By Melissa Waterman

Just a few days after the close of the October Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team (TRT) meeting in Providence, RI, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) reported that a third North Atlantic right whale had been found dead approximately 100 miles east of Nantucket. The death underscores the urgency of the discussions of the 50-plus member group of public and private organizations and agencies, whose task since 1997 has been to protect endangered large whales from the entanglement threat presented by commercial fishing along the Atlantic seaboard.

The meeting began with formal welcomes by the Deputy Assistant of NOAA Fisheries, Sam Rauch, and Regional Administrator of NOAA’s Greater Atlantic Office, Michael Pentony, each of whom emphasized the importance of the TRT coming together to identify further protections for North Atlantic right whales. Sean Hayes, protected species branch chief at the Northeast Fisheries Science Center, presented the highlights of a Technical Memo, “North Atlantic Right Whales – Evaluating Their Recovery Challenges in 2018.” He was quickly met with a chorus of complaints against the paper, released the week before the meeting. Patrice McCarron, the Maine Lobstermen’s Association’s (MLA) executive director, said she was shocked by both the lack of data to substantiate claims made in the paper, and the misuse of data on Maine’s lobster industry. “It is completely unacceptable for the agency [NMFS] to have zero understanding of a fishery that they have been regulating for over 20 years. The paper fundamentally erodes trust between the agency and the industry, making it difficult for us to work with them.”

Krista Tripp grew up and still lives in Spruce Head, Maine. She recently received her lobster license after spending 12 years on the Zone D lobster license waiting list while working as a sternman for other lobstermen. This interview was recorded in March 2018 at the Maine Fishermen’s Forum. Krista Tripp was interviewed by Matt Frazza and intern Teagan White. This interview was edited by intern Kaitlyn Clark.

I’ve worked on boats basically my whole life and I started, I’d say, probably around the time I was 13. That’s when I got my first official job with my grandfather on his lobster boat. I did stern for him for like a year and then when I started high school, me and my brother got a boat to share. So we each had 150 traps, and sometimes I would go stern for him and he would go stern for me. I did that all through high school and we would each have to log our hours and amount that we hauled and what we caught, poundage-wise.

How would you feel if you knew that a long line of adversaries was ready to shut down your livelihood and you had no one in your corner to help you wage battle against them? That is the situation currently facing the Maine Lobstermen’s Association (MLA) and Maine lobstermen.

After the death of 18 North Atlantic right whales in 2017, primarily in Canadian waters, environmental groups became galvanized. In January 2018, the Center for Biological Diversity, the Humane Society of the United States, and the Defenders of Wildlife sued the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for failing to protect the whales. The suit demands that NMFS complete an Endangered Species Act (ESA) Section 7 review of the American lobster fishery within 60 days, asserting that NMFS is in violation of the ESA and the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) for not adequately protecting North Atlantic right whales. A month later, the Conservation Law Foundation and Earth Justice also filed suit.

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The close of the year is a mixed time. On the one hand we look forward cheerfully to being with family and friends for Thanksgiving and Christmas. On the other, the days are shorter, the nights longer and colder, and the woes of the world seem heavier than ever. For many lobstermen, it is a time to begin bringing their traps to shore, take stock of the season and enjoy a few months of hard-earned rest.

Next year, however, promises to be full of issues, both large and small, that will affect all Maine’s lobstermen. Among these, actions by the federal government to protect the endangered North American right whale loom large. As we highlight in this month’s issue, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is contemplating specific measures, among them buoyless lobster gear, to ensure the continued survival of the whale population. At the October Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team meeting in Providence, RI, representatives of environmental organizations, NMFS, and lobstermen debated what should be done and the impact any actions would have on the New England lobster fishery.

In addition, a lawsuit by several national environmental organizations against NMFS on behalf of the whales added urgency to the discussion. The Maine Lobstermen’s Association (MLA) successfully petitioned to be recognized as an intervenor in that lawsuit. The MLA’s legal effort is funded by the Association’s Legal Defense Fund which is used to procure legal services from Crowell and Moring, a Washington, D.C. law firm. The MLA Legal Defense Fund has been vital in previous instances when it was imperative that the MLA have standing in court cases whose end result would deeply affect lobstermen.

We hear this month from Erin Summers, Maine Department of Marine Resources, on the agency’s ongoing study of vertical lines used in the lobster fishery. The project is investigating the strength of actual rope used by Maine and Massachusetts lobstermen to determine how much strain it takes to break. In addition, researchers are looking at current vertical line use and configurations and documenting the hauling loads experienced in the industry using load cells aboard lobstering vessels. The investigators hope to bring new scientific data to the debate about fishing gear entanglement and right whales.

Lack of herring is another issue that will face lobstermen in the new year. Recognizing that the New England Fishery Management Council’s decision this fall to reduce the quota for Atlantic herring would have a profound effect on Maine’s lobstermen, the MLA conducted a survey of its members on the issue of bait. Lobstermen were asked questions concerning bait use throughout the year and queried as to what they think should be done to avert a bait crisis. Their concerns and suggestions are summarized in an article this month.

Colleen Coyne, a seafood expert at Food Export-Northeast, writes this month about the continuing strength of Maine lobster exports, despite the current Chinese tariffs against lobster. While China does dominate among Asian countries, others, such as Vietnam and South Korea, continue to import Maine lobster. European countries also remain strong market opportunities for Maine lobster. Coyne notes that one Berlin restaurant chain found its offerings of lobster rolls met with overwhelming consumer demand.

Maine seafood processors appear to be optimistic about the future as well. As we note in Landings, several Maine companies are expanding their holding and processing capacity. Ready Seafood, recently acquired by Premium Brands of Vancouver, plans to construct a new $10 million lobster processing and storage center in Saco. Greenland Lobster, based in Stonington, will be opening a new lobster and crab processing plant in Bucksport next year. Maine lobster remains a highly sought-after seafood product and these companies are taking steps to meet that demand.

The MLA has provided health insurance enrollment assistance to Maine fishermen through its health insurance Navigators since the Affordable Care Act was implemented in 2013. Federal funding cuts this year meant the loss of its Navigator. However, affordable health insurance remains critical to many fishing families. Landings will continue to provide information drawn from the federal health insurance web site and other sources.

Finally, Landings continues its publication of interviews with Maine fishermen and others conducted by Maine Sea Grant at the 2018 Maine Fishermen’s Forum. These interviews with fishermen, aquaculturists, ship captains and others offer insight into the concerns and joys of those who make their living from the sea. This month Landings features an interview with Spruce Head lobsterman Krista Tripp, whose journey into the fishery has been a long one. We hope you enjoy it.

As ever, we welcome your thoughts about future Landings articles.
MAINE LOBSTERMEN WEIGH IN ON BAIT CONCERNS

By MLA staff

Take a minute to listen at any of Maine’s hundreds of lobster wharves. What word do you hear again and again? “Bait.”

Maine lobstermen are obsessed with bait, and for good reason. Actions this fall by the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) mean that there will be a dramatic decrease in the amount of herring available for harvest next year. Simple economics dictate that when supply drops and demand remains strong, prices typically increase. One can only imagine what a decrease of 77 million pounds of herring will mean for the bait market. It surely will put pressure on the entire bait supply, driving up demand for other types of bait, such as menhaden or frozen bait.

The Maine Lobstermen’s Association (MLA) conducted a survey of members this fall to assess what types of bait lobstermen use, when and where, and what practical ideas they might have to lessen the bite of next year’s bait crisis. Eighty-three individuals responded from all seven lobster zones. Slightly more than half of respondents hold a federal permit.

Th e MLA surveyed all zones to assess what types of bait lobstermen use, when and where, and what practical ideas they might have to lessen the bite of next year’s bait crisis. Eighty-three individuals responded from all seven lobster zones. Slightly more than half of respondents hold a federal permit. Just over half of respondents hold a federal permit.

While herring is indeed a preferred bait among these lobstermen, the range of other baits used is extensive. Redfish, fresh and frozen alewives, rockfish, mackerel, flounder, skates, frozen tuna heads, haddock, and even pig hides are used throughout the year.

The survey respondents clearly recognized that the ways in which lobstermen use herring as bait would have to change. Their suggestions varied from the typical “survival of the fittest” approach to more practical tweaks.

A Zone B lobsterman wrote, “It’s part of the business, high points and low, the fishery runs in cycles, always has, always will. The guys prepared for it will stay, the others will go ashore and get a job.”

“I think that lobstermen should wait to fish when lobsters are going good to maximize profits and not use bait when catches are low, like winter, spring, also, fishermen can bait lighter, such as 33% less fish in each pocket. We may all be on a bait limit, like it or not, so we’ll have to adapt,” wrote a Zone A lobsterman.

Another Zone B lobsterman commented, “Some use three to four times more bait than traditional. Some dump bait. Keep adding. Can’t believe fishermen dump bait where they set back.”

A handful of respondents contemplated a reduction in traps as a way around the bait crunch. “If they cut bait by 50% there should be a lower trap limit. [A limit of] 500 or 600 would solve bait and whale problems plus overfishing and trap snarls,” wrote one Zone B lobsterman. “Go alone and fish less traps. Encourage state-wide limit of 450. Closed season/rolling closures,” wrote a Zone E lobsterman.

Other suggestions from lobstermen to lessen the sting of next year’s bait crunch included stretching out the time between hauls, using smaller finer-mesh bait bags or bait-saver bags, limiting the number of allowed crew and shortening the work week.

One frequent idea highlighted the dilemma of many lobstermen: when is it most profitable to go fishing? And how does that calculation differ for state versus federal permit holders? For lobstermen who are hauled out during the winter, setting traps in the late spring and early summer can lead to a large bait and fuel bill to pay off later in the year because their landings are too low to cover costs. “We need to fish less gear in the spring, save quota until the catch increases,” wrote a Zone D lobsterman. “Another thing to consider is not setting out until the shed is starting so that the bait resource is conserved as much as possible,” a Zone B lobsterman wrote. “Sundays off until December,” wrote a Zone A lobsterman.

Most of those who responded to the survey expressed themselves as either “concerned” or “extremely concerned” about next year’s bait situation. And, as ever, there was a certain amount of humor mixed in with the responses. Among the sober suggestions of continued MLA advocacy for greater herring quotas and exploration of alternative baits, one idea stood out. “Armed insurrection?” suggested one Zone C lobsterman.

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Although lobster sales to the industry's major markets outside North America have taken a hit in 2018, the industry remains resilient. Lobster dealers continue to diversify into new markets and to seize new marketing opportunities.

First, seafood companies faced a loss in sales to the European Union (EU) resulting from provisional implementation of CETA (the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement between Canada and the EU) in 2017, which gave Canadian lobster exporters preferential market access. From January through August 2018, U.S. lobster sales to the EU declined by nearly $26 million, or 40%, compared to the same period the year before.

From January through May, lobster exports were up 105% to China compared to the same period in 2017, reaching nearly $78 million. Those sales helped to offset losses in Europe, and the lobster industry was on track to have another record-breaking year of sales to China. Exports of lobster to China by Maine companies tripled during the period, and exports of lobster by Massachusetts companies doubled.

But then the second blow to the lobster trade came in July 2018. Lobster was included among the products that would be affected by China’s retaliatory tariffs in response to U.S. tariffs and sales evaporated. For how long the industry will continue to be shut out of China is anybody’s guess, but when the market reopens Food Export-Northeast will implement activities to help lobster exporters regain lost market share.

During this foreign market turmoil Food Export-Northeast has been working alongside the lobster industry by remaining committed to traditional markets while continuing to explore new options and marketing opportunities within traditional markets. More lobster companies than ever (a total of seven) exhibited at Seafood Expo Asia in Hong Kong this past September. Immediately after that show, four lobster companies were part of a U.S.-wide seafood trade mission to Vietnam coordinated by Food Export-Northeast. Four lobster companies are exhibiting at the China Fisheries & Seafood Expo in Qingdao in early November, and seven lobster companies are currently registered to exhibit in an enlarged Food Export-Northeast USA pavilion at the 2019 Seafood Expo Global in Brussels next May.

Food Export-Northeast also continues to promote lobster on behalf of the industry. We recently provided a major Chinese social media outlet with requested information about how American lobster is harvested, how the fishery is managed, and what makes U.S. lobster a sought-after seafood product across the globe. Menu promotions in Singapore and retail promotions in Thailand are also being planned. Keeping up trade relations and product awareness remains important and will hopefully help rebuild markets when the trade war ends.

As Maine’s lobster processing sector continues to grow, Food Export-Northeast is increasing support it by identifying new market opportunities and conducting promotions to create consumer awareness and demand. Germany, for example, is not traditionally a strong market for live lobster, but it may be a potentially good market for lobster meat.

To test the waters, in September we coordinated a “Lobster Rumble” during Berlin Food Week. The USA was this year’s country of honor, which offered an A Berlin, Germany, gourmet hot dog restaurant found its customers had a serious craving for lobster rolls made with Maine lobster. Two hundred sold in two hours. Food Export-Northeast photo.

Continued on page 18
for us to work with them moving forward," McCarron stated. Department of Marine Resources (DMR) Commissioner Keliher shared McCarron's concerns, which she outlined in a scathing letter sent to the Northeast Fisheries Science Center.

Of particular concern was a conclusion on the effects of right whale protection measures from 2015. The report stated that Maine lobstermen are using stronger lines to haul their traps because, under the regulations, they must put more traps on a trawl when fishing offshore in order to reduce the number of vertical lines in the water. However, as Commissioner Keliher and McCarron both pointed out, the report gave no evidence to support the claim. NOAA has no data on how whale entanglement rates, especially fatalities, have changed since the 2015 rope regulations were enacted, Keliher stated.

"It's really disappointing that there is just no accountability for that paper," McCarron commented after the meeting. "In addition to singling out the northeast lobster fishery, and the Maine lobster fishery in particular, it ignores Canadian culpability in the right whale decline and the fact that Canada has no plans to enact whale protection regulations outside of the Gulf of St. Lawrence."

The purpose of the meeting was to review seven proposals submitted by TRT members to strengthen protections for large whales from entanglement in commercial fishing gear. While no binding decisions were to be made at the meeting, the goal was to identify a suite of potential recommendations to reduce large whale entanglements in fishing gear to be evaluated and considered for refinement at the March 2019 ALWTRT meeting. Those proposals ranged from trap reductions, requirements from VTR and VMS, closures, weak rope, capping rope diameter, increased gear marking, and ropeless fishing. Participants were asked to score those proposals from 1 to 4 then evaluate them based on the average score.

"Trap reductions do not seem to be on the table as a whale protection measure. There was no traction on that proposal," McCarron said. "The conservation and research groups continue to push hard for ropeless fishing, despite the fact that is still very much in the experimental phase. They are hyper-focused on testing ropeless fishing to work out the kinks and see if it can be scaled for portions of the commercial fishery." There was general agreement among the TRT members that ropeless fishing remains a medium-to long-range option because the technology is not yet available.

Another proposal called for lobstermen to use weak rope — lines that would break at 1,700 pounds of pressure — in the fishery. As DMR's Erin Summers pointed out, many of the ropes used by Maine lobstermen and tested this summer by the department as part of its $714,000 three-year project funded by NOAA break below 1,700 pounds' pressure. "Remember, weak rope doesn't exist right now. No one is making it," McCarron said. "But the closure has been extended into May in recent years due to continued presence of right whales."

"We talked about coming up with criteria for a closed area, such things as whether it's a foraging area, if there's a certain density of whales there, how long it would be in place, how to repeal it," McCarron said.

The TRT will meet next in March 2019, to finalize its recommendations to NMFS. If the TRT is unable to come to consensus on recommendations, the agency is still required to ensure the continued existence of North Atlantic right whales. This task is made more difficult as the whales continue to travel into unprotected Canadian waters in search of their preferred food, copepods.

McCarron admits that the meeting was frustrating and that no consensus of approach emerged. "We were successful in getting our message across, however, that the Fisheries Science Center's paper was unacceptable and that we are extremely concerned that Canada has no plans to protect the whales outside of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. NMFS can't achieve its Potential Biological Removal (PRB) goal without Canada," she said.

Environmental organizations also strongly favored a tried and true whale protection measure, closures. The Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan currently has nearly 32,000 square miles of seasonal whale protection closures in place. The most well-known closure is the Massachusetts Restricted Area, which encompasses 3,073 square miles in and around Cape Cod Bay, from February through April to protect large aggregations of feeding right whales. The closure has been extended into May in recent years due to continued presence of right whales.

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Lobstermen, environmentalists and federal regulators met for three days at the recent Take Reduction Team meeting in Providence. MLA photo.
New regulatory measures for fixed gear fisheries aimed at reducing the rate of serious injuries and mortalities of North Atlantic right whales due to entanglement are on the horizon. Serious information gaps exist, however, regarding how vertical lines are fished throughout the Gulf of Maine. Additionally, no data exist on the functional needs of the industry for vertical line hauling strength spatially. In July, the Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR) began a project, in collaboration with New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut, industry associations, the University of Maine, and FB Environmental Associates, a neutral third-party consulting firm, to collect data on vertical line fishing practices. The project’s primary goals include understanding current vertical line use and configurations, determining the functional breaking strength of existing vertical lines, and documenting the hauling loads experienced in the industry using load cells aboard fishing vessels.

We are conducting an online and phone survey to collect information about how fishermen utilize and rig their vertical lines and how the use and configurations vary by area fished. The survey has been underway since August 2018 and we are continuing to conduct surveys by phone. We are also collecting samples of whole vertical lines from fishermen to test them for their functional breaking strength. This information will provide a baseline of the strength of lines currently being used by the industry. One of the gear modifications being discussed in the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan process is the potential of using reduced strength vertical lines. However, without a baseline knowledge of the strength of the lines currently being used in the industry, there is no way to determine if this regulatory measure will result in a conservation benefit for the right whales.

The last component of data collection is the deployment of load cells on board fishing vessels. The load cells log the actual load experienced by the vertical line on a vessel as a fisherman hauls in his traps. These data will document the strength of a vertical line required under actual operating conditions to ensure that fishermen will be able to continue to fish safely and effectively under proposed measures to restrict the strength allowed in their vertical lines. The survey, rope strength and working load data will be used by the University of Maine to build a model to both describe the landscape of vertical line use and needs in the region and to assess potential regulatory measures through the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan. If you are a licensed lobster fisherman and have not completed the survey, you may do so online at www.maine.gov/dmr/science-research/species/lobster/ropesurveylandingpage.html.

If you would like to donate a sample of vertical line or have a load cell on your vessel to test hauling loads, please contact us at FB Environmental Associates. I can be reached by phone at 706-9466 or by email at caitlinc@fbenvironmental.com.

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The Department of Marine Resources wants to break your rope! Donations of actively fished or retired vertical lines are sought for this important research project. DMR photo.
STEAMING AHEAD

The project will take a giant step forward next year. The Northeast Center will have two lifejacket vans visiting ports in Maine and Massachusetts from April to November, 2019. The vans will be stocked with various life jackets to make it easier for lobstermen to try on different models and buoyancy aids to find what works for them. The hope is that if lobstermen can try on a variety of lifejacket designs, they may find one that they are willing to commit to wear while fishing.

The why is simple. Wearing a life jacket saves lives. Yup, that means actually WEARING a life jacket. Simply having a Coast Guard approved life jacket aboard your boat does not save lives — you have to have it on your body! The statistics are staggering. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), from 2000-2016 there were 141 fishing fatalities in the Northeast; 55% were due to vessel disasters and 22% were due to falls overboard. Of those 141 fatalities, 30 were in the lobster fishery.

If you look solely at the lobster fishery, the leading cause of the fatalities is clear with a staggering 57% due to falls overboard and 30% due to vessel disasters. Of those who died due to a fall overboard, none were wearing a life jacket. More than half of falls overboard are not witnessed and nearly 40% were caused by gear entanglements. A national study of fishing accidents released by the Centers for Disease Control in 2018 reviewed records for each fall overboard to determine the circumstances of the fall, including time in water, presence of survival or rescue equipment, recovery attempts, and administration of medical treatment. Sixty percent of those who perished were deckhands, but the majority were not new to fishing, averaging 43 years of age with 16 years of fishing experience. Seventy-five percent of those involved in a fishing fatality had taken any formal safety training.

I spend a lot of time these days worrying about the future of the lobster fishery. We are staring some serious issues straight in the face and it is difficult to know what the impacts will be for many individual lobstermen. It’s stressful hearing differing ideas from so many lobstermen who really don’t view the world in the same way. Some want change, others want to be left alone. The MLA’s job is to ensure that the lobster resource remains healthy and our industry remains profitable so that this generation can hand the fishery on to the next.

It is a big lift, for sure, the kind that can keep you up at night worrying about who will still be lobstering in five years. The kind you approach one day at a time so that you can keep moving forward. And then you get a reality check.

On October 23, I learned that another lobsterman was lost at sea. Scott Chandler of Jonesport died after a fall off his lobster boat while fishing alone. Just a regular guy fishing on a regular day. And then he’s gone. This scenario is all too familiar — Butch Ciotom of Stonington was lost in May while he was fishing.

Scott’s death is a brutal reminder of how dangerous the lobster fishery can be, and how little we focus on the importance of safety. How many men are talking about vessel safety at the coffee shop? I’m guessing most conversations are focused on herring and whales, and not the safety of their fishing operations.

Ironically, the day before I learned of Scott’s death, I received an update on the Northeast Center for Occupational Health and Safety’s project to develop a comfortable life jacket that lobstermen would wear daily while fishing. They have been working with Maine and Massachusetts lobstermen during the past few years to develop a life jacket that lobstermen and their crew could work in with ease while on the water. The MLA has been a proud partner in this project because it is one of the few that have made a real difference in engaging lobstermen on safety at sea.

Project staff have talked to more than 550 commercial lobstermen in Maine and Massachusetts. Many lobstermen participated in a phone survey to describe how life jackets are currently used and how they might be improved to increase the rate they are worn aboard lobster boats. Nearly 200 lobstermen have tried various life jackets, either during the summer or winter fishing, to give researchers feedback on how to improve them.

Northeast Center for Occupational Health and Safety staff have also attended the Massachusetts Lobstermen’s Association and Maine Fishermen’s Forum annual meetings during the last few years. These forums offered a place for lobstermen to try on different life jacket designs and to share their own stories about “close calls” at sea.

Through this project researchers have learned that 77% of lobstermen surveyed are interested in a new type of PFD. Some of the changes lobstermen would like to see include life jackets incorporate are the use of reflective material, personal location beacons, strobe lights, whistle and a knife.

The bottom line is that being prepared and wearing a life jacket can save your life. NCOHIS photo.

MAINE LOBSTERMEN’S ASSOCIATION UPDATE
The MLA Directors met on October 3 in Belfast. Kristian Porter welcomed Rick Wahle, the new Director of the Lobster Institute. Wahle is seeking to engage with sectors of the lobster industry to bring the University's talent and resources to better address issues of concern. Wahle has heard from both lobster dealer and harvester groups that lobster quality and shrinkage are an issue. The MLA Board concurred that this is an important issue on which the Lobster Institute seeks to take the lead. Suggestions included studying the causes of shrinkage and weak lobsters and developing best practices for handling and storing lobsters on vessels, at the dock and in transport. The Lobster Institute board meets November 15 in Orono.

Patrice McCarron provided an update on whale issues. NMFS released a Technical Memo evaluating the recovery challenges for North Atlantic right whales. This document was intended to provide a balanced overview of the threats facing right whales. Instead, the paper downplayed the role of climate change and Canadian fisheries and singled out the Northeast lobster fishery, and Maine lobster fishery in particular, as the focus of new management measures. The report misunderstood and misused a variety of lobster data, made claims without data to substantiate them, and overall read more like an opinion piece than a technical memo. The Department of Marine Resources sent a letter to the Northeast Fisheries Science Center outlining its concerns. The MLA board supported the MLA submitting its concerns in writing to the agency as well.

NMFS received seven proposals for consideration by the Take Reduction Team (TRT) to increase whale protection, which will be discussed at its meeting in October. Proposed measures include closures, ropeless fishing, weak rope, capping rope diameter, gear marking, trap reductions and better data collection. Maine will have six representatives at the meeting, including four lobstermen. The October meeting is intended to discuss the proposals but no decisions will be made until the TRT meets again in March 2019. The MLA will continue to coordinate with DMR on its data collection project involving vertical lines in order to better inform these whales rule discussions and to develop ideas that Maine lobstermen could implement. The MLA will attend the Ropeless Fishing Consortium and North Atlantic right whale consortium meetings in November.

McCarron informed the board that the New England fishery management Council (NEFMC) met in late September and supported an ABC (Acceptable Biological Catch) control rule, which will result in deeper cuts to the herring quota. The MLA strongly opposed this at the meeting. The October meeting is intended to discuss the proposals but no decisions will be made until the TRT meets again in March 2019. The MLA will continue to coordinate with DMR on its data collection project involving vertical lines in order to better inform these whales rule discussions and to develop ideas that Maine lobstermen could implement. The MLA will attend the Ropeless Fishing Consortium and North Atlantic right whale consortium meetings in November.

The MLA strongly opposed this at the meeting. The anticipated quota for the 2019 entire fishery is approximately 14,588 metric tons—about half of the Area 1A quota in 2018. The Council also added an additional year-round ban on midwater trawlers within 12 miles of the coast. The Board discussed the results of the MLA bait survey and recommendations from MLA members on how to respond. The Board supported sending a letter to NMFS urging it to increase the quota for 2019 beyond the NEFMC recommendations, but within the confines of the law. There is a growing urgency to identify alternative bait sources and reduce the amount of bait used. The MLA will continue discussions as the industry comes to grips with what these herring cuts will mean for the lobster industry.

Dana Deal of Prospect Harbor informed the board that Cook Aquaculture wants to lease a 44-acre site off the east side of Great Wass Island outside Mudhole Channel for salmon pens. Local fishermen are concerned that this would close a large portion of the bay to lobstering, scalloping and urchin fishing. The MLA supports fishermen's concerns and will weigh in on any application is filed.

The MLA Relief Fund Benefit was a huge success raising nearly $8,000. The MLA Board discussed the need to do a push to get more support for the MLA Legal Defense Fund. The next MLA meeting will be November 14 at 4 p.m. in Belfast.

The NEFSC presented a summary of its technical paper on the current risks posed to right whales. In this paper, they single out the Northeast lobster fishery and Maine lobster fishery as significant risks to right whales. They misuse lobster data to make their case, and do not provide any data to substantiate some of their claims. They play up entanglement concerns, downplay climate change, and under-represent Canada's role in the right whale decline in recent years. DMR sent a scathing letter to NEFSC detailing many of its concerns. Erin Summers did a great job pushing NMFS for accountability, but the agency seemed very reluctant to acknowledge its errors or to take responsibility for such a scientifically-weak paper. Patrice McCarron reiterated DMR's concerns and made a strong point that it is completely unacceptable for the agency to have zero understanding of a fishery it has regulated for 20 years without ever having had a full, independent review of the data, and that Maine and the lobster industry, making it difficult for lobstermen to work with new whale regulations. Sam Rauch, NMFS Deputy Director, noted that he heard Maine's concerns loud and clear. It remains to be seen, however, if and how NMFS and NEFSC will respond to these facts.

There was an interesting update on whale entanglements, which showed the spike in entanglements and increase in serious injury and mortality (SI/M) from Canadian snow crab gear. The agency provided some initial data on rope diameter from gear retrieved from whales housed in the NMFS warehouse. As suspected, almost all the gear was from Canadian snow crab gear, which must be overcome.

Ropeless fishing will not work for our commercial fisheries. Lobstermen do not have sole access to the ocean, and there are many technical, enforcement, economic and operational issues (scalability and gear conflict) which must be overcome.

Maine is willing to do more to help whales, but the solution must be scaled to the level of risk posed by our fishery. Maine is willing to work on additional gear marking and rope diameter and/or breaking strength caps, based on the outcome of DMR's current work on Maine's endlines.

Maine was well represented at the Take Reduction Team in October meeting by Erin Summers from DMR, Patrice McCarron from the MLA and four lobstermen — Dwight Carver, John Williams, Kristian Porter and Mike Sargent. The Maine contingent worked well together and ably represented Maine's position. It was a long four-day meeting and our lobstermen gave up a lot of time and lost revenue to be there. They were all amazing and deserve many thanks from everyone in the lobster industry! All of the slides and meeting materials for the October TRT meeting are available online at www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/proTECTED/whaletrp/trt/c.

The Maine team repeated some core concerns throughout the meeting:

- The Canadian snow crab fishery and ship strikes are responsible for the majority of the recent spate of whale entanglements deaths.
- Canada must come up to U.S. standards on whale regulations. Without Canadian regulations in place for all of the Canadian fixed gear fisheries, we will never have a full whale plan and will never be able to reach the PBR (Potential Biological Removal) rate for right whales [which is 0.9].
- Ropeless fishing will not work for our commercial fisheries. Lobstermen do not have sole access to the ocean, and there are many technical, enforcement, economic and operational issues (scalability and gear conflict) which must be overcome.

Maine’s concerns loud and clear. It remains to be seen, however, if and how NMFS and NEFSC will respond to these facts.
whales. As a result, they fly where they think they will see whales, predominately around Cape Cod Bay, Great South Channel and Nantucket. They rarely fly the Gulf of Maine because they might see so few whales there. Once they spot whales, they continue to fly that area to document as many individuals as possible. The rest of their resources have been in the Gulf of St. Lawrence over the past two years in order to help Canada ramp up its whale surveillance. NEFSC plans to redirect its resources back to the U.S. There is a separate surveillance effort around Florida and Georgia on the calving grounds where very few whales have been seen during past few years.

**Preliminary Results from DMR Gear Study**

Erin Summers presented some preliminary data from the ongoing DMR gear study. The study requires more lobstersmen to respond to the online gear survey; staff will be calling lobstersmen to increase the response rate. The results from breaking used vertical lines revealed some interesting facts. DMR staff have broken ropes sizes 5/16", 11/32", 3/8" and 7/16". Straight ropes were broken (not knots or splices), as well as ropes with knots and splices. The results indicate that the maximum breaking strength so far for 3/8" rope with no knots or splices is around 1,900 pounds (average around 1,450 pounds). The maximum breaking strength of 7/16" rope with no knots or splices is around 2,500 pounds (average around 2,000 pounds). Ropes broke at a lower number of pounds around knots and splices; splices were slightly stronger than knots.

**Review of Seven Right Whale Protection Proposals**

The main goal of the TRT meeting was to review the seven proposals to increase protections for right whales. Proposed measures range from trap reductions, requirements from VTR and VMS, closures, capping rope diameter, increased gear marking, and ropeless fishing. The TRT was divided into four subgroups to review the proposals and look for areas of common ground. In general, the researchers and conservation groups supported weak rope, closures, ropeless fishing, better reporting and gear marking; the fishing groups opposed ropeless fishing and had varying levels of support on some of the other measures such as gear modifications. Through the subgroups, the TRT agreed on some general areas for further analysis:

- Ropeless fishing is a medium-to-long-term objective because the technology is not available. The conservation and researcher groups are pushing hard to get this technology tested, with varying support for using it in closed areas due to concern over its potential risk to whales if it fails. NMFS will look at developing a scaled approach to ropeless fishing with the near-term goal to develop the technology for use in the highest-risk areas for whales.

- Closures will be considered for the highest-risk areas such as feeding areas where there are large and consistent aggregations of whales. There was some agreement on criteria for minimum conditions that could trigger a new closure.

- Gear modifications are the most viable solution in the near-term. There was no real consensus on what they would be - weak rope, capping rope diameters, reduce number of vertical lines, or other modifications. There was some support to form a working group to further discuss options and use data from DMR's vertical lines project.

- NMFS was asked to look at weak links. If they are not working they should not be required.

- NMFS will explore additional gear marking requirements.

Trap reductions did not receive much TRT support. The TRT instead sought to request that the ASMFC consider benefits to whales if trap reductions are moved forward under the lobster management plan.

The TRT recognized that ASMFC is already working on expanding reporting requirements and urging NMFS to work with ASMFC on potential VTR/VMS requirements.

**Next Steps**

NMFS will provide a meeting summary and will begin analyzing the various options discussed by the TRT. The conversation will resume in March 2019 at which time NMFS will expect a recommendation from the TRT. If there is no consensus, NMFS will likely recommend action on its own. It is unclear what the timeline for implementation of any new regulations would be. NMFS has indicated it would not follow the normal rulemaking process. However, it is possible that the release of a new Biological Opinion under the Endangered Species Act could require regulations to be implemented more quickly.

**BAIT UPDATES**

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**Area 1A Herring Fishery Update**

The Area 1A herring fishery reopened to all gear types on October 1 with five consecutive landing days to catch the remaining quota, totaling approximately 8,900 metric tons. The fishery will close when 92% of the quota is projected to be harvested.

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**Herring Spawning Closures**

The Eastern Maine Spawning closure was in effect from August 22 to September 24. The Western Maine Spawning closure was in effect from September 26 to October 24. The Mass/NH Spawning closure was in effect October 4 to 31. Closures may be extended if samples show that fish are still spawning. During a closure, it is unlawful to fish for, take, possess, transfer, or land in any State of Maine port or facility, or to transfer at sea from any Maine registered vessel, any catch of herring harvested in the closed area.

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**2018 Atlantic Herring Landings**

For Data through October 25, 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Catch 2018</th>
<th>Original Quota 2018</th>
<th>REVISED 2018 Quota</th>
<th>% Revised 2018 Quota</th>
<th>2017 landings as of 10/20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1A*</td>
<td>20,691</td>
<td>31,789</td>
<td>27,743</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>22,016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1B</td>
<td>2,455</td>
<td>3,552</td>
<td>2,639</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>1,911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6,700</td>
<td>31,137</td>
<td>8,200</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>3,462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8,724</td>
<td>43,763</td>
<td>11,318</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>14,086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>38,560</td>
<td>100,843</td>
<td>49,900</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>41,475</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Quota June 1 thru Sept 30 – ~18,581; Oct 1 thru Dec 31 = ~6,942

**Maine Reopened Menhaden Fishery on September 17**

Maine opened the State Allocation menhaden fishery on September 17. Menhaden harvest is allowed from Monday to Thursday each week. The daily limit is reduced by this regulation to 80,000 pounds, with a weekly limit of 160,000 pounds. Harvesting and landings are restricted to Maine territorial waters and may occur once per 24-hour period. All landings must be reported daily via email to menhaden.dmr@maine.gov.

The fishery for Atlantic menhaden is managed through the ASMFC. Maine’s allocated quota share for 2018 was 2,439,114 pounds, which was fully consumed on July 22. The DMR has been the recipient of additional quota via transfers of menhaden quota from partnering states to allow for the re-opening of this directed fishery.

**ASMFC Atlantic Herring Board Seeks Spawning Protections**

The ASMFC Herring Board initiated an addendum to consider strengthening spawning protections in Area 1A (inshore Gulf of Maine) and extending spawning protections in Area 3 (off Cape Cod and Georges Bank). This action is in response to the 2018 Benchmark Stock Assessment, which showed reduced levels of recruitment and spawning stock biomass over the past five years, with 2016 recruitment levels the lowest on record.

Currently, the Board uses a series of closures to protect spawning aggregations in the Gulf of Maine. These closures extend for four to six weeks; their timing is informed by samples which are used to project the start of spawning. Recent analysis by the Atlantic Herring Technical Committee found that while the current spawning closure system has improved, the protocol could continue to be strengthened by considering when, and for how long, a closure is initiated. Specifically, the analysis showed that, under the current protocol, spawning closures are initiated when there are approximately 25% spawning fish in the fishery. Greater protection could be provided by initiating a closure when a lower percentage of the population is spawning and extending the closure for a longer time. As a result, the Board initiated Draft Addendum II to consider these modifications to the Gulf of Maine spawning closure protocol.

In addition, the Board initiated Draft Addendum III to consider the establishement of a spawning protection program in Area 3. This management area encompasses Georges Bank and the back side of Cape Cod. While both are recognized as important spawning areas for herring, they do not currently have protections specific to spawning. By initiating this addendum, the Board seeks to protect spawning in this region in order to promote stock rebuilding.

Finally, to support future management of the stock, the Commission’s Executive Committee allocated funds to carry out sampling of the Atlantic herring fishery. This sampling will focus on investigating spatial and temporal spawning patterns in Georges Bank and Nantucket Shallows.

Continued on page 10
The Board reviewed Maine DMR’s bait protocol. This protocol was established at the Right Whale Take Reduction Team (ALWTRT) meeting. The American Lobster Management Board met to discuss bait sources available to the lobster fishery, and to review a NEFSC Technical Memo on challenges faced by the lobster fishery. Several industry groups, sponsored a forum with the candidates running for MLA, in partnership with Maine Coast Fishermen’s Association and several software companies to develop a reporting form.

The Board also reviewed the NEFSC Technical Memo on right whales as well as the NEFSC Technical Memo on northern shrimp life cycle, including the timing of hatch and early life survival. Warmer water temperatures are generally associated with lower recruitment indices and poorer survival during the first year of life. Ocean temperatures in the western Gulf of Maine shrimp habitat have increased over the past decade, and temperature is predicted to continue rising as a result of climate change. This suggests an increasingly inhospitable environment for northern shrimp in the Gulf of Maine. The Section and its Advisory Panel will be meeting November 15-16, 2018 to consider final action on Addendum I and set 2019 specifications.

NORTHERN SHRIMP BENCHMARK ASSESSMENT INDICATES RESOURCE REMAINS DEPLETED

ASMFC is proposing changes to the shrimp management plan, which would provide states the authority to allocate their state-specific quota between gear types in the event the fishery reopens. Maine will hold a public hearing on November 5, at 4 p.m. at the DMR Office Augusta. New Hampshire will hold a public hearing on November 6 at 7 p.m. at the Urban Forestry Center in Portsmouth, NH. Public comment will be accepted until 5 p.m. on November 7. Comments can be emailed to comments@asmfc.org (Subject line: Northern Shrimp) or mailed to Megan Ware, Fishery Management Plan Coordinator, 1030 N. Highland Street, Suite 200A-N, Arlington, VA, 22201.

ASMFC LOBSTER MANAGEMENT BOARD

The American Lobster Management Board met to discuss bait sources available to the lobster fishery, review a NEFSC Technical Memo on challenges facing the recovery of right whales, and receive an update on the recent Atlantic Right Whale Take Reduction Team (ALWTRT) meeting. The Board reviewed Maine DMR’s bait protocol. This protocol was established to reduce the risk of viral agents, parasites, and nuisance species being brought via bait into state waters. Given that the quota for Atlantic herring is expected to be reduced sharply, the Board agreed to develop a resolution to address threats created by the use of lobster baits that are known to harbor viral, bacterial, parasitic, and invasive agents. This resolution will be developed by a working group, which will assess both long-term and short-term needs. The Board also reviewed the NEFSC Technical Memo on right whales as well as recent discussions of the TRT. Given that the recommendations of the TBT may have management implications for the lobster fishery, the Board decided to form a work group to evaluate the measures being considered and provide recommendations to the Board.

Staff also provided an update on the Electronic Tracking and Reporting Subcommittees. The Electronic Tracking Subcommittee is focused on implementing a 1-year pilot program to test tracking devices in the fishery and has submitted a grant proposal to fund this project. The Electronic Reporting Subcommittee is focused on guiding the development of electronic reporting in the fishery. To date, this group has identified needed data elements on a form, reviewed available software, and discussed the merits of selecting a single, preferred software versus identifying specifications which allow multiple software companies to develop a reporting form.

The Board also reviewed and approved state compliance reports and FMP Reviews for American Lobster and Jonah Crab. The Board noted that New York and Delaware have not fully implemented provisions of the Jonah Crab FMP. Jurisdictions stated that regulations are going through their respective legislative processes. As a result, the Board agreed to send letters to these states requesting them to come into compliance. Finally, the Board approved Marc Palomo to the Jonah Crab Advisory Panel.

SEAFOOD INDUSTRY GUBERNATORIAL FORUM A SUCCESS

MLA, in partnership with Maine Coast Fishermen’s Association and several other industry groups, sponsored a forum with the candidates running for Governor. All four candidates — Shawn Moody, Janet Mills, Alan Caron and Terry Hayes attended. Candidates responded to a variety of questions ranging from who would be the next DMR Commissioner to health care, climate change, right whales, bait shortages, and many more. The Forum was streamed on Facebook live and received more than 2,000 views.

LOBSTERMEN’S HELP NEEDED TO IMPROVE WHALE REGULATIONS

Maine DMR is collecting data to provide a better understanding of how Maine lobstermen are fishing their gear in order to assess the impacts of various proposals to expand wholesale protection measures on Maine lobstermen. Strong participation by lobstermen in this project will be essential to Maine’s ability to negotiate future whale rules.

On October 10, the Maine Marine Patrol launched a high performance, 31-foot vessel designed for fisheries and recreational boating enforcement, and maritime security. Powered by twin 350 horsepower motors and capable of speeds more than 50 knots, the Impact will be stationed at the South Portland Coast Guard facility. The boat, built by Brunswick Commercial and Government Products, was purchased with a grant of $59,915 from the Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund and a grant of $241,305 from the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s Port Security Grant Program.

ZONE A PROPOSES CHANGES TO TRAWL LIMITS

The Zone A Council has proposed to eliminate the Hancock County Trawl Limit area in Zone A. This would eliminate the maximum of three traps on a trawl in Zone A and allow license holders to fish longer trawls. The proposal was supported by over two-thirds of the Zone A license holders voting in a referendum conducted in June. On August 29, the Zone A Council voted unanimously to recommend to the Commissioner to advance this proposal to rule-making. There is no public hearing scheduled, but DMR is accepting comments until November 2 to dmr.rulemaking@maine.gov or Amanda Ellis, 21 State House Station, Augusta, Maine 04333.

DMR LAUNCHES NEW MARINE PATROL BOAT

On October 10, the Maine Marine Patrol launched a high performance, 31-foot vessel designed for fisheries and recreational boating enforcement, and maritime security. Powered by twin 350 horsepower motors and capable of speeds more than 50 knots, the Impact will be stationed at the South Portland Coast Guard facility. The boat, built by Brunswick Commercial and Government Products, was purchased with a grant of $59,915 from the Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund and a grant of $241,305 from the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s Port Security Grant Program.

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In this season of giving thanks, the MLCA is grateful to Geary’s Brewing Company for its support of the Lobstermen’s Relief Fund Benefit.

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WHEN YOUR ENGINE MEANS BUSINESS,
MILTON CAT MEANS MORE.
To Our Lobster Industry Friends,

Dr. Bob Bayer has had an amazing career as an expert in “all things lobster”. Whether it be lobster biology and physiology, workings of lobster pounds and holding tanks, value-added product development, alternative baits, or lobster health; Dr. Bob has always been there for lobster harvesters, lobstering communities and every sector of the lobster industry. His phone was always on 24/7 to help answer questions and solve problems…and I am sure that will not change in his retirement.

To sum up over thirty years of service and commitment would take much more than this humble letter. His research and outreach has left a lasting legacy in the lobster industry. Upon the occasion of his retirement from the Lobster Institute, we hope you will join us in thanking and honoring Dr. Bob by helping him continue his legacy of service to the lobster fishery by aiding us in building The Dr. Bob Bayer Fund at the University of Maine Foundation. Your contribution will help both today’s and tomorrow’s lobstersmen secure a future for Maine’s coastal communities.

The University of Maine Foundation is helping Dr. Bayer’s friends and colleagues establish the Dr. Bob Bayer Fund by offering a 4:1 matching gift of up to $25,000. For every $4 you donate, the Foundation will contribute another dollar. Dr. Bayer is retiring at the end of this year; yet through this fund, the lobster industry will always benefit from his legacy.

Bob has asked that this fund in his name support value-added and new technology product development to benefit the lobster industry. Join us by sending your gift today. The Institute also encourages you to send your stories and memories of Dr. Bob to share with him as he retires. Email stories to lobsterinstitute@maine.edu.

With thanks,

Kathy Heansller
Conary Cove Lobster

Jack Merrill
Lobsterman & MLA Board of Directors

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On the fourth consecutive official National Lobster Day, the MLMC saw increased engagement and conversations from years prior. National Lobster Day garnered 507.7 million earned media impressions, up 8.8% from 2017. Social media was filled with chatter about National Lobster Day, being mentioned over 2,900 times (33% more from 2017).

Celebrations of the holiday included national and regional restaurant participation, with national chains such as Red Lobster and Luke’s Lobster creating special deals for the holiday. Their participation drove coverage in national food and lifestyle media outlets, such as Delish, Food & Wine, People, and Thrillist.

Past partners and attendees of MLMC events also leveraged the holiday for either new menuing opportunities or promoting their current lobster offerings, including Ocean Prime (National), Boka and GT Fish & Oyster (Chicago), Crave FishBar and The Meatball Shop (NYC). This year’s chef partners Jimmy Papadopoulos, Kwame Onwuachi and Karen Akunowicz also shared their Maine Lobster experiences with their followers.

Social influencers who have participated in previous MLMC events, like @cy_eats, @indulgentseats, @jasoneats and @adamsoko, posted on their platforms.

Finally, National Lobster Day has even made its way into pop culture, with celebrity/entertainment media and influencers using NLD to create fun content, like E! News referencing a Friends episode, and SpongeBob Tweeting to Larry the Lobster on the holiday.

Support the MLA Legal Defense Fund

The MLA Legal Defense Fund is supporting MLA’s fight against extreme whale rules such as ropeless fishing and closures. Funds are being used to pay for legal fees in response to a lawsuit filed by several national environmental groups.

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NATIONAL LOBSTER DAY DOMINATED SEPTEMBER 25
The MLMC’s efforts increased conversation year over year around the holiday.

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Celebrations of the holiday included national and regional restaurant participation, with national chains such as Red Lobster and Luke’s Lobster creating special deals for the holiday. Their participation drove coverage in national food and lifestyle media outlets, such as Delish, Food & Wine, People, and Thrillist.

Past partners and attendees of MLMC events also leveraged the holiday for either new menuing opportunities or promoting their current lobster offerings, including Ocean Prime (National), Boka and GT Fish & Oyster (Chicago), Crave FishBar and The Meatball Shop (NYC). This year’s chef partners Jimmy Papadopoulos, Kwame Onwuachi and Karen Akunowicz also shared their Maine Lobster experiences with their followers.

Social influencers who have participated in previous MLMC events, like @cy_eats, @indulgentseats, @jasoneats and @adamsoko, posted on their platforms.

Finally, National Lobster Day has even made its way into pop culture, with celebrity/entertainment media and influencers using NLD to create fun content, like E! News referencing a Friends episode, and SpongeBob Tweeting to Larry the Lobster on the holiday.

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FOUND A TAGGED LOBSTER?

If you find a lobster with a yellow t-bar tag marked with “AOLA” please contact: Heidi Henninger at (774) 251-9454 or heidi@offshorelobster.org

The Atlantic Offshore Lobstermen’s Association (AOLA) is working with New Hampshire Fish and Game and Maine Department of Marine Resources to tag lobsters in the Gulf of Maine and on Georges Bank in 2017 and 2018, in order to track migration and investigate growth.

WHAT TO REPORT: date, location, tag #, whether the lobster had eggs or v-notch, and whether it was kept or released.

Carapace Length: We are testing a software system that can accurately measure size from photographs. Please take a photo of the lobster next to a gauge (top right above) and text this to 774-251-9454 along with the measured carapace length.

REWARDS: Every tag report qualifies as one raffle entry. Rewards will be drawn in July and December, 2018 & 2019. Reports with accurate length reports and/or photos will be entered into higher value raffles. $8,000 in rewards will be distributed.

If you find a tagged lobster, please release it and contact:
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Unfortunately, I went to Massachusetts and went scalloping a little bit and I didn’t get my paperwork in on time. I just kinda left it up to my parents and they’re kinda old school. They didn’t take me seriously because I am a woman and so they didn’t really think to turn my paperwork in. Well, I was definitely serious about it, so I was kinda upset when I came home and realized that I had missed the deadline and my brother got his license and I got put on the waiting list. But I was able to learn some stuff and come back home and still work on boats. After being on the waiting list for 12 years, I just recently got my lobster license and I’m so grateful that at least I finally got it.

This year I’ve worked my way up to 500 traps. You’re allowed 100 each year, so I started at 300 and last year was 400 and then this year is 500 until you reach your trap limit which is 800. This year I’m going on my own and it’s really exciting because I actually ended up with my grandfather’s boat. He passed away a couple years ago at the time that I was getting my license and by the grace of God everything kind of fell into place. I ended up purchasing his lobster boat so I’ve been able to keep it in the family.

I really do think [my grandfather] was open to [the idea of me being a lobster fisherman] because not only did he take me as his sternman but he took my aunt and actually my cousin, who never really grew up in the lobstering industry, he brought her onboard just to show her the ropes. My parents have come around now. I mean, when I was younger you never saw any women really working on boats, you know? In our family, that’s all we did, so it was just the norm for us. I don’t know if I was just really sheltered and didn’t know of other women in other areas fishing, but I certainly felt like the oddball in my school and growing up in my area. So it’s really great to see a lot more women getting into the industry.

I always knew that [fishing was] what I wanted. I really enjoyed it when I was younger and I would actually stack my study halls at the end of the day in school so that I could leave school early and go to haul. So I guess I just knew then that I really enjoyed it and that’s really what I like doing. I mean a lot of my friends were going off to school and I was the one that was like, “Okay, well, I’m just gonna stay here and do college here, and that way I can still go fishing.”

Although I live on Spruce Head, I fish South Thomaston because that’s what my family always did. I actually had the option to fish Spruce Head because I live there, but I talked to my dad and he just didn’t think it would be right for me to do that, whereas all of us fish South Thomaston. So that’s what I’ve been doing. When my grandfather passed away, [my dad] bought my grandfather’s house.

My grandfather fished Cribhoven, so my dad’s fishing Cribhoven now and he fishes in federal waters as well, and so does my brother. So I’m kinda actually left alone. I wish more family was still fishing around me, but hey, it’s okay, I’ll figure it out.

I would absolutely love to be the first federal water fisherman, I think that would be so cool, and not only that I’d be with my brother and my dad. I think with being a woman fisherman, you’re always gonna come up against different obstacles. It’s really hard honestly, to be a woman amongst all of the boys because you’re not one of the boys. I think a lot of people don’t take women too seriously in the industry and I hope that will change.

Our generation is really going to have to come up with some solutions to keep the lobsters alive and well and producing. I hope that we won’t have to deal with any horrendous algae blooms or the lobster moving way offshore and us not being able to go fish for them. That’s why I’m kinda stressing about getting a federal license, because we don’t know what’s gonna happen. We can speculate all we want but we just don’t know.

Years ago, people would just fish in this inside channel. My father actually was one of the very few that started fishing out here [offshore] to get away from all the others. Now a lot more people are finding that there’s lobsters way offshore so they’re getting bigger boats and they’re getting the equipment needed to go fish offshore. But who knows if they were always out there or if they just stopped coming in or if global warming is affecting their patterns or what.

If the fishing industry goes away, then that’s a huge concern. I always had the idea that you know, I would pass it down to my kids and that they would pass it down to their kids. This has always been such a way of life here that we really don’t know what else we would do, you know? Hopefully we’ll be able to find some kind of other things to do on the water, maybe another species or something to catch, but the fear is that we’re not going to have an industry to pass down to future generations. Because what would we do? We’re all built on lobstering.

Voices of the Maine Fishermen’s Forum, an Oral History was made possible by Maine Sea Grant, The First Coast, College of the Atlantic, and the Island Institute. This series is coordinated by Natalie Springuel, Maine Sea Grant.

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Voices continued from page 1

outstanding opportunity to showcase iconic American foods to German consumers. Our German in-market representative worked with a gourmet hot dog retailer to create a special lobster roll recipe from the Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative website. The restaurant prepared a variety of lobster rolls and asked consumers to vote for their favorite. The restaurant used the occasion to test whether lobster rolls could become part of their permanent menu. That decision was reached quickly when over 200 lobster rolls were purchased during the first two hours of the two-day event. In total, about 900 lobster rolls were sold. An estimated 150 journalists from across Germany also sampled the lobster rolls, which resulted in a significant amount of good press across the country. Had the restaurant not run out of lobster meat halfway through the second day, the number of lobster rolls sold would have easily exceeded one thousand.

Qualifying lobster exporters are eligible to receive federal cost-share assistance from Food Export-Northeast to conduct their own foreign market promotion activities. Applications are currently being accepted for 2019. Companies are encouraged to apply now because we anticipate that the money may be fully allocated early in 2019.

Through Food Export-Northeast’s “Branded Program” companies can receive a 50% reimbursement of export marketing expenses; companies may only participate in that program for five years, after which they “graduate.” Food Export-Northeast is applying for a special block of funds, part of the $12 billion in aid to farmers announced earlier this year by President Trump, to help those companies negatively impacted by the U.S.-China tariffs or other trade policy issues and who may have also graduated from the Branded Program. More details are forthcoming. Visit www.foodexport.org or contact me at ccoyne@foodexport.org for more information.

Krista Tripp and her grandfather’s boat. Shearwater. K. Tripp photo.

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Voices continued from page 1

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Coyne continued from page 4
ACA HEALTH INSURANCE ENROLLMENT NOVEMBER 1 TO DECEMBER 15

From healthcare.gov

By November 1, individuals currently enrolled in health insurance plans through the Marketplace Exchange should get two letters: one from your current insurance company and one from the Marketplace. Together they explain your 2019 coverage status, which plan (if any) you’ll be enrolled in or matched with if you don’t act by December 15, any changes in your coverage and financial help, and directions if you need to send the Marketplace any documents.

If you had Marketplace health insurance in 2018, you can renew, change, or update your plan for 2019 during the Open Enrollment Period, November 1 to December 15.

No matter what plan you want to enroll in, you should update your Marketplace application with your expected income and household information for 2019 and compare your current plan to what’s available for 2019.

New, affordable plans may be available this year. Plans and prices change every year. Your situation may have changed too. You may find 2019 plans with coverage and features that better meet your needs, especially if you have had or expect income or household changes.

Update your application so your 2019 financial help is correct. Financial help is based on your expected income for 2019 (not 2018). If you don’t update your income and household information, your premium tax credit and other savings could be wrong for 2019. If this happens:

You could wind up paying more for your monthly premium than you have to. You may use more advance payments of the premium tax credit than you qualify for. You’d then have to pay back some or all of the difference when you file your federal tax return.

You may be automatically enrolled for 2019 — but you should update your application and check out new insurance plans first. If you don’t renew or enroll in a plan by December 15, you may be automatically enrolled in the same or a similar plan. This way you’ll be covered on January 1, 2019. But the best way to make sure you have a 2019 plan that meets your current needs and you get the financial help you qualify for is to log in beginning on November 1 to update your information and see all the plans available for 2019. You should do this even if you want to keep the same plan.

From the Maine Bureau of Insurance

The Maine Bureau of Insurance is urging consumers who buy insurance on the individual market to start comparing options ahead of open enrollment. Anthem has returned to the Affordable Care Act (ACA) Marketplace in Maine for 2019. Average premiums across insurers range from a 4% decrease to a 2% increase over 2018 rates.

The Bureau of Insurance has a rate calculator on its website: https://www.maine.gov/pfr/insurance/consumer/individuals_families/health/purchasing_health_insurance/premium_rates/calculate_rates.html

The calculator does not apply subsidies. Those will be available on the federal healthcare.gov website when open enrollment begins on November 1.

IT PAYS TO SHOP AROUND FOR INSURANCE COVERAGE

From Money Market.com

Consumers shopping for coverage during the 2019 health care exchange open-enrollment period, which runs from November 1 to December 15, may get a break in premium costs.

For the first time since the Affordable Care Act was passed in 2013, premiums will go down, according to the federal Department of Health and Human Services. Prices on average are predicted to drop 1.5% for Silver plans, the most popular mid-range option on the health insurance marketplace exchanges.

A Brookings Institution report released in August concluded that without the popular mid-range option on the health insurance marketplace exchanges.

For the first time since the Affordable Care Act was passed in 2013, premiums are expected to drop for 2019. Nevertheless, any reduction in premium costs is welcome, especially for people who don't qualify for government tax credits designed to help with premium costs.

Yet it bears repeating that consumers need to shop carefully on the exchanges. The Trump administration has permitted to two alternative types of insurance coverage to be sold that won’t be subject to the same ten essential health benefits standards as ACA-regulated policies. The administration loosened restrictions on both short-term health plans and association health plans, which are cheaper but often provide much less coverage of essential health benefits such as maternity care or treatment for preexisting conditions. If you're searching on the Internet to find insurance information, these plans may turn up.

Be sure to compare all levels of coverage carefully, especially if you qualify for a tax credit subsidy. Gold plans, for instance, come with higher premiums but lower deductibles and other out-of-pocket costs. For some consumers with high out-of-pocket costs, premium subsidies help make these seemingly more expensive plans more affordable than some of the higher-deductible Silver and Bronze plans.

Check the provider directories of all the plans available on your exchange to see if your primary care providers are still included. If you can’t find your providers in the directory, call them to double-check if they're still part of the network.

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MAINE LOBSTER PROCESSORS INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

By MLA staff

According to recent news reports, several lobster processing companies in Maine are investing in new holding and processing facilities in the state. The largest among these new projects is that of Ready Seafood of Portland through their company Maine Seafood Ventures, currently located in Scarborough. The company, founded by brothers Brendan and John Ready in 2004, plans to construct a new $10 million lobster processing, storage and education center in Saco on 40 acres off Route 1. Maine Seafood Ventures received a $400,000 grant from the Maine Technology Institute to expand markets for fresh Maine lobster by implementing the latest high-pressure processing technology.

Saco is also the site of the Cape Seafood processing plant, part of Luke’s Lobster. Maine Seafood Ventures planned Saco facility will include space for processing and tanks to store live lobsters for shipping. The Ready Companies currently employ more than 200 people to process and sell more than $100 million of lobster a year, with sales split evenly between domestic and foreign markets.

Ready Seafood also sold itself to a Canadian specialty food company, Premium Brands of Vancouver, in early September after six months of discussions. The acquisition will give Ready Seafood access to Premium Brands’ worldwide market of more than 2,000 buyers and will provide it the capital to rapidly complete construction of the new Saco facility. The two brothers will remain co-chief executive officers of the company.

Greenhead Lobster, based in Stonington, will be opening a new processing plant in Bucksport next year. Construction began in October at the Buckstown Heritage Park on Route 46. Bucksport offered many incentives for businesses which would add new jobs to the local economy. Greenhead’s new building will be used to process lobster and crab, extracting meat from claws and freezing tails. Hugh Reynolds, president of the company, said in an interview with the Waldo County Village Soup that a major factor in locating at the industrial park was the municipal water supply. The processing facility could use up to 12,000 gallons of water per day for cleaning and hygiene during peak processing runs.

Shucks Maine Lobster president John Hathaway unveiled in August his ambitious plans to build a 16,000-square-foot multi-use Maine Sustainable Seafood Center on the Portland waterfront. In an application to the Portland Fish Pier Authority for a 30-year lease on a vacant Commercial Street lot, Hathaway stated that Shucks Maine Lobster planned to occupy 7,000 square feet of the first floor of the proposed facility to process lobster, employing 40 people to do so. A separate 2,450-square-foot area of first floor space would become a restaurant focusing on seafood and locally sourced products. On the second floor, 3,000 square feet would be used for a working waterfront heritage center. There would also be a cooking academy and research and development kitchen, according to the proposal.

Prior to this proposal, Shucks Maine Lobster had received approval in 2017 from the Gorham Planning Board for a 28,000 square foot processing facility in that town. The company received a $400,000 grant from the Maine Technology Institute to expand its lobster processing capacity. Hathaway, however, said that those plans are on hold while he pursues the Portland waterfront project. In 2013, Hathaway signed a lease with Portland for 19,000 square feet in the Portland Ocean Terminal for a Shucks expansion. That agreement was terminated in 2015.

The projects, when they are completed, will significantly boost Maine’s existing lobster processing capacity, currently comprising just six large lobster processing facilities, according to the Maine Lobster Dealers Association.

In addition to the grants to Maine Seafood Ventures and Shucks Maine Lobster, the Alliance for Maine’s Marine Economy, working with the Maine Technology Institute, also provided $500,000 to Maine Fair Trade Lobster to expand its seafood processing plant in the former Sinson plant in Prospect Harbor and $150,000 to Cape Seafood, Luke’s Lobster’s processing company, for lobster processing equipment at its Saco facility.

According to the Maine Fair Trade website, it is the state’s largest lobster processor with 100,000 square feet of space. The company achieved its goal of handling more than 8 million pounds of lobster employing 130-150 workers in 2015, after its third season in operation. In a 2017 MaineBiz article, Luke Holden explains that Cape Seafood employs 125 people and sources much of its product directly from lobstermen. The company buys 100% of the catch from the Tenants Harbor Fisherman’s Coop, accounting for 20% of the company’s supply. Overall, they source about 80% of our lobster from Maine and 20% from Canada.

CERTAIN LOBSTER TRAP TAG FEES SET TO INCREASE

From the Department of Marine Resources

The Department of Marine Resources is notifying lobster harvesters that the fees for certain trap tags will increase by a small amount for 2019. The fee increase is to cover increasing costs associated with the purchase and administration of the trap tags, resulting from a new trap tag contract.

There will be no increase in the cost of initial tags, or replacement tags which are available when no more than 10 percent of a harvester’s tags are lost. Each remains 50 cents per tag. The increase will affect the cost of catastrophic loss tags, second zone tags, and tags re-issued to reflect a change in federal permit status. Catastrophic loss tags, which are tags to replace initial tags when more than 10 percent of initial tags are lost, will increase from 10 cents to 15 cents. Second zone tags, which are required for all traps fishing in a zone other than the declared zone, will increase from 10 cents to 20 cents. Tags re-issued when a state license holder changes to or from a federally permitted status, will increase from 10 cents to 20 cents.

The Department can minimize impacts to the Lobster Management Fund. With these modest increases, the Department can minimize impacts to the Lobster Management Fund. The increase is to cover increasing costs associated with the purchase and administration of the trap tags, resulting from a new trap tag contract. In 2018, tag manufacturer TydenBrooks provided the lowest cost bid for the Department’s requirements for trap tag production, but it was a significant increase over past bids.

Revenues from the sale of lobster trap tags are deposited in the Lobster Management Fund, which supports lobster science, management and enforcement. If the Department did not raise the fees of these specific tag types, fisherman would have been paying less for the tag than it cost to produce resulting in a negative effect on the Lobster Management Fund. With these modest increases, the Department can minimize impacts to the Lobster Management Fund and the work it supports.

The Department intends to continue to explore new options for lower cost tags that meet the needs of the lobster fishery to minimize the need for any further adjustments to trap tag costs.
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND FALL LOBSTER SEASON “A MIXED BAG”

By Colin MacLean, The Guardian, reprinted with permission

Traps across Lobster Fishing Area (LFA) 25 came out of the water on October 10, marking the end of a mixed bag of a fall lobster season. On the Summerside waterfront, Merrill Montgomery, captain of the Salty Curls, and his crew spent the morning hauling up traps, loading them onto a truck and getting them set for winter storage.

All things considered, he was pleased with how his things went. “Season was great, fantastic. Weather was great, catch was great and price was pretty good,” he said. In terms of prices for his catch, he reported getting $4.50 per pound for cans and $5 per pound for markets at the start of the season, but it dropped by 25 cents after a couple of weeks.

Captains just across the Northumberland Strait, he noted, were getting an average of about 25 cents more per pound than those landing on P.E.I., which remained a point of annoyance for harvesters here on P.E.I. “It doesn’t make sense by 25 cents after a couple of weeks. By 25 cents after a couple of weeks, captains and $5 per pound for markets at the start of the season, but it dropped by 25 cents after a couple of weeks. By 25 cents after a couple of weeks, captains are hopeful for a return to strong catches next year, added Knox.

Lee Knox, president of the Prince County Fisherman’s Association, said the prices Montgomery quoted were standard this year. In terms of the catch, it wasn’t as good for everyone, said Knox.

Lobstermen have taken steps to defend the Maine lobster fishery from the potentially punitive consequences of the lawsuit. “The MLA will not risk any new whale protection measures which could be handed down by the court with input from only the government and the environmental community. MLA must be at the table to represent Maine lobstermen,” explained Patrice McCarron, MLA’s executive director. Through its Legal Defense Fund, the MLA has been able to draw on the legal expertise of Mary Anne Mason, Esq., a partner at the law firm of Crowell & Moring in Washington, D.C., to become an intervenor in the suit.

“We are facing big legal issues over whales, bait and who knows what else will come up,” explained MLA board member Bobby Ingalls from Bucks Harbor, who contributes $100 a month to the Legal Defense Fund. “We have to try to keep abreast of so many complex issues that could change the way of life we have been living for some time. I see changes on the horizon and a lot of them won’t be easy to live with.”

“The lawsuit is about pushing NMFS to take action beyond what we think the science supports,” Mason said. “The case is before a judge who is a pretty active judge, one who wants the parties to toe the line. It is plausible that it will result in regulations that will affect all lobstermen.”

The case is being pursued at the U.S. District Court in D.C. In May 2018, the MLA successfully petitioned to become an intervenor, which allows it to monitor the litigation and to have a voice during any discussions of remedies. In August, the Massachusetts Lobstermen’s Association followed the MLA’s lead and is also a party to the case at this time.

The financial cost to take part in the case is considerable. As Mason notes, a simple intervenor motion, as was filed on behalf of the MLA, runs into the thousands of dollars. Currently the parties in the case are in the discovery phase, collecting data to support their separate claims. Mason predicts that discovery will continue into the early part of 2019 and that early in the new year the judge is likely to set a schedule for initial motions and briefs, followed by a hearing, if necessary.

“This judge actively manages his cases. He sets deadlines, orders people to come up with a plan and ways to implement that plan. He is being asked to order NMFS to take action under the ESA by a certain time. If he becomes persuaded that NMFS has violated the ESA and must make a finding promptly — before all the scientific questions have been addressed — then lobstermen could be in trouble,” she said. As an intervenor, the MLA can take part if the judge wants a brief on the substantive merits of a proposal made by either the plaintiffs or the defendant.

This isn’t the first time that the MLA has taken part in the legal process on behalf of its members. In 2007 it also filed successfully to be an intervenor in a legal suit brought by the Humane Society and the Oceans Conservancy against NMFS to force the agency to release regulations regarding right whale protections. As an intervenor, the MLA participated in mediation to reach a settlement in the suit.

The tenor of the dispute, however, has changed significantly since 2007 in the wake of the 2017 mortalities and greatly reduced right whale birth rates. The environmental organizations want the court to force NMFS to review the data used for its 2014 biological opinion on the lobster fishery, which found that the fishery did not jeopardize right whales. The plaintiffs contend that the right whale population’s decline since 2010 and the unprecedented number of right whale deaths indicate that significant changes have taken place in the population and that the data informing the biological opinion should be updated. However, their public statements assume that changes in lobster harvesting practices are required to save the species. This singular focus ignores changes to their habitat and distribution unrelated to the fishery.

“In the last instance, NMFS was able to work through the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team (TRT) process to develop regulations that were designed to address identified threats to the species. Although that process was contentious, everyone had the belief that they could come up with an effective solution,” Mason explained. “What’s changed is that the focus is on specific remedies, such as ropeless fishing, before the threats have been fully identified. That’s a backward process because the science may not support the need for such a remedy at all.”

Legal continued from page 1

LANDINGS

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND FALL LOBSTER SEASON “A MIXED BAG”

By Colin MacLean, The Guardian, reprinted with permission

Only the MLA has taken steps to defend the Maine lobster fishery from the potentially punitive consequences of the lawsuit. “The MLA will not risk any new whale protection measures which could be handed down by the court with input from only the government and the environmental community. MLA must be at the table to represent Maine lobstermen,” explained Patrice McCarron, MLA’s executive director. Through its Legal Defense Fund, the MLA has been able to draw on the legal expertise of Mary Anne Mason, Esq., a partner at the law firm of Crowell & Moring in Washington, D.C., to become an intervenor in the suit.

“We are facing big legal issues over whales, bait and who knows what else will come up,” explained MLA board member Bobby Ingalls from Bucks Harbor, who contributes $100 a month to the Legal Defense Fund. “We have to try to keep abreast of so many complex issues that could change the way of life we have been living for some time. I see changes on the horizon and a lot of them won’t be easy to live with.”

“The lawsuit is about pushing NMFS to take action beyond what we think the science supports,” Mason said. “The case is before a judge who is a pretty active judge, one who wants the parties to toe the line. It is plausible that it will result in regulations that will affect all lobstermen.”

The case is being pursued at the U.S. District Court in D.C. In May 2018, the MLA successfully petitioned to become an intervenor, which allows it to monitor the litigation and to have a voice during any discussions of remedies. In August, the Massachusetts Lobstermen’s Association followed the MLA’s lead and is also a party to the case at this time.

The financial cost to take part in the case is considerable. As Mason notes, a simple intervenor motion, as was filed on behalf of the MLA, runs into the thousands of dollars. Currently the parties in the case are in the discovery phase, collecting data to support their separate claims. Mason predicts that discovery will continue into the early part of 2019 and that early in the new year the judge is likely to set a schedule for initial motions and briefs, followed by a hearing, if necessary.

“This judge actively manages his cases. He sets deadlines, orders people to come up with a plan and ways to implement that plan. He is being asked to order NMFS to take action under the ESA by a certain time. If he becomes persuaded that NMFS has violated the ESA and must make a finding promptly — before all the scientific questions have been addressed — then lobstermen could be in trouble,” she said. As an intervenor, the MLA can take part if the judge wants a brief on the substantive merits of a proposal made by either the plaintiffs or the defendant.

This isn’t the first time that the MLA has taken part in the legal process on behalf of its members. In 2007 it also filed successfully to be an intervenor in a legal suit brought by the Humane Society and the Oceans Conservancy against NMFS to force the agency to release regulations regarding right whale protections. As an intervenor, the MLA participated in mediation to reach a settlement in the suit.

The tenor of the dispute, however, has changed significantly since 2007 in the wake of the 2017 mortalities and greatly reduced right whale birth rates. The environmental organizations want the court to force NMFS to review the data used for its 2014 biological opinion on the lobster fishery, which found that the fishery did not jeopardize right whales. The plaintiffs contend that the right whale population’s decline since 2010 and the unprecedented number of right whale deaths indicate that significant changes have taken place in the population and that the data informing the biological opinion should be updated. However, their public statements assume that changes in lobster harvesting practices are required to save the species. This singular focus ignores changes to their habitat and distribution unrelated to the fishery.

“In the last instance, NMFS was able to work through the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team (TRT) process to develop regulations that were designed to address identified threats to the species. Although that process was contentious, everyone had the belief that they could come up with an effective solution,” Mason explained. “What’s changed is that the focus is on specific remedies, such as ropeless fishing, before the threats have been fully identified. That’s a backward process because the science may not support the need for such a remedy at all.”
RIVER HERRING STOCKS ON THE UPSWING

River herring are making a comeback in New England’s rivers. Once considered for listing as an endangered species, the fish, which include alewives and blueback herring, are now returning to rivers and streams at a rate that fisheries regulators say is encouraging. The comeback is most noticeable in Maine. Maine fishermen harvest alewives and their catch of nearly 1.7 million pounds last year was the second largest in the last 37 years. Fishing for river herring was one of the earliest industries in colonial America, and annual catches of more than 50 million pounds were common throughout the 1960s. Those numbers fell to about 1 million pounds per year in the mid-1990s and commercial catches plummeted throughout the early 2000s. But a 2017 assessment of 54 river herring stocks by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission found that 16 were experiencing trends of increasing abundance and only two showed declining trends.

LAW SUIT AGAINST MARINE NATIONAL MONUMENT DISM ISSED

A federal judge upheld the creation of the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument in early October, dismissing a lawsuit from commercial fishing groups that challenged presidential authority to establish the monument. The national monument, created by former President Barack Obama, was authorized under the Antiquities Act. The Massachusetts Lobstermen’s Association’s lawyer argued that the Act does not include authorization to protect bodies of water and that the monument in question, an area of nearly 5,000 square miles, was too large. U.S. District Judge James Boasberg ruled that the National Monument complied with the law and sided with the Trump administration’s motion to dismiss the suit. He clarified that preferences measures will still prevent whale deaths. Earlier this year, the Department of Fisheries and Ocean imposed sweeping closures in the Gulf of St. Lawrence to prevent a repeat of 2017, when 12 of the critically endangered whales died in Canadian waters. The Department considers the stricter measures at least partly responsible for the fact that no right whales have died in Canadian waters so far this year. Federal fisheries minister Jonathan Wilkinson also announced a new pilot project with Grand Manan Island lobster fishermen. The project includes a requirement that fishermen cut the trailing buoy upon sighting a right whale to reduce rope in the water. The president of the Grand Manan Fishermen’s Association, Brian Guptill, hopes the pilot project will avert what happened this summer when a single right whale transiting the fishing area led to an automatic 15-day shutdown.

B AIT SAFETY A CONCERN FOR ASMFC

The American Lobster Management Board, part of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, took a first step toward adopting regional bait safety rules, voting in late October to develop a resolution to prohibit the use of exotic baits that could introduce disease, parasites or invasive species to East Coast waters. The board unanimously agreed on the need for protection from the dangers posed by introduction of new kinds of bait in the lobster fishery which may occur next year when regulators reduce herring quotas. The board agreed to develop a bait safety resolution based on Maine’s existing rules that all lobstering states would enact by 2020. To get compliance, the board also plans to begin the process of adding bait safety to its lobster management plan.

COLDWATER LOBSTER ASSOCIATION RECEIVES GRANT TO TEST ROPELESS FISHING

Canada’s Atlantic Fisheries Fund has funded a pilot study by the Coldwater Lobster Association on the effectiveness and practicality of ropeless fishing gear technology for the commercial lobster industry within lobster Fishing Area 34 (LFA 34). LFA 34, located off southwestern Nova Scotia, is Canada’s largest lobster fishery, with 975 licenses landing over 64 million pounds of lobster in 2016. The season runs from the end of November until the end of May. The American Lobster Management Board, part of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, took a first step toward adopting regional bait safety rules, voting in late October to develop a resolution to prohibit the use of exotic baits that could introduce disease, parasites or invasive species to East Coast waters. The board unanimously agreed on the need for protection from the dangers posed by introduction of new kinds of bait in the lobster fishery which may occur next year when regulators reduce herring quotas. The board agreed to develop a bait safety resolution based on Maine’s existing rules that all lobstering states would enact by 2020. To get compliance, the board also plans to begin the process of adding bait safety to its lobster management plan.

LOBSTERMAN LOST AT SEA

Scott Chandler, 51, a West Jonesport lobsterman, died when he fell off his boat near Doyle Island on October 23. Chandler was seen falling off his 20-foot lobster boat, Marie Louise II, at 9:20 a.m. by nearby commercial seaweed harvesters who reported the incident, according to the Department of Marine Resources. Chandler was fishing in the vicinity of Doyle Island, which is due west of Hopkins Point in Jonesport. Divers recovered his body around 5:10 p.m., about 200 yards from where he entered the water. Details of the accident are under investigation.

THE MLA LEGAL DEFENSE FUND NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT.

The MLA Legal Defense Fund allows MLA to fight in court against potential new whale rules such as ropeless fishing and seasonal closures. The money you contribute to the Fund is used to pay for legal expertise from Crowell and Moring in response to a lawsuit filed by several national environmental groups.

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THE MLA PUSHES NMFS FOR MORE HERRING QUOTA IN 2019

By MLA staff

In late October, the Maine Lobstermen’s Association (MLA) sent a letter to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) strongly urging it to use its discretion to set the 2019 Atlantic herring quota above the level recommended by the New England Fishery Management Council (Council).

The MLA urged NMFS to use the same methodology that the agency used for the 2018 in-season quota adjustment. In doing so, the agency would keep the probability of overfishing below 50%, but above the 15% recommended by the Council in order to give the lobster industry an additional year to prepare for reduced herring landings.

The MLA stated, “The Council’s recommendation is estimated to result in an overall quota of just 14,558 metric tons, a devastating 71% reduction of the NMFS-adjusted quota for 2018. The impact of losing nearly 78 million pounds of herring from the bait supply in one year will, in and of itself, be devastating to Maine’s lobster industry. The fact that we are losing fish that are locally landed in Maine and New England ports during peak lobster fishing season will certainly exacerbate the blow. The Maine lobster industry needs much more time to identify alternative sources of bait, coordinate bait distribution and grow infrastructure and storage capacity.”

The MLA noted that the Council did not analyze the significant negative economic impacts that this magnitude quota cut would have on the lobster industry. The wide-ranging impacts that Maine lobstermen will actually experience next year will be far more dire than anything contemplated by fishery managers.

The MLA also urged NMFS to portion the 2019 quota using the Area sub-allocations used in 2018, placing more fish in Area 1A. Area 1A directly provides bait to the lobster fishery and would, in turn, match herring landings with the lobster fishery’s time of peak demand. The MLA stated, “Having the greatest proportion of the 2019 herring actually present in the fishery...”

The MLA also informed NMFS of reports from many Downeast lobstermen of an abundance of small herring seen while fishing and in the bait supply from Canada. This indicates a strong presence of juvenile herring in this region, which seems to contradict the findings of the herring stock assessment. The letter stated, “Given the importance of the herring fishery to the lobster industry, the MLA strongly supports an interim herring assessment before the 2020 specifications are set in order to fully understand the number of juvenile herring actually present in the fishery.”

The MLA urged NMFS to use its flexibility to spread the impact of the quota reduction beyond 2019 to allow Maine’s lobster industry additional time to prepare and respond, noting that the impact of implementing the Council’s recommendations would be devastating for Maine’s lobstermen and the small communities that they support.
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RESEARCH

The MLCA partners with regional research organizations including ME Department of Marine Resources, Gulf of Maine Research Institute & New England Aquarium to tackle science and conservation questions that impact Maine's lobster industry. MLCA partners lobstermen with researchers on projects such as testing whale safe fishing gear prototypes and measuring inshore herring spawning stocks.

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