

EASTERN OYSTER

(06/07 ARCHIVE - NCDMF)

Stock Status – Concern - Long-term decline caused by over harvesting, habitat disturbances and pollution. Dermo (*Perkinsus marinus*) infections persist in all areas but mortality rates have been significantly reduced in recent years due to less favorable environmental conditions for the parasite. Landings have responded accordingly with the most notable development being the return of a small but viable fishery in Pamlico Sound. However, oysters continue to be highly vulnerable to overfishing because disease, water quality (low dissolved oxygen), and habitat impacts can significantly reduce population levels in a matter of months.

Average Commercial Landings and Value 1997-2006 – 281,985 lbs. of meat/\$1,208,599

2006 Commercial Landings and Value – 447,452 lbs. of meat/\$2,232,380

Average Recreational Landings 1997-2006 – Unknown, **2006** - Unknown

Status of Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) - A state FMP was adopted August 2001 by the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission. Recommendations are currently being implemented. The FMP was amended in 2003 to change the criteria for hand-harvest methods only. An update of the 2001 FMP is in development and scheduled for completion in April 2008.

Research and Data Needs - Habitat size and location; oyster density within habitat; fishing mortality and substrate disturbance caused by 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 Regulations (2007) – 3-inch shell length

Harvest Season - Open season October 15 through May 15, 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 -12 weeks after settlement.

Historical and Current Maximum Age - 40 years/unknown

Juvenile Abundance Index 1997-2006=1.09, **2006**= 1.79
(Spatfall information on cultch planting sites available on request)

Habits and 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° C (50° to 79° F) respectively. Spawning is triggered by increases in temperature (> 20° C), and salinity (>10 ppt.) and occurs in North Carolina from May through September.

For more information, see [DMF Species Leads page](#)