

COMMERCIAL FISHERIES RESEARCH FOUNDATION

The Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation is a non-profit, private research foundation founded and directed by members of the commercial fishing industry. The CFRF's primary mission is to conduct collaborative research and education projects that assist in the achievement of sustainable fisheries and vibrant fishing communities.

MESSAGE CORNER:

For decades we've tried to sort out a means to improve the value of scup to fishermen. A goal has been to diminish the reliance of the consignment market in the cities (New York City, Jessup/Baltimore and Philadelphia) to allow supply and demand to dictate the pricing. CFRF took on the incredible challenge to seek such a solution by enhancing marketing of scup. Fortunately, scup stocks are sustainable for the long term, but the challenges were many: fillet machines for volume, fresh vs. frozen, fish size, fillet size, vacuum packs, fresh/frozen finish fillets and marketing outlets. We agreed to collaborate with Pier Fish Company to process and market, Johnson & Wales University and local chefs to provide exquisite recipes, tastings and nutritional value, and RI fish dealers for quality product. For over four years this partnership was all led at CFRF by research biologist Mike Long. Mike toiled with the team, experimenting and confronting trials until a viable fillet was available. Earlier this month, the entire team displayed their fillets at the Seafood Expo North America with chefs producing delicious "scup tacos" to a receptive audience of fish buyers. Pier Fish salesmen cultivated interest of potential buyers from supermarket chains and institutional markets. The future is brighter due to the tenacious effort of Mike and the collaborators.

Fred Mattera, CFRF President

PROJECT RESULTS: DEVELOPMENT OF A MARKETABLE SEAFOOD PRODUCT FROM SCUP



Our scup processing and marketing project finally came to its culmination this month. The goal of the project was to develop a frozen scup fillet product that met consumer demand, improved prices, and justified expanded harvest of this underutilized species. In achievement of that goal, we debuted vacuum sealed, boneless and skinless frozen scup fillets in an exhibitor booth and the New Product Showcase at the Seafood Expo North America in Boston. This is the biggest seafood show in the country, bringing together more than 1,300 suppliers from 49 countries to provide North America's seafood buyers access to their products. At the booth, CFRF and Commercial Fisheries Center of Rhode Island staff relayed the sustainability of the scup fishery, fishermen perspectives and the market challenges scup faces. Pier Fish Company staff met with potential retail and food service buyers. Chef Josh Berman of JB Cuisine and Johnson and Wales University students

served nearly 1,000 free fried scup tacos to potential buyers and Expo attendees. Dodge Associates produced great outreach materials for the booth, while the Sustainability Incubator set the stage with a press release prior to the event. A true example of teamwork! Feedback throughout the Expo was extremely positive, and Pier Fish staff received many promising sales inquiries that will likely lead to expanding the market for scup in its new frozen fillet form. This project originally started in 2018, but due to Covid-19 delays, the project was extended several times to ensure that the final frozen fillet product could be presented at the Seafood Expo. We are thankful to the NOAA Saltonstall-Kennedy program for funding this project and working with us to extend it.

We are now preparing the final project report, which will be available on the project website when completed. If you'd like to read the final report once released and find out more about the project, visit the project webpage [here](#).



PROJECT UPDATE: LOBSTER AND JONAH CRAB RESEARCH FLEET

Even in the face of rough weather and storms this fall, the Lobster and Jonah Crab Research Fleet was hard at work sampling over 5,000 lobsters and 2,900 Jonah crab since November. This brings the total number of lobster and Jonah crabs sampled since 2013 to over 181,500 and 107,400, respectively. This is impressive and we would like to thank all the fishermen involved for their time and effort! The data collected by the Research Fleet are incorporated into the lobster and Jonah crab biosamples databases at the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program and used extensively in the lobster stock assessment and upcoming Jonah crab stock assessment. The effort from the Research Fleet has also been used to support several supplemental projects to help better understand the lobster and Jonah crab resource. One includes working with Jim Manning at the Northeast Fisheries Science Center to incorporate CFRF's bottom water temperature data into his larger data set. Another, in collaboration with Jessica Waller (ME DMR) and Dr. Tracy Pugh (MA DMF), led to a publication in *Fisheries Research* about lobster size at maturity in offshore areas (see the publications section at the end of the newsletter).

The Research Fleet will continue data collection, with support by the Campbell Foundation, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, and NOAA's Saltonstall-Kennedy Program. We are looking to bring on additional offshore vessels. Please visit the project webpage [here](#) to find more information about this project and an application form to join the fleet.



PROJECT UPDATE: SOUTH FORK WIND FARM FISHERIES MONITORING—FISH POT SURVEY



Year-1 of the South Fork Wind Farm Fish Pot survey came to a close with the final survey trip occurring on December 29th. The survey is designed to determine the spatial scale of potential impacts of wind farm turbine construction on the abundance and distribution of structured associated finfish species. A huge thanks go out to Joe Baker and Evan Adams of F/V Harvest Moon for their attention and dedication throughout the first year of the survey! Catch throughout the sampling season fluctuated but was dominated by Jonah crabs and black sea bass. Crab catch peaked in August and December. Black sea bass catch increased through the initial survey months and peaked in October and remained high through December. Scup catches were consistent throughout the survey, but were only a fraction of the amount of black sea bass. Other species of fish such as cunner and conger eels were common in some months but never in the abundances of black sea bass or even scup.

More information on this project can be found [here](#). Funding for this monitoring is provided by South Fork Wind LLC.

PROJECT UPDATE: SOUTH FORK WIND FARM FISHERIES MONITORING—GILLNET SURVEY

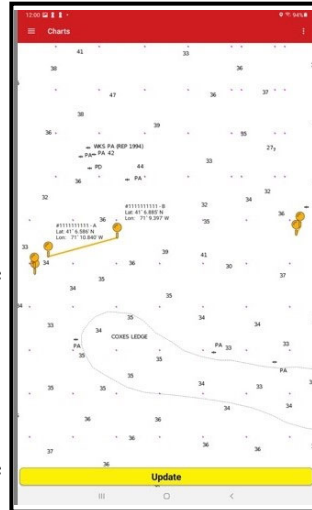
This December marked the completion of the first year of the gillnet survey. The survey is conducted in partnership with the F/V Cailyn and Maren and F/V More Misery, and is designed to assess the seasonal abundance, distribution, movement and habitat use of winter skate and monkfish in the South Fork Wind Farm area and two reference areas to the east and west of Cox Ledge. The eastern reference area encountered 20 different species and was dominated by skates (both winter and little skates), monkfish, bluefish, summer flounder and spiny dogfish. The proposed wind farm area encountered 23 different species and was dominated by skates, monkfish, bluefish, Jonah crab and spiny dogfish. Finally, the western area had the most species encountered (27!) and was dominated by winter skate, sea scallops, monkfish, bluefish, little skate and Atlantic menhaden. The second year of the survey will kick off next month.

More information on this project can be found [here](#). Funding for this monitoring is provided by South Fork Wind LLC.



NEW PROJECT: ELECTRONIC GEAR LOCATION MARKING

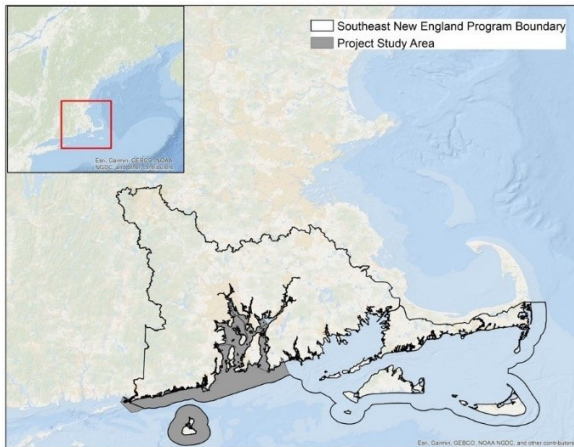
We are in the planning stages of a new project supported by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to test an electronic gear location marking application (app). To reduce gear entanglement by North Atlantic Right Whales, there has been a movement towards buoyless fishing systems. Less attention than needed has been given to the fact that without an adequate marking tool conflicts with mobile gear threaten the viability of several fisheries in shared fishing grounds. There is a crucial need for reliable technology that allows fishermen to identify the location of gear that does not have buoys. In collaboration with NOAA, this project will leverage our South Fork Wind Farm fisheries monitoring surveys and recruit additional fishermen to test the accuracy and utility of the Track Tracker app that was developed to fill this need, but has not been sufficiently tested. Our goals are to identify how accurately this app reflects the true location of marked gear, as well as to determine the usefulness of this app to fishermen. Stay tuned for project updates [here!](#)



Sample Track Tracker App Chart

NEW PROJECT: RHODE ISLAND GHOST GEAR REMOVAL PLAN

Ghost gear, or derelict fishing gear, impacts coastal Rhode Island waters. This new project builds on the results of a recently completed project which mapped ghost gear locations in Narragansett Bay. Now, with the support of commercial fishers and other regional stakeholders we will develop a cohesive, sustainable ghost gear management and removal plan to remove this gear and more from Rhode Island waters. As part of this project, we are



organizing regional partnerships to help develop and implement the plan, and will host a workshop in late summer that will bring together local stakeholders and international experts to discuss and evaluate the planning document. The project will conclude with outreach to the public on this plan and the issue of ghost gear. See our project webpage [here](#) for workshop, public meeting announcements and outreach materials. This project is funded by the Southeast New England Program watershed grants.

NEW BOARD MEMBER: KATIE ALMEIDA, THE TOWN DOCK:

We are excited to publicly welcome our newest board member, Katie Almeida. Katie is the Senior Representative of Government Relations and Sustainability for the Town Dock located in Point Judith, Rhode Island. The Town Dock is the largest supplier of calamari in the United States. They own six otter trawl vessels that fish for longfin squid, illex squid, whiting, butterfish, fluke, scup, black sea bass, herring, and a mix of groundfish. Katie is responsible for following all state and federal regulations that pertain to the species on which the Town Dock relies. She sits on the Squid/Mackerel/Butterfish, Fluke/Scup/Black Sea Bass, River Herring/Shad, and Small Mesh Multispecies Advisory Panels. She also is a part of the New Bedford working group for Wind Industry Issues and the Rhode Island Industry Advisory Committee. Further, she is a board member of the Responsible Offshore Development Alliance and Responsible Offshore Science Alliance. She brings a lot of valuable experience and connections to help guide CFRF.



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MORE ON-GOING PROJECTS:

- **A Pro-Seafood Climate Action Agenda:** A group of RI and MA fishing organizations initiated a process to craft a narrative on climate solutions that places wild seafood production at its core. Contact Sarah Schumann (schumannsarah@gmail.com) for more information.
- **Assessing the Vulnerability of the Atlantic Sea Scallop Social-Ecological System:** This project looks at how vulnerable sea scallop fishing communities are to ocean acidification and warming water temperatures and develops recommendations on how to build resiliency to these changes. For more information on this project visit [here](#).
- **Black Sea Bass Research Fleet:** In partnership with RI DEM, the Black Sea Bass Research Fleet produces year-round estimates of black sea bass catch, bycatch, and biological data for seven different gear types in the Southern New England and Mid-Atlantic regions. More information can be found [here](#).
- **Catalyzing the Restoration of the Bay Scallop:** This project seeks to help develop a restoration plan for bay scallops in Rhode Island. Information on this project can be found [here](#).
- **Phase II Piloting a N-Viro Dredge in the Scallop Fishery:** This project builds on previous work to utilize this dredge to reduce bycatch, including small scallops, in the sea scallop fishery. To follow along with the N-Viro dredge project and read the Phase I project report, visit the CFRF project webpage [here](#).
- **Piloting a Low-Bycatch Automatic Squid Jig Fishery:** This project investigates the feasibility of automatic squid jigging machinery, used in other large-scale squid fisheries worldwide, in the southern New England Longfin squid fishery. Check out the project [here](#) for more information and updates.
- **Salinity Maximum Intrusions:** This project will map intrusions of warm, salty water that may influence fish distributions in Southern New England. Check out the blog at <https://sirates.sites.umassd.edu/> and our project webpage [here](#) for more information.
- **Sea Scallop Research Fleet:** This project seeks to develop and test methods of collecting individual weights and spawning condition of scallops during normal fishing operations. For project updates visit [here](#).
- **Shelf Research Fleet:** In partnership with Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution the Shelf Research Fleet collects oceanographic data along the continental shelf. More information can be found [here](#).
- **South Fork Wind Farm Fisheries Monitoring— Beam Trawl Survey:** This survey is designed to help determine potential impacts of wind farm development on bottom dwelling animals. More information can be found [here](#).
- **South Fork Wind Farm Fisheries Monitoring—Ventless Trap Survey:** The goal of the survey is to assess the seasonal abundance, distribution, movement, and habitat use of lobster and Jonah crab in the South Fork Wind Farm area and two reference areas to the east and west. More information can be found at [here](#).
- **Whelk Research Fleet:** In partnership with RI DEM, this project seeks to fill data gaps in the combined Knobbed and Channeled Whelk fishery across southern New England through fishermen collected data. Please visit the webpage for more information [here](#).

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH:

- In January, David Bethoney presented results from our ghost gear work at the Land to Sea Speaker Series.
- In February, Aubrey Ellertson joined fellow members of the Sea Grant American Lobster Initiative for a network-wide meeting to discuss ways to foster collaboration and a sense of community across the expanding research program.
- In March, Aubrey Ellertson attended the virtual Ocean Science Meeting and presented “*Fishermen on the Front Lines of a Warming Ocean: The Shelf Research Fleet*”.

RECENT RELEASES, PUBLICATIONS, AWARDS AND UPCOMING EVENTS:

- **Event:** Research Workshop on Jonah Crab Management, April 6th, 3-7pm. For information and to RSVP, visit [here](#).
- **Article:** “[Scientists, Shellfishermen Seek Strategies to Sustain Ocean State’s Dwindling Bay Scallop Populations](#)” - ecoRI News, January 2022
- **Recent Publication:** “[Differences in the size at maturity of female American lobsters \(*Homarus americanus*\) from offshore Southern New England and eastern Georges Bank.](#)” (Ellertson et al. 2022), Fisheries Research, Volume 250
- **Press Release:** “[SENA Launch Sustainable Wild Atlantic Scup for Food Service](#)”, March 2022

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