light of the current recruitment situation, several different scenarios are being analyzed for further consideration in Framework Adjustment 32.

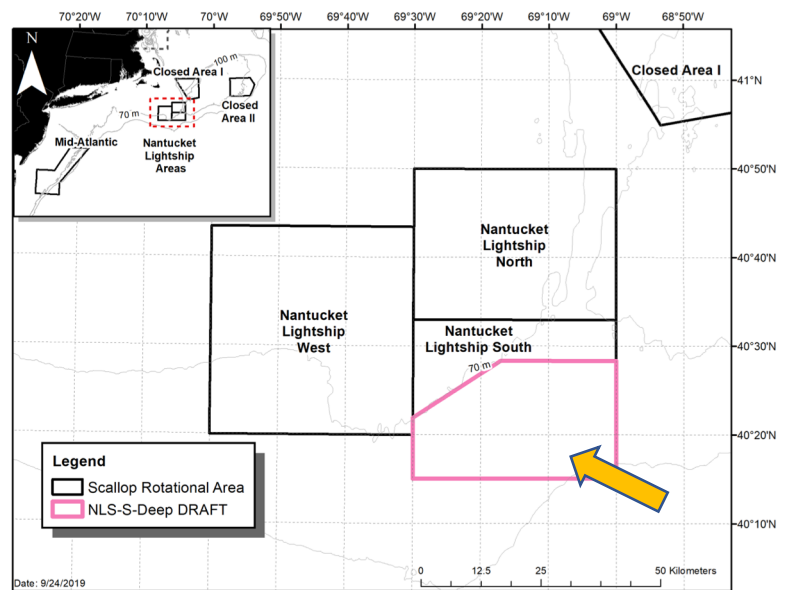
The PDT will be analyzing options that involve five or six access areas trips for full-time limited access permit holders, coupled with options for open area days-at-sea under several different fishing mortality rates. The PDT anticipates that all of the alternatives should result in 50 million to 55 million pounds of projected landings for the 2020 scallop fishing year, which begins on April 1. Projected landings for the ongoing 2019 fishing year remain at roughly 60 million pounds.

Nantucket Lightship South-Deep

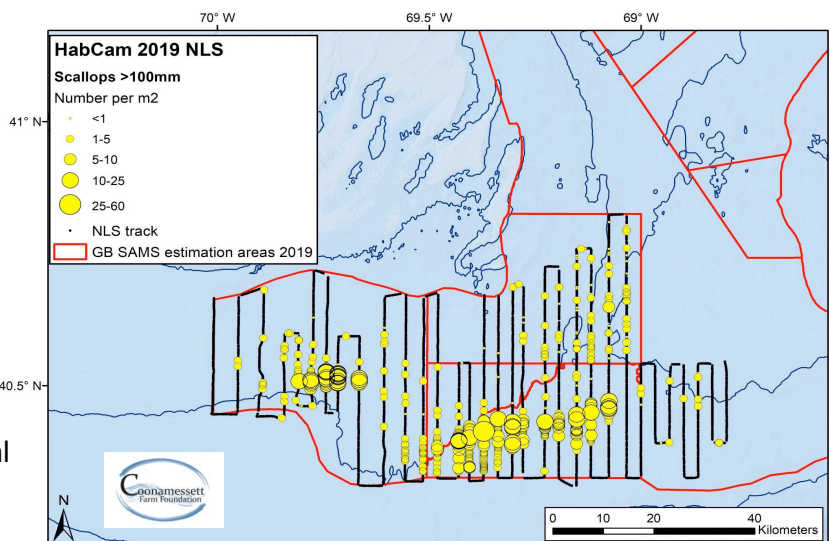
Access area scenarios likely will include a trip into the deeper waters of Nantucket Lightship South. This bottom currently harbors extremely dense concentrations of small, slow-growing scallops that are living in marginal habitat.

Survey information from 2019 indicated that: (1) these scallop grew more than expected over the past year; and (2) a substantial portion of them are now in the 30-to-50 meat count range.

- The area is dominated by a single exceptional year class of scallops. The animals will be eight years old in 2020.
- Over 35,000 metric tons (mt) – more than 3 billion animals – are estimated to be in the south-deep area.
- Two high-density patches are at depths of 70 meters or more (see yellow dots in map at right).
- Many of these scallops normally would not be retained by dredges with 4" rings, but the beds are so thick that commercial dredges should be able to retain the catch.



The Scallop PDT will analyze the possibility of expanding the southern boundary of the Nantucket Lightship South-Deep Area to allow access to dense aggregations of small scallops, potentially under different harvesting rules. – NEFMC graphic above; Coonamessett Farm Foundation below





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Industry members informed the Council that market opportunities could be made available for these smaller scallops, and many fishermen expressed concern that the scallops would die of old age or complications associated with their density before they ever reached the 10-20-count range.

The Council, through its Scallop Committee, supported having the PDT explore alternatives for expanding the boundary of the Nantucket Lightship South-Deep Area so that scallopers may be able to take advantage of this unique situation through a rotational access area trip, possibly under different harvesting measures.

Nantucket Lightship (NLS)

- **NLS North:** This area experienced minimal recruitment but has some of the largest scallops among the established access areas. It is a candidate for a partial trip in 2020.
- **NLS West:** This area has experienced a substantial downturn in biomass with high total mortality from fishing, discards, and natural causes. The PDT is concerned that the area may not support another trip in 2020.
- **NLS South Shallow:** This area may not be able to support a full trip on its own, but the PDT will develop options that combine a partial trip in the shallow area with other NLS areas.



Dense aggregations of small scallops were documented in the Nantucket Lightship Deep-South Area during the 2019 surveys. The animals shown above were captured in the VIMS dredge survey within the area (VIMS photo). A heat map on page 2 from CFF's HabCam survey also portrays the density.

Closed Area I, Closed Area II South, and the Mid-Atlantic Access Area

CLOSED AREA I: The 2019 surveys revealed that large scallops remain available in Closed Area I, mainly in the area known as "the sliver." This area, however, is not likely to support a full trip on its own. Roughly 6 million pounds of scallops are needed to allocate an 18,000-pound access area trip to the entire limited access scallop fleet. The PDT is looking into alternatives that would combine a partial trip into Closed Area I, coupled with partial access to another area.

CLOSED AREA II: Using results from the 2019 surveys, the PDT estimated that roughly 35.7 million pounds of scallops are contained within Closed Area II. The majority of the biomass is located in the eastern portion of the area (see map next page). These scallops are dominated by two cohorts. In 2020, the oldest animals will be age 6. Closed Area II is a solid candidate for supporting at least one full-time trip and possibly an additional partial trip. The PDT also will develop options for a potential focused closure in-and-around



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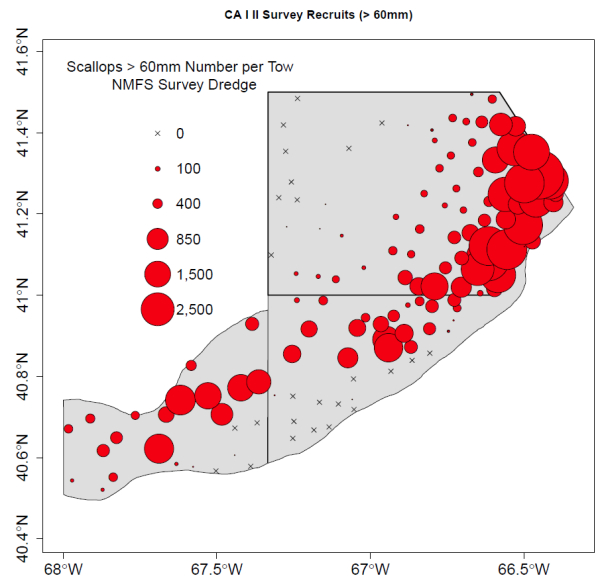
Closed Area II to protect smaller scallops in order to allow those animals to grow out and provide better yields to the fishery in future years (see page 1 map).

Mid-Atlantic Access Area

The Mid-Atlantic Access Area, which combines the Hudson Canyon and Elephant Trunk Areas, continues to hold high biomass and is a candidate for two trips in 2020. Fishing opportunities in the Mid-Atlantic Access Area continue to be supported by a very large 2012 scallop year class.

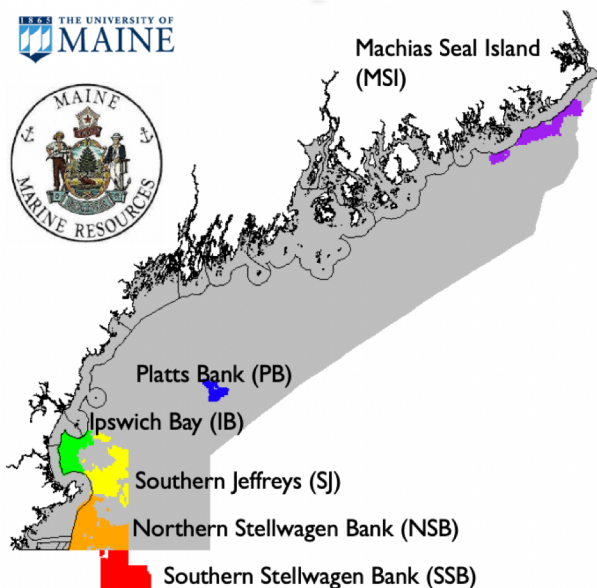
The 2019 surveys did find evidence of small scallops in the Elephant Trunk Area, including some very small pre-recruits that survey teams will continue to monitor.

The Delmarva Area, which is just to the south of the Elephant Trunk Area, was converted to open bottom in 2018. Biomass continues to decline in Delmarva, dropping from an estimated 10,923 mt in 2015 to 203 mt in 2019, according to survey results. Scallops in Delmarva are at the southern extent of their range.



The eastern portion of Closed Area II contains healthy concentration of harvestable scallops that are greater than 60 mm in shell height. – VIMS graphic

Northern Gulf of Maine and Southern Stellwagen Bank



The Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR) and the University of Maine teamed up to carry out a 2019 survey of the Northern Gulf of Maine and Southern Stellwagen Bank on the F/V Clean Sweep.

The survey partners conducted 323 five-minute dredge tows between May 27 and June 24.

The survey documented a strong recruitment event on Stellwagen Bank, both in the northern and southern portions of the bank (see map at left and photo at right).



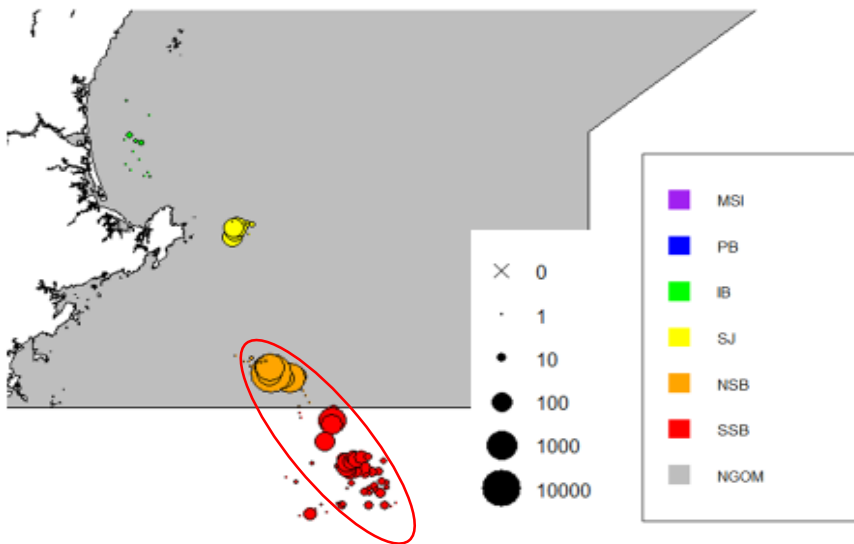
– DMR/UMaine photo



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The Scallop PDT will develop alternatives for a targeted closure around the majority of these small scallops on Stellwagen. The goal is to protect the year class for future harvest after the scallops have had time to grow. The highest density of harvestable scallops in the Northern Gulf of Maine currently are located on Jeffreys Ledge, according to survey results.

Southern Extent of Northern Gulf of Maine Area and Northern and Southern Stellwagen Bank



The Maine DMR/UMaine 2019 survey in the Northern Gulf of Maine came across large aggregations of small scallops on Northern Stellwagen Bank (orange circles on map) and Southern Stellwagen Bank (red circles). The red circles are south of the current southern boundary for the Northern Gulf of Maine. The yellow circles show small scallops on Southern Jeffreys Ledge. The map shows scallops with shell heights ranging from 35 mm to less than 75 mm. – DMR/UMaine graphic

What's Next?

The Scallop PDT will develop numerous alternatives for specifications and other measures for Framework Adjustment 32 over the next two months. These alternatives will be considered by the Scallop AP and Committee during a series of meetings in [October and November](#) before being presented to the full Council in [December](#) for final action.

- All documents and presentations used during the Council's discussion are available at [September 2019 Scallop Materials](#).
- Visit the Council's [scallop webpage](#).
- Questions? Contact Jonathon Peros, the Council's scallop plan coordinator and Scallop PDT chair, at (978) 465-0492, ext. 117, jperos@nefmc.org.

Survey Partners

The 2019 surveys were conducted by the following institutions using a variety of methods, including scallop dredges, a drop camera, and a towed camera called HabCam, short for Habitat Camera Mapping System. The teams were:

- The Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS), which conducted surveys in the Mid-Atlantic, Nantucket Lightship, and Closed Areas I and II;
- The School for Marine Science and Technology (SMAST) at UMass Dartmouth, which conducted surveys in the Mid-Atlantic, Nantucket Lightship, Great South Channel, Closed Area I, and Closed Area II North;
- Coonamesett Farm Foundation, which conducted surveys in Nantucket Lightship, the Elephant Trunk, and Closed Area II and surrounding bottom;
- The Northeast Fisheries Science Center; and
- The Maine Department of Marine Resources and University of Maine, which worked together to survey the Northern Gulf of Maine and Southern Stellwagen Bank.