

EASTERN OYSTER

Stock Status – Concern – Long term decline caused by over harvesting and habitat disturbances. Sampling data shows DERMO has declined in recent years and commercial landings have shown some improvement. Recreational landings are unknown. The Oyster Sanctuary Program has increased the biomass of oysters in and around the Pamlico Sound area.

Average Commercial Landings and Value 2000-2009 – 364,143 lbs. of meat/\$1,628,987

2009 Commercial Landings and Value – 573,630 lbs. of meat/\$2,655,463

Average Recreational Landings 2000-2009 –Unknown

Status of Fisheries Management Plan – A state fishery management plan (FMP) was adopted August 2001 by the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission. The FMP was amended in 2003 to change the criteria for mechanical harvest methods only. Amendment II was adopted June 26, 2008. Recommendations are currently being implemented.

Research and Data Needs – Habitat size and location; oyster density within habitat; fishing mortality and substrate disturbance caused by different harvest techniques; Catch-Per-Unit-Effort (CPUE) data; parasite: life history, means of transmission, and possible control methods; effects of pollutants; effects of bottom disturbing fishing gear; accurate landing data for commercial and recreational harvest from public and private bottom

Current Minimum Size Limit – 3-inch shell length

Harvest Season – Open season October 15 through March 31, DMF director may impose any or all of the following restrictions:

- Specify days of the week harvesting will be allowed.
- Specify areas.
- Specify means and methods, which may be employed in the taking.
- Specify the time period.
- Specify the quantity, but shall not exceed possession of more than 50 bushels.
- Specify the minimum size limit by shell length, but not less than 2 ½ inches.

Size and Age at Maturity – 2 inch shell length/4 weeks-12 weeks after settlement.

Historical and Current Maximum Age – 40 years old/unknown

Juvenile Abundance Indices 2000-2009 – 1.87, **2009**–3.09
(Spatfall information on cultch planting sites available on request)

Habits/Habitats – Oysters are bivalve mollusks residing in intertidal or subtidal estuarine environments. A relatively clean firm substrate where water circulation provides sufficient food is necessary for oysters to attach, survive and grow to market size (3 inches). Optimal salinity and temperature ranges are 12 to 25 ppt. and 10 to 16 degrees C (50 to 79 degrees F) respectively. Spawning is triggered by increases in temperature (> 20 degrees C), and salinity (>10 ppt.) and occurs in North Carolina from May through September.

For more information, please contact Clay Caroon at clay.caroon@ncdenr.gov (phone 800-682-2632 or 252-808-8058).