Hard Clam Fishery Management Plan Amendment 3

Summary

The Hard Clam is a commercially and recreationally important molluscan shellfish species harvested in North Carolina's estuarine waters. The commercial Hard Clam fishery has been in decline since its peak in the 1980's. The mechanical harvest portion of the commercial fishery has seen the most pronounced decline, landing less than 2% of the fishery's peak harvest (1995) each year from 2017 to 2022. Harvest from the recreational fishery cannot be quantified because the number of recreational shellfish harvesters in North Carolina is currently unknown.

The goal of the N.C. Hard Clam FMP is to manage the Hard Clam resource to provide long-term harvest and continue to offer protection and ecological benefits to North Carolina's estuaries.

The North Carolina Marine Fisheries Commission (MFC) adopted Amendment 3 to the Hard Clam Fishery Management Plan at its May 2025 business meeting. Habitat protection and quantifying recreational participants were the major issues addressed.

Recreational Harvest

The number of recreational shellfish harvesters in North Carolina is unknown, which prevents reliable estimates of total recreational harvest and hinders communication of human health and safety information. The DMF will further explore options and develop a solution to estimate recreational shellfish participation and landings, and develop a mechanism to provide all recreational shellfish harvesters with Shellfish Sanitation and Recreational Water Quality health and safety information.

Hard Clam FMP Information:	NCDMF Proclamation Webpage:	Sign up for NCDMF Proclamation

Questions?

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Mechanical Harvest

Bottom disturbing fishing gear, including hydraulic clam dredges, clam trawls (kickers), and shrimp and crab trawls cause direct physical damage to soft bottom habitat. These gears can also harm clam beds and oyster reefs indirectly by causing excessive sedimentation.

Since 1994, the mechanical Hard Clam fishery has steadily declined from a maximum harvest of over 8.7 million Hard Clams in 1995, to below 100,000 Hard Clams per year from 2017 to 2022. The precipitous decline in landings is mirrored by a similar decline in participation over the same period (Figure 1).

Each year the NCDMF invests significant resources to mark, monitor, and enforce mechanical clam harvest areas.

Due to these concerns about physical disturbance of SAV and oyster habitat by the gear, concerns about turbidity and sedimentation, dwindling participation and landings, and significant cost to demarcate, maintain, and enforce the fishery, the NCDMF re-examined the fishery in terms of whether the habitat value may outweigh the value of the fishery.

Adopted Management

Mechanical Clam Harvest

- Phase out mechanical clam harvest in three years (May 2028)

Mechanical Clam Harvest in Conjunction with Maintenance Dredging

- Discontinue allowance for mechanical clam harvest in conjunction with maintenance dredging

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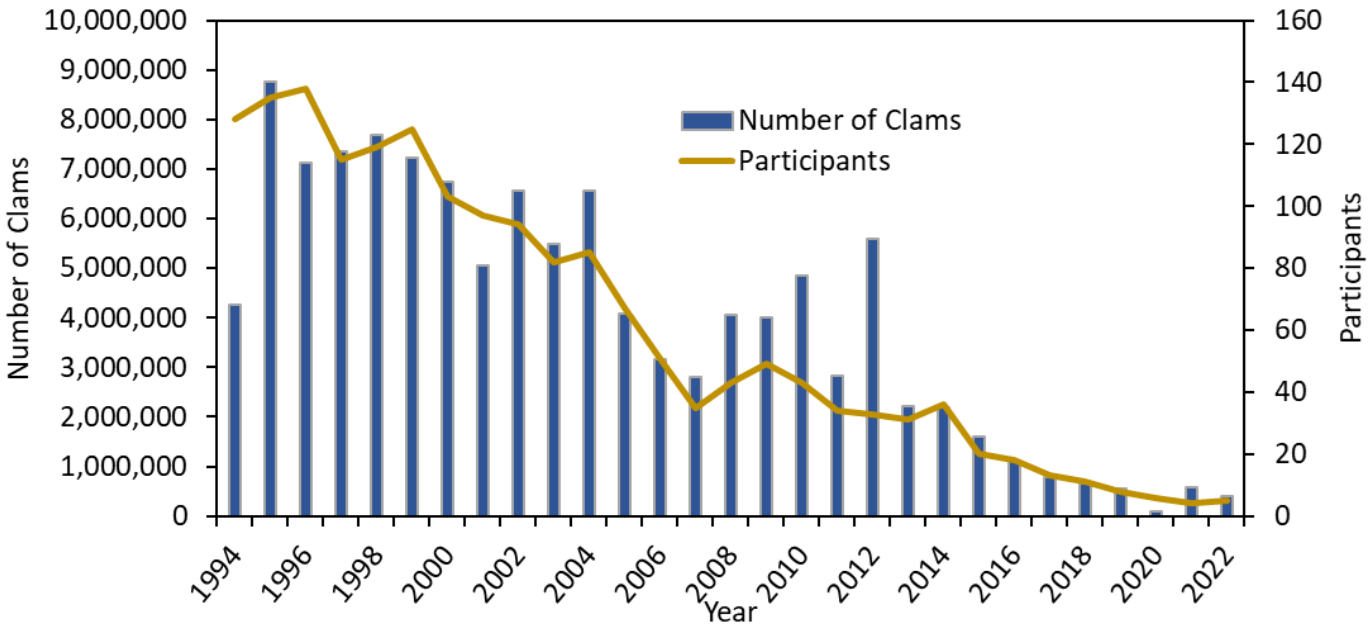

Figure 1. Hard Clam landings (number of clams) and number of participants using mechanical gears on public bottom by year