

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE FROM THE MAINE DEPARTMENT OF MARINE RESOURCES

DATE: March 9, 2015

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New Approach to Scallop Monitoring Results in Re-Opened Fishing Grounds

A new approach to scallop monitoring in Maine state waters has led to changes in scallop abundance estimates that will result in the reopening of three important fishing grounds this season.

The areas opening are [Inner Machias Rotational Area](#), [Wahoa/Jonesport Reach](#) and [Gouldsboro Bay and Dyers Bay](#), which were closed through emergency rulemaking by the Maine Department of Marine Resources on December 13, 2015. The Department will open the areas the week of March 14 by allowing the emergency regulation to lapse.

“The Maine scallop fishery has seen significant advances in both science and management in recent years,” said Maine DMR Science Bureau Director Carl Wilson. “In 2012 the DMR, working closely with industry, implemented rotational management and targeted in-season closures. These new management tools were developed to continue rebuilding the resource in areas that had been closed for three years, while supporting a sustainable fishery.”

Under the new management strategy, pre-season dredge surveys were used by the DMR to estimate abundance and harvestable biomass in areas likely to be subject to heavy harvesting pressure. DMR staff uses estimates of scallop biomass removed from these areas based on port sampling, sea sampling, and industry feedback to make decisions about timing of in-season closures. Closures occur when 30%-40% of the harvestable biomass in an area has been removed.

To further improve understanding of the scallop resource and the impacts of the fishery, the Department piloted in-season dredge surveys in Cobscook Bay during the 2014-15 fishing season. Results from the 2014-15 in-season surveys allowed Cobscook Bay to remain open two weeks longer than the pre-season survey originally supported. “This is a valuable tool that we are using to validate our initial projections,” said Wilson.

During the current 2015-16 season, in-season surveys have been used in Cobscook Bay as well as Machias Bay, Gouldsboro Bay and western Vinalhaven. After comparing results of the pre and in-season surveys, DMR scientists found discrepancies that needed further investigation to fine-tune biomass estimates and projections.

As a result of this in depth analysis, Department scientists determined that approximately 13,500 pounds remains in the Inner Machias Rotational Area and 4,500 pounds is left in Gouldsboro Bay to be harvested.

Corrected projections of harvestable biomass and in-season surveys both revealed that less than the targeted 30% of the harvestable biomass had been removed from these areas, both of which were closed by emergency action in December 2015. As a result, these areas along with Wahoa/Jonesport Reach and Dyers Bay will temporarily re-open to fishing the week of March 14.

“The in-season surveys allow DMR scientists to better evaluate pre-season estimates and to more effectively assess the scallop resource in specific areas,” said Wilson. “This in turn enhances the timeliness and precision of management decisions. This season, the additional analysis has provided Maine scallop harvesters with late season fishing opportunity.”