TRADITIONS UNDER SIEGE IN MAIN LobSTER FISHERY

By Melissa Waterman

Maine is home to more than 4,800 licensed lobstermen operating along the coast. Those lobstermen represent fishing traditions that go back more than one hundred years. Within the small towns that dot the Maine coast, men and women head to sea each day as their parents and grandparents once did, using their hard-earned skills to capture lobsters and bring them to shore. Now that tradition is at risk as fishery regulators consider the need for increased protections for North Atlantic right whales, regulations which could threaten the livelihoods of these resolute lobstermen.

Mike Sargent drives a big black Ram 2500 pick-up truck, the kind of truck that pushes through the mud of a Maine spring with ease, the kind of truck guys drive hard in television ads. Sargent, however, is a quiet-spoken 25-year-old lobsterman from Steuben, a little fishing town on the coast of Maine where having a big truck is as natural as breathing.

"I started fishing with my dad when I was eight," Sargent explained at an empty Bellfast restaurant on a cold spring afternoon. "My dad was a big figure in the fishing world Downeast." Stanley "Cappy" Sargent was known as a skilled Millbridge fisherman of high standards, turning to scalloping, sea urchins, groundfishing and lobster fishing over the years. When Sargent was a youngster, his father would wake him at 1 a.m. to go to the boat, Gale Warning, and head out to sea. The elder Sargent fished further off the coast than many others in the region, out to the very limits of federal water. "He'd let me sleep until about 8 a.m., then we'd start to set," Sargent said. "He taught me to splice when I was just 4."

Continued on page 15.

2017 LOBSTER LANDINGS SHOW DIFFERENCES AMONG ZONES

By MLA staff

According to data from the Department of Marine Resources (DMR), lobster landings in Maine dropped by slightly more than 15% last year, from nearly 131 million pounds in 2016 to 111 million pounds in 2017. Statewide, the boat value fell 18.6%, from about $533 million in 2016 to just under $434 million in 2017. The decline means 20 million fewer pounds of lobster was landed last year than in 2016.

The drop, however, was not spread equally along the coast. As the lobster population continues to shift eastward, lobstermen in the Downeast lobster zones saw strong landings last year, while those

Continued on page 6.
Welcome to the merry month of May! It’s been a long winter and the cold spring leading finally, to the pleasure of Maine’s summer and a new season of lobster fishing.

This month in Landings we take a closer look at the 2017 lobster landings for the state. It’s clear that lobster stocks remain robust in the eastern counties, continuing a steady shift from the west to the east portions of the coast begun many years ago. Stonington remains the highest value port in the state, due to high lobster landings in the Downeast region. The reliance on one species, however, continues to worry some fishermen, although sublegal lobsters remain prolific, according to Department of Marine Resources data.

Landings also begins a series of interviews with Maine lobstermen focusing on the traditions of the fishery and the continuity between generations. Fishing is an occupation that calls for seamanship skills and an extraordinary understanding of a particular patch of ocean. That understanding begins for many lobstermen when they are children and is increased bit-by-bit over many years. Fishermen of many generations share their knowledge within families or, occasionally, outside the family in a process that is truly uncommon in the world today. We highlight that continuity of tradition in our new series.

The plight of the North Atlantic right whale continues to be in the news in 2018. Seventeen right whales died during 2017, 12 in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. As a consequence, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is facing two court cases brought by environmental groups who argue that the agency is not doing enough under the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act to protect the endangered whales. New England lobstermen are concerned that the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team (ALWTRT) may alter its whale protection plan to require lobstermen to begin ropeless fishing or make other radical changes to their fishing practices.

This month, we talk to Mike Sargent of Steuben, who learned about lobstering and the whale issue from his father, Cappy Sargent, when he was a young boy. Sargent continues his father’s legacy of stewardship and a love for protecting whales despite never having seen one while fishing.

Landings also reviews a California research scientist’s recently published paper that examines the connection between the right whales’ shift to the Gulf of St. Lawrence and a change in the availability of their preferred food, a small copepod, due to a warming Gulf of Maine. Other species have moved into the Gulf as its temperature has risen. Black sea bass, once found only below Cape Cod, are now turning up in Maine fishermen’s catches. The fish, which are commercially valuable, present a possible new fishery for the state. However, they also are known to be voracious predators of juvenile lobsters. Could this new resident of the Gulf pose a problem for Maine’s lobster population?

The Maine Lobstermen’s Association health insurance Navigator Bridget Thornton provides an overview of ways to get health care when you don’t have insurance. Maine is fortunate to have a network of health clinics that see people who have no health insurance or inadequate health insurance. The clinics provide treatment either for free or at a sliding scale based on income. Such clinics may be the only route for some Maine residents to gain treatment if they do not have health insurance.

We also have an update on the Eastern Maine Skippers Program. This educational program, organized by the Maine Center for Coastal Fisheries in Stonington, helps high school students from fishing families complete their education through learning about Maine’s marine resources and management. Currently eight high schools in Downeast Maine are part of the program, with more than 100 students participating. This year their topic was “How can individuals and communities manage and restore local fisheries?” The public is invited to hear about the results at the program’s final presentations on May 24 at The Grand in Ellsworth.

Finally, Landings presents the work of Richmond artist Matt Barter. Barter is a self-taught painter who grew up in Bar Harbor and learned his craft from his father, the artist Philip Barter. He worked as a sternman in South Gouldsboro for a few years before focusing on his art. His colorful oil paintings reflect the world that he sees around him, a world full of boats, bait sheds, fish and ever-present sea gulls. One of his paintings now hangs in Sen. Angus King’s office in Washington, D.C. We hope you enjoy a glimpse of this Maine artist’s work.

Steuben lobsterman Mike Sargent learned the traditions of lobstering from his father, Cappy Sargent, when he was a young boy. Sargent continues his father’s legacy of stewardship while finding new ways to protect North Atlantic right whales. Photo courtesy M. Sargent.
Is it just me or has this been a very late spring? Finally, we are seeing 60 degrees. Officers are winding down from a productive scallop season and working through a busy off season with the price at $2500 a pound, keeping folks busy. Our summer fleet of vessels is preparing to go into the field and we are all looking forward to improved weather for getting outdoors. So, what’s new with Marine Patrol?

At the March Maine Fishermen’s Forum, we all watched with pride as Specialist Sean Dow received the coveted Maine Lobstermen’s Association Officer of the Year Award. Sean was recognized for his strong efforts to get the P/V Dirigo underway, as well as his solid commitment to supporting team work in Section 4 (Belfast to Gouldsboro).

In addition, Officer Jason Leavitt was recognized in mid-April as the Northeast Regional Boating Safety Officer of the Year. Jason has a strong field presence in his area and puts a large effort into Patrol’s recruitment program. He received his award at a ceremony in Burlington, Vermont. Jason covers the Jonesport/Beals Island Patrol area. We are proud of both of these exceptional officers.

Another award recipient is Officer James Mayotte. James covers the Boothbay region and is being recognized as the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) Boating Safety Officer of the Year. James has proven himself an avid boater and focuses on both commercial and recreational boating safety in a region that has its share of both.

As I have often stated in the past, with the retirement of several of our experienced officers the Bureau has become very young. Forty percent of our current workforce has less than five years’ experience. We are doing well with both recruiting and retention. We are seeing good quality candidates and no one has left us for over a year. I believe our success is related to improved recruitment efforts and the recruitment and retention pay increase in 2016.

We have three new officers currently at the Police Academy who are due to graduate in mid-May, just in time for our busy summer season. Two of them are already trained in the field and will hit their regions running, we hope. The third will be entering our field training program. Officer Alexandre Michaud will be covering the St. George Patrol, while Officer Emily Lopez will be transferring into the South Harpswell Patrol from Kittery. Officer Nicholas Stullwell will be getting his feet wet in the Owl’s Head Patrol. All three are on their way to a prosperous start.

In addition, Patrol is in the process of refilling the Kittery Patrol with an officer who covered southern Maine as a seasonal last summer. Officer Taylor Shewokis will be coming on board full time in mid-May and entering our training program. He will be attending the Police Academy in August. We are also in the process of hiring a new boat specialist to cover southern Maine, from Yarmouth to Kittery. This position was recently vacated due to a retirement. Lastly, we are conducting new hire interviews in early May to fill at least one additional position, likely Downeast. By comparison, last year at this time we had eight vacancies. If all goes well we will be down to two this summer.

It should also be mentioned that Officer Tyler Sirois is transferring from the Vinalhaven Patrol to Stonington, bringing that region back to full capacity just in time for the launching of the Bureau’s new 26-foot General Marine vessel.

As fishing season approaches please keep safety paramount in your mind. Please ensure all your safety gear is up to snuff and that you have planned for the unexpected. Also, below are a few important rules to keep in mind.

All lobster gear must be tagged with a 2018 tag no later than June 1. If you don’t order your tags with a month leeway you may not receive them in time. Of course, if there are some exceptional circumstances as always Patrol will work with you. Make sure you keep your local officer updated. Also, do not neglect second zone tags. This is a relatively new law statewide and Patrol is finding some issues with adherence. Every trap that you currently fish outside your primary zone must have a second tag.

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Human beings have an innate desire to control their environment. If I want a pond in the backyard, I make one. If I want dry land, as in the Netherlands, we build dikes and make dry land. Yet with the advent of a steadily warming climate, mankind finds itself stymied. We want to ensure that certain things we value, like endangered polar bears and right whales, continue to exist. But what if the very environment we have altered stacks the deck against them?

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is facing a problem. Between 2016 and early 2018, 18 North Atlantic right whales died. The majority of those deaths occurred in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Yet under U.S. laws — the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) — the federal government is required to maintain the species' existence. To do that, NMFS must ensure that the impact of lobstering and other activities on the right whales is reevaluated on a timely basis.

Lobster fishing is one of those federally-permitted activities. Several environmental organizations have sued NMFS to ensure that they reevaluate the impact that lobstering and other fisheries have on the right whales. But what if the deaths and recent population decline among right whales has little to do with lobster fishing? What if it is instead an unintended consequence of a warming Gulf of Maine?

Erin L. Meyer-Gutbrod, a quantitative ecologist at the Marine Science Institute at the University of California, published a paper last fall which found that changes in the temperature of the Gulf of Maine have altered the distribution of right whales, leading them further north in search of food. That, in turn, has led the whales into Canadian waters, where the stringent laws protecting them in the U.S. do not apply.

Right whales build up bulk by eating a species of fat-rich copepod called Calanus finmarchicus. Migrating from their southern winter grounds, they return to Massachusetts Bay around February to gulp down dense patches of the copepods, which overwinter in the region and rebound as the sun grows stronger. Meyer-Gutbrod and colleagues examined right whale birth records against C. finmarchicus abundance in the 1990s and 2000s to see if there was a correlation. They drew on data compiled by the Continuous Plankton Recorder survey, which NOAA has conducted since 1961 between Boston and Cape Sable, Nova Scotia.

Meyer-Gutbrod constructed a computer model to project what might happen to the North Atlantic right whale population during the next century under various scenarios of food availability and human-induced mortality. Based on whether C. finmarchicus abundance was high or low, and how many whale deaths occurred due to human activities, the model indicated that, "Contrary to previous predictions, the right whale population is projected to recover in the future as long as prey availability and mortality rates remain within the ranges observed during 1980-2012."

The author cautions that, "The population projections under conditions of increased anthropogenic mortality rates demonstrate that the North Atlantic right whale population may decline to extinction if an additional six adult females (or 13 total individuals taken from demographic states at random [male or female]) are killed each year, with preying conditions remain similar to those observed from 1980 to 2012."

Meyer-Gutbrod also pointed out that, regardless of human activities, Gulf of Maine temperatures have forced the right whales to migrate further in their search for C. finmarchicus, thus expending more energy than in the past. "Given the known effects of nutritional limitations on calving intervals, the increased time and energy used to extend the winter calving migration may have a detrimental impact on the population's recovery rate," the paper states.

How can NMFS protect the right whales if they are heading north in search of food into the heavily fished and unregulated waters of Canada? That is a question that neither the ESA nor the MMPA can address.

The Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR) received a grant in April from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to improve the data on the interaction of fishing gear and endangered North Atlantic right whales.

The $714,245 grant is funded through the Section 6 Species Recovery Grants to States Program administered by NOAA. The three-year project, which begins this summer, will focus on how and where fishing gear is used in the Gulf of Maine. Fishermen from Maine to Connecticut will be asked to contribute information on how their vertical lines are rigged and fished. Information will include rope type and diameter, trap configuration, distance from shore, depth, and type of surface system.

The project will also include a study on the breaking strength of vertical lines currently in use, as well as the amount of load put on the vertical lines during different hauling conditions. This analysis will document the strength of rope currently in use, determine what rope strength will ensure that fishermen can fish safely and efficiently, and help determine whether reducing the strength of vertical lines might help decrease severe entanglements of right whales.

The DMR will solicit participation from fishermen who are willing to test the hauling loads and breaking strengths of their fishing gear. Project participants include the Maine Lobstermen's Association (MLA), FB Environmental Associates, and the University of Maine School of Marine Science.

Whale Alert is an app for iOS devices that can help reduce the chance of ships striking whales by displaying active whale management areas, required reporting areas, recommended routes, areas-to-be-avoided and near real-time warnings in shipping lanes along both coasts of the United States and Canada. This information allows vessel operators to avoid collision with whales by slowing down and heightening their visual awareness.

The recently updated app now includes reporting of whale sightings. This information is shared in real-time with leading whale researchers and state and federal management authorities. In some cases, whale sightings will trigger confirmation ‘over-flights’ by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) or the United States Coast Guard (USCG) who will then determine whether or not temporary speed restrictions should be created. Whale Alert specifically provides data from Boston-area acoustic whale detection buoys for right whales only and autonomous wave glider whale detections. The app is available for free from the iTunes Apple Store (https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/whale-alert/id911035973?mt=8).

The Center for Coastal Studies in Provincetown, Massachusetts, is raising funds to expand its aerial surveillance program for right whales. Called 1,000 Friends for the North Atlantic Right Whales, the campaign goal is to raise $100,000 so that the science center can expanded its aerial reconnaissance beyond Cape Cod Bay to the waters east of Cape Cod and north to Jeffrey’s Ledge, off the Massachusetts and New Hampshire coasts. Aerial surveys allow whale researchers to survey more extensively in less time than on a vessel. North Atlantic right whales can be difficult to see from a boat, even for a trained observer. When feeding, right whales swim slowly, mere feet below the surface for over twenty minutes. From the air, observers can see into the water and can track a subsurface whale until it emerges for a breath.

The Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans will close the Gulf of St. Lawrence snow crab fishery earlier this year and is pledging to temporarily close other snow crab fishing zones if a North Atlantic right whale is spotted in the area. A section of the southern Gulf closed to snow crab fishermen on April 28, nearly 2½ months earlier than normal; all fishing gear must be removed from the water by June 30. Other snow crab fisheries can be closed for at least 15 days if a right whale is spotted in the area. DFO also announced plans to reduce the number of snow crab traps in the water and expand aerial and at-sea surveillance of right whales this season. New temporary speed limits for ships longer than 20 meters exist from April 28 to November 15. Vessels will be allowed to travel at normal speeds in two shipping lanes located north and south of Anticosti Island when no whales are present, but if a right whale is spotted within two and a half nautical miles of any section of those lanes, a mandatory 15-day slowdown to 10 knots will be implemented within the adjacent section.
The Eastern Maine Skippers Program (EMSP) will wrap up its fifth year on Thursday, May 24, when students make their final presentations at The Grand in Ellsworth.

The Skippers Program began in 2012 as a collaboration between Maine Center for Coastal Fisheries, a Stonington-based nonprofit, and Deer Isle-Stonington High School. This year the program, which provides young aspiring commercial fishermen and fisheries-focused students with the skills to be successful in a time of rapid environmental and regulatory change, reached a historic milestone. One hundred students enrolled in this year’s program, a 150% increase in participation since the program’s origination in 2012. The program is now in eight Maine high schools, including Deer Isle-Stonington, Ellsworth, George Stevens Academy, Jonesport-Beals, Mount Desert Island, Narraguagus, North Haven, and Vinalhaven.

EMSP utilizes a project-based approach to learning, where students explore real-world problems to gain a deeper knowledge and skill set. Each year, students tackle a new project. This year, they’re focused on “How can individuals and communities manage and restore local fisheries?”

Students spend the school year identifying fisheries issues and researching a pathway to possible solutions, then share their findings with an audience during final presentations. The event is a culmination of a school year’s worth of work, and an opportunity for students to practice public speaking and how to successfully deliver information.

Ten students from Narraguagus High School are exploring whether or not Northern shrimp can rebound in the Gulf of Maine. Working with Maggie Hunter at the Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR), they acquired an experimental license, allowing them to set shrimp traps in an otherwise closed area. The Northern shrimp fishery has been closed since 2013. Utilizing local fishermen’s knowledge, they decided where to set traps and the data they would collect, including water temperature, tide, weather, bait, set time, catch, and bycatch. A student’s parent, who is also a local fisherman, volunteered to help students conduct their research. Not only will the findings be presented to the audience at The Grand, but the students will also share this information with DMR.

Mount Desert Island High School students recently interviewed six lobster fishermen from Bar Harbor. The eight students plan to document 20 years of change on Frenchman Bay by giving a voice to Bar Harbor fishermen. During the interviews, they ask how fishing has changed, how an influx of tourism and cruise ships have impacted the harbor, and what the future may look like. Natalie Springuel of Maine Sea Grant was integral in the coordination of these interviews and is now helping students identify themes and a process for documenting their findings. Students will give a voice to Bar Harbor’s fishermen when they share their stories during final presentations. They also plan to share this information with the town council and historical society of Bar Harbor.

Other discussions during final presentations may include issues related to whale entanglement, how to give students a larger voice in management, scallop aquaculture, bait supply, gear design, or access to fisheries and licenses.

Maine Center for Coastal Fisheries supports the Eastern Maine Skippers Program in partnership with Rural Aspirations Project. Throughout the school year, the center facilitates program-wide meetups, where students can interact and learn from one another. They also provide access to scientists, fishermen, regulators, and industry professionals so students can work collaboratively on the challenging questions at hand. Program teachers attend group training and professional development days to better assist their coastal high school students both inside and outside of the classroom.

Together, Maine Center for Coastal Fisheries, Rural Aspirations Project, and Maine’s high schools are preparing students to contribute to the vitality of Maine’s fishing communities. “These young people will be the leaders of our fishing industry,” according to Maine Center for Coastal Fisheries’ Executive Director, Paul Anderson. “We need to nurture our fisheries and keep them here in Maine. These are the people that will lead those efforts in the future.”
Lobster zones A, C and D comprise the majority of the state's lobster landings, at 22%, 25%, and 19% respectively. Zone B lobstermen brought in 14% of the lobster while zones E, F, and G landed 19% of the 2017 total. Zone C lobstermen harvested the greatest number of pounds (27,679,499) while zone A came in second, at 24,613,396 pounds. By comparison, zone E lobstermen caught slightly more than 6 million pounds and zone G lobstermen caught slightly more than 4 million pounds. Of $4.07 per pound. Some credit the decline in boat price to the inventory of 2016 live and frozen processed lobster held by Canadian firms. Others point to the Canadian-European Union Free Trade Agreement that came into force in September, 2017, which immediately removed the 8% tariff on live Canadian lobster. Enormous harvests of crab and shrimp throughout the world also suppressed lobster prices globally.

We seem to be getting more complaints of wet stored gear. Some fishermen have received two or more violations of this regulation. We all know that the right whale issue is going to get more attention given last year's deaths. It is likely that enforcement of wet storage and other whale-safe provisions is only going to become more emphasized. Please tend to your gear. Losing a livelihood for leaving gear unattended seems like a high price to pay. Why risk it? Patrol’s most frequently asked question is “What do you consider a v-notch?” The confusion is understandable, given that there is no specific definition other than “a v-notch of any size or a mutilation that could hide that notch makes that female lobster illegal to possess.” Even though we get asked this question a lot and spend a good deal of time at meetings explaining the law, we observe very few violations each season. My experience is that fishermen are generally cautious when it comes to deciphering what they consider a v-notched lobster. This is a good thing. If you do have questions, reach out to your local officer and go over what is considered illegal. Remember, zero tolerance means there is no allowance for keeping any v-notched lobster. There is no perfect flipper definition. Marine Patrol Officers are all trained in how to recognize a v-notch and a mutilated female lobster. We work to ensure a level of consistency up and down the coast. If a fisherman disagrees with an officer, they have been advised to take a picture of the flipper and confer with another officer or supervisor. Officers will be having additional training on this issue later this spring.

Atlantic halibut cannot be possessed on a vessel holding a Federal Permit at the same time as lobsters are possessed. State license holders who do not possess a Federal Permit may not possess Atlantic halibut in federal waters. Commercial fishermen targeting halibut may now use only 250 hooks as opposed to 450. The season has been reduced by 20 days, May 11 through June 20.

As always, if you have a question please ask for clarification from a Marine Patrol Officer before taking a risk. Effective communication on a fisherman’s part generally avoids potential problems later. We appreciate the overall support that lobstermen provide to Marine Patrol. Have a safe and prosperous summer and fall season.
Our leadership has changed. Our mission has not.

Join now during our Spring membership campaign. New Harvester members only $200!

The Maine Lobstermen's Association is known for the work we do. We've been working for Maine lobstermen since 1954.

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Harvester Membership Levels

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Continuity. Integrity. Perseverance.

Kristan Porter, Cutler, ME

MLA MEMBERSHIP FORM

Les Dyer 1954-1966

Ossie Beal 1967-1974

David Cousens 1991 - 2018


Kristan Porter, Cutler, ME
The Portland Press Herald ran an article in late April about a significant influx of warm water entering the Gulf of Maine through the Northeast Channel. Whether you believe in climate change or think it’s a crock, this news should concern you. There are many species that are highly sensitive to ocean temperatures and, unfortunately for lobstermen, those include lobster, herring and right whales. Scientists from the Bedford Institute of Oceanography, based in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, were surprised in early April to find “a big rush of warm water going into the Gulf.” They measured the temperature of the deep current entering by way of the Northeast Channel, the deep passage between Brown and Georges Banks. Researchers recorded temperatures of 57°F at depths ranging from 150 feet to 450 feet, according to the Press Herald article. This is reportedly 11°F above normal and the highest temperature recorded in 15 years of surveys at this time of year. They also measured temperatures at depths of 600 feet in Georges Basin in December that were 5°F above normal, the highest reading at that site in 40 years. NERACOOS buoys located in Jordan Basin also measured record warm temperatures in 2017 and thus far in 2018.

Scientists hypothesize that this warm water is due to changes in ocean currents affecting the location of the Gulf stream rather than changes in air temperatures. Andrew Thomas, a University of Maine oceanographer, commented in the article that “It looks like there’s a bunch of really warm water that’s just hanging out there,” noting that it could take as long as a year for the water to be pushed to the surface and into Maine’s coastal areas. It makes me wonder what we might see, not this year, but in the 2019 lobster fishing season.

Such drastic variations in ocean temperatures have far-reaching impacts. As ectotherms, the entire life cycle of the lobster, from growth and molting to mating and spawning, is affected by water temperature. So far that has had a positive impact on our resource, but things are starting to change. And let’s not forget about right whales and herring, both of which appear to be highly sensitive to temperature changes.

The right whale population began to decline in 2010 and the whales appear to be suffering a decline in health. Researchers have observed that the whales are skinnier and have given birth to fewer calves in recent years. The Press Herald article notes the concern of Nick Record from the Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences that the intrusions of warm water into deep-water basins is specifically harming marine species like right whales and herring because both depend on dense patches of the copepod Calanus finmarchicus, which until recently had been present in large numbers in the deep waters of the eastern Gulf of Maine. “That’s the habitat the whales have abandoned in the last few years, so it may be connected to the changes in the deep water coming into the gulf,” Record stated. Herring fishermen likely share Record’s concern. Though the herring stock appears to be healthy, the fish have eluded fishermen in the offshore Area 3 fishery over the last few years. Less than half of the annual quota has been harvested during the past two years. Area 3 herring fishermen landed only 22% of their quota in 2017 and 44% in 2016. By contrast, they landed 94% of the quota in 2014 and 74% in 2015.

The effect of warm water on right whales has become all too familiar to lobstermen. The shift in copepod distribution sent right whales away from their traditional grounds near the Bay of Fundy and into the Gulf of St. Lawrence, putting them directly in the path of the expanding and unregulated snow crab fishery. Many whales suffered from vessel strikes and entanglements, resulting in twelve deaths in 2017. The cumulative impact of the decline in right whale population, worsening health, and the recent spike in mortalities — all likely driven by changing ocean temperatures — resulted in three lawsuits this year aimed at expanding right whale protections. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is in the processing of reviewing how several fisheries, including the American lobster fishery, affect the status of the right whale population under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act and the federal Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team has recommissioned to prepare for potential new regulations that protect right whales.

**NERACOOS buoys recorded higher-than-average water temperatures at 250 meter depth in Jordan Basin during the last half of 2017 and during the first few months of 2018, as these two graphs show.**

As always, stay safe on the water.

Patrice

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Kennebunk, ME 04043
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www.mainelobstermen.org

May 9, 5 p.m.
June 6, 3 p.m.
July 11, 5 p.m.
at the Nautilus Restaurant

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**MAINE LOBSTERMEN’S ASSOCIATION UPDATE**

**STEAMING AHEAD**

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**MAINE LOBSTERMEN’S ASSOCIATION UPDATE**

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**Board of Directors’ MEETING SCHEDULE**
All meetings take place in Belfast, unless otherwise indicated.

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The MLA Board met on April 11 in Belfast. Kristan Porter welcomed the board as MLA’s new president. Andi Pelletier provided an update on the ongoing spring membership campaign which is going well.

V-notching — the MLA board revisited its discussion on how to ensure fair interpretation of Maine’s V-notch standard. Patrice asked DMR about the possibility of reissuing the V-notch poster that Marine Patrol had distributed a while back. DMR is very open to this and willing to work with the MLA to get education materials out to officers and lobstermen. There was also discussion of the benefits of using a stainless steel V-notch tool versus the end of the gauge to cut the notch since there’s concern that flippers are ripped off or mutilated when the end of the gauge is used. The stainless V-notch tool is durable and consistently makes a clean “V” in the tail. Board members believed that use of the tool would maximize the benefit of V-notching lobstering, improve the quality of each lobster, and minimize potential harm. Given the recent predictions for a slow decline in landings, this is more important than ever. MLA is following up with DMR lobster biologists to learn if various methods of V-notching impact lobster conservation or the quality and health of the lobster.

Legislative Update — the Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative was reauthorized for three more years and the temporary medical allowance for lobster was expanded from a maximum of one year to a maximum of two years. No other lobster related legislation was passed.

Right Whales — Patrice updated the board on the issues concerning right whales. Several science and conservation groups have mounted a one-sided media campaign that has put all the blame for the poor state of right whales on the fishing industry. The MLA has been working tirelessly to educate the media on the Maine lobster industry’s strong efforts and positive track record on whales, and to broaden the discussion to include the impacts of changing ocean conditions on whales. The Portland Press Herald ran a much more balanced article in early April. The MLA attended both the ropeless fishing and the weak rope/gear marking Take Reduction Team (TRT) subgroups. These were not decision-making meetings; instead they were to raise issues to help NMFS better understand the potential management approaches. NMFS will prepare reports for full consideration by the TRT this fall.

Erin Summers update the board on the grant DMR received to conduct a three-year research project to better inform future whale rules which will begin this summer. The MLA is a partner in this study. The research will include: 1) a voluntary survey to collect data from lobstermen on buoy lines and surface systems to document the gear currently in use; 2) collecting used buoy lines for break-strength testing to determine the functional breaking strength of ropes currently fished by lobstermen; 3) placing load cells aboard lobster boats to test for the maximum loads needed under extreme working conditions such as hang downs, set overs or storms; 4) model results from vertical line breakage and load cells to identify impacts of proposed conservation measures such as hang downs, set overs, or storms; and 5) test operational feasibility and safety of proposed gear modifications. There is strong interest from lobstermen, including MLA board members, to participate in this work. The Commissioner thanked the board for MLA’s excellent work on this project and the Association’s close coordination with the department. He stressed the importance of having a unified voice from Maine on whale issues.

The MLA held an industry whale meeting in February with approximately 50 lobstermen in attendance. The group discussed the whale issue and brainstormed strategies for Maine moving forward. The MLA was expanded from a maximum of one year to a maximum of two years. No other lobster related legislation was passed.

Wind — the MLA discussed the continued movement to development wind farms along the Atlantic coast. The Board expressed its strong discomfort with any citing of wind farms off the Maine coast given the cultural and economic importance of the Gulf of Maine to Mainers. The board believes that the ecological diversity of the Gulf of Maine remains far more valuable than any energy that could be generated from it. Further, the board is concerned that Maine is significantly behind other states in terms of developing renewable energy. 

Tier 4 Engines — the MLA has been working with Mack Boring and EPA to revisit the new Tier 4 engine requirements which are overly burdensome and inappropriate for the lobster fishery. The goal is to advocate for reversing these requirements and reverting to the Tier 3 standards for Maine lobster boats.

New Business
Fall elections — MLA will coordinate with other fishing groups to organize a strategy to educate candidates about Maine’s fishing industries.

Plastic Traps — Concern was raised over the potential for traps made of plastic to be adopted in the lobster industry over time. The industry must be wary of introducing more plastic into the ocean. The discussion was tabled for discussion this fall.

Committees — the MLA Board will form a finance and a legislative committee.

Meeting schedule — MLA Directors meetings will be held at 5pm at Nautilus Restaurant in Belfast on May 9, June 6, July 11 and September 5.

LOBSTER ADVISORY COUNCIL

The Lobster Advisory Council (LAC) met in Augusta on April 5. Erin Summers provided an update on whales. The TRT held two subgroup meetings focused on ropeless fishing and weak rope. These were not regulatory discussions but rather provided the agency feedback on operational feasibility, cost, safety, enforcement and gear conflict concerns. NMFS will create a memo describing the outcome of each meeting. The full TRT will be apprised of this work during the fall meeting. Summers also described a three-year grant received by DMR to work with states from Maine to Connecticut on the whale issue. The project will collect baseline data on how vertical lines are fished, the functional breaking strength of those ropes, use load cells to document the working loads need to haul gear and work with UMaine to model the results and guide management discussions.

The Commissioner explained that there are two lawsuits filed by conservation groups against NMFS pushing for more stringent whale regulations. Max Strahan filed a third suit in Massachusetts. DMR is consulting with Maine’s Attorney General office on how to respond. The Commissioner stressed the need for members of the industry to work together on this issue and speak with a united voice. The state is looking to NMFS for guidance on what solutions may be acceptable if new rules are put in place.

The DMR is expecting to experience a $600,000 shortfall in the lobster management fund, which is funded by trap tag sales, over the next two years. The Commissioner is exploring options to fill the gap but hopes to maintain trap tag fees over the next two years and look for funds elsewhere. However, there is concern about the cost of replacement tags. Due to the budget gap, the DMR is not able to send money from other accounts at this time. Therefore, the LAC will not make any recommendations on Seed Fund expenditures until the shortfall is resolved.

DMR announced lobster landings in March at the Maine Fishermen’s Forum. 2017 was a good year, with more than 110 million pounds landed valued at $134 million, but down from 2016. The Commissioner commended the collaboration between the Maine Lobster Dealers Association and Colby College to document the economic contribution of the lobster supply chain to Maine, valued at another $1 billion.

The Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative (MLMC) has a public seat that needs to be filled. A list of nine names to fill the Public Member seat were generated by the MLMC Board and presented to the Lobster Advisory Council (LAC). The LAC will make an appointment in the April meeting, but will continue to collect further information for a future LAC meeting.

The Commissioner informed the LAC that new menhaden rules are in the works but not yet published. The Department received many constructive comments and it reworked part of the rules to reflect that input. To deal with concerns regarding enforcement of the 6,000-pound limit, the DMR intends to require that fish must be in trays or barrels and not loose on deck so that Marine Patrol Officers can estimate the catch. If menhaden come to Maine, it is likely that the state quota will be caught quickly. Maine then will be eligible to participate in the episodic quota. The small-scale fishery will only open if the episodic quota is caught.

Marine Patrol reported three new candidates at the Academy. DMR is working to fill the Challenger boat captain position out of Portland (the Challenger is being replaced). The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) approved Addendum 26 to the lobster plan. Maine will have five years to phase in 100% harvester reporting. The costs will be paid by ACCSP, not the state. Ten-minute squares will be added to the existing reporting program in 2019 to improve the spatial resolution of data. ASMFC is also considering a subgroup to explore creating a pilot VMS program for lobster.

MLA Navigator Bridget Thornton reminded industry members that she can comment on the project. The LAC’s role is to give the DMR and Legislature advice. DMR will consult with the LAC when any permits are filed regarding the wind project. Several LAC members volunteered to work with DMR on this when permits are filed.

DMR was asked about the status of the state Lobster Fisheries Management Plan (FMP). It has been on hold due to limited staff time. A question was raised...
During the fishing season, states will agree on changes to the weekly landing quota of the Trimester 2 area, which encompasses the nearshore portion of Area 3, after projecting that the fishery’s river herring/shad catch cap had been harvested. The herring midwater trawl possession limit of 2,000 pounds in this area until December 31, 2018. The Atlantic herring fishery, which is managed by the Mid-Atlantic Council, also reached its river herring/shad catch cap, Effective February 27, NMFS prohibited federally-permitted mackerel vessels from possessing more than 20,000 pounds of mackerel per trip through December 31, 2018.

HERRING

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*Quota June 1 thru Sept 30 = 24,710, Oct 1 thru Dec 31 = 8,192

The ASMFC Days Out meeting to determine effort controls for Trimester 2 of Area 1A is scheduled for April 25. All herring harvesters possessing a Category A Limited Access Permit for the Atlantic herring fishery are required to submit a declaration of intent to harvest for Trimester 2 (June to September) of Area 1A by April 15th to herring.dmr@maine.gov. Harvesters must send the name of the permit holder, permit number, vessel name, gear type to be used, vessel capacity (pounds or number of trucks) and contact phone/email.

On April 18, Mike Asano from NMFS updated the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) on the status of right whale management efforts. The full TRT plans to hold a meeting in the fall to consider measures that may be necessary to reduce the effects of gillnet and trap/pot gear entanglements on right whales. There are two TRT subgroups investigate the feasibility of ropeless fishing and whale release rope and gear marking.

The Ropeless Fishing Subgroup determined that further investigation of ropeless technology is supported, but it must involve the fishing industry in re-search and development. Furthermore, the subgroup suggests that ropeless fishing might be allowed in closed areas and requests that the full TRT develop “best practice” criteria for where and how ropeless investigations, especially if in closed areas, occur. Ropeless technology is not a near-term solution. The group identified specific feasibility concerns and identified some best practice considerations for the full TRT to include in the feasibility report.

The Whale Release Rope/Gear Marking Subgroup identified several themes during discussions. Shifting distribution of whales makes it difficult to evaluate effectiveness of current measures or to design new measures. The lack of data on existing fixed gear (relative distribution and abundance of various diameter lines fished or functional breaking strength) confounds attempts to interpret the significance of the relationship between reduced serious injury and low breaking strength gear. The ASMFC has new reporting requirements beginning in 2019 and NMFS is developing a supplemental gear data report to help fill this data gap.

Several potential concepts of whole release rope were discussed. Ideas included reduced strength “tag line” connecting the surface system to extended groundlines, hollow, weak “sleeves” inserted into line at intervals to reduce breaking strength, or 1700 lb. functional breaking strength line. Feasibility considerations to be discussed by the full TRT include safety, scalability across region and fisheries, enforceability, operational considerations such as time, costs, breakage, depths, and bottom type, and evidence and evaluation of relative contribution to overall recovery efforts.

MLA continued from page 9

1A

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Cumulative Catch YTD</th>
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<th>% of Quota</th>
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*Quota June 1 thru Sept 30 = 24,710, Oct 1 thru Dec 31 = 8,192

The statutory adjournment for the 128th Legislature was April 18. The Legislature considered several bills that could impact the lobster industry during the second session; two bills became law.

The Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative was reauthorized through October 2021. The reauthorization includes status quo on fees, a three-year sunset, formal establishment of an executive committee and tasked the Department of Marine Resources with investigating whether the fee structure for dealers could be amended to reflect the amount of lobster handled to minimize financial burden on smaller businesses. The DMR will report its findings in January 2019.

The temporary medical allowance for lobstermen was expanded from a one-year to a two-consecutive year maximum, but a new terminal medical allowance was not created. Legislation to amend pilotage requirements for vessels providing regularly scheduled passenger ferry service between Bar Harbor, Maine and Yarmouth, Nova Scotia was defeated. Legislation to open the fishway on the Sheepscot River in Palermo from April 15 to June 1 was also defeated.

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Global demand for Maine lobsters continues to rise. But shipping lobsters abroad is no easy task.

Bids Now Accepted - P/V Challenge II

The Maine Department of Marine Resources, Bureau of Marine Patrol is seeking bids for the purchase of the Patrol Vessel Challenge II. The Challenge II is a 1997 46-foot Jarvis Newman. It is powered by a VOLVO TAMD 163P with approximately 14,000 hours. The Challenge II has an 8KW generator and a full electronics package. The vessel is set up for lobster fishing and has below-deck holding tanks. It is finished with a galley and accommodations. All bids must be submitted on a “P/V Challenge Bid Form” available online at www.maine.gov/dmr. Bids must be in a sealed enveloped marked “Challenge Bid” and mailed to:

Maine Marine Patrol, ATTN: Challenge Bid, 21 SHS, Augusta ME 04333.

A viewing of the Challenge II will be conducted on May 25, 2018 at 11:00 a.m. at 2 Portland Fish Pier, Portland, Maine.

All bids must be received by 4:00 p.m. on May 31, 2018. Bids will be opened on June 4, 2018 at 1:00 p.m. Bidders need not be present for the bid opening. The winning bidder will be notified by phone and email. For more information, visit www.maine.gov/dmr

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Sargent continued from page 1

Sargent remembers fishing with his father one day as a young boy when the two saw a whale far offshore. "One of my dad’s friends was captain on a whale-watching boat and he called us on the radio to let us know he’d spotted it. He knew we wanted to see one," Sargent recalled. He has never seen a whale since then.

Sargent and his two younger siblings, who now are also lobstermen, learned their trade as their father had learned his: on the water. Cappy Sargent took all three — Mike, his sister Whitney and brother William — aboard his boat as sternmen, a hard job made no easier for them as the captain’s offspring. "He wanted us to be up to snuff on all the marine laws, to be the best in everything we did," Sargent recalled. By the time he was 15, Sargent had his first boat, a little 15-foot open skiff, and a hundred lobster traps of his own. He continued to work for his father on the weekends; after school his father helped him haul his traps.

Sargent graduated from Narraguagus High School in 2011 and headed to Maine Maritime Academy in Castine. His father had instilled in him a love of the sea but also a recognition that furthering his education would be a good investment. So Sargent began studying marine engineering operations. He bought a larger lobster boat, a 29-foot Novi. Once again his father was involved. "We rebuilt it the summer after freshman year," he said.

Balancing college studies with lobstering filled Sargent’s days. "I would fish 600 to 700 traps until school started [in September] then take up about half; I would fish those after school until about November," the commute, from his home in Milbridge to Castine and back, added up to nearly 600 miles per week.

Sargent received his undergraduate degree in 2015 then took a look around. Marine engineering jobs were few and far between that year. He had purchased another, larger boat which could lobster safely offshore, where he and his father had fished. So, after lobstering within the three-mile limit for the remainder of 2015, he headed out in June, 2016, federal lobster permit in hand, accompanied by Cappy. "My dad came with me to help set five trawls and taught me how to run [Loran] lines," Sargent said.

Their collaboration was short-lived. On July 2, Cappy Sargent died unexpectedly.

Sargent became a full-time lobsterman soon after the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) mandated a radical change in lobstering practices. Since 1997, lobstermen in Maine and the other New England states had been required to make alterations in their fishing gear in order to protect large whales, such as the North Atlantic right whale, from becoming entangled. As the plan evolved, lobstermen had to work weak links into the top of their buoy lines to enable the lines to break if a whale should snap the rope with its mouth, tail or flippers. "I remember building buoys with my dad years ago. It was the day before. The breakaway swivels came in [a mechanism that allows the buoy to detach if it is snagged by a whale]. We would have to burn out the old spindles and set in new breakaways. It took forever!" Sargent recalled.

But even more dramatic rules were in the offing. Over the years his father had participated in research with Department of Marine Resources (DMR) scientists and others to better understand the lobster stock and lobstermen’s role as stewards of that resource. Cappy allowed sea samplers to accompany him on his trips in order to record what he hauled in the traps on a given day, a vital bit of data collected by DMR since 2000. Laura Ludwig, now with the Center for Coastal Studies on Cape Cod, was one of those sea-samplers. "We went out in the winter of 2005-2006. I'd meet Cappy at the boat at 3 a.m. which was a little early for me. Cappy said something like ‘It’s not early if you get to bed at 7 p.m.’ He was never late, he never cancelled, he never called in sick," she recalled. "And that guy could splice. He was a master splicer. He could splice a gangion into a groundline faster than I can tie a knot."

Carl Wilson, director of DMR’s Marine Science Bureau, found Cappy Sargent eager to take part in any number of research projects. "Sea sampling, crab trap experiments, Jonah crab surveys. He served on the Lobster Advisory Council for a time. With Cappy, you always got an unvarnished opinion," Wilson said. He also assisted the DMR in identifying where, exactly, deep sea coral lay in the area around Eastern Schoodic Fjerge, helping to define more precisely the area of concern to federal regulators.

"He was kind of ornery about regulations but honestly, what Cappy said made a lot of sense. He had a perspective that most guys did not have," Ludwig added.

In 2009, NMFS instituted a challenging new regulation for lobstermen. Previously multiple lobster traps set together, called arawl, were connected with polypropylene rope which floated in the water. Depending on how the traps lay on the sea floor, the rope could rise and make loops between the traps, loops that could potentially entangle whales. NMFS declared that all groundlines, as these connecting ropes are called, must be replaced with rope that sank onto the bottom. Lobstermen were faced with the cost of converting all their groundlines to the new, more expensive sinking line.

Ludwig, who was working for the Gulf of Maine Foundation at the time, coordinated a rope buy-back project funded with federal money. She travelled along the Maine coast to designated sites where lobstermen could bring their floating rope and exchange it, by the pound, for vouchers to buy sinking rope. In three years, the rope buy-back project collected over 2 million pounds of groundline from over 1,154 Maine lobstermen. Ludwig reported that over 1 million pounds of floating rope went to Conigliaro Industries in Framingham, Massachusetts, where it was used as a lightweight aggregate in concrete products. Other rope was recycled into door mats and other crafts. Cappy and his son were active proponents of the rope buy-back project. "Cappy maintained two sets of groundlines for his nearshore gear and his offshore lengtheners. It was a tremendous amount of work for him to rerig everything and then learn how to fish it safely," recalled Ludwig. "But he made it work."

Continued on page 23
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YOUR HEALTH INSURANCE: Are you uninsured or need help paying for medicine?

By Bridget Thornton

With rising prices in the health insurance Marketplace and very specific guidelines to qualify for Medicaid (MaineCare) and Medicare, many people find themselves without any predictable options to receive health or dental care, or to get prescriptions filled.

Did you know that Maine has a large network of free and sliding-scale clinics? These clinics are located across the state in regional health centers and local hospitals. While the free clinics typically only see those that are uninsured, regional health centers welcome everyone regardless of insurance status. For people without insurance, these centers offer a sliding-scale fee based on income. The clinics and health centers typically offer a full range of primary care services, and some also provide mental health counseling, support and recovery groups, chronic disease management, case management, insurance enrollment assistance, and oral health services.

If you live in Cumberland, Kennebec, Knox, Lincoln, Waldo, or York Counties, you also have access to the CarePartners program which helps people get primary care and specialty care with support services, such as case management and low-cost medicines. To enroll or for more information about CarePartners, call 1-877-626-1684.

In addition, hospitals in Maine must provide free care to those that qualify. You have a right to get "medically necessary" care at any hospital in Maine, even if you can’t pay for it. Some hospitals offer sliding-scale discounts based on your income as well.

While we often think of physical health when it comes to healthcare, oral health plays an important role in your overall well-being. Dental disease affects people of all ages and is highly preventable with regular checkups. Many people do not have dental insurance, but they do have access to dental clinics. These dental clinics operate the same way many health clinics do, by providing free or low-cost services to everyone.

Prescription drug costs can be a huge headache, but here in Maine we have programs to help reduce the cost of prescriptions. There are state programs like MaineCare, MedAccess, ME Rx Plus, and Drugs for the Elderly and Disabled (DEL). These programs are based on household size, income, and sometimes assets.

You may also find programs to help with medical costs through your local pharmacy, such as Hannaford, or through general assistance provided by your town office. Some of these programs have income or other guidelines for their help, and some do not. You can call 1-800-965-7476 for more information on how to access these programs.

Have you heard about $4 generics? An easy way to save on prescriptions is by using generics. Generic medications are usually much cheaper than brand name drugs. Many large retail pharmacies have started providing generic medications for only $4, regardless of your income or insurance status. Smaller, local pharmacies sometimes have generous discount programs as well. It’s a good idea to call the pharmacies nearest to you and ask about any discount programs they may offer.

Don’t let being uninsured stop you from getting the care you need and deserve. If you need help finding a local health or dental clinic or a prescription drug assistance program, call the MLA at 207-967-4555 or email Bridget at bridge@maineloobstermen.org.

Health clinics operating in Maine’s coastal counties

FREE HEALTH CLINICS
ANDROSCOGGIN COUNTY:
Free clinic of L-A. Trinity Jubilee Center *
207-782-5700

CUMBERLAND COUNTY:
Portland Community Free Clinic *
207-874-8982

HANCOCK COUNTY:
Ellsworth Free Clinic *
207-667-7953

KNOX COUNTY:
Knox County Health Clinic *
Rockland 207-921-6996

SAGADAHOC COUNTY:
Oasis Free Clinic *
207-721-9277

 YORK COUNTY:
Leavitt’s Mill Health Center *
207-929-6455

COASTAL COUNTY HEALTH CLINICS WITH SLIDING SCALE PAYMENT OPTIONS
CUMBERLAND COUNTY:
Portland Community Health Center Portland 207-874-2141

HANCOCK COUNTY:
Bucksport Regional Health Center Bucksport 207-469-7371

KNOX COUNTY:
The Medical Center on Vinalhaven Vinalhaven 207-863-4341

LINCOLN COUNTY:
MaineHealth / Lincoln Medical Partners
The John F. Andrews Family Care Center Boothbay Harbor 207-633-7820
Damariscotta 207-563-4777
Waldoboro 207-832-6394
Wiscasset 207-882-7911

SAGADAHOC COUNTY:
Two clinic locations: Damariscotta and Wiscasset.

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Attention Maine Lobstermen

The Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (MA DMF) has begun an Industry-Based Trawl Survey for Gulf of Maine cod (Cod IBS) aboard the F/V Miss Emily. The survey area includes federal waters off of the coast of Maine, specifically in lobster zones: E, F, and G. The survey started on April 1st, 2018 and ends on July 31st, 2018. Tow locations will be announced monthly on MA DMF website, social media, and the MA DMF listserv. To receive real-time text message updates of the survey go to the MA DMF Website and sign up or call Bill Hoffman at 978-582-0308 ext 106. Additionally, the survey vessel will monitor VHF channel 16 during survey operations. In order to avoid gear conflicts, MA DMF respectively requests that fixed gear be temporarily removed from the tow locations during survey times.

May 2018 tow locations adjacent to the Maine coast detailed in maps below

For future month tow locations visit www.mass.gov/marinefisheries and visit the Cod IBS project page.
By Melissa Waterman

It’s a good feeling to know that you are doing what you really like to do for your work. That describes Kathy Clark’s perspective of her role as Swan’s Island Fishermen’s Co-op general manager. “Sometimes the thing you least expect to do is the one you like the most,” she said.

Clark, 73, did not come to the world of lobster by birth. She began life on a farm outside Rutland, Vermont, where her parents had moved from New York state. After some years her father moved the family to Massachusetts where he worked in construction. After Clark married her husband, Roy, the couple decided to move back to Vermont, settling near the Canadian border in the sparsely populated Northeast Kingdom, near Lake Memphremagog.

But the couple had an itch for the sea. They saw an article about the island of Frenchboro and, intrigued, went to visit. “We liked the area but with a child in high school we thought it was too remote,” Clark recalled. Instead they decided to move to the town of Hancock on the mainland. Over the years they explored the Downeast coast, visiting Swan’s Island several times. “We moved out here in 1995,” Clark said. “Some people thought we were crazy. “But, having lived in a small town in rural Vermont, Clark found life on Swan’s Island similar. “There we didn’t go out much at night, settling near the Canadian border in the sparsely populated Northeast Kingdom, near Lake Memphremagog.

Clark keeps track of what comes over the wharf, the different dealers whose trucks shuttle to and from the island via ferry, the bait costs – all the financial details that can make or break the co-op’s profitability. But through it all she keeps a balanced view of the business and the different characters she must deal with. “The names and faces are different [from those she knew in Vermont] but the issues are pretty much the same,” she said. “There are good people, bad people, people who get worried about one thing or another.”

That non-judgmental point of view is just one of Clark’s many valuable traits, according to Kenny Lemoine, a longtime co-op member. “Kathy is very honest, easy-going and considerate. She jumps in when something needs to be done and doesn’t brag herself up. They don’t come any better,” Lemoine said.

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Classes scheduled for May 6 - Stonington; May 12 - Jonesport; May 19 - Belfast; June 7 - Portland; June 22 - Phippsburg

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Brian Smith
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IMPACT OF BLACK SEA BASS IN GULF OF MAINE REMAINS UNCLEAR

By Abigail Hayne, University of New England

With the Gulf of Maine warming at a rapid rate, its waters are opening up to a host of new guests, one of which is causing quite a stir. Meet the black sea bass, a favorite fish of recreational fishermen but a cause of concern to others, even being labeled the new “poster child for climate change.” Lobstermen in Maine as well as marine scientists are asking the same questions: what exactly is this mysterious black sea bass and what are the implications of its presence in the Gulf?

Black sea bass (*Centropristis striata*) call Atlantic coastal waters their home, ranging from the Gulf of Mexico to southern Massachusetts. They are protogynous hermaphrodites, which means that the fish are all females for the first part of their life, then change into males at 2 to 5 years of age. This unique characteristic complicates studies on the species, leading to uncertainty about its stock size as well as its response to commercial harvesting.

The northern black sea bass stock migrates seasonally and spawns in New England waters in the late summer. In fall, when coastal bottom water temperatures approach 44.6°F, the fish will move offshore to wintering areas at depths of 240 to 540 feet. In spring, when bottom waters exceed 44.6°F, black sea bass move inshore to shallow water. Historically, black sea bass have not been found north of Cape Cod due to cooler water temperatures; however, as the Gulf of Maine warms, their northern range is expanding. In 2016, black sea bass abundance in that area indicates that the population is expanding. Working with nine Rhode Island fishermen using eight different types of gear, the Foundation has been sampling fishermen’s catches since December 2016. The conclusion? “Black sea bass are caught in basically everything that goes in the water,” said executive director Anna Malek Mercer at the Maine Fishermen’s Forum in March.

Unfortunately, studies of black sea bass in the Gulf of Maine are limited and preliminary at best. In order to understand the ecological impacts of their increasing range, it is crucial to get a better understanding of their abundance in the Gulf as well as shifts in distribution. For now, the implications of having more black sea bass in the Gulf of Maine remain a mystery.

Black sea bass are managed by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) which sets an annual quota and then allocates that quota on a state-by-state basis. A benchmark stock assessment in 2016 found that black sea bass were not being overfished. The quota is divided nearly equally between the recreational and commercial fisheries. In 2016, commercial fishermen caught approximately 2.49 million pounds, less than the 2.71 million-pound quota. Otter trawls, gill nets, and fish pots and traps account for the majority of black sea bass landings in most states.

Maine is allocated 0.50% of the annual quota (13,559 pounds), compared to Massachusetts, which receives 13% (352,525 pounds), a reflection of the fact that the species once rarely ventured above Cape Cod. How much of Maine’s quota is landed each year is unclear. Since so few Maine fishermen land the fish, the landings data remain confidential, explained Jeff Nichols, communications director at the Maine Department of Marine Resources.

Studies by the Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation in Rhode Island on black sea bass abundance in that area indicate that the population is expanding. Working with nine Rhode Island fishermen using eight different types of gear, the Foundation has been sampling the fishermen’s catches since December 2016. The conclusion? “Black sea bass are caught in basically everything that goes in the water,” said executive director Anna Malek Mercer at the Maine Fishermen’s Forum in March.

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SCALLOP QUOTA INCREASED FOR UPCOMING SEASON

Next season’s quota for scallops was increased by NMFS in April. Adjustment to the Atlantic sea scallop fishery management plan resulted in an annual catch limit of 60 million pounds for the fishing year, up from 51.7 million pounds in 2017. The fishing season for scallops runs from April 19, 2018 to March 21, 2019.

MOTION MADE TO DISMISS NATIONAL MARINE MONUMENT LAWSUIT

In April the Department of Justice made a motion to dismiss a lawsuit filed last year by the Massachusetts Lobstermen’s Association, the Atlantic Offshore Lobstermen’s Association, the Long Island Commercials Fishing Association, the Rhode Island Fishermen’s Alliance, and the Garden State Seafood Association. Establishment of the monument created a prohibition on all commercial fishing, with a period of seven years to phase out lobster and red crab fishing. The fishing groups filed the suit in response to the Obama Administration designating the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument in September 2016. The Administration’s motion to dismiss argues that Congress gave the President discretionary authority through the Antiquities Act explicit ability to create such monuments.

RECREATIONAL FISHERMEN STILL CAN’T LAND COD

Recreational fishermen will fish under emergency regulations this summer. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) announced that new rules will apply to fluke, black sea bass, scup and tautog. The prohibition on retention and landing of Gulf of Maine cod by all anglers in federal waters and by anglers on board for-hire vessels in state waters will remain in effect. In addition, private recreational anglers also are prohibited from retaining and landing GOM cod, effective May 1, and for 90 days thereafter.

P.E.I. FISHERMEN DEVELOP VERSATILE COMPUTER APP

The Prince Edward Island Fishermen’s Association (PEIFA) is testing a new app that will help keep track of lobster landings as well as environmental factors in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The Association developed the app, called Open Trip, to fulfill new Department of Fisheries and Oceans regulations that will require electronic logging of lobster catches starting in 2019. Having data logged electronically will speed up the data analysis process; with the current paper system, information on catches is not available until it is almost the next fishing season. The app will also make it possible for lobstermen to log in lost gear and sightings of marine mammals or species at risk, as required this year by new regulations. If testing goes well this spring, PEIFA plans to sell the app to fisherman in other provinces since the e-logging regulations will apply nationwide.

NOVA SCOTIAN FIRM PLAN HOLDING FACILITY IN PORTLAND

Live Stor Ltd. of North Sydney, Nova Scotia, has reached an agreement with Tennessee-based LIG Assets to establish two live lobster holding facilities in the U.S. The new facilities would be based in Portland, Maine and Seattle, Washington. Under the name Live Stor America, a million-pound live holding system operation in both cities would support import and export of live seafood from the U.S., Europe and Asia. The purpose of the system is to improve the overall domestic and international supply chain for live seafood so it can be long-haul shipped and delivered to overseas destination without affecting the quality of the product.

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Polyform US
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Port Lobster Co.
Richard Stanley
Custom Boats
Riverdale Mills
Seaview Lobster Co.
South Bristol Fisherman’s Cooperative
Superior Bait and Salt
Superior Marine Products Inc.
Tenants Harbor Fisherman’s Cooperative
Vinalhaven Fisherman’s Coop
Williams Collins & Sons
Williams CPA Group LLC
Winterport Boot Shop
Worcesters Lobster Bait
For Mike Sargent, making every effort possible to ensure no whale gets tangled in his gear is second nature. But he sees that there are challenges to the changes that lobstermen have made. “The floating groundlines used to last five or six years,” Sargent said. “Now they’re gone in two years.”

Cappy taught his son the importance of maintaining his gear; Sargent developed his own system to alert him when specific lengths of rope need to be retired. In addition to regular visual inspections, “I go by colors. My oldest is blue, 10 fathoms. That will come out this year. Next year it’s the green, 15 fathom line that I’ll take up,” he explained.

In addition, Sargent marks all his lines with red tracers to identify it as Northeast lobster gear. These tracers are strands of red line, one foot in length, that are in-terlated into the existing rope, three distinct marks per vertical line. Threading these red tracers into each of Sargent’s coils of rope takes time—a lot of time. Sargent uses a fid, a traditional tool shaped like a cone used to unlay strands within a rope, to open the line and weave the red tracer within it. Afterward Sargent takes the additional step of marking the one-foot length with red paint as well. “Yes, we have tracers in everything, 140 fathom endlines, 20 fathom endlines, everything,” he said ruefully.

Sargent may be young in years but he, like his sister and younger brother, holds decades of knowledge in his head, gleaned from his father and other older men in the fishery. “The Maine lobster fishery is a sustainable fishery. It’s made of families working together,” he said. “You have to realize that it’s often the only thing left in these small towns. There’s nothing else to fall back on.”

He is carrying on his father’s work by helping the DMR with its sea sampling surveys, attending meetings to learn more about the challenges facing right whales and participating in other scientific studies. He was elected to the Maine Lobstermen’s Association board of directors in March. Like many of Maine’s younger lobstermen, Sargent knows that he has a continuing role to play in protecting the lobster resource and any whales in the region, both for himself and for those who come after him.
Art is t M a t t  B a r t e r  g r e w  u p  i n  a  c r e a t i v e Bar Harbor family, headed by his father, the artist Philip Barter. As a young man, he worked as an apprentice in his father’s studio, learning the mechanics of painting, prepping canvas and art theory.

Heading out on his own, Barter worked for two years as a sternman for a South Gouldsboro lobsterman. As an artist he focuses not on lobstering at sea but on the more mundane tasks of preparing to lobster. “Most of the work for lobster fishing is on shore, tending and prepping equipment, not landing the lobster,” he said. “That hard work gets overlooked. I want to show the lobster industry from start to finish.” He works in oil, often on wooden boards, to portray a world of simple forms and vibrant colors. He also sculpts large figures inspired by space exploration, astronauts, and the late singer David Bowie.

Barter’s work can be found at his gallery, the Barter Art House, in Brunswick, and at galleries in Blue Hill, Northeast Harbor, Boothbay, Sullivan, and Islesford. For more information, visit www.mattbartersart.com.

Photos by M. Waterman, from an exhibit at the Camden Library in March.