Sustainable Fisheries Goal Implementation Team Meeting Member Updates
December 6 -7, 2016
Annapolis, MD

Recreational Cobia Angler Survey Member Update
Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC)
Ryan Jiorle, Fisheries Management Specialist, VMRC

The Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC) plans to institute mandatory recreational reporting for the cobia fishery, beginning in the 2017 fishing season. This is in response to a large estimated harvest according to NOAA's Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP), which caused Virginia's recreational cobia anglers to express frustration with the data collection process. During the 2016 season, staff set forth a voluntary permit and reporting system. Following that, the VMRC sent out an electronic survey to all those who signed up for the voluntary permit, soliciting information on their cobia fishing activity as well as their opinions regarding the state's mandatory reporting platform. VMRC plans to incorporate this feedback as it reformulates and streamlines the reporting requirements for 2017 and beyond.

Approximately 48% of the permittees (214 of 448) returned completely surveys to the VMRC, and some of the findings are summarized below:

- Most of the respondents (61%) indicated they only target cobia "sometimes," while 19% reported only targeting cobia when the fishing was "really good." Approximately 16% considered it the main species they target.
- A large percentage of anglers (39%) launch from marinas and other private-access sites (docks, boat ramps, etc.). The only way a private-access site can be sampled under the MRIP survey is if the owner of the marina or access-point gives permission to do so. Thus, there is a large risk in this fishery of not sampling the full angling population.
- Only 26% of these respondents reported submitting any cobia data during the 2016 season; of those who didn't, many indicated they forgot to report or didn't do so because it was voluntary.
- Only 21% of the respondents felt that reporting lengths of cobia should be mandatory, while 40% felt it should only be mandatory for cobia that are kept. Only 4% of these respondents felt reporting weights of all cobia should be required, while approximately half of them felt it should be completely optional.
- Of the respondents who reported cobia data this year, the main reasons they liked the program was because it was simple and easy to use. Suggestions for improving it were more varied, including improving the option for selecting fishing location, making the reporting process more clear, and the need for a smartphone app. Earlier in the survey, nearly 60% of all of the survey respondents indicated they'd be more inclined to report their trips if there were Android and iPhone apps available for doing so.

Virginia Marine Resource Commission's Atlantic Sturgeon Observer Program, Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Member Update
Virginia Marine Resource Commission
Katie May Laumann

Sturgeon Observer Program: Since the VMRC Sturgeon Observer Program started in May of 2016, 44 commercial gill net trips have been observed. Eight Atlantic sturgeon were incidentally taken on these trips, 4 in the James River and 4 in the Atlantic Ocean (off of Chincoteague). Of these, 5 were released alive and 3 were dead as a result of gear interactions. All of the sturgeon observed as bycatch were sub-adults. This observer program is being expanded to include pound net observation for incidental take of sea turtles, and the first pound net observation trip was made in November.

Summer Flounder: A 3.77 mill RHL has been set for 2017, requiring a 40% coastwide reduction from 2016 harvest. A variety of options for how this reduction may be taken have been proposed and will be presented to the Council and Board at their next meeting. Due to the scale of the reduction needed, it will most likely be shared among all states coastwide.

Scup: A 5.5 mill lb RHL has been set for 2017, which will require a 29% reduction from 2016 harvest. Because Wave 5 has historically been important in scup harvest, and 2016 wave 5 estimates are not yet available, the reduction necessary may need to be recalculated when these numbers are available.

Black Sea Bass: A 2.82 mill lb RHL has been set for 2017, which will require a 44% reduction from 2016 harvest. This RHL may be adjusted when the current benchmark stock assessment is released. ASMFC staff and others have recommended postponing "in-depth analysis of revisions to the recreational management measures until early 2017, once the assessment results become available and the Scientific and Statistical Committee revisits 2017 catch and landings limits".

Virginia's Recreational Summer Flounder Fishery Member Update
Virginia Marine Resources Commission
Alex Aspinwall

The recreational Summer Flounder fishery in Virginia has been experiencing steady declines in total harvest since 2011 with 2016 (89,357 fish) being one of the lowest estimates recorded. Current management measures in place include a 16" size limit with a 4 fish bag limit. These measures may change coming 2017.

In 2017, states will be facing a 40% reduction on the coast-wide recreational harvest limit. In order to meet these reductions, staff and the technical and monitoring committees for this species recommend a regional management approach. There are currently five options on the table that will be presented to the ASFMC for further review. Of the five options, only two options require the Delmarva region to make a 30% reduction in harvest for 2017. Cooperative efforts have been made by the Delmarva region to implement restrictive measures that would meet harvest reductions if those actions are required by the ASFMC. Management actions being considered to meet the 30% reduction include a 17' minimum size limit in addition with a reduced bag limit of 3 fish. Analysis suggests that these reductions would result in a 30% reduction for the region.

The ASFMC will hold meetings in December and February to discuss management options for Summer Flounder and other important species. The Delmarva region is prepared to make reductions and will wait until the meeting to discuss further actions.

Striped Bass nutrition and forage availability benchmarks for Maryland's portion of Chesapeake Bay Member Update

Maryland Department of Natural Resources
Jim Uphoff, MD DNR, Fishing and Boating Services

Indicators of forage status and Striped Bass well-being in Maryland's portion of Chesapeake Bay have been developed from monitoring of Striped Bass condition (proportion without body fat, 1998-2015), resident striped bass relative abundance (September-October private boat catch per trip,1983-2015), natural mortality (relative survival of three year-old striped bass,1987-2015), main prey to predator ratios (Atlantic Menhaden, Bay Anchovy, and Spot divided by Striped Bass relative abundance, 1983-2015), and fall diets of Striped Bass (proportion of empty stomachs 1998-2015).

Targets and thresholds have been developed for each indicator to summarize overall annual conditions during 1998-2015. A scoring system summarizes whether each indicator met its target (score = 5), was near its target (score = 4), avoided its threshold (score = 3), neared its threshold (score = 2), or fell within threshold boundaries (score = 1). Annual mean scores indicated that threshold or near threshold conditions prevailed during 1998-2007; scores indicated more favorable conditions (near target to meeting target) during 2008-2010; and status has hovered between avoiding threshold and near threshold conditions, with considerable scatter among individual indicators, through 2015. Individual indicators are not infallible and unmeasured factors may be episodically important. Lagged responses may complicate interpretation. Indicators are not etched in stone. Indicator development would be enhanced by knowing what decisions managers expect to make with Chesapeake Bay forage indicators.

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council Member Update
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
Jessica Coakley and Julia Beaty

In 2016, the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) completed a number of initiatives intended to address habitat and ecosystem objectives. The Council unanimously approved a guidance document in August 2016 to facilitate the transition to an ecosystem approach to fisheries management (EAFM) in the Mid-Atlantic. The EAFM Guidance Document is designed to serve as an umbrella document that will enable the Council to coordinate ecosystem considerations across fishery management plans (FMPs). The Council's EAFM approach is organized around four major topics: forage species, habitat, climate change and variability, and interactions. Development of the document was informed by four workshops which brought together scientists, managers, and stakeholders to discuss each issue and associated best management practices. The EAFM Guidance Document and supporting documents are available at www.mafmc.org/eafm.

In August 2016, the Council approved an amendment to protect unmanaged forage species in the Mid-Atlantic. If approved by the Secretary of Commerce, the Unmanaged Forage Omnibus Amendment would limit possession of over 50 previously unmanaged forage species to 1,700 pounds in Mid-Atlantic Federal waters. The Council approved separate management measures for chub mackerel due to the existence of a directed chub mackerel fishery. The Council also recommended specific steps to be taken before they will consider allowing fisheries for these species to expand. More information is available at: www.mafmc.org/actions/unmanaged-forage.

The Council released a series of policy documents focused on non-fishing and fishing activities that threaten fish habitat. These documents outline the Council's positions on six anthropogenic activities: wind energy, offshore oil, marine transport, liquefied natural gas, coastal development, and fishing. Policy development was spearheaded by the Council's Ecosystem and Ocean Planning (EOP) Committee in conjunction with input from members of the public, the Council's EOP Advisory Panel, and subject matter experts on state coastal zone management, energy issues, and habitat. By clearly communicating its positions on anthropogenic activities, the Council will work more effectively with management partners to mitigate and avoid adverse impacts to fish habitat. The habitat policies are available at www.mafmc.org/habitat.

The Council is undertaking an Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Review. It will be conducted as a two-step process. During 2017 and 2018, the EFH Review Fishery Management Action Team (FMAT) will first evaluate and synthesize new scientific and technical information on fish habitat and will develop recommendations as to whether changes to the existing EFH descriptions and other habitat components of the Council's FMPs are warranted based on that new information. The FMAT will present this evaluation in an EFH Review Technical Report to the Council. After receiving this report, if the Council chooses to make changes to its FMPs (e.g., revise EFH descriptions, designate HAPCs, implement other management measures or actions, etc.), the second step would be to initiate FMP amendment(s) to revise the FMPs. To track this project, visit: http://www.mafmc.org/habitat

Oyster Best Management Practice Expert Panel Status Member Update
Oyster Recovery Partnership
Julie Reichert-Nguyen

The Oyster BMP Expert Panel has released their revised version of their first incremental report titled, "Panel Recommendations on the Oyster BMP Nutrient and Suspended Sediment Reduction Effectiveness Determination Decision Framework and Nitrogen and Phosphorus Assimilation in Oyster Tissue Reduction Effectiveness for Oyster Aquaculture Practices." The Panel is tentatively scheduled to present their report for an approval decision by the WQGIT, in coordination with the Sustainable Fisheries and Habitat GITS, during the WQGIT's December 19, 2016 meeting, pending approval from the Watershed Technical Workgroup on December 1, 2016.

The Oyster BMP Expert Panel will continue to meet through 2017 and will be focusing on evaluating the reduction effectiveness protocols related to nitrogen and phosphorus assimilation in shell and enhanced denitrification associated with oysters for private oyster aquaculture and oyster reef restoration practices. The Panel will also be evaluating the reduction effectiveness potential related to sequestration of nitrogen and phosphorus in oyster reefs and suspended sediment reduction from biodeposition processes (i.e., removal of sediment in the water column by transferring it to the bottom sediment via oyster filtration).

Catfish Gear Conflict Study
Virginia Institute of Marine Science
Bob Fisher

Update on Fishery Resource Grant project centered around gear conflict; hoop-net v e-fishing...the effect Low Frequency electroshocking has on catch of blue catfish in the commercial hoop-net fishery. Some industry members are looking to petition VMRC to permit e-fishing as a gear-type in the blue catfish fishery. It is currently a standing opinion within the commercial hoop-net fishery that e-fishing is causing a reduction in their catch i.e. fish exposed to e-fishing do not trap (go to bait). This latest catfish FRG project was conducted in the Pamunkey River and paired a commercial hoop-net fisherman together with the commercial watermen operating the LF e-fishing gear targeting blue catfish. The study was designed to harvest catfish from hoop-nets deployed ~1/4-1/2 mile apart, fished 3x/week over a 4 week period, with half of the nets shocked over each time fished (with shocked fished removed) and the other half not shocked over.

The collaborative effort brought insight to this gear conflict issue, and possibly provided means to minimize potential conflicts. First, a comparison of hoop net harvest levels with and without electro-shock fishing indicated no statistically significant difference in hoop net harvest levels. An analysis of variance indicated that the best fit log-linear model with an r-square of 0.085 was not statistically significant at the alpha = 0.05 percent level. Site preference for these two gear types, as explained by both fishermen, also seemed to differ: hoop-nets best fished in shallower, gradually sloped habitats with less current (prevent hang-up when swinging with tide and fouling with debris); e-fishing best in deeper, steeper-sloped habitats with faster currents (draw fish into electric field instead of tickling them away). It was also observed that catfish become de-sensitized to electrical current when repeatedly exposed to low frequency e-fishing, especially the larger fish (fish absorb power as a function of body surface area). This was observed by the sharp reduction in catch from e-fishing. Seasonality is also part of this equation, were e-fishing is limited by water temperature and conductivity, which allows this gear type to only be functional in VA Tidewater area from late Spring to early fall. Hoop-nets are fished year-round.