EASTERN OYSTER
(06/09 ARCHIVE - NCDMF)

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 oyster in and around the Pamlico Sound Area. The Oyster Shell Recycling Program continues to expand outreach activities to collect post-consumer shell to enhance oyster habitat in cultch planting, hatcheries, and sanctuaries.

Average Commercial Landings and Value 1999-2008 - 328,405 lbs. of meat/$1,455,464

2008 Commercial Landings and Value - 465,563 lbs. of meat/$2,036,491

Average Recreational Landings 1999-2008 — unknown, **2008** — 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 mechanical harvest methods only. Amendment II was adopted June 26, 2008 and recommended maintaining current catch limits with no harvest cap until changes in catch rates occur. Amendment II also recommended increase shellfish sampling programs and institute collection of recreational shellfishing data to acquire the necessary data for a complete oyster population assessment.

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 Regulations - A 3-inch shell length minimum size limit for commercial and recreational fishermen. The commercial and recreational fisheries are regulated by proclamation each year. Check with NCDMF for the most recent proclamation on oysters. The NCDMF director may impose any or all of the following restrictions: harvest days, areas, time periods, methods and means of taking, quantity that cannot exceed a possession of more than 50 bushels.

Harvest Season - Open season can occur only between October 15 through March 31. The open season can vary within this time period through proclamation.

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 Average 1999-2008 - 1.57, **2008** - 2.35
(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 degrees C (50 to 79° F) respectively. Spawning is triggered by increases in temperature (> 20° C), and salinity (>10 ppt.) and occurs in N.C. from May through September.

For more information, see DMF Species Leads page.