



News Release

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New Report Highlights Ways to Keep Blue Crab Population Healthy

The Chesapeake Bay blue crab fishery is currently operating sustainably, according to the recently released 2012 Chesapeake Bay Blue Crab Advisory Report. While the report highlights the health of the blue crab population, it also recommends continued work to sustain robust crab populations over the long term.

The report was developed by the Chesapeake Bay Stock Assessment Committee, which includes scientists and representatives from federal and state governments as well as academic institutions. It is based on data collected in the Bay-wide winter dredge survey (a cooperative effort between Maryland and Virginia) and on annual estimates of blue crab harvest. The report recommends:

- **Female Crabs:** While the target is to have 215 million adult female crabs in the Bay, estimates indicate that there were roughly 97 million adult female crabs in the Bay at the beginning of the 2012 crabbing season—above the overfishing threshold of 70 million. Because the number of female crabs has declined over the past two years, the jurisdictions that manage blue crabs should ensure that harvest of female crabs is limited relative to their overall numbers.
- **Male Crabs:** Currently, management focuses on limiting the Bay-wide harvest of female crabs to target levels. To ensure the overall fishery remains healthy, the jurisdictions should continue to monitor trends in male abundance and consider adopting a conservation trigger for the male component of the population.
- **Recreational Harvest:** Recreational harvest of crabs affects overall crab population figures. To sharpen accuracy of the data, improving estimates of recreational harvest of blue crabs must be made a priority.

“The recent history of blue crabs in the Bay is a success story, thanks to resource managers using science to make important decisions,” said Peyton Robertson, director of the NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office and chair of the Chesapeake Bay Program’s Sustainable Fisheries Goal Implementation Team. “We at NOAA are committed to delivering science that managers use to ensure a sustainable fishery for Chesapeake Bay blue crabs.”

“After 23 years of consistent sampling, the winter dredge survey has become a powerful tool for assessing the health of the stock and for offering sound management advice. Next year, we’ll be looking carefully at the survival of the record 2012 year-class, since they will become our spawning crabs in 2013,” said Lynn Fegley of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, current chair of the Chesapeake Bay Stock Assessment Committee.

The advisory report, posted at http://www.chesapeakebay.net/groups/group/sustainable_fisheries (click on the “Publications” tab), was formally approved by the Chesapeake Bay Program’s Sustainable Fisheries Goal Implementation Team. The Team provides a forum to discuss fishery management issues that cross state and other jurisdictional boundaries and better connect sound science to management decision making.

The Chesapeake Bay Program is a regional partnership that has coordinated and conducted the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay since 1983. Partners include the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; the U.S. Department of Agriculture; the states of Delaware, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia; the District of Columbia; the Chesapeake Bay Commission, a tri-state legislative body; many federal agencies; and advisory groups of citizens, scientists and local government officials. Visit www.chesapeakebay.net.

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