

Casco Bay Regional Shellfish Working Group Draft Meeting Summary



Date: November 29, 2023

Location: Morrell Meeting Room, Curtis Memorial Library,
Brunswick

Time: 1:00-3:00 PM

Participants: Curtis Bohlen (Casco Bay Estuary Partnership [CBEP]), Will Owen (Harbormaster/shellfish warden, Town of Yarmouth), David Young (Harbormaster/shellfish warden, Town of Falmouth), Dan Devereaux (Coastal Resource Manager, Town of Brunswick), Kevin Oliver (Harvester and Yarmouth/North Yarmouth Shellfish Committee member), Ari Leach (Marine Scientist, Maine DMR), Mary Ann Nahf (Harpowell Marine Resources Commission [MRC]), Nate Orff (Lobsterman, Scarborough), David Wilson (Harvester and Chair – Harpswell MRC), Travis Wilson (Harvester), Madelyn Hennessey (West Bath Selectboard), Chris Green (Harvester), Ivy Frignoca (Friends of Casco Bay), Ray Trombley (Casco Bay Shellfish), Anne Hayden (Brunswick resident), Camden Reiss (Harvester), Marissa McMahan (Manomet and Georgetown Shellfish Committee), Emily Farr (Manomet), Jessica Joyce (Tidal Bay Consulting), Dan Sylvain (Harbormaster/marine warden, Town of Brunswick), Mark Leuchtenberger (Harpowell MRC), Victoria Boundy (CBEP), Jeanne Christie (Congresswomen Pingree), and Amy Sheehan (Freeport resident)

Welcome and Introductions:

After brief introductions, Emily reviewed the mission of the Casco Bay Regional Shellfish Working Group (WG) and the agenda for the meeting.

Town Sharing

One representative from each municipal shellfish/marine resource committee was asked to share the following information: 1) What is the current focus of your committee, and 2) What are the obstacles to addressing the shellfish community's needs?

Arrowsic

- They conducted local shoreline cleanups, and worked with students to build sculptures out of trash.

Brunswick

- The Marine Resources Committee (MRC) conducted annual shellfish surveys, and they are prepping for an upweller (for quahogs) to be delivered and working on getting permits from DMR. They are also in the beginning stages of drafting a comprehensive shellfish management plan.
- Harvesters are interested in working with the Town Council and MRC to see if they can introduce oysters into their Marine Resources Program.

Falmouth

- The shellfish warden position has been vacant for last 1.5 years, so they are not in compliance with DMR standards, and are working on getting in compliance. The Shellfish Committee is new and focused on educational events for committee and community, and they recently hosted a presentation from Dr. Brian Beal about the Downeast Institute.

Freeport

- The Town has a grant from Maine Coastal Program to work on preserving shore access. They are partnering with Freeport Conservation Trust to work on landowner relations for access through private property. GEI consultants is also a project partner analyzing feasibility of potential sites for deep-water boat ramp access (right now all ramps are tidal).

Georgetown

- The Town recently updated their ordinance to be in compliance with DMR regulations. They have been working on drafting a new shellfish management plan.
- After conducting several conservation projects for soft-shell clams and quahogs without any real increase in the resource, the Committee members and harvesters are feeling defeated about population enhancement. They have not yet considered oysters.

Harpswell

- The Town is continuing to grow hard shell clams for seeding; they have had success in some places, and not others (maybe less success in places where there aren't already quahogs).
- They hosted a landowner appreciation event this summer where they served soft-shell clams and quahogs in various dishes and steamed. They gained a lot of ground and positive recognition.

Scarborough

- The Shellfish Committee has mostly been dealing with fee structure changes and wording revisions in their ordinance.
- They are trying to figure out how to incentivize harvesters to conduct surveys. They did not see a lot of seed on the mudflats this season.

West Bath

- Diminishment of available access to the flats is the most difficult issue. Very limited access to the one good deep-water launch that has access to the flats. Other good access is in Brunswick, and you have to go all the way around Foster's Point to get to harvesting areas.
- They changed their ordinance last spring to amend activities allowed for conservation hours.

Yarmouth

- They have had a decline in participation in surveys and meetings in last year due to the political climate of their Town Council. It is hard to get support or understanding from the town, and hard to maintain volunteers if they don't feel respected.
 - o Town looking at finding funding to pay people to do surveys
- They have had some rate increases for licenses (though participation has declined).

Discussion

A brief discussion followed around the Gouldsboro Shore Project and preserving access through landowner relations, outreach and tax incentives. There is a proposed bill in this legislative session that would amend the Working Waterfront program within the Current Land Use regulations, to provide more incentives to enroll properties in that program for tax reductions. In the next legislative session, discussions are underway regarding providing similar incentives in the Open Space program specific to preserving walk-in paths for intertidal harvesters.

Presentations

Jessica Joyce, Caitlan Vultaggio, and Emily Farr offered presentations on the following topics (see the link to the presentation file in the 'Meeting Archive' webpage for more information):

Public Outreach Events – Jessica shared information about participating in several events that helped the public understand the fishery. For the Yarmouth Clam Festival, clammers build a giant clam hod and a student painted a mural, we worked with CBEP and the Maine Shellfish Learning Network to design and print a 'tide-to-table' placemat that was distributed in the food tents, we worked with the Chamber of Commerce on their sourcing of clams, and had a letter-to-the-editor published celebrating clammers at the Festival. We also participated in the Casco Bay Seafood Festival in June, where we partnered with Casco Bay Shellfish and Maine Street Bistro chefs who made quahog ceviche and steamed quahogs.

Residency Requirements Guidance Document – Former Resilience Corps Fellow, Caitlan Vultaggio, shared that this priority was identified at the WG meeting last fall – residency requirements as pressing issue the WG should collaboratively address. Caitlin and Virginia Hawkins, Manomet's Resilience Corps Fellow, conducted interviews and gathered data and information to compile this report, which includes information to help municipal committees, town councils, and selectboards navigate residency discussions. The report is available online: <https://www.cascobayregionalsheffishworkinggroup.org/announcements>

Preserving intertidal access – Emily reviewed a mapping project Manomet is coordinating with six towns in the Casco Bay region, and shared pie charts that summarize data across all projects, and shared options for preserving access points. Across all the towns, 65% of all access points were on private property, and most of these were informal agreements with private landowners. Seventy-eight percent (78%) of all access points were walk-in sites. More detail on the results from this work are in the slides, and a report will be available soon.

Group Discussion

The meeting opened up with a brainstorm around developing a list of regional WG projects that meeting the following criteria: would benefit multiple communities, would occur within the span of one year, is feasible with volunteer effort, has a reasonable equipment budget, and does not require additional funding. Participants shared the following ideas:

1. **Compile information about towns using upwellers and/or seed relays for stock enhancement.**
 - Share success stories, where to get materials and source seed, how to overcome challenges, and how to engage students and other members of the community.
2. **Develop a geographically-specific push notification system or text alerts for rainfall or emergency closures due to oil spills or sewer line breaks.**
 - When you sign up to receive .gov delivery emails from the Public Health Bureau at DMR, you can also elect to get a text message, although the text provides a link to the email/message. You can subscribe to these communications by clicking the red envelop at the bottom of DMR's website, which brings you to this link: <https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/MEDMR/subscriber/new>
 - There was interest in a coordinated system with both DMR and the Department of Environmental Protections (DEP) because they manage oil spills.
 - There was a question about whether emergency notifications can help transition certain growing areas to be managed on a real-time basis, rather than being closed by default (e.g., opening up areas near wastewater outflows)?
 - Recreational harvesters may not know about the DMR emails, although towns could provide the information to recreational license holders when they purchase their licenses.
3. **Conduct an in-depth historical analysis of shellfish industry in Casco Bay** (since late 1800s/early 1900s).
 - Compile information on what management and conservation existed to enhance/restore resource in the past to the present, including challenges.
 - Local historical societies and libraries can be a source of information, and it would be an ideal project for a student.
4. **Identify avenues to provide municipalities with finer-scale information about landings** (e.g., cove-specific) **to inform management.**
 - Currently, the harvest location is only available at town level, and this presents challenges with the accuracy/utility of DMR landings data given a mismatch between landings reporting (annual, calendar year) and licensing timelines (annual, not typically calendar year).

- Can wholesalers report the cove/site to the state through their dealer software, e.g., Trip Ticket? Harvesters already report this information on their tags.
- The rule of three applies to protect confidentiality (i.e., landings data from three harvesters and three dealers need to be present before summary data can be shared).
- Dealers could consider using more modern software that provides summary-level data and other communication options.
- Some municipalities require harvester reporting in their local ordinance (Cumberland, Biddeford), which would address the town-level interest for finer scale data. Brunswick is providing incentives for voluntary harvester reporting.

5. Conduct an analysis of mudflat closures and openings (shellfish growing areas) in Casco Bay.

- With water quality scores degrading over time in several places, there are concerns about mudflats that were recently opened being closed again. DMR typically provides only a few weeks advanced notice before an area is closed.
- Casco Bay Estuary Partnership last did an analysis of closed areas in 2015, and looked at how regularly they closed, what the local sources of pollution were, etc.
- DMR is planning to update P90 reporting data more frequently than once/year, but there are still issues with how often the data is collected (6 times/year – so 1-2 bad measurements can close a mudflat).

6. Preserving access to the shore continues to be a shared challenge, although there is some progress being made in certain towns.

A Conversation with Friends of Casco Bay

Ivy Frignoca, the Casco Bay Keeper, provided an overview of Friends of Casco Bay (FOCB), including their water quality monitoring, advocacy work, and research.

- They have also lost coastal access, which impedes their ability to monitor the water quality.
- They utilize Data Sondes with different sensors to measure: salinity, acidity, temperature, dissolved oxygen (lower DO this summer), and total nitrogen. They also measure alkalinity (with water samples) and observe algal blooms. Most sites are seasonal, and several are continuous (year-round) monitoring stations.
- Casco Bay Estuary Partnership is developing a hydrodynamic model that will predict how water moves around, and how this effects temperature, salinity, and water velocity.
- Ivy prompted a discussion about how their work can support the shellfish fishery and access.

Discussion

- There was interest in monitoring areas high in the intertidal, where there have been very high water temperatures, significant eelgrass loss, and algal blooms. Monitoring both the water and mud (especially temperature) is important, and perhaps focusing on areas that no longer have productive shellfish resource. There was also interest in distributing monitoring across multiple sites in each town.
- The changes in wind patterns (e.g., SW wind in recent years will change distribution of HABs), and extreme weather (e.g., drought or excessive rain) that are affecting the ecosystem.
- In the past, FOCB hosted nitrogen Nab events – get 100+ people to sign up, pick a single day (or two days, one wet, one dry), and everyone goes out to collect water sample at same time. Then the data is analyzed for bacteria and total nitrogen, so you can address specific areas of concern with this approach.
- There was agreement in monitoring areas of non-productive mudflats to help understand the conditions that make the ecosystem inhospitable for clams (aside from green crabs and other predators). There was a suggestion around having harvesters support these monitoring efforts for their conservation activities, and lessen the burden on FOCB staff.

Announcements

- The next Shellfish Advisory Council (ShAC) meeting is on November 30th in Ellsworth and online.
- The DMR regional shellfish meeting for mid-coast Maine is on December 4th in Bucksport.
- Shellfish Focus Day is scheduled on February 29th at the Samoset Resort in Rockport as the first day of the Fishermen's Forum

Next Steps

- The meeting summary will be posted online and distributed via our newsletter
- The Steering Committee will be reviewing the proposed project ideas next month, and once they are narrowed down, we will discuss how to address these initiatives at our next meeting.
- Next WG meeting will be held in late winter/early spring of 2024