



**NOAA
FISHERIES**

ATLANTIC COASTAL FISHERIES COOPERATIVE MANAGEMENT ACT

FY13 through FY16 Report to Congress

Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act

With the passage of the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act (the Act) in December 1993, NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), in cooperation with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), was charged with the responsibility of supporting the interstate fisheries management efforts of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC). When Congress reauthorized the Act in 2000 (Public Law 106-555) it required that the Secretary of Commerce submit biennial reports to Congress on the use of federal assistance provided to the ASMFC and the Atlantic Coast states, and an evaluation of the success of the funded activities in implementing the Atlantic Coastal Act.

Federal assistance is executed via a grant program authorized by the Act. The projects funded by the grant program are carried out to gather information and conduct activities that support management of United States multijurisdictional fisheries. These projects respond to fishery management planning, data collection (including statistics), research, habitat, and law enforcement needs under the Act. Many of the projects funded are core elements that support fishery management programs for interstate fisheries.

Funding provided to the ASMFC, the Atlantic Coast Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP), member states, NMFS, and the USFWS through the Act continues to be integral to realizing state and federal alignment of fishery management and data collection programs carried out in U.S. Atlantic Coast waters. All beneficiaries of the funding have come to depend upon it for essential services as well as for short-term projects supporting immediate fishery management objectives.

Use of Federally Appropriated Assistance

Commissions and States

Following the annual Congressional appropriation, NMFS determines the total available funds. NMFS uses a formula to distribute available funds among recipients, which is based on the value of each state's commercial and recreational fisheries, the number of Commission fisheries management plans (FMPs) in which each state participates, and other factors. "Eligible states" under the Act include all the ASMFC member states from Florida to Maine, the District of Columbia, and the Potomac River Fisheries Commission (PRFC). The ASMFC and eligible states submit grant applications identifying the projects and work the funds will be used to support. The projects are monitored closely by NMFS Regional Program Offices and through NOAA's online reporting and monitoring program, Grants Online.



Sampling in North Carolina. Photo credit: NOAA Fisheries.

The ASMFC, including the ACCSP, receives approximately 75 percent of their funding from the Act. Together the ASMFC and the ACCSP employ 35 staff in their offices in Alexandria, Virginia. From 2013 to 2016, the ASMFC cooperatively managed 29 fish stocks, covering 25 species of marine fish from Maine to Florida. Of these 29 stocks, 20 stocks are not subject to overfishing, 12 stocks are not overfished and 7 stocks are rebuilt. The ACCSP has grown to establish coast-wide data collection and reporting standards and now serves as a data warehouse for more than 50 years of complete fisheries landings data. The ACCSP developed and runs the Standard Atlantic Fisheries Information System, or "SAFIS," which is the principal electronic seafood dealer reporting system on the Atlantic Coast.

The ACCSP Coordinating Council, an oversight group comprised of the ASMFC, eligible states, NMFS, USFWS, and the three Atlantic Coast fishery management councils, serves as a centralized budgeting and coordinating body for the implementation of the ACCSP. ACCSP funds are allocated to recipients based on the recommendations of the Coordinating Council's Operating Committee. In contrast to general state projects, which are based on each individual state's discretion and are comprised of diverse projects that support the Act, ACCSP funding is more centralized and coordinated coast-wide.

Section 803 of the Atlantic Coastal Act directs the Secretary of Commerce, in cooperation with the Secretary of the Interior, to develop and implement a program to support the interstate fishery management efforts of the ASMFC. The program shall include activities to support and enhance state cooperation in:

- (1) The collection, management, and analysis of fishery data (statistics).
- (2) Fisheries management planning.
- (3) Fisheries research, including stock assessment, and biological and economic research.
- (4) Fisheries law enforcement.
- (5) Habitat conservation.

Development of projects for funding is left to the discretion of the ASMFC and the states, with the stipulation that submitted projects must support one of the five project priorities listed above. This process has enhanced individual state agency capabilities to perform activities that support the ASMFC's Interstate Fisheries Management Program, which includes the development of FMPs and addenda and amendments to these FMPs. Projects are designed to strengthen individual agencies in areas where the recipients have the greatest internal needs. For instance, many states use the funding to provide better marine commercial fisheries statistics, while other states use their funding for fisheries law enforcement. Table 1 contains the breakdown of funding to the Act's state and state partner recipients for fiscal years 2013 through 2016. See Appendix 1 for a list of individual state projects.



Examining weakfish otolith size. Photo credit: NJDFW.

Table 1. Atlantic Coastal Act funding by state and state partners for FY13 through FY16.

| Recipient | Total Projects | FY13 | FY14 | FY15 | FY16 |
|---|----------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission | 1 | \$1,806,959 | \$2,019,536 | \$2,019,536 | \$2,019,536 |
| Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program | 1 | \$1,275,005 | \$1,425,000 | \$1,425,000 | \$1,425,000 |
| Maine | 3 | \$183,707 | \$181,847 | \$185,661 | \$191,572 |
| New Hampshire | 2 | \$131,642 | \$135,609 | \$132,048 | \$135,876 |
| Massachusetts | 3 | \$217,583 | \$226,306 | \$228,133 | \$234,243 |
| Rhode Island | 3 | \$158,113 | \$160,860 | \$162,213 | \$164,526 |
| Connecticut | 1 | \$151,895 | \$156,109 | \$157,448 | \$158,497 |
| New York | 1 | \$175,301 | \$179,949 | \$181,633 | \$181,062 |
| New Jersey | 1 | \$203,901 | \$216,170 | \$219,050 | \$216,813 |
| Pennsylvania | 1 | \$100,090 | \$103,774 | \$101,697 | \$100,840 |
| Delaware | 1 | \$156,784 | \$164,969 | \$167,420 | \$168,199 |
| Maryland | 3 | \$174,443 | \$185,408 | \$187,922 | \$188,217 |
| Virginia | 1 | \$182,292 | \$193,784 | \$199,804 | \$196,646 |
| Potomac River Fisheries Commission | 1 | \$87,550 | \$97,850 | \$97,850 | \$97,850 |
| District of Columbia | 1 | \$34,000 | \$38,000 | \$38,000 | \$38,000 |
| North Carolina | 3 | \$185,857 | \$194,395 | \$192,913 | \$190,494 |
| South Carolina | 1 | \$143,110 | \$151,506 | \$148,536 | \$149,564 |
| Georgia | 1 | \$136,395 | \$144,967 | \$141,977 | \$141,597 |
| Florida | 2 | \$186,055 | \$196,378 | \$193,547 | \$194,989 |
| TOTAL: | 29 | \$5,690,682 | \$6,172,417 | \$6,180,388 | \$6,193,521 |

Federal Government

NMFS and USFWS use the Act’s funds to participate in quarterly ASMFC meetings, technical committee meetings, ACCSP meetings, program administration, and research. Table 2 provides the funding allocation for NMFS and the USFWS for these activities.



Table 2. Atlantic Coastal Act funding by federal agency/office for fiscal years (FY) 2013 through and 2016.

| Federal Allocation | FY13 | FY14 | FY15 | FY16 |
|--|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Habitat Conservation | \$12,258 | \$12,258 | \$4,000 | \$25,000 |
| Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office | \$355,337 | \$320,693 | \$305,167 | \$307,962 |
| Northeast Fisheries Science Center | \$115,792 | \$111,000 | \$138,000 | \$138,000 |
| Southeast Regional Office | \$44,243 | \$49,171 | \$47,130 | \$40,113 |
| Southeast Fisheries Science Center | \$111,344 | \$111,344 | \$111,344 | \$111,400 |
| U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service | \$89,427 | \$89,427 | \$90,000 | \$90,000 |
| TOTAL: | \$728,401 | \$693,893 | \$695,641 | \$712,475 |

Evaluation of Projects Funded in 2013 through 2016

Projects funded through the Act are evaluated by many different metrics. Common metrics include the number of enforcement actions, the number of permits issued, the number of service calls to seafood dealers and commercial harvesters, the number of meetings attended, the number of observed fishing trips, and the number of fish sampling tows. Each recipient submits semi-annual and annual reports to the NMFS Northeast and Southeast Regional Program Offices. In many cases the funding provided through the Act enables the states to conduct essential fisheries work that it would be unable to support otherwise. Perhaps the best metric by which to evaluate the success of these projects is through the status of the fisheries resources themselves.

As of 2016, there were 29 fish stocks, covering 25 species managed, all, or in part, through the ASMFC. Of these 29 stocks, the stock status is fully known (both overfished and overfishing status is known) for 18 stocks, partially known (either overfished or overfishing status is known) for 7 stocks, and fully unknown for 4 stocks. Of the 29 managed stocks, 20 stocks are not subject to overfishing, 2 stocks are subject to overfishing, and the overfishing status is unknown for 7 stocks. Of the 29 managed stocks, 12 stocks are not overfished and 7 of these stocks are rebuilt, 9 stocks are depleted or overfished, and the depleted or overfished status of 8 stocks is unknown (see table 3, and the ASMFC’s definitions).

This number of species and stocks does not include 40 species of Atlantic coastal sharks because these species are principally managed by NMFS. The ASMFC has a limited fishery management plan for Atlantic coastal sharks to complement federal management actions.

ASMFC Definitions

Rebuilt/Sustainable: Stock biomass is equal to or above the biomass level established by the FMP to ensure population sustainability.

Recovering/Rebuilding: Stocks exhibit stable or increasing trends. Stock biomass is between the threshold and target level established by the fishery management plan.

Unknown: There is no accepted stock assessment to estimate stock status.

Depleted: Reflects low levels of abundance though it is unclear whether fishing mortality is the primary cause for reduced stock size.

Concern: Those stocks developing emerging issues (e.g., impacts due to environmental conditions).

Overfished: Occurs when stock biomass falls below the threshold established by the fishery management plan.

Overfishing: Occurs when fish are removed from a population at a rate that exceeds the threshold established in the fishery management plan.

Table 3: Stock status of species managed in whole or part by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission as of 2016.

| Species | Stock | Overfished | Overfishing | Rebuilding Status and Schedule |
|-----------------------|----------------------|------------|-------------|--|
| American Eel | | Depleted | Unknown | Harvest restrictions adopted in response to 2012 benchmark assessment. |
| American Lobster | Gulf of Maine | N | N | Rebuilt/Sustainable |
| | Georges Bank | N | N | Rebuilt/Sustainable |
| | Southern New England | Depleted | N | In 2012, approved 10% reduction in exploitation, trap reductions in Areas 2 & 3. Board initiated Addendum XXV as a result of 2015 benchmark assessment. |
| American Shad | | Depleted | Unknown | Depleted coast-wide; Amendment 3 established 2013 moratorium unless river specific sustainability can be documented. |
| Atlantic Croaker | | Unknown | N | Overfished status unknown; biomass increasing & age structure expanding since late 1980s; benchmark assessment scheduled for completion in 2017. |
| Atlantic Herring | | N | N | Rebuilt; 2015 stock assessment update indicated spawning stock biomass is above the target and fishing mortality (F) is below the threshold. |
| Atlantic Menhaden | | N | N | 2017 total allowable catch (TAC) set at 200,000 metric tons, a 6.45% increase from 2016 TAC. |
| Atlantic Striped Bass | | N | N | Rebuilt since 1995. Management action triggered in 2013; harvest reductions implemented in 2015. F estimated below target level in 2015, but female spawning stock biomass continues to decline towards the threshold. |
| Atlantic Sturgeon | | Y | N | 40+ year moratorium; to be rebuilt by ~2038. Listed in 2012 under the ESA. Benchmark assessment scheduled for 2017. |
| Black Drum | | N | N | FMP approved in 2013; status based on 2015 benchmark assessment which found |

| Species | Stock | Overfished | Overfishing | Rebuilding Status and Schedule |
|------------------|-----------------|------------|-------------|---|
| | | | | 2012 median biomass well above median biomass that produces MSY. |
| Black Sea Bass | | N | N | Benchmark assessment completed in 2016; stock status may change pending release of assessment results in 2017. |
| Bluefish | | N | N | Biomass above threshold but below target. |
| Horseshoe Crab | | Unknown | Unknown | 2013 assessment update found New England & NY stocks to have declined; DE Bay & Southeast stocks increased over time. Adaptive Resource Management Framework used since 2013 to set harvest levels for horseshoe crabs of DE Bay origin; benchmark assessment scheduled for 2018. |
| Jonah Crab | | Unknown | Unknown | No range-wide assessment; Interstate FMP adopted in 2015. |
| Northern Shrimp | | Depleted | N | Abundance & biomass indices lowest on record; recruitment indices very low. Fishery moratorium in place from 2014 to 2017 to protect remaining spawning population. |
| Red Drum | Northern Region | Unknown | N | Spawning potential ratio above target and threshold. |
| | Southern Region | Unknown | N | Spawning potential ratio above target and threshold. |
| River Herring | | Depleted | Unknown | Depleted coast-wide; Amendment 2 established 2012 moratorium unless river specific sustainability can be documented. |
| Scup | | N | N | Rebuilt/Sustainable |
| Spiny Dogfish | | N | N | Rebuilt/Sustainable |
| Spanish Mackerel | | N | N | Rebuilt/Sustainable |
| Spot | | Unknown | Unknown | Traffic light approach adopted to assess stock trends & initiate management response; benchmark assessment scheduled for completion in 2017. |

| Species | Stock | Overfished | Overfishing | Rebuilding Status and Schedule |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|------------|-------------|--|
| Spotted Seatrout | | Unknown | Unknown | Omnibus Amendment includes measures to protect spawning stock & establish 12” minimum size limit. |
| Summer Flounder | | N | Y | 2016 assessment update shows biomass trending downward since 2010; 2015 F exceeded threshold by 26%. |
| Tautog ¹ | | Y | Y | Overfished coast-wide and regionally (2016 assessment update); initiated amendment for regional stock units, reference points, fishing mortality targets and stock rebuilding schedules. |
| Winter Flounder | Gulf of Maine | Unknown | N | Biomass unknown; stock not responding to low catches/exploitation rates. |
| | Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic | Y | N | Current biomass at 23% of spawning stock biomass target based on 2015 assessment update; recruitment continues to decline. |
| Weakfish | | Depleted | N | 6-year rebuilding period if spawning stock biomass is below threshold level; Board approved further harvest restrictions based on 2009 benchmark assessment. |

¹ The 2016 tautog assessment split the coastwide stock into 4 regional stocks: Massachusetts–Rhode Island, Long Island Sound, New Jersey–New York Bight, and Delaware–Maryland–Virginia. Of these 4 stocks, 2 stocks are not subject to overfishing and 2 stocks are subject to overfishing. One stock is not overfished and 3 stocks are overfished. This report designates the coastwide tautog stock as subject to overfishing and overfished because tautog was assessed as one stock during most of the reporting period.

Success of Federal Activities

For fiscal years 2013 through 2016, NMFS used funds to participate in the ASMFC process, the northern shrimp trawl survey in the Gulf of Maine, menhaden port sampling in Beaufort, North Carolina, and lobster management activities.

The USFWS used funds to participate in of the ASMFC process, North Carolina anadromous fish population characterization, deployment and maintenance of the Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, acoustic array and tagging database for striped bass, Atlantic sturgeon, and horseshoe crab recaptures.

Details of the federal activities funded can be found in Appendix 2.



Tagging Atlantic striped bass. Photo credit: R. Wilson Laney, PhD., USFWS.

Appendix 1 – List of Individual State Efforts to Support the Atlantic Coastal Act

Maine Department of Natural Resources – Marine Resources Monitoring of Maine Fisheries (Ongoing); FY15-16 Managing Mandatory Dealer Reporting in Maine; and Portside Commercial Catch Sampling and Comparative Bycatch Sampling for Atlantic Herring, Atlantic Mackerel, and Atlantic Menhaden Fisheries.

New Hampshire Fish and Game Department – Law Enforcement of ASMFC Managed Species in New Hampshire (Ongoing); and Programs Improving Management of ASMFC Managed Species in New Hampshire (Ongoing).

Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game – Massachusetts Fisheries Dependent Data Collection, Analysis & Dissemination (Ongoing); Swipe Card Pilot Implementation for Massachusetts Trip-Level Shellfish Transactions; and Electronic Trip-level Reporting for the For-Hire Sector.

Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management – Administrative Support to the ASMFC Fishery Management Process; Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management – Implementation of a Barcode Commercial Fishing License in Rhode Island; and Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management – Advancing Fishery Dependent Data Collection for Black Sea Bass in the Southern New England and Mid-Atlantic Region Using Modern Technology and a Fishing Vessel Research Fleet.

Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection – Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act; and Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection – Connecticut Interstate Marine Fisheries Management.

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation – Interstate Management of Marine Fisheries in New York State (Ongoing).

New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection – Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Program (Ongoing).

Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission – Bio-monitoring and Assessment Project for American Shad and River Herring in the Susquehanna River Basin (Ongoing).

Maryland Department of Natural Resources – Maryland Limited Entry for Fisheries Management (Ongoing); Maryland American Eel Population Study (Ongoing); and Improving Timeliness and Reporting Accuracy in Maryland: Expansion of Online Reporting for Maryland Commercial Fisheries.

Virginia Marine Resources Commission – Virginia Enforcement of Atlantic States Marine Fisheries, Commission Fishery Management Plans (Ongoing).

Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control – Coastal Fisheries Management Assistance (Ongoing).

Potomac River Fisheries Commission – Compliance with Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management (Ongoing).

District of Columbia Department of Environment – American Shad Population Dynamics and Stock Enhancement Assessment (Ongoing).

North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources – Enhancement of North Carolina Commercial Fisheries Data and Statistics (Ongoing); Pilot study: Characterization of bycatch and discards, including protected species interactions, in the commercial skimmer trawl fishery in North Carolina; North Carolina Commercial and Recreational Fisheries Age and Sex Data Collection; and Characterization of finfish bycatch and discards, including protected species interactions, in the cobia hook-and-line fishery.

South Carolina Department of Natural Resources – Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act Program in South Carolina (Ongoing).

Georgia Department of Natural Resources – Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act Planning and Implementation for the conducting of surveys, administration and education to support the Atlantic Coastal Act (Ongoing).

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission – Florida Atlantic Coast Stock Assessments (Ongoing); and Increase Intercept Sampling Levels for the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS), For-Hire Methodology, of the Charter Boat and Head-boat Fishery on the Atlantic Coast.

Appendix 2 – List of Individual Federal Projects to Support the Atlantic Coastal Act

NMFS used funds to implement the following:

- Support of the ASMFC process – Funds have provided partial support for NMFS staff to participate in the ASMFC process, and joint processes with the regional fishery management councils (New England, Mid-Atlantic, and South Atlantic). This includes participation on management and policy boards, as well as technical committees, providing leadership and assistance with workshops, development and analysis of management actions, plan development, stock assessments, and identification of habitat needs.
- Northern Shrimp Trawl Survey – The Gulf of Maine Northern Shrimp survey was initiated in 1983 and has since been conducted annually aboard the R/V Gloria Michelle. It is a standardized survey conducted during July and August that employs a stratified random design and standard field data collection procedures similar to those used in Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) multispecies bottom trawl surveys. This survey, which was developed and implemented with support from the ASMFC, provides the primary fishery-independent data source for the assessment and management of the Gulf of Maine Northern shrimp stock. The NEFSC has held lead responsibility for conducting this survey and for processing and archiving the resulting data. The Northern Shrimp Technical Committee of the ASMFC plays a supporting role in staffing this survey.
- Menhaden port sampling, Beaufort, North Carolina – The objective of this effort is to provide science-based stock assessment support to the ASMFC to ensure Atlantic Coast states compliance with conservation measures for Atlantic menhaden. The efforts and inputs include staff time and analysis for sampling, sample work-up and related data activities at a Chesapeake Bay processing plant (Reedville, Virginia), and for aging the menhaden, processing data, maintaining records, monitoring landings, and conducting assessments at the NMFS Beaufort Lab.
- Lobster Management Activities – The service of an environmental technician is currently being supported to provide programmatic and administrative support services to the Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office’s Sustainable Fisheries Division. Services provided are specific to the development and implementation of federal lobster management actions under the authority of the Act and consistent with the recommendations of the ASMFC’s Interstate Fishery Management Plan for American lobster. Lobster services/deliverables provided under the contract are limited to following tasks: lobster trap tag program; lobster trap limited access program; lobster trap transfer program; as well as general Atlantic Coastal Act fisheries program support.

The USFWS used funds to implement the following:

- Support of the ASMFC process – Provide partial support for participation of USFWS personnel in the ASMFC process, and joint processes with Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and South Atlantic Fishery Management Council. This includes participation on management and policy boards, as well technical committees, providing leadership and assistance with workshops, development and analysis of management actions, plan development, stock assessments, and identification of habitat needs. USFWS also coordinates and implements the cooperative winter tagging cruise, partnering with the ASMFC, NMFS, North Carolina, Maryland, Virginia, and other states to conduct mandatory tagging of migratory striped bass for mortality calculations, opportunistic tagging of Atlantic sturgeon (if authorized), as well as to assess winter habitat use off North Carolina and Virginia for other species. Lastly, the USFWS assists in preparing the Striped Bass Biennial Report to Congress.
- North Carolina anadromous fish population characterization – Provided on-going hydroacoustic monitoring of anadromous fish populations in the Roanoke River, one of the least fragmented, most intact, bottomland

hardwood ecosystems on the U.S. East Coast. The watersheds in coastal North Carolina, including the Roanoke, Tar-Pamlico, Neuse and Cape Fear drainages, historically were the epicenter of anadromous fisheries on the U.S. East Coast. Former anadromous nursery and spawning habitats above the Roanoke Rapids, Gaston, John H. Kerr, Rocky Mount Mills, Falls, and Cape Fear River Locks and dams are currently blocked.

- Deployment and maintenance of Cape Hatteras acoustic array – Provide funding to support ongoing retrieval, refurbishment and redeployment of the VR2W acoustic array to the southeast of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. This array has detected spiny dogfish which were implanted with acoustic tags and released during the Cooperative Winter Tagging Cruise, and also numerous individuals of many other species tagged by multiple researchers along the Atlantic Coast.
- Tagging database for striped bass, Atlantic sturgeon, and horseshoe crab recaptures – Provide funding and coordination of the coast-wide cooperative striped bass, Atlantic sturgeon and horseshoe crab tagging programs. Coordination includes tag acquisition, distribution, and recovery; assistance to partners in sampling and tagging fish; and administration of reward programs. These tagging programs are a cooperative effort among federal and state agencies, research institutions, private companies, and commercial and recreational fishermen. The striped bass tagging program provides information on distribution, migration, and mortality to assist in making management and restoration decisions.



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