By Melissa Waterman and Patrice McCarron

Everyone knows that there are a whole lot of lobsters crawling about in the Gulf of Maine and Canada. Maine lobstermen alone landed more than 123 million pounds in 2012, an increase of approximately 18 million pounds from 2011, itself a record-breaking year for lobster landings. Canadian lobstermen brought in nearly 147 million pounds in 2011 and reports indicate that that figure may be up significantly for 2012.

The abundance of lobster in Canada and the United States has caused serious ripples within the industry. Expanding supply requires new markets to be developed, especially for a product that must travel through the supply chain alive. Additional challenges are posed when lobster landings spike during times when lobsters are typically in scarce supply. In June of 2012, Maine's landings doubled what had been landed in previous years, leaving many dealers looking for markets in which to sell the product.

The Gulf of Maine Research Institute's independent evaluation of the Maine lobster industry, completed in November, 2012, concluded that recent increases in landings have resulted in significant deflation in price, concluding “It is clear that demand is currently growing less than the supply.”

Canada manages its lobster fishery through 40 separate management areas, called Lobster Fishing Areas. Each LFA has its own management plan, trap limit and season. These LFAs were designed, in part, to ensure a steady supply of lobsters to processors throughout the year. The U.S. lobster fishery, man...
March is here and with it, the annual Maine Fishermen’s Forum. Most of us don’t really look forward to the cold and damp days, big storms and icy roads of March. But I think just about everyone in Maine’s commercial fishing industry looks forward to the Forum. For 38 years the forum has been THE place where the fishing industry and everyone associated with it have gathered to walk the trade show floor, talk, argue, and, of course, socialize over adult beverages. As legend has it, the forum is held during the first weekend in March every year because Farmer’s Almanac records showed that weekend consistently has the worst winter weather. And for all the years that I’ve been attending, this prediction has proven true.

The first forum took place in 1976, born of a need to bring the fishing community together to grapple with the implications of a new federal law – the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976 – which put in place the country’s first federal fisheries management framework and established the exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Over the years, the forum’s seminars and discussions have acted as mirrors reflecting the issues facing the fishing industry, while offering participants a neutral place where they can grapple with issues of the day. These have included the myriad changes to the groundfishing industry, the Magnuson-Stevens Conservation and Management Act reauthorization in 1996, establishment of co-management for the lobster industry, and in recent years, the implications of wind energy development and seafood marketing. The mood of the Forum generally reflects the intensity of the issues facing the fishing industry.

In its early days, the forum was managed by Maine Sea Grant. In 1984, it was reorganized as a non-profit organization and has been run since by a volunteer board which reflects the diversity of Maine’s fishing communities. The current chair of the board is an active fisherman, a true testament that the forum is still run by the fishing industry for the fishing industry.

Fishermen harvest public resources and consequently are subject to intense government regulation. Unfortunately, fisheries management often becomes a game of divide and conquer, resulting in a system which seems destined to pit fisherman against fisherman. Fisheries management was and still is stressful, frustrating and divisive. Yet, despite this fact, the forum provides a venue for all Maine fishermen to come together. It reminds us that we have much more in common than we often realize. Even the most contentious seminar debate is likely to end with laughs over a friendly cocktail.

It’s hard to think of another event at which you can eat, drink, hobnob with fishermen from throughout Maine and the other New England states, encourage the education of fishermen’s children, and applaud the noteworthy among Maine’s fishing industry. Ask anyone who attends the Thursday night seafood reception (with products all donated by the industry) about the quality of Maine seafood and the stature that those who harvest those scallops, mussels, clams, lobster and shrimp have in their eyes. Friday night features the annual auction to raise money for the Forum Scholarship Fund in support of college students from fishing families. The auction is always exciting with generously donated items which forum attendees eagerly bid on. By 2012, more than $209,000 in scholarships has been awarded by the forum.

The scholarships are announced during the Saturday night banquet. While largely a night of celebration, the forum holds a moment of silence to honor the memory of those lost at sea that year. The banquet also features several awards, including an industry award for the Marine Patrol Officer of the Year and a Golden Shuck Award to honor a lobsterman for outstanding service.

The Trade Show has grown to become a major attraction of the forum. With more than 100 exhibitors, the forum’s Trade Show is like entering a well-stocked candy shop for most fisher- men. Vendors from the United States and Canada showcase the engines, electronics, hydraulic equipment, gear and other items that are so vital to a fisherman’s livelihood. If you want a new boat, an old boat, a new hauler or a better insurance policy, you can find it at the Trade Show.

The forum is also a time for Maine’s elected officials to check in with the industry. In a typical year, all four of Maine’s Congressional delegations will make an appearance and in many years the Governor gives a presentation. It’s worth noting that the Department of Marine Resources Commissioners and key DMR staff always attend for the entire weekend, using the time to build stronger relationships with industry members.

The Maine Fishermen’s Forum is truly a rare event. Try to find another conference at which a fisherman can get caught up on key regulatory issues, shop for all the goods and services he might need, meet old friends and make new ones or talk turkey over a beer with the Commissioner. The forum allows fishermen – lobstermen, scallopers, clammers, shrimpers, fish farmers, groundfishermen, seaweed harvesters, worm diggers, and all the rest – and their families to reconnect and remember just how special Maine’s fishing industry is. The Maine Fishermen’s Forum is truly a state treasure.
FROM THE DOCK: Don’t assume the worst of other lobstermen

I would like to respond to Seth Ciomei’s FROM THE DOCK commentary in February’s newsletter. As chair of the Lobster Advisory Council I have been at the forefront of all the discussions mentioned in Seth’s comments. There are many different opinions on what changes should or should not be made in our industry and the DMR community outreach meetings have proven. I believe a healthy and open dialog is necessary to continue to move our industry forward. Where I take issue with Seth’s comments is his attack on the motivations of those of us who have participated in these discussions, and who might have a different opinion than his. Anyone who knows me and many of the other lobstermen who have taken the time to participate in all the meetings and discussions on increasing the profitability of Maine’s lobster industry knows that we are not deterred by hard work. I have made my living in this industry and I am not yet ready to slow down. I recognize that our industry has changed and if we don’t react to the changes, in a measured and deliberate way, we are only hurting ourselves. I personally do not want to see any changes that would make harvesting lobsters less profitable. All successful industries evolve with the times, and Maine’s Lobster Industry should be no different. We must continue to challenge ourselves to think of better ways to manage and market Maine Lobster without erroneously assuming the worst of the motivations of the hard working people involved.

Sincerely,
Robert Baines
South Thomaston

GUEST COLUMN: Fishing in the Bering Sea

By Taylor Strout

You learn hard lessons out on the water when you grow up the son of a fisherman. The first of many is respect. Respect for all the ocean can give you, and respect for all she can take away. If you spend enough time out there, some will learn more than others what she’s truly capable of.

My father started bringing me on the water when I was about 10 years old, when I was old enough to stay out all day without asking him to drop me off at the beach to go home. I soon understood what kept my father fishing for all these years and why he rather have a bad day of fishing than not. He wasn’t built for the 9-5 job. Like father, like son: I didn’t fit the description either.

After proving my ability on the water, I quickly moved into hand-hauling from my own skiff. It was a 1972, 17-foot Boston Whaler that often reminded me of a sponge soaked beyond its capacity, leaking water from its core with every new hole I drilled. I wasn’t too concerned because I fished out of the old ANN-E all the way up through high school. Maybe it was because they’re supposed to be unsinkable, or because I was proud to be fishing out of the same boat my father did when he was that age.

But all good things must come to an end, and they did. I left the ocean to pursue a college degree in Colorado. There’s a saying that you never really know what you’re missing until it’s gone; after five years in the mountains, I needed to get back on the water. Thanks to a slowing economy, my degree wasn’t useful in finding a job. So after multiple internships, I found myself back out on the water.

All seemed good; I was home and back where I felt the most comfortable, the deck of my father’s lobster boat. But soon after that, the lobster market was flooded, the price made stemming even more difficult, and I hadn’t renewed my lobster license to fish on my own. I needed my college education to come up big.

I looked high and low for about a year but nothing seemed to work. Then one day I got a phone call and I suddenly realized I was using the wrong education. What did I know more about than anything else? What did I grow up doing? What is it you can never gain from the inside of a book? The answer was a strong pair of sea legs, a strong work ethic and good sense out on the ocean.

Throughout my life I had been gaining from my father the knowledge and skills to work in one of the world’s most dangerous fishing grounds, the Bering Sea. I hung up the phone and got ready for my flight at 6 a.m. the next morning. I asked myself, are you ready for this? Then, after some quick goodbyes and a few cold ones to cool my nerves, I was on my way, ready or not.

We were slowly dropping through the clouds in a little ten-seater airplane. What did I know more about than anything else? What did I grow up doing? What is it you can never gain from the inside of a book? The answer was a strong pair of sea legs, a strong work ethic and good sense out on the ocean.

About fishing in Alaska’s Bering Sea.

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By Colleen Coyne

Foreign markets are essential to the economic vitality of Maine’s lobster industry. Annual foreign trade statistics, recently released by the U.S. Census Bureau, provide insight into how U.S. sales of lobster performed in foreign markets during 2012.

Overall Exports - Value Stable, Volume Up
In 2012, total U.S. seafood exports were over US$5.2 billion (down 2% from 2011). American lobster ranked as third most valuable seafood exported (after not-canned salmon and pollock). Lobster represented 9% of the total value of U.S. fishery products sold to foreign markets and exports totaled $491.1 million, up nearly $8 million (1.4%) over 2011. Total volume exported was nearly 106 million pounds (47,965 MT), up nearly 17 million pounds (7,652 MT) and 16% over 2011. Canada, which traditionally purchases the greatest share of U.S. lobster exports to Asia more than doubled in value from 2010 - 2012.

Maine lobster production to support its processing industry, made purchases of 221.5 million and nearly 68 million pounds (30,721 MT). It is probably no surprise that total export value to Canada remained unchanged from 2011 but volume jumped by 28%.

Top Five Consumers
Italy, Spain and France historically dominated foreign market consumption of American lobster. Over the past two years, China and Hong Kong also emerged as key markets. New markets are increasing and diversifying sales opportunities for the lobster industry.

Leading foreign consumption markets in 2012, were: Italy at $53.4 million (down 11% in value and down 7% in volume); Spain at $48.2 million (down 11% in value and down 7% in volume); France at $30.4 million (down 3.5% in value and up 6% in volume); China at $28.3 million (up 11.2% in volume, and down 6% in value and 70% in volume); and Hong Kong at $25.4 million (up nearly 14% in value and up 23.5% in volume).

Dramatic Growth in Asian Markets
U.S. lobster exports to Asia more than doubled in value from 2010 - 2012. In 2012, sales reached nearly $91.3 million. Sales of lobster were up $30.4 million and 50% over the year before, helping to offset losses in Europe. Total volume exported to Asian markets reached nearly 12 million pounds (5,365 MT), up 56% over 2011.

China was the fastest growing market, worldwide, for U.S. lobster in 2012. Much of the lobster sold into Hong Kong was destined for consumption in China. Combined, sales to Hong Kong and China totaled nearly $54 million, placing China even with Italy as leading contender for foreign market consumption of U.S. lobster. Activities conducted by Food Export-Northeast to promote U.S. lobster (educational seminars for importers and chefs, menu promotions, media events and trade show support for exporters), combined with aggressive targeting by Maine’s lobster industry, have dramatically increased sales of lobster to Asian markets. Five Maine lobster exporters exhibited at the 2012 Asian Seafood Exposition in Hong Kong, Food Export-Northeast provided pre-arranged meetings with qualified buyers, funding assistance for exhibiting and additional support services. Maine companies reported $410,000 in onsite sales. Projected sales of $3.7 million over the next twelve months were also expected, which potentially could boost the combined total annual export sales of these companies by more than 7%.

European Countries Contract but Still Vital
Europe’s economic woes, reduced consumer spending and the weakened Euro currency adversely impacted sales of many high-value food products in 2012. Overall, exports of U.S. fishery products to the 27-member European Union (EU) declined by 9% in value to $1.1 billion. Lobster ranked as the second most valuable U.S. seafood export (after pollock). Total sales of American lobster from the U.S. to the EU were $162 million, down about $24 million and 13% from the year before.

Sales should improve as economies rebound. American lobster is popular.
Andrew Curtis comes to the door with his five-month-old yellow Labrador barking noisily in the background. The 23-year-old Owls Head lobsterman has a ready smile. And why not? He and his girlfriend Tiffany are about to set out on a February road trip Downeast, looking for the perfect 34-foot lobster boat to buy. “It’s a transition time for me,” Andrew explained. “Makes me nervous.”

Andrew is both a licensed lobsterman and the long-time sternman for his uncle, Maynard Curtis. He hauls with his uncle all day and then tends his own 400 traps from his 18-foot Seaway in the afternoon and evenings. “I started hauling traps when I was about six with my grandfather, Bernard Curtis,” Andrew said. When he was ten years old, he starting hauling with Maynard and got his own apprentice license. Andrew’s father was not a lobsterman, however. “Oh no, he hated it,” Andrew laughed. “His dad made him go but when he was about fifteen years old, my grandfather said to him, you either come haul with me this summer or paint the house. Well, even though my dad hates heights, he decided to paint the house.”

Andrew continued hauling with his uncle after graduating from Rockland High School in 2008. He took a year off from fishing to attend Eastern Maine Community College, studying to be an electrician. “But I decided I’d rather be home and lobstering,” he explained. Sterning with his uncle has given him a different sort of education. “Maynard’s a worker,” Andrew admitted cheerfully. “I enjoy going out with him and there’s a guaranteed paycheck at the end of the day.” He has gained most of his knowledge about lobstering by pestering his uncle with questions and “always watching the bottom,” Andrew said.

Both men sell their catch to Ship to Shore Lobster in Owls Head, where Andrew worked briefly in the past. Both Andrew and his uncle also favor herring for bait. “Of course, they always try to scare you about whether you can get enough bait. “I think if you add it all up, herring comes out [better] cost-wise,” Andrew said. Worked briefly in the past. Both Andrew and his uncle also favor herring for bait. Andrew finds the switch from being a sternman on his uncle’s boat to fishing on his own fairly smooth. “You have to be thinking all the time,” he said, referring to every situation, you are on your own. You have to figure out how to get out of it by yourself.”

One time Andrew did find himself in a tight spot. He tends his own traps, which are set in the rocky areas around Ash Island and other inshore Owls Head spots, from about three o’clock in the afternoon to seven or seven-thirty at night. One day his motor broke down near the rocks of Ash Island. “It was about seven, and there was no one out,” he recalled. “I tied the anchor off and then had to take off the hydraulic motor on top of the engine cover. I wrapped a rope around the fly wheel and pulled.” He called a friend on his cell phone just to let someone know what had happened. After three fierce pulls, he managed to get the motor to turn over. “Yeah, that was scary,” he said.

When he’s not working as a sternman, making his own traps, or lobstering, Andrew likes to go ice fishing at Hobbs Pond in Hope and Togus Pond, outside of Augusta. He is renting his father’s house in Owls Head but plans to buy the five-acre property in the future. “It’s good to have a goal,” he said.

Andrew points to the bright pile of newly painted buoys in the garage. “I just turned over. “Yeah, that was scary,” he said. Maynard’s a worker, “Andrew admitted cheerfully. “I enjoy going out with him and there’s a guaranteed paycheck at the end of the day.” He’s excited about moving out on his own. “My grandmother says, ‘don’t do it.’ She’s concerned,” he said. ”But I think that if you work hard enough you can make good money. You’ll only get out of it what you put in to it.”

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GIVE THE GIFT OF THE MLA

By Melissa Waterman

NEW RECRUIT: Time for a transition and a new boat

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GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE AND YOU

By Jonathan Grabowski
Northeastern University Marine Science Center

This paper was originally presented at the American Lobster in a Changing Ecosystem Symposium held in Portland, Maine, November 2012.

The extirpation of top predators has largely altered ecological communities and ecosystem functioning globally. As recently as 25 years ago, two teams of scientists documented that predator fish such as larger cod, wolffish, and cusk were much more prevalent on offshore ledges than in coastal waters. Dr. Robert Steneck of the University of Maine, the head of one of these teams, also demonstrated that predator attack rates on lobsters were much higher on offshore ledges. Meanwhile, Dr. Jon Witman of Brown University and his colleagues revealed that the most predatory rock and Jonah crabs were consumed within 12 hours at offshore sites, whereas crab survival was much higher at coastal sites. Thus, these two teams both concluded that the removal of large, predatory fish in coastal Maine fundamentally changed the inshore ecosystem. Removal of top predators, and the consequent dampening of predation pressure, may have contributed to recent increases in lobster populations in coastal regions of the Gulf of Maine.

Over the past five years, a team of scientists from Northeastern University, the Gulf of Maine Research Institute, the University of Maine and Brown University have revisited these sites. They quantified predator communities and predation rates on tethered lobsters to evaluate whether this inshore-offshore difference in predation communities still exists. In addition, since many of the offshore sites in the Gulf of Maine were closed to fishing in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the team was able to evaluate whether the Western Gulf of Maine Closure Area (i.e., Jeffreys Ledge) and the Cashes Ledge Closure Area (i.e., Cashes and Fippennies Ledges) were protecting and rebuilding predator populations.

These sites were compared with offshore open areas, such as Platt’s Bank and a portion of Jeffreys Ledge that extends into open waters, as well as similar inshore sites near Port Clyde, Cape Small, Casco Bay, and the Isles of Shoals. At each site, scientists used underwater video and hook-and-line surveys to compare whether predatory fish communities still differ between the inshore and offshore regions of the Gulf of Maine and to establish if predatory fish communities in offshore closed and open areas are different.

Twenty small, medium or large lobsters were tethered on 300-meter longlines for 24 hours at each site to determine how long they survived. Lobsters were attached to the longline using nylon briddles attached to monofilament leaders clipped to the longline every five meters. Longlines were deployed on hard bottom at each site to control for potential differences in bottom habitat. The result? The team found that predator communities are still more abundant offshore than inshore. The surveys indicated, however, that predatory fish were only more abundant offshore in the closed sites. Substantial changes have occurred in community structure, and these changes are occurring even in the closed sites. For instance, we observed that cunner, a small prey fish, has increased substantially at some offshore closed sites such as Cashes Ledge. Cunner were virtually absent on Cashes Ledge during the 1980s. This uptick in small prey fish likely indicates that predatory fish are not as abundant as they once were even in some of the closed areas. The team also found that the mortality rates of small tethered lobsters were higher inshore than offshore, suggesting that predators of these smaller lobsters such as sea ravens, sculpins, and smaller gadids are likely most prevalent in coastal regions. However, small tethered lobsters at offshore open sites, such as Cashes Ledge, also suffered high predation rates, which is likely explained by the recent increase in cunner and other small predatory fishes observed there. Predation of large lobsters only occurred in the offshore closed sites, suggesting that larger predators are still more abundant on offshore ledges than in inshore areas of the Gulf of Maine.

Including open sites located offshore revealed that closure status can greatly influence predatory fish communities and predation rates. Even though the offshore open sites were close to the offshore closed sites, the study results suggest that predator communities and predation rates on lobsters at the offshore open sites more closely resemble those of the inshore rather than offshore closed sites. At the offshore open sites, mortality of large lobsters was extremely low, whereas mortality of smaller lobsters at these sites was high and similar to that of the inshore sites. Furthermore, the team observed very few large predatory fish at the offshore open sites. These results are bolstered by Continued on page 12

Continued on page 12

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(Continued on page 12)

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Coast Guard drill conductor training courses for fishermen. More recently, they organized regular docksides vessel safety exams to help fishermen come into compliance with new Coast Guard regulations. The Association has helped fund swim lessons for island children at the YMCA in Ellsworth. And it assists local families through its contributions to the Island Pantry and the heating assistance program.

While the efforts of the women involved in the Association focus primarily on the serious issue of fishing safety measures, Oliver and her cohorts have always maintained an attitude of fun. "Honestly, the best part of this work has always been the networking," says Oliver. In the early days members of IFWA and their husbands would regularly attend meetings of the New England Fisheries Management Council to testify on different policy issues. "It could be incredibly discouraging, but getting connected to others along the coast has always been my favorite part," she said.

Oliver served for many years as the IFWA representative to the Maine Fishermen’s Forum board of directors. That position is now held by Clare Grindle, a former local school teacher descended from a long line of fishermen. "Clare is great because she has the generational knowledge of the community. I was about 31 when we started. Some members were even younger than that. I didn’t grow up here," Oliver continued.

Connecting among the many generations of fishermen on the island is particularly important to current IFWA vice president, Genevieve Kurile-McDonald. "One of my favorite things about the organization is the Fishermen’s Hall of Fame," says Kurile-McDonald. "It’s like an oral history project. We craft speeches about their backgrounds. It’s like an oral history project." Kurile-McDonald said. Currently Kurile-McDonald is or-

Continued on page 15
Maine Lobstermen’s Association

Advocating for responsible resource management and prosperity for Maine’s commercial lobstermen since 1954.

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Maine Lobstermen’s Association Update

Steaming Ahead

In February, the MLA Board met for two days to talk about the future of the Maine lobster industry. Like so many lobstermen, MLA Board members have been challenged to move beyond venting their emotions and frustrations and to start thinking about the state of the industry. This meeting was an opportunity to take stock of where we are, and to talk objectively about how to improve our future.

2012 was a difficult year: some areas of the state landed record catches and made good money, while others saw decent landings yet struggled to make ends meet. The MLA operates for all lobstermen in Maine, and our job is to find solutions that will improve the plight of the industry as a whole. This is demanding at the best of times, and can be downright daunting during difficult times.

One of the things you can count on about the MLA Board is each member’s commitment to the industry. The lobster fishery has been good for each of them, and they want to ensure that opportunity exists for the next generation. Many have dedicated years of time and energy, and they refuse to give up on any problem simply because its solutions are not clear.

Despite the lack of a clear path forward, the MLA board gathered in good faith to talk about solutions. After all, they reasoned, if the MLA can’t talk about these issues in a rational manner who can? The Board invited DMR lobster biologist Carl Wilson to walk them through what we are today. What do the landings mean, how are the various regions of the state affected, how many lobstermen are doing just fine, and what should we expect in the future? True to form, Carl presented informative data that portrayed a Gulf of Maine in flux. Carl warned that the lobster resource is changing at a rapid pace, and therefore, there is no reliable guide on what to expect in future years.

The Commissioner joined the meeting to provide an update of his recent outreach meetings with the industry.

The board also invited Tim Harkins, a small lobster buyer who specializes in the live market, to share his thoughts on lobster quality and some of the difficulties facing the lobster industry. Tim shared some eye-opening information on the financial loss associated with seemingly low shrinkage rates. With just two dead lobsters in a crate, a dealer will be out more than $400 over 50 crates. Preventing that loss would put money back in the lobstermen’s pockets.

Thank You!

The MLA offers its sincere gratitude to Brian McLean of New Harbor, and Lawrence R Pye of Small Point for their years of outstanding service on the MLA Board of Directors. Brian has served as an MLA Director since 1984; Pye has served since 2006. Each has proudly and effectively represented lobstermen in their areas, and worked for a sustainable future for the Maine lobster industry.

Proposal to Weaken Rules for Mosquito Spraying

The public has until March 15 to send written comments to the Maine Board of Pesticides Control (BPC) regarding the proposal to weaken its existing pesticide rules to allow for government-sponsored, wide area mosquito-control programs to protect the public against diseases such as West Nile virus and Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE). The BPC explains that surveillance data from the last decade show that mosquito-borne viruses are on the increase in the Maine. The first confirmed human case of West Nile virus was documented in 2012. Due to the threat of a disease outbreak, the Maine CDC may recommend wide area, mosquito-control programs in targeted areas of the state in coming years. These programs would be very difficult to conduct under current state law.

The proposed amendments would allow government-sponsored, wide area, mosquito-control programs without the need to obtain consent from each individual landowner. Instead, property owners could request to be excluded from ground-based spraying and to be provided advance notice for aerial-control programs. In addition, certain sensitive sites would be excluded from aerial programs.

The MLA board spent a great deal of time talking about the types of changes we’ve seen in the industry over the years. The fishery has certainly changed – money is now made on volume. The board’s sentiment was that landing lots of lobsters is a good thing. What concerned members was the attitude that many have toward those lobsters that they land. Some lobstermen pay little or no attention to how lobsters are handled on board. Directors cringed as they shared stories about lobsters being tossed in piles on the sorting table and flung into tanks. They were concerned that as the price of lobster weakens, there is less incentive for lobstermen to take good care of the product aboard their vessels.

But the discussion revealed that Maine lobstermen are a proud group – proud to be lobstermen and proud of the product they land. MLA Board members strongly agreed that it is the harvester’s responsibility to land the best quality product possible. The better the product we land, the more chance we have of getting paid a better price for that product. As the industry’s lead trade association, the MLA is the one who should step up to the plate to encourage all lobstermen to land the best quality product possible.

The outcome of this two-day meeting is a commitment by the MLA to work with lobstermen and ensure they have the tools necessary to land the best quality lobster possible. We know that lobstermen know how to fish and don’t need to be told how to run their hauling operations. Instead, MLA’s efforts will be focused on giving lobstermen the information they need to do the best job they can. We know that lobstermen need to be handled gently, they need to stay cool and moist, and they need oxygen. How a lobsterman executes his hauling operation to maximize the quality of the lobster is up to him. The MLA will be working to establish guidelines for “best practices” aboard the vessel, from the trap to the truck. This will be all voluntary – take it or leave it – and up to each harvester to use as he sees fit.

The MLA Board believes that making a commitment to land the best quality lobster possible just makes sense. So, what do you think? We’d love to hear your thoughts.

As always, stay safe on the water.

Maine Sea Grant

Asmfc Appointment

On February 19, the Maine’s Speaker of the House and Senate President appointed Representative Walter A. Kumienga III of Deer Isle to the Atlantic State Marine Fisheries Commission.
LOBSTER INDUSTRY BILLS


LD 486  An Act To Provide for the Effective Marketing and Promotion of Maine Lobster. This bill amends provisions of the law establishing the Lobster Promotion Council as follows: 1) It increases the surcharge assessed on harvester and dealer licenses and creates a surcharge on the processor license to fund the council; 2) It changes the criteria for membership and the selection process; and 3) It requires that the council report annually to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over marine resource matters, the Lobster Advisory Council and the lobster industry. Sponsored by Rep. Kruger; cosponsored by Sen. Langley. The public hearing is scheduled for March 6 at 9am.


LD 482  An Act To Improve the Quality of the Data Used in the Management of Maine’s Fisheries. This bill makes a number of changes to various reporting requirements of the DMR landings summary: This bill would allow lobster license holders to incorporate under a new business name and continue operating without remedying their noncompliance. It authorizes the commissioner to suspend licenses for noncompliance with reporting requirements in order to ensure effective catch monitoring and assess an administrative fee if licenses are suspended. It prevents unlicensed crew members on lobster or crab fishing boats and scallop and sea urchin diving tenders from selling any catch and limits selling to certain licensed harvesters. It expands the seaweed buyer’s license to include anyone buying seaweed for resale and removes the ability of marine worm and seafood dealers to harvest seaweed without a license. Finally, it expands the requirement to hold a retail license for the sale of all marine organisms instead of just lobster, crayfish and shellstock. Sponsored by Rep. MacDonald of Boothbay (DMR bill); cosponsored by Sen. Langley.


Bills not yet printed (as of 2/20/13)

An Act To Allow the Sale of Incidentally Caught Lobsters (LR 1901). Concept summary: This bill would allow lobster incidentally caught as bycatch in Lobster Management Area 3 to be landed in Maine, abiding by Area 1 size requirements. Sponsored by Sen. Haskell of Cumberland.

An Act To Create a Noncommercial, Nondomiciled Resident Lobster and Crab Fishing License.
An Act To Amend the Lobster Trap Tag System Rules for Certain Zones (LR 1178) Spon-

An Act To Ease Compliance and En-
forcement near Lobster Zone Borders (LR 1681) Sponsored by Rep. Chap-
man of Brooksville.

An Act Regarding the Swans Island Lob-

An Act To Create a Tax Incentive Pro-
gram To Improve the Maine Lobster Industry (LR 92) Sponsored by Sen. Johnson of Lincoln.

An Act To Provide a Reduced-price Lob-
ster Meat Permit to Licensed Crab Pick-
ners (LR 98) Sponsored by Sen. Langley of Hancock. Note: this may have been
worked out through a mechanism other than Legislature.

An Act To Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue To Provide Funds for the De-
velopment of Lobster Processing Capac-
ity in the State (LR 94) Sponsored by Rep MacDonald of Boothbay.

An Act Regarding the Passage of River
Herring on the St. Croix River (LR 1304). Sponsored by Rep. MacDonald of
Boothbay.

An Act To Provide Guidance for the De-
velopment of State Fisheries Manage-
ment Plans (DMR bill)

Resolve. To Develop Principles To Guide
Deer Isle.

An Act To Make Technical Changes to
Maine’s Marine Resources Laws (DMR bill)

An Act To Restore Maine’s Groundfish

Marine-related Bonds and Tax Bills

LD 358 An Act To Protect Family Farms
and Working Waterfront Subject to Es-
tate Tax and Reduce the Maine Estate
Tax Exclusion. This bill reduces the
$2,000,000 Maine exclusion amount
for the Maine estate tax to $1,000,000
for the estates of decedents who die
on or after January 1, 2014. It removes
the value of eligible family owned and
operated farmland and eligible family
owned and operated working waterfront
activities and project sites requiring
remediation due to contamination.

LD 273 An Act Authorizing a General Fund Bond Issue To Fund the Dredg-
ing of Casco Bay and the Expansion of
the Portland Fish Exchange. The funds
provided by this bond issue, in the
amount of $6,500,000, will be used for
dredging Portland Harbor in Casco
Bay ($5,000,000) and for improve-
ments to the Portland Fish Exchange
building ($1,500,000). Sponsored by
Pres. Alfond of Cumberland; cospo-
sored by Reps. Dion, Lum and
Woodbury.

LD 378 An Act To Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue To Complete Renova-
tions of a Pier at the Gulf of Maine Re-
search Institute. The funds provided
by this bond issue, in the amount of
$1,000,000, will be used to complete
renovation of a pier at the Gulf of
Maine Research Institute. Sponsored
by Rep. Dion; cosponzored by Reps.
Dill, Sen. Gerzofsky, Rep. Hamann,

LD 385 An Act To Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue To Fund the Dredg-
ing of Portland Harbor in Casco
Bay ($5,000,000) and for improve-
ments to the Portland Fish Exchange
building ($1,500,000). Sponsored by
Pres. Alfond of Cumberland; cospo-
Sen. Haskell, Sen. Johnson, Rep. Rus-
Woodbury.

LD 378 An Act To Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue To Complete Renova-
tions of a Pier at the Gulf of Maine Re-
search Institute. The funds provided
by this bond issue, in the amount of
$1,000,000, will be used to complete
renovation of a pier at the Gulf of
Maine Research Institute. Sponsored
by Rep. Dion; cosponzored by Reps.
Dill, Sen. Gerzofsky, Rep. Hamann,
LOBSTERMAN AS ARTIST: North Haven man links art and the sea

by Melissa Waterman

"I'm just a cave painter at heart," Eric Hopkins said, smiling, as he leafed through hundreds of his distinctive paintings and drawings in his Rockland studio. The North Haven native is well-known for his simple yet sophisticated images of Penobscot Bay, the islands and marine animals such as lobsters and codfish. What isn't as well known is Hopkins' earlier days, when he hauled lobster traps by hand and went scalloping in the winter months.

Members of the Hopkins family first settled on North Haven around the Revolutionary War; his maternal grandmother's family arrived on the island before 1776. Eric's great-grandfather had a general store on the island and his grandfather did construction. Eric's father ran a fish market and marina as well as a ferry between North Haven and nearby Vinalhaven, and worked as a schoolteacher. When Eric was born, life on North Haven was something of a "monoculture," he said. "You worked for the summer people. You might fish and be a caretaker. That was it."

As a child, Hopkins liked nothing better than to mess around in boats. He started fishing a few lobster traps when he was young, hand hauling from a leaky outboard boat. "I thought it was fun," he recalled. "I liked to haul at low tide and look around at things." He sold his catch at his father's fish market. At that time, summer residents could have their lobsters cooked at the market and the meat picked for them. Hopkins turned those empty shells to good use. "I would take the shells and then make these [small figures] and then turn around and sell them. I did that right through high school," he said.

During the summer months Hopkins dug clams then, as he grew older, started working as a sternman for other lobstermen on the island. His family moved to Rockland when he was in high school but Hopkins couldn't sever his link to North Haven. "I didn't like school," Eric explained matter-of-factly. "My senior year I spent more time skipping school than in it. I had a mooring in Owls Head harbor so I would go out to the island and just stay there. I read books and did homework and got my best grades that year. I was on the Honor Roll!"

Hopkins readily acknowledges that his eye for color and form was shaped by his upbringing on North Haven. He recalls one time when he was quite small going with his father on a fishing trip and noticing the beautiful colors of a fish they landed. "I brought that fish home but it had lost all its color. So I painted all over it," Hopkins said. But after graduating from Rockland High School in 1969, the life of an artist didn't seem to be in his future.

He applied to the Rhode Island School of Design but, with a limited portfolio, was rejected. "There was no reason to admit me and I wasn't," Hopkins said. "You were only allowed one year of art in high school and that was a privilege." He considered attending Maine Maritime Academy but because of poor eyesight, gave up on that idea. His high school art teacher arranged for Hopkins and three of his friends to interview at the University of Maine's State Teachers College in Gorham and, much to his surprise, the professor offered them scholarships. Hopkins and his friends decided to attend the University of Maine and study art.

Continued on page 19

Lobsterman as Artist: North Haven man links art and the sea

LOBSTER SHELLS find a new use in these childhood sculptures by Hopkins. Photo by Melissa Waterman.

Penobscot Bay and its many islands are a continuing motif in Hopkins' work. Photo by Melissa Waterman.

Eric Hopkins in his Rockland studio. Photo by Melissa Waterman.

Penobscot Bay and its many islands are a continuing motif in Hopkins' work. Photo by Melissa Waterman.
among European consumers. Promoting U.S. lobster attributes, and sustain-
ability of the fishery, remains important to prevent substitution of a less
expensive species alternative during difficult economic times and to accede
recovery of lost sales as economic conditions improve. Food Export-Northeast
continues to conduct generic product promotions at foodservice and retail
operations, combined, totaled 273 million pounds in 2011. Canada is the larger
harvester and is responsible for 54% of the annual lobster harvest; the US
lands the remaining 46%. Maine's share of the total harvest accounts for 38% of the catch. Of the US
lobster harvest, Maine lands about 83%, Massachusetts lands about 11%, and the other Atlantic coastal states land the remaining 6% according to Na-
tional Marine Fisheries Service Annual Commercial Landing Statistics. According to NMFS, the U.S. lobster resource contributed more than $423
million to American fishermen in 2011.

Furthermore, those combined land-
ings have more than doubled in the past 25 years. Since 2007, US lobster
landings have increased by 56% and Canadian landings have increased by 36%. The Lobster Settlement In-
dex project, conducted in Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Rhode Island over the past 24 years,
indicates that young-of-the-year set-
tlement began to increase in 2009, hinting at continued robust landings in the future.

Finding good markets for all of these
lobsters has become an issue of con-
cern in the last few years. While the
live market continues to offer the
best price for lobster, it is limited by
the challenges of getting the lobster
to the customer alive. As landings
have increased, the processing sec-
tor has evolved as ready and able to
purchase a large volume of product
for sale to customers. Canada has a
leg up in terms of lobster processing
capacity. Beginning in the late 1980s,
the Canadian government, in partic-
ular the province of New Brunswick,
began to invest in lobster process-
ing infrastructure. As a result, Can-
da has more than two dozen active
processing facilities in the Maritime
provinces. However, the processing
sector in Maine is on the increase. As
a result of the Mosley Group Report,
completed in 2009, Maine amended its laws concerning lobster process-
ing in the state. Maine now author-
izes production of shell-on lobster
parts (i.e., tails, legs, claws and cara-
pace) and sale of these products, a
move, in addition to other factors,
that has spurred additional process-
ing activity in the state. Maine DMR
reports issuing 16 lobster processing
licenses in 2011.

As the waters of the Northwest Atlan-
tic continue to warm, many factors
will affect the dynamics of the lobster
industry. It is anticipated that lobster
landings will continue to be strong, and the timing of those landings will
shift to earlier months. Mother Na-
ture is providing US. and Canadian
lobstermen with a lot more lobster,
and at different times than in the
past. Both lobstermen and the mar-
kets will need to adjust.

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INSIDE THE DMR: The Bureau of Marine Science and Bureau of Public Health

By Melissa Waterman

Striped bass, bluefish, horseshoe crabs, Atlantic sturgeon, American lobster, scallops, eels; if it swims in the sea or migrates up one of Maine's rivers, it's likely that the Bureau of Marine Science has counted it, studied it and measured it. One of the bureau's chief responsibilities is gathering data necessary to create sustainable management plans for dozens of the state's commercial and recreational marine species. "If we weren't doing this work, there would be no sound information on which to base management measures," explained Linda Mercer, bureau director. “It's important that the decisions made make sense." The proposed 2013-2014 budget for the bureau is $6.9 million; there are 57 positions. Bureau staff within the biological monitoring and assessment division collect data on groundfish, monkfish, sea scallops, lobsters, ocean quahogs, and Atlantic herring among other marine species, as well as the state's diadromous species (those which migrate from fresh to salt water) including Atlantic salmon, alewife, American eel, shad, and blueback herring. "Sampling takes place dockside or at sea," Mercer continued. Each spring and fall the bureau also conducts a survey which covers the Maine coast from Portsmouth, New Hampshire, east to Lubec. The multi-species survey generates important data that is used by regional bodies such as the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission in stock assessments. "The department has been conducting the survey twice each year since 2000. The data is used in a number of important stock assessments, such as those for shrimp and lobster," Mercer said. In addition to the biological monitoring and assessment division, the bureau also has a marine education division and a sea-run fisheries and habitat division. The sea-run fisheries and habitat division focuses its salmon restoration efforts in historic salmon rivers such as the Penobscot, Kennebec, Dernys, and Duck Trap Rivers, among others. Salmon on various life stages are stocked in the rivers and access to the rivers protected for the fish. Restoring the Kennebec, Androscoggin and Penobscot Rivers for shad and river herring has also become a significant part of the division's work.

The marine education program operates the Maine State Aquarium from May through September and provides education programs for school groups and others throughout the year. Educational and living history programs are conducted at the Burnt Island Lighthouse Station Resource Center in Boothbay Harbor. Education division staff take the famous DMR touch tank, full of representative marine species, to schools, public festivals and other events throughout the year.

The Bureau of Public Health, as its name suggests, concentrates on making sure that marine species harvested in Maine and eaten by the public are safe. It oversees the statewide shellfish monitoring program required by the National Shellfish Sanitation Program (NSSP). "The Bureau is comprised of three major programs – the growing area program, the shellfish dealer inspection program and the shellfish management program. The growing area program is the largest unit with 21 employees and two office locations, in Boothbay Harbor and Lam- one," explained Kohi Kanwit, director of the bureau. Growing area program staff perform water quality testing in order to classify shellfish areas, conduct shoreline surveys to identify and evaluate pollution sources, and monitor marine biotoxins that could cause "red tide" or paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP). The division operates four FDA-certified laboratories and two microbiology and biotoxin labs. The shellfish dealer inspection program ensures proper sanitation at shellfish dealer facilities. This includes site inspections, a rigorous certification process and permitting of certain activities such as wet storage or bulk tagging of shellfish. The three staff within the program perform almost 500 inspections each year. "The inspectors play a key role in any illness investigation by tracing the source of implicated shellfish through the harvester and dealer tagging system," Kanwit said.

The Shellfish Management Program is responsible for development and maintenance of municipal shellfish management programs. Maine is one of only two states in the country that allow qualifying municipalities to manage their intertidal shellfish resources including licensing, resource enhancement, resource surveys, harvest limits and enforcement. The program's three biologists act as liaisons among the towns, shellfish harvesters and the DMR. "They attend town meetings, approve shellfish ordinances and review annual reports and license allocations," Kanwit said. Each year the biologists attend between 150 and 180 meetings to keep track of the state's 76 municipal shellfish programs. "These three programs work to ensure the health and sustainability of the valuable and bountiful shellfish resources of the state," Kanwit said.

MAINE LOBSTER PROMOTION COUNCIL MARKETING UPDATE

Maine Lobster Chef Ambassadors

Maine Lobster Promotion Council is starting its 2013-14 Maine lobster Chef Ambassador series with two events. First, Chef Wilfred Beriau is headed to the American Culinary Federation's Northeast Regional Convention being held in Verona, New York in March. Chef Beriau will be teaching culinary students and professional chefs the best ways to handle and cook Maine lobster. MLPC will supply the lobster for the cooking class as well as educational materials for the chefs and culinary students. We appreciate Chef Beriau's ongoing support for the Maine lobster community.

In May, Chef Michele Ragussis will represent Maine lobster at the Monterey Bay Aquarium's Cooking for Solutions event. Chef Ragussis, executive chef at The Pearl Seafood Restaurant and Raw Bar in Rockland and runner-up on the Next Food Network Star competition, is another great representative for Maine lobster. Monterey Bay Aquarium is a strong proponent for sustainable fisheries - their Seafood Watch guide is a popular tool with consumers. It's important for Maine lobster to be a part of this event to emphasize our strong history of sustainable management of the lobster fishery.

Maine Food and Lodging Expo

In April, MLPC will once again exhibit at the Maine Food & Lodging Expo. MLPC will have the opportunity to educate restaurant operators about opportunities to promote Maine lobster in the coming season. Everyone recognizes the importance of our local restaurants in selling and promoting Maine lobster to residents and the many tourists who come through the state in the summer and fall. With another season of big landings expected, we will need everyone ready to go during the upcoming lobster season.

Chef Michele Ragussis, from the Pearl Restaurant in Rockland, will promote Maine lobster at the Monterey Bay Aquarium in May. Photo courtesy of MLPC.

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there is one thing that’s the same no matter what sea you’re on, it’s your presence on the boat. It’s the ability to find the rhythm and always keep a close eye on your surroundings. You look the greenest when you are standing flat-footed with no clue as to what’s supposed to happen next. Trust me, I looked pretty green trying to figure out this new fishery.

Mid-water trawling in the Bering Sea gave me entirely new respect for the ocean. I’ve seen our 148-foot F/V Morning Star take on some nasty weather while we’ve been out fishing for pollock through some of the coldest nights. It’s amazing and sometimes mind-blowing to realize what a vessel this size can fish through.

There is no bigger adrenaline rush than working on a frozen deck in the middle of the night on the Bering Sea with 20 to 30 foot rollers one wrong move away. With the first couple of trips under my belt, I found my rhythm and became fueled by the bad weather. Day-in, day-out, I made it through my first two seasons and I’m now headed back for my third. But, it is not only the freezing ice, high seas and strong winds that stay with you. It’s the lasting impression of a well-maintained fishery that I take with me as well.

People are always going to have their different opinions when it comes to the health of our oceans. But it’s these differences in opinions which create the checks and balances that we need. The trick to staying on top seems to be figuring out how to interpret these different opinions and implement the appropriate regulations with good timing.

Taylor Strout is a Cape Elizabeth native and a graduate of the University of Colorado Boulder. When he isn’t fishing for pollock in the Bering Sea, Taylor lives in South Portland with his wife Nikki and their two dogs Luna and Breck.

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Though every fishery in Alaska has had good and bad years, it seems to me that most of them have been carefully monitored. The crab fishery came back after hard times and near collapse in the 1980’s. Even the groundfish and mid-water trawling fisheries seem steady despite the constant pressure from a technologically advancing fishing fleet.
year (May 1, 2008, to April 30, 2009), and proof of purchase of at least one trap tag between 2004 and 2008. In June, 2012, NMFS informed all current Area 1 license holders that they would have to submit an application with the required information by November 1 in order to renew their license for 2013. Approximately 1,800 lobstermen held federal licenses for Area 1. Of those, 1,700 submitted the application on time, Burns said, and have been reviewed by the agency. Some 70 individuals are still under review, however.

Some of those are under review because they could not prove they had purchased a tag during the four year period. Others are there because their permit was not active in 2008. "You can put your permit on the shelf, so to speak," Burns explained. "It's called Confirmation of Permit History (CPH). If your permit was in dormant status in 2008, it can't meet the test."

NMFS has sent those lobstermen whose applications are still under review a final request for the required information. Burns anticipates that the review process will be completed by May 1. "Whenever you have a limited entry program there's always some fortunate but when you have a limited permit it remained an area 1 permit. Mine was the only one that was taken. If I had put those permits on a skiff like many others did I would have been golden," Porter noted. "I am advising everyone I know to get their permits out of CPH as fast as possible."

Burns said that no applicants had been denied but confirmed that 70 permits were still under review. NMFS has sent those lobstermen whose applications are pending a final request for the required information. Burns anticipates that the review process will be completed by May 1. "It's unfortunate but when you have a limited entry program there's always some that don't get in," he added.

Kristan Porter of Cutler had a quahog/lobster permit for Area 1. He purchased a new boat in 2005. His quahog/lobster permits could not be transferred to the new boat because of the vessel's larger size. "So, instead of giving up my quahog permit, which I would have had to do because you can't split permits, I put both permits into CPH and bought another lobster permit for the new vessel," Porter explained.

Unfortunately, Porter found that his permit in CPH was not counted by NMFS as an active permit. "Apparently when you are in CPH you are in no man's land and have no designation. I did not know this and assumed that if it went in to CPH as an area 1 permit it remained an area 1 permit. Mine was the only one that was taken that met the tag requirements but was in CPH in 2008. If I had put those permits on a skiff like many others did I would have been golden," Porter noted. "I am advising everyone I know to get their permits out of CPH as fast as possible."

Burns said that no applicants had been denied but confirmed that 70 permits were still under review. NMFS has sent those lobstermen whose applications are pending a final request for the required information. Burns anticipates that the review process will be completed by May 1. "It's unfortunate but when you have a limited entry program there's always some that don't get in," he added.

Garbo depends on the hard work and stewardship of Maine lobstermen.

Thank you!

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Organizing and cataloguing over 20 years’ worth of speeches as IFWA prepares for its 25th anniversary. Those speeches will become a commemorative book. She also is working to digitize all of the IFWA records. Kurlec-McDonald said with a laugh that one of her favorite things to take care of for the Association is the paperwork. "It needs to be done," she explained matter-of-factly. She is clearly good at it, providing printed documents of Hall of Fame members, the Association’s history, timeline and mission.

Kurlec is joined on the executive board by president Liz Perez, secretary Vickie Hardie, and treasurer Jenny Steele, who has served in that role since the organization’s birth. The executive committee generally leads the organization, planning events and programs. They are advised by two steering members who have longevity in IFWA. "We have a strong core group and typically our executive committee members hold their positions for two to four years before transitioning new people into those leadership roles," explained Oliver.

IFWA is solely run on volunteer power and unlike most nonprofits, does not hold an annual fundraising drive. Instead, the Association is supported by donations of all sizes from residents and local organizations, such as the Stonington Opera House. The annual Fishermen’s Day brings in some money, as does the holiday fair held each year at the Island Community Center. They have even staged a Fishermen’s Wives Storytelling contest fundraiser in the middle of January. The money defrays expenses for safety classes but also goes out to island students in the form of scholarships for college.

Yet for all the safety and education efforts of the Association, tragedy will still strike. In December, 2012, two local fishermen were lost at sea when their vessel, The Foxy Lady II, went down while scalloping off Cape Cod. The IFWA organized a community service in February to honor the two men and set up a fund for their families. It was a sad reminder that despite the best efforts of some very determined women, the fishing life still remains a dangerous one.

Andy Gove receives his Hall of Fame award from Genevieve Kurlec-McDonald at the 2012 Fishermen’s Day. Photo courtesy of Penobscot East Resource Center.
Black-backed gulls experience decline

Anywho has a widely shared population around the water has been seagulls. The Maine coast and the many islands that dot the Gulf of Maine are home to a variety of sea birds, the largest being the great black-backed gull (Larus marinus). Though gulls may seem to be plentiful along the coast, the great black-backed gull population is actually declining. “It’s hard to say that one thing is related to the black-back’s decline,” said Brad Allen, Maine Department of Inland Fish and Wildlife wildlife biologist. “It’s most likely a number of things that have resulted in a population decline.”

Black-backed gulls are native to New England. They experienced a much more dramatic population decline in the past. In the 1800s, the large gulls were hunted for their meat and for their feathers. By the turn of the century, the gulls were “wiped off the Maine coast,” said Allen. Soon after, hunting and egg collecting were outlawed and by the early 1930s, the gulls returned to Maine. And so thereafter, the population boomed.

Dr. Stephen Kress, vice president for bird conservation at the National Audubon Society and founder of the Puffin Project, said the black-backed gulls rebounded due to two major changes. First the Migratory Species Act was put in place in 1918 which protected the gulls from hunting and egg collecting were outlawed and by the early 1930s, the gulls returned to Maine. And so thereafter, the population boomed.

Allen noted that humans were very wasteful during the 20th century. With all the chicken and fish processors dumping scraps, black-backed gulls found plenty of food. “The population climbed in the 1940s and 1950s to the point where gull control was something people were thinking about,” Allen said. “Then in the late 1980s to early 1990s, dumps were closed and we started to clean up. The carrying capacity for gulls went down because there wasn’t as much food available to them.”

“Black-backed gulls are excellent predators,” explained Kress. He warned against calling the gulls aggressive, however. “They are effective. They are good at what they do.” The gulls, which can reach a wingspan of five feet, prey upon terns, laughing gulls, puffins, eider ducks, and crabs. “Crabs make up half of their diet,” Kress said. “But the gulls specialize. Not all gulls eat eggs or chicks, each has its own preference.” Because the gulls build their nests earlier than other seabirds, they are able to prevent other birds from entering their territory. “If other birds do nest, they will probably be attacked,” Kress said. But now the gulls have become prey themselves. With an increase in bald eagle populations, black-backed and herring gull populations are decreasing. “There are still many of them. It’s the regional population that is declining, especially in the east where eagles are abundant,” kress said. The last census of gulls in Maine took place in 2008 and documented 9,536 pairs of great black-backed gulls on 189 islands – a 42% decrease since the mid-1990s when there were 16,392 pairs of gulls on the coast. “Twenty years ago I would visit islands and they were covered with gulls. Now I go to the same islands and there are none,” Allen said. “It’s not bad, not good, it’s just different.”

Allen doesn’t think the eagle population is solely to blame for gull populations decreasing, though. “It’s a complicated web, really. Eagles are typically fish eaters, but the fish populations have declined in recent years. If the fish stocks were in better shape, would eagles eat fewer birds? It’s hard to know – we don’t have all the answers,” he said.

A new census on gulls will be conducted this summer and results released in 2014. Linda Welch, refuge biologist at Maine Coastal Islands NWR, said the census will mirror the one executed in 2008.

### Table: Pairs of Great Black-backed Gulls in each Maine County in 1996 & 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>1996 Pairs (189)</th>
<th>2008 Pairs (49)</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>York</td>
<td>2,437 (138)</td>
<td>1,070 (73)</td>
<td>-56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumberland</td>
<td>1,094 (67)</td>
<td>488 (32)</td>
<td>-55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penobscot</td>
<td>1,483 (84)</td>
<td>470 (28)</td>
<td>-69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waldo</td>
<td>1,287 (75)</td>
<td>589 (37)</td>
<td>-54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knox</td>
<td>3,266 (75)</td>
<td>2,776 (66)</td>
<td>-15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sagadahoc</td>
<td>747 (13)</td>
<td>232 (10)</td>
<td>-69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hancock</td>
<td>2,128 (44)</td>
<td>819 (35)</td>
<td>-62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>3,975 (198)</td>
<td>1,515 (87)</td>
<td>-62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>9,936 (526)</td>
<td>3,331 (189)</td>
<td>-67%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge.
In mid-February, the Maine Lobstermen's Association board of directors gathered for a two-day retreat to discuss the status of the fishery and develop a plan to improve the overall health of the Maine lobster industry.

MLA board members first heard from Department of Marine Resources (DMR) lobster biologist Carl Wilson who reviewed data showing significant changes in lobster abundance, US and Canadian lobster landings, value of the catch and environmental changes. In 2011, the US and Canada landed nearly 273 million pounds of lobster with Maine accounting for 38% of these landings. Surveys of lobster abundance have demonstrated a notable shift in the resource towards the east and into offshore areas. In Maine, landings vary widely by region with Zone C reporting the highest landings at 32.5 million, followed by Zones A and C, each with 25 million. Zones C and A have doubled their landings since 2008, Wilson warned that the industry cannot look to its past to predict its future in the face of such sweeping changes.

Maine landed a record 123 million pounds in 2012. The timing of the landings was earlier than seen in recent years with peak landings occurring in July. June landings doubled compared to 2010 and 2011; and quadrupled compared to 2009. Maine's lobster landings in July 2012 were the second highest monthly landings ever recorded, exceeding 2010 and 2011 landings by nearly 60% and nearly three times higher than 2009. Landings in August 2012 were within 10% of those seen in 2011 which was the highest monthly landings ever recorded. Landings remained strong through the end of the year.

The board discussed the impact of these record landings for individual lobstermen. DMR data reveals that more than 60% of Maine lobstermen land less than 20,000 pounds; 25% land between 20,000 to 50,000 pounds and only 3% land more than 90,000 pounds. So, despite historic record landings, the majority of Maine's lobstermen are not landing big numbers of lobster.

The true game changer for the lobster industry could be water temperatures. In 2012, water temperatures in the Gulf of Maine were the warmest in the 11 years since the data has been collected by the region's ocean observing buoys – in deep and shallow waters and in inshore and offshore areas. Wilson noted that the Boothbay station, which has been monitoring surface water temperatures for more than 100 years, recorded seven of its ten warmest years in the last decade. The other three occurred in the early 1950's during the last warming trend. And, he warned, that the warm water temperatures found in the Gulf of Maine last year have not cooled significantly thus far this year. The results of this temperature regime shift are more lobsters earlier in the season, and more soft lobsters throughout the year. He pointed out that the spring lobstering season once made up 20 to 40 percent of annual landings; that percentage is now down to 10 percent.

Tim Harkins, president of Rocky Coast Lobster in Arrowsic, spoke about how some lobster dealers are coping with changes in the industry. His company ships live lobsters in the United States and does contract grading for companies that ship abroad.

Harkins emphasized strongly that time, temperature and handling are critical to the quality of a lobster and hence, its value. The quality of the lobster will never be better than when the trap comes over the rail of the boat; from there, quality can only be lost. Harkins said, "If you treat a $2.00 lobster like a $1.50 lobster, you'll get it [that price] next week. It's a self fulfilling prophecy."

Dealer reports in 2010 indicated that only 7% of the lobster landed in Maine is old shell; 79% is soft shell and 14% is reported as ungraded. Given the delicate nature of the product landed in Maine, maintaining quality is critical. Shrinkage, or the dead loss of lobsters, is costing fishermen and dealers a lot of money. The 2009 Moseley Group report to the Governor's Task Force on the Economic Sustainability of the Maine Lobster Industry reported that the industry is experiencing on average roughly 20% shrinkage annually, a figure disputed by some. Given the change to handling practices and reduce shrink, the industry could recapture a sizable amount of value that is currently being lost at every level of the supply chain – from the boat to the processor or consumer. Harkins posits that based on his business model, when he buys 90 pound crates of lobster at $3.50/lb, a loss of 2.5% equates to 2.25 lbs or roughly two lobsters. The crate then weighs only $7.75 lbs, which is a loss of $3.59 on that one crate. But he isn't buying just one crate; if he buys 50 crates, he's losing $405 [see below].

Harkins talked about the definition of lobster quality. For dealers, the answer is simple: shipability. He looks for lobsters that are healthy, have two claws that they can hold up, are able to flip their tails and do sit-ups, have no visible shell damage and no cracks. A healthy lobster can be shipped further which gives the dealer more opportunity on where it can be sold. Depending on the markets, this may or may not be important. To maintain higher quality lobster has limitations and usually goes straight to the processor.

Harkins discussed some of the changes in the lobster industry over the years. One result of the large volume of lobster being landed is our dependence on processors who are able to handle the volume of lobster harvested each year. The result is that the base price becomes what the processors are willing to pay. Harkins explained that under his business model, he does not earn a margin on lobsters that he puts on a truck for processing. So he works closely with his docks to ensure the best quality lobster. During times of intense volume, particularly if the volume is not anticipated, many dealers are left to deal with the logistics of keeping the product moving rather than marketing product.

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**Cost of Shrinkage**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shrink</th>
<th>Loss of pounds/crate</th>
<th>Final lbs</th>
<th>Cost/crate</th>
<th>Cost on 50 crates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>1.35 lbs</td>
<td>88.65 lbs</td>
<td>$3.55</td>
<td>$225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>88.20</td>
<td>$3.57</td>
<td>$331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>87.75</td>
<td>$3.59</td>
<td>$480</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DMR commissioner Pat Keliher joined the MLA board on the second day of the meeting to review the common themes that arose during the DMR's 16 outreach meetings which drew approximately 1,400 lobstermen in January. He explained that there were no bills before the Legislature at this time that would affect the lobster season this year, referring to proposals short-term changes to the fishery such as days out.

MLA board members expressed deep concern regarding the fast pace of change facing the industry, and the ability of many businesses to weather the high expenses and poor boat prices. As the leading harvester organization in Maine, MLA must ensure that harvesters are in the best position possible to maximize the price they receive for their catch. Given the complexity of the issues facing the lobster industry, and the divisiveness of many of the solutions which have been proposed, the MLA board members agreed that it was time to get back to basics. Maine lobstermen are known for their stewardship of the resource, and the pride they take in landing a world-renowned seafood. But given the exponential increase in volume in recent decades, there is a growing disconnect between how lobstermen perceive their product in the market, and how they are handling the product aboard the vessel. Ultimately, lobstermen must land the highest quality product possible, in order to get paid the best price.

Improving handling practices is "our responsibility," as one board member put it. "People casually talk about high shrinkage or landing lobsters that cannot take a band. We need to put some pride back into our fishery," commented MLA Director Patrice McCarron. The board discussed developing a series of practical techniques, or best management practices, which could be adopted by lobstermen. Best practices would include all aspects of getting the lobster from the trap to the dock to ensure that dealers and processors get the best quality lobsters possible. Despite concern that improving handling practices and quality of lobster may not translate into better prices in the short-term, there was a strong consensus that Maine lobstermen need to take pride in themselves and their lobsters. This is a critical building block if we are to create a more profitable future for lobstermen.

The MLA is envisioning a multi-year plan to build a foundation for the lobster industry upon which we can build a more profitable future. Given the continued and rapid expansion of lobster landings, the industry must immediately work at building demand for Maine lobster. Second, lobstermen must assure that they are landing the highest quality product possible, in order to maximize the potential of each lobster in the market. This can be achieved if every lobsterman considers how each lobster is handled from the trap to the dock to ensure that dealers and processors get the best quality lobsters possible. Despite concern that improving handling practices and quality of lobster may not translate into better prices in the short-term, there was a strong consensus that Maine lobstermen need to take pride in themselves and their lobsters. This is a critical building block if we are to create a more profitable future for lobstermen.

The MLA Directors brainstormed a series of ideas on how to maximize the quality of lobster landed in Maine – in the traps, on deck, during holding through to when they are loaded on to the truck. MLA will work with lobstermen, dealers, and scientists to develop a program of best handling practices. The Directors discussed at length the need to develop a program that is voluntary, practical in a high volume fishery, flexible and able to provide a variety of options for lobstermen depending on their vessel size and setup, and the area where they fish. The MLA will solicit feedback from the membership during the MLA annual meeting on March 1.
Calling for old rope!

The Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation (GOMLF) will purchase used ground-lines or endlines from fishermen in Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island through the end of March, 2013. Lobstermen and other fishermen who use fixed gear with groundlines (e.g. shrimp trap, gillnet, crab, sea bass, or hagfish fisheries) are encouraged to pre-register. A maximum of 20,000 pounds of rope will be collected.

Fishermen will be paid fifty cents per pound ($0.50/lb) for rope of 7/16", 1/2" or 9/16" diameter. Rope can be any length of sink rope, poly, or "neutrally buoyant" rope. GOMLF will issue each fisherman a check on the day of collection. The rope will be used by an artist for land-based purposes only and will not circulate again in the fishery. For more information on the rope collections or to register, contact Laura Ludwig at 207-263-5300 or lldowneast@gmail.com.

Four elver licenses awarded

Four new 2013 elver licenses were awarded by the Maine Department of Marine Resources in February. More than five thousand Mainers applied for the licenses, at $40 million, second only in value to lobsters. During the height of the 2012 season, elvers were valued at approximately $2,600 per pound. The licenses, at $40 million, second only in value to lobsters. During the height of the 2012 season, elvers were valued at approximately $2,600 per pound. The licenses, selected through a lottery administered by Maine State Lottery officials, were awarded to Mark Wakem from Poland, Alyssa Orestis from Searsport, Meredith Perry from Spruce Head, and Garrett Lemoine from Swan's Island. The new licenses are issued to replace those individuals who did not renew theirs in 2012. In addition, four existing dip net license holders were given the opportunity to change their gear to fyke net which, while increasing potential income for the individuals, does not increase overall effort in the fishery. The fyke net lottery winners were Ryan Miller from Surry, Garrett Coffin from Nobleboro, Jason Brewer from Walpole, and Timothy Brewer from Nobleboro.

St. Croix River alewives subject of bills

Maine’s State Legislature will debate proposals that could see the St. Croix River finally re-opened to alewives. L.D. 72, sponsored by State Rep. Madonna Soctomah of the Passamaquoddy Tribe, is an emergency bill that would require the Grand Falls Dam fishway to be opened to the “unconstrained passage of river herring” by May 1. A second bill, favored by Governor LePage, would be in accord with the Adaptive Management Plan developed under the auspices of the U.S.-Canadian International Joint Commission several years ago. The international plan prohibits alewives from passing the next set of dams at Vanceboro and Grand Lake Stream. Biologists would carefully monitor the situation, stepping in to close fishways if alewives appeared to cause trouble at certain densities.

The bill would start the gradual re-opening of the river next year. In 1995, the Maine Legislature passed a law that ordered the fishways at the Woodland and Grand Falls dams closed to alewives because inland fishing guides feared the alewives would harm the smallmouth bass populations in the region’s lakes and ponds. The St. Croix alewife runs collapsed to just 900 fish in 2002, a decline of 99.7 percent. In 2008 the Legislature revisited the issue, but ultimately decided to open only the Woodland Dam in Baileyville to the fish, depriving them of an estimated 94 percent of their habitat. Last year, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency directed the state to allow the alewives beyond Grand Falls. The state Attorney General said that the agency’s ruling was irrelevant. The Conservation Law Foundation has since sued the state in federal court to compel action.

Island Bizplan contest open to island residents

The Island Institute has announced a new initiative designed to encourage and support entrepreneurs in Maine’s 15 year-round island communities. The Island Bizplan Contest, made possible through the Island and Coastal Innovation Fund (ICIF), the organization’s subsidiary, offers $10,000 in cash prizes and technical assistance to winners from among business start-ups and emerging young companies.

The contest will run from February 1 to April 12, and is open to commercial and nonprofit businesses that have physical addresses on Chebeague, Cliff, Frenchboro, Great Cranberry, Great Diamond, Islesboro, Islesford, Isle au Haut, Long, Monhegan, Matinicus, North Haven, Peaks, Swan’s and Vinalhaven islands. There is no fee to enter.

One first-place award of $7,500 will go to the business or entrepreneur who submits the most commercially viable plan or to the non-profit whose business plan is considered the most likely to achieve long-term sustainability for the organization. The winner will also receive ten hours of technical assistance. The second- and third-place awards of $2,000 and $500 will also include ten hours of professional support. Winners will be announced on May 1. Only on-line applications will be accepted. To apply, go to www.islandinstitute.org/icif/islandbizplan.php.

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March 1
TAA Business Planning workshop, 1-2:30 p.m., and Lobster Market Overview, 2:45-4 p.m., Maine Fishermen’s Forum, Rockport.

March 6
Marine Resources Committee, public hearing, 9am, Room 206 Cross Building, FMI 287-1337.
LD 486 An Act To Provide for the Effective Marketing and Promotion of Maine Lobster.
LD 469 An Act To Allow the Commissioner of Marine Resources To Investigate Price Fixing of Lobster.
LD 451 An Act to cap certain marine resources licenses issued by the Passamaquoddy Tribe.

March 6
5-8 p.m., TAA Business Planning workshop, Machias Savings Bank, Machias.

March 7
TAA Lobster Market Overview workshop, 5-8 p.m., Ellsworth City Hall.
TAA Product Quality and Handling workshop, 5-8 p.m., GMRI, Portland.

March 10-12
International Boston Seafood Show, Boston.

March 12-14
ASMFC American Lobster Stock Assessment Modeling Workshop, Old Lyme, CT

March 15-17
Maine Boatbuilders Show, Portland Company Complex, Portland, ME.

March 15-22
Atlantic Stock Assessment Review Group, St. Petersburg, FL.

March 21-22
Lobster Institute Town Meeting, Saint John, New Brunswick. FMI 207-581-1443

March 26
TAA Product Quality and Handling workshop, 5-8 p.m., GMRI, Portland.

March 27
TAA Business Planning workshop, 5-8 p.m., Machias Savings Bank, Machias.

March 28
TAA Business Planning workshop, 5-8 p.m., Ellsworth City Hall.

March 29
Maine Lobster Promotion Council, Hallowell.

April 9
DMR Advisory Council meeting, 1 p.m., Hallowell.

April 23-25
New England Fisheries Management Council meeting, Mystic, CT

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surprise, Hopkins got in. After three semesters in Gorham, he attended the Montserrat School of Visual Arts in Beverly, Massachusetts, for one semester, then Marlboro College in southern Vermont for another term. In between college periods, he fished in Maine: scallops, shrimp, groundfish. “I was always fishing. That was when you still could,” Hopkins noted. Finally he landed a job as night watchman and maintenance man at the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts on Deer Isle.

At Haystack, Hopkins became friends with visiting arts faculty from the Rhode Island School of Design, who encouraged him to reapply to the school. After being admitted, Hopkins delved into a variety of art forms, including glass blowing. “I grew up in the day of those thick Coke bottles.

[On North Haven] we would build bonfires and then toss the bottles in and watch them melt. What more could you ask for? Fire and glass,” Hopkins recalled.

Over the years Hopkins’ art has remained linked to his childhood home. The forms found in his paintings – lobster claws, codfish bodies, whelks – are the items he saw, and still sees, everyday around him. “When you are fishing you tend to look into the water. There’s an incredible amount of variation even with something like lobster claws,” Hopkins explained. “Now I’m into the ice around here. I’m trying to integrate nature, art, science, history, all of that together.”
The Maine Lobstermen’s Community Alliance is fortunate to have a diverse board of directors, drawn from the fields of education, research and Maine’s fishing communities. In the next several issues of Landings, we will highlight those directors and their commitment to Maine’s fishing heritage.

At first glance, Amy Lent might seem an unlikely candidate for the MLCA board. Lent came to Maine in 1996 after a high-level marketing and operations career with Saks Fifth Avenue, Pet Valu International, and the James A. Michener Art Museum in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. It was in that year that she took the helm of the Maine Maritime Museum in Bath. The 51-year-old museum focuses on Maine’s maritime heritage and culture through gallery exhibits, an historic shipyard, educational programs, and a research library.

Lent jumped into her new job with characteristic energy. She helped the museum broaden its interpretation of the maritime experience and begin to focus on contemporary maritime issues. “When we were thinking of people who would bring a different perspective to the table, we naturally thought of Amy,” said Patrice McCarron, president of the MLCA.

“I am passionate about the lobstering industry in Maine because this industry is largely responsible for maintaining the maritime heritage and culture that make Maine different from other coastal states,” Lent said. “As director of the Maine Maritime Museum I have a responsibility to help preserve this heritage and to educate people from Maine and around the world about why this is so important.”

While the museum features a rich lobstering exhibit and hosts the popular “Voices of the Sea” music and storytelling event in the spring, Lent has found that serving on the MLCA board has allowed her to gain a different understanding of the issues facing Maine’s coastal communities.

“I enjoy every opportunity I have to learn more about this complex industry and the challenges facing the fishermen,” Lent said. "I enjoy every opportunity I have to learn more about this complex industry and the challenges facing the fishermen,” she said. “What I learn through this work enables the staff at the museum to do a better job educating our visitors and promoting the value of the fishery to thousands of people from around the world.”

Lent also serves as a board member of the Council of American Maritime Museums, a member of QM2 Museum Leadership Roundtables, and has served on the American Association of Museums Annual Program Committee and the New England Museum Association Nominating Committee. She is a member of the International Women’s Forum and the Maine State Tourism Marketing Committee.

When Lent is not at work or serving one of the numerous boards of which she is a member, she and her husband and 12-year-old son explore Maine from their home in Bath. “We don’t own a boat but we do get out in our kayaks from time to time. Sometimes we go over to Robinhood Marina [in Georgetown] and pretend that we have a boat!” she said.