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## **NOAA Fisheries Service Considers Listing Eastern Oyster as Threatened or Endangered**

The NOAA Fisheries Service announced today that it will review the status of eastern oysters (*Crassostrea virginica*) along the Atlantic and Gulf coast to determine if the species warrants protection under the federal Endangered Species Act.

NOAA Fisheries Service received a petition in January from the Ecosystem Initiatives Advisory Services to list the eastern oyster as threatened or endangered under the ESA. Since then, the agency has reviewed the information submitted with the listing petition, and determined it presents enough information to initiate a status review. NOAA Fisheries Service will appoint a status review team over the next several weeks to compile the available information and evaluate the status of the species. Results of the full status review are expected in January 2006.

“Oysters can tolerate wide variations in the environment, but preliminary data suggest that their numbers have declined significantly, possibly due to both harvest and disease,” said William T. Hogarth, assistant administrator for NOAA Fisheries Service. “We will look at this very carefully and will determine if listing is warranted.”

NOAA Fisheries Service is asking for documented information for use in the status review, such as descriptions of current or past distribution, abundance, population condition, information on the existence of subspecies, and details on restoration and protection efforts. A full explanation of information sought can be found in today's Federal Register notice. NOAA Fisheries Service is also accepting the names of recognized experts that could participate in a peer review of the status review.

The eastern oyster lives in North American estuaries, from the Gulf of St. Lawrence to the Yucatan Peninsula. Oyster reefs are a dominant feature of many eastern U.S. coastal estuaries. In addition to supporting fisheries, oysters and the reefs they construct provide shelter and habitat for many other estuarine organisms, improve water quality and reduce bank erosion.

U.S. Atlantic Coast landings of eastern oysters have decreased from a high of 160.6 million pounds in 1890, to 2.4 million pounds in 2003.

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NOAA Fisheries Service will accept comments on today's announcement through July 17. Comments can be submitted by mail, e-mail and fax. For more information on submitting comments, contact Kimberly Damon-Randall, NOAA Fisheries Service, Northeast Regional Office, (978) 281-9300, ext. 6535, Marta Nammack, NOAA Fisheries Service, HQ, (301) 713-1401, ext. 180, or Jennifer Moore, NOAA Fisheries Service Southeast Regional Office, (727) 824-5312.

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

NOAA, an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through research to better understand atmospheric and climate variability and to manage wisely our nation's coastal and marine resources.

More information is available at:  
[http://www.nero.noaa.gov/prot\\_res/CandidateSpeciesProgram/eas.htm](http://www.nero.noaa.gov/prot_res/CandidateSpeciesProgram/eas.htm)

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