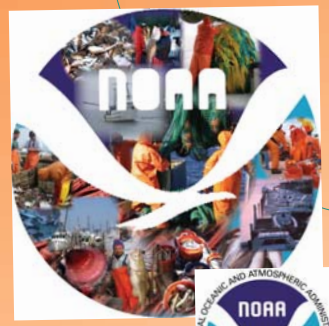
Northeast Cooperative Research

PARTNERS PROGRAM



Working Collaboratively to Guide Fishery Management Decisions in the Northeast Region

NOAA Fisheries Service Northeast Regional Office developed the Northeast Cooperative Research Partners Program (NCRPP) to improve the management of the fishery resources in the Northeast region through research developed and conducted in collaborative working relationships involving the fishing industry, managers and scientists. The program involves partners from federal, state and private organizations that work together to address research priorities and establish common informational goals.

Partners associated with the program cover a wide range of individuals and organizations and include: fishing organizations such as the Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fisherman's Association; gear specialists and other scientists at Universities in Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Rhode Island; scientific organizations such as the Gulf of Maine Research Institute and the Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences; and, of course, individual commercial and recreational fishermen who contribute their time and expertise.

The Partners Program is only one of several programs that conduct and facilitate cooperative research in the Northeast region. The program, which is administered by the Northeast Region in cooperation with the Northeast Fisheries Science Center, is part of the Northeast Cooperative Research Program. This Research Program also includes cooperative research projects that are administered separately by the Science Center. These include programs related to monkfish, yellowtail flounder, and surfclams. NOAA Fisheries Service also provides funds for cooperative research to the Northeast Consortium which is engaged in cooperative research and monitoring projects in the Gulf of Maine and Georges Bank.

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Since 1999, the NCRPP has funded a total of 52 research projects at a cost of over 26 million dollars. Funding for research has been allocated to both longer and shorter term research projects. Longer term cooperative research programs involve the collection of both fisheries independent and dependent data. They include industry based resource surveys to collect fishery independent information, a fishermen's study fleet to collect fishery dependent information in higher resolution, and a tagging program to study movements and aggregation patterns of cod.

INDUSTRY BASED SURVEYS

The Gulf of Maine Cod Assessment is one of three Industry Based Surveys funded by the NCRPP. Industry based surveys for cod and yellowtail were pilot projects that were funded by the NCRPP from 2002 through 2005. The Maine-New Hampshire inshore trawl survey has been funded by both the NCRPP and the Northeast Consortium since 2001. These surveys are referred to as "Industry Based" because they are conducted on commercial fishing vessels, rather than research vessels.

The surveys for cod investigates aggregations of cod in time and space, and collects information on age and spawning behavior. The yellowtail survey is designed to collect stock demographics of yellowtail flounder by season and area. The Maine-New Hampshire inshore trawl survey collects important information on a number of recreationally and commercially important species found in the Gulf of Maine.

STUDY FLEET

The NCRPP Study Fleet Program was a pilot project to develop and implement state-of-the-art electronic data reporting devices for use aboard groundfish fishing vessels in the Northeast. The goal of the project was to design and field test electronic reporting hardware for collecting, recording, and transferring more accurate and timely fishery-based data. The vessels participating in the Study Fleet collected more detailed information on a number of fish species for potential use in stock assessments and management decisions. Data collected from this pilot project will be evaluated to determine how and where the reporting devices will be used to collect fisheries data.

COD TAGGING

The Northeast Regional Cod Tagging program is a NCRPP-fu longer term project. In 2005, the tagging objective of the study was met with over 100,000 cod tagged and released. This project united fishermen and research organizations from Canada to Cape Cod in a large-le tagging effort aboard commercial and recreational fishing vessels. The tags identify when and where the fish were released. Fishermen who catch tagged fish and return the tags identify when and where they were recaptured, providing critical insight into Atlantic cod tribution and migration patterns.

SHORT-TERM RESEARCH

In addition to these longer term projects, numerous shorter term research projects are funded annually and include research projects on a broad range of topics.

Funded projects have included research on gear selectivity, fish habitat, stock assessments, and socioeconomics. In 2004, a total of 7 projects were funded that involved the special access programs established by the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan. For example, one study is examining the difference between a large-mesh, faced bottom trawl and a regular trawl net in reduction of cod and other bycatch in the haddock fishery. Shorter term research in 2005 included topics related to ecosystems based fishery management socioeconomic aspects of recreational and commercial marine fisheries in the Northeast, strategies for enhancing safety at sea, and commercial gear modifications to reduce bycatch.

MANAGEMENT AND SCIENCE IMPLICATIONS

Results to date indicate that the money for the NCRPP has been well spent. NCRPP projects have produced information that has significantly enhanced the understanding of a number of fishery resources as well as contributed to the body of information used to make management decisions.

For example, gear research on whiting net designs conducted by the Maine Department of Marine Resources led to the approval of Framework Adjustment 38 to the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan, which allowed for a seasonal whiting fishery in the inshore Gulf of Maine using the modified gear.

In addition, data collected from the industry based Maine/New Hampshire trawl survey has been used in a stock assessment model for American lobster, the latest monkfish assessment, setting specifications for Atlantic Herring, documenting the recruitment and abundance of Atlantic menhaden, determining the 2004-2005 fishing season for Northern shrimp, and designing a video survey assessment for Jonah crab.

Research projects have also provided additional information not related to the primary objectives of the research. For example, the industry based survey for cod has been used to supply data for a fecundity study of Gulf of Maine cod, on cod otoliths for comparative study with archaeological samples from Native American sites in Southern Maine, otope analysis and DNA and RNA/DNA ratios on cod and haddock, and fecundity studies for rainbow smelt and yellowtail flounder.

However, the most important result of the NCRPP is also the most angible: better communication and collaboration among managers, scientists and the fishing industry. This has allowed resource managers and scientists to better understand fishing practices and operations on the water, as well as to benefit from the tremendous knowledge that can only be attained from one-on-one communications with industry participants. Collaboration has helped the industry to gain an enhanced appreciation of scientific methods and the pathway by which the best available information can most effectively be made available for consideration by fishery managers.