

Eastern Oyster Fishery Management Plan

Amendment 5

Summary

The North Carolina Marine Fisheries Commission (MFC) adopted Amendment 5 to the Eastern Oyster Fishery Management Plan at its May 2025 business meeting. Stock status is unknown due to insufficient data to conduct a traditional stock assessment. Recreational landings and fishing effort are unknown and cannot be quantified from the voluntary recreational survey.

The goal of the N.C. Eastern Oyster FMP is to manage the oyster resource in such a way as to enhance oyster populations that provide long-term harvest and continue to offer protection and ecological benefits to North Carolina's estuaries.



Mechanical Fishery Management

The mechanical oyster fishery is limited to subtidal open water regions of Pamlico Sound and its surrounding bays. To balance the value of oysters as a fishery resource and essential habitat, a three-tiered management strategy was adopted for oyster mechanical harvest management.

- **Deep-Water Oyster Recovery Areas** (habitat value > fishery value)
- **Cultch Supported Harvest** (habitat value = fishery value)
- **Rotational Harvest Cultch Sites** (habitat value < fishery value)



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.

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Deep-Water Oyster Recovery Areas

(habitat value > fishery value)

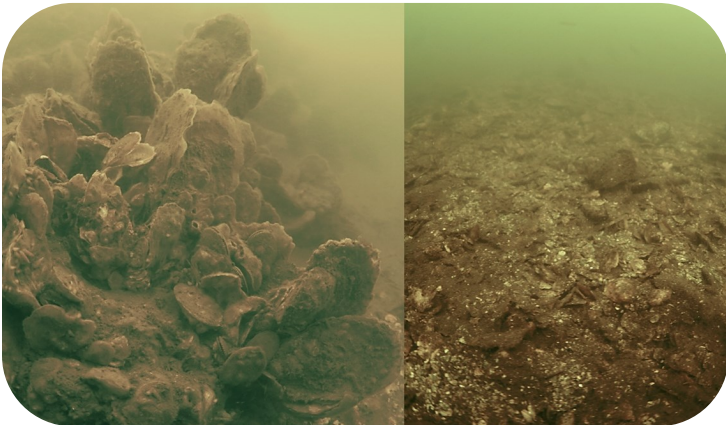
The first tier prioritizes the ecological value of oysters with the designation of Deep-water Oyster Recovery Areas (DORAs) at the mouth of the Pamlico and Neuse rivers by closing these areas to mechanical harvest. The DORA closures protect 81% of the identified deep-water oyster habitat, preventing further height loss and damage to recovering oyster reefs.



Rotational Harvest Cultch Sites

(habitat value < fishery value)

The third tier is the Rotational Cultch Site strategy, which uses rotational openings for 10-acre planting sites across four management areas in Pamlico Sound to further strengthen the integration of the NCDMF's Cultch Planting Program into management of the oyster fishery, prioritizing the fishery value of these sites.



Cultch Supported Harvest

(habitat value = fishery value)

The second tier is a Cultch Supported Harvest strategy that incorporates industry input to guide NCDMF pre-season sampling locations used to assess the percentage of legal-sized oysters to set fixed season lengths, which may only be extended, balancing habitat and fishery value and providing harvesters with greater certainty on the season length. NCDMF's extensive cultch planting program will continue to support the fishery by replenishing material lost through mechanical harvesting.



Adaptive management

To evaluate the effectiveness of the second tier, an adaptive management framework is included to evaluate fixed season lengths if participation in the mechanical harvest fishery changes by more than 25%. If adaptive management is triggered, season lengths may be lengthened, shortened, or maintained as previously adopted.

Eastern Oyster
FMP
Information:



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Questions?

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