The NOAA FISHERIES NAVIGATOR

Emergency Measures to Protect GOM cod and Provide Some Opportunities to Target Haddock

Effective Nov. 12, NOAA Fisheries, at the request of the New England Fishery Management Council, implemented a series of short-term management measures for the groundfish fishery. These measures are intended to reduce overfishing on the Gulf of Maine cod stock and provide some fishing opportunity on the abundant Gulf of Maine haddock stock.

The following Q&A is intended to address how this latest action affects fishermen.

Q: What are the new measures for Gulf of Maine haddock?

A: For Gulf of Maine haddock, the commercial fishery quota is being increased from approximately 676,812 pounds to around 1.3 million pounds.

Q: What are the specific measures for Gulf of Maine cod?

A: Specific interim management measures include:

- A combination of time/area closures for commercial and recreational fisheries to reduce overall Gulf of Maine cod catch, protect the core area of stock distribution from fishing removals, and help ensure that unimpeded spawning can occur;
- Limits on how much cod can be caught during a given fishing trip for both common pool and sector commercial vessels in open areas (200-pound trip limit);
- A prohibition on recreationally caught Gulf of Maine cod;
- A modified sector gillnet exemption, which will help reduce the amount of gillnet fishing gear in the water, particularly roundfish nets that are capable of catching cod; and
- A prohibition on vessels that fish for groundfish in the Gulf of Maine from fishing in any other management area during the same fishing trip. Prior to this action, fishing vessels were able to fish for groundfish in any or all of four management areas – inshore or offshore Georges Bank, in the Gulf of Maine, and in the Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic – on the same trip.

Q: How long will these interim measures be in place? Will the public have an opportunity to comment on them?

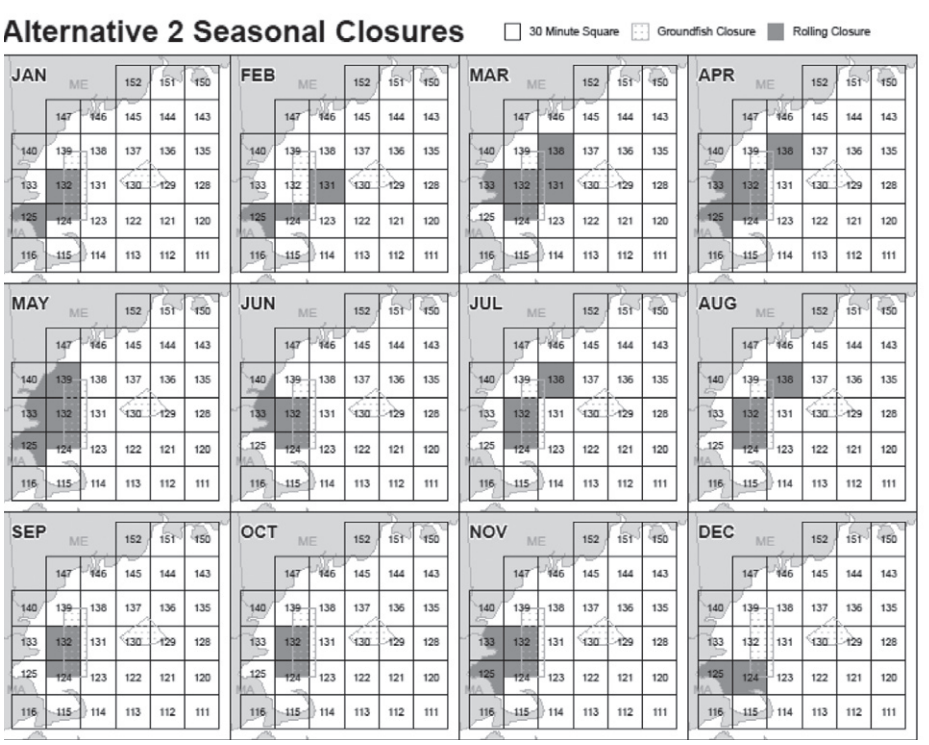
A: Under federal fisheries law, Secretarial actions that implement interim emergency management measures are put in place for six months. Any public input received on these interim measures during this time will be considered should we have to extend the action for a full year.

We would only extend these interim management measures if the council is not able to develop its management measures or puts forward insufficient measures to satisfy requirements under the law before the interim measures expire.

Q: How did you identify the closure areas?

A: We based our options on those already considered by the council. However, we expanded the times/areas to cover months where spawning was not well protected or where catch would not be reduced because there were insufficient, if any, closures.

These areas cover the majority of locations where cod were caught in high proportions during the 2010-2014 fishing years and are still likely concentrated. We also used documented information of cod spawning times and locations to help define other areas in need of protection.



Q: What is the current sector exemption pertaining to gillnet use?

A: Currently, sector gillnet vessels are allowed to fish up to 150 gillnets in all months except April and May, with no restriction on how many of the nets can be roundfish nets. Without the exemption, sector vessels now will be restricted to using 100 or fewer gillnets in the Gulf of Maine, only half of which can be roundfish nets.

Q: What are the new reporting requirements if you fish in the Gulf of Maine?

A: If a vessel has declared a trip into the Gulf of Maine broad stock area prior to leaving port, that vessel is now restricted from fishing outside of this area during that same trip.

This action will enable us to better monitor and account for cod caught in the Gulf of Maine. These measures are intended to affect only Gulf of Maine trips and, so, do not prevent vessels from fishing on both Georges Bank and in Southern New England on the same trip.

For more details on these measures, please visit our website at <www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/sustainable/species/multispecies> and review the interim and emergency rules for Gulf of Maine cod and haddock.

You Can Tailor GARFO E-mails to Better Suit Your Interests

The Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office (GARFO) is now using an e-mail service to send out notifications to the public. In addition to providing recipients with links to our website and other resources, this service allows you to customize the e-mails you receive from us.

If you are already on our e-mail list, you do not need to do anything since you are automatically signed up to receive all e-mail announcements from us.

However, if you would like to customize the types of announcements we send to you, simply click on the "update profile/e-mail address" link at the bottom of the next e-mail you receive from us. This will bring you to a list of topics to select from.

To select or unselect at topic, click on the box to the left and save your changes. Then, in the future, you will receive only announcements about the topics you selected.

If you currently are not on our e-mail list, you can sign up by visiting our website at <www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov> and clicking on the button in the left column that says "Get E-mail Updates." You then will be prompted to enter your first name and e-mail address, and select topics. Once you click the "sign up" button, you'll be signed up for our e-mail list.

If you have questions or trouble signing up, call Olivia Rugo, GARFO, at (978) 675-2167 or e-mail her at <Olivia.Rugo@noaa.gov>.

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Marine Mammal Authorization Program Exemptions Certificate Requirements

The Marine Mammal Authorization Program (MMAP) is a mandatory registration program for commercial fishermen. The program provides exemptions from the Marine Mammal Protection Act's prohibition on the accidental take of non-endangered/threatened marine mammals during commercial fishing activities.

In the Greater Atlantic Region, fishermen are automatically registered for the year if they have a valid state/federal license/permit as of Jan. 1.

This certificate requirement applies to all fishermen who fish in federal and state waters using the following types of commercial fishing gear:

- Gillnets;
- Pelagic longlines;
- Traps/pots;
- Midwater or bottom trawls, including pair trawls and flynets;
- Menhaden purse seines in the Mid-Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico;
- North Carolina long haul seines;
- North Carolina roe mullet stop nets;
- Virginia pound nets; and
- All high seas fisheries targeting Atlantic highly migratory species outside 200 nautical miles.

If this includes you, the MMAP requires that you:

- Carry an authorization certificate, which is valid Jan. 1-Dec. 31 of each calendar year, during fishing activities;
- Carry an observer if requested;
- Comply with applicable marine mammal protection measures and Take Reduction Plans; and
- Report any marine mammal serious injury/death caused by fishing operations within 48 hours of the interaction using the Marine Mammal Mortality/Injury Reporting form. The form is available on the MMAP website or by calling (978) 281-9328.

If you participate in an applicable fishery and have not received your certificate in the mail, please visit the MMAP website at <www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/mmap> to download a certificate, or call (978) 281-9328 and we will mail one to you.

Trap/pot fishermen

Regardless of the permit you hold, if you set trap/pot gear targeting any species, you may be expected to comply with marine mammal gear restrictions and regulations as determined by the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan in your area, even if your fishery is not currently managed under a Fishery Management Plan.

For more information, please visit the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction website at <www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/whaletrp> or call the NOAA Fisheries fishery liaison for your area:

- New England – John Higgins at (207) 677-2316;
- Mid-Atlantic – Glenn Salvador at (757) 414-0128;

or

- Southeast – David Hilton at (252) 921-0142.

Butterfish Quota Transfer Keeps Directed Squid Fishery Open

Butterfish is caught as a target species and incidentally by vessels targeting longfin squid. To cover both sources of butterfish catch, the annual butterfish quota is allocated between a butterfish landings quota for the directed fishery and a butterfish mortality cap for the longfin squid fishery.

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council recognized that, in certain years, there could be substantial unused butterfish landings or butterfish cap allocation and that revenues could be increased if quota could be moved between the two allocations near the end of the year.

We recently approved regulations to allow a late-year transfer, in either direction, of up to 50% of unused quota between the butterfish landings and the butterfish mortality cap allocations in order to optimally use the total annual butterfish quota.

Near the end of each fishing year, we project the likely trajectories of butterfish landings and the butterfish cap. We can make a transfer if it looks like either butterfish landings or the butterfish cap are approaching their closure thresholds and if it seems the other fishery will not be affected if some quota is taken away.

This fishing year provided the perfect opportunity to use this new provision. By the end of October, only 12% of the butterfish cap had been harvested, but 86% of the butterfish landings quota had been harvested.

Instead of closing the directed butterfish fishery at a time when butterfish were available, we transferred 1,900 metric tons of butterfish from the cap allocation to the landings allocation on Nov. 4. This transfer will allow the directed fishery to continue to operate.

Because very little of the butterfish cap has been harvested this year, we do not believe that the transfer will prevent the longfin squid fishery from operating through the fishing year, which ends on Dec. 31.

For more information, call Aja Szumylo, Sustainable Fisheries Division, at (978) 281-9195 or e-mail her at <aja.szumylo@noaa.gov>.

Proposed ALWTRP Changes in MA Waters

Based on a request from the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries and with support from the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team, which includes fishermen, state and federal resource managers, scientists, and gear specialists, NOAA Fisheries has proposed making additional changes to its Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan (ALWTRP).

The proposed rule was issued on Nov. 6, and comments were accepted until Nov. 21. The following ALWTRP amendments were proposed:

- Delaying the start date of the fishery closure in the Massachusetts Restricted Area by one month – from Jan. 1 to Feb. 1; and
- Extending the size of the Massachusetts Restricted Area closure area.

"After consulting with our Take Reduction Team, we determined that modifying the closure area start date and extending the size of the closure area would provide virtually the same conservation benefit as the planned closure but with less adverse economic impact on the commercial fishing industry," said NOAA Fisheries Regional Administrator John Bullard.

"We are always open to good ideas," he continued. "The state came to us with a good proposal that was a win-win for everybody, so we are moving forward with making these plan changes."

According to Dave Gouveia, NOAA Fisheries Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Program Coordinator, whale protection measures need the support of fishermen and the environmental community to be effective.

"The input we received during 16 outreach meetings from Maine through Florida over the course of several months helped us craft the plan revisions that we implemented in June 2014," Gouveia said. "Similarly, the changes now proposed are intended to address concerns raised by Massachusetts fishermen."

The measures approved in June included: a reduction in the amount of fishing gear in portions of federal and state waters; time/area closures to reduce interactions between fisheries and whales in areas where concentrations of whales and gear are highest; and an expanded gear marking scheme to make it easier to identify gear when whales get entangled.

Discussions about additional proposals for ALWTRP modifications concerning the minimum number of traps per trawl requirement will occur in January during the next Take Reduction Team meeting.

For more information, call Kate Swails, Protected Resources Division, at (978) 281-9481 or e-mail her at <kate.swails@noaa.gov>.

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Update on Northeast Cooperative Research Program Activities

Despite recent declining federal budgets, the Northeast Cooperative Research Program (NCRP) has been steadily making progress on the activities outlined in the program's 2010-2014 strategic plan.

The plan was developed in 2009 with input from the New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Councils, Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office, and stakeholders to help guide the direction of the program.

The major research themes of the plan included forming a conservation-engineering program to improve regional coordination and technology transfer to industry and developing innovative monitoring tools and pilot programs to address data gaps.

Between 2010 and 2012, six multi-year conservation engineering network program contracts were awarded to increase support and coordination between industry and scientific partners.

The collaborative groups were formed to work on specific issues facing the fishing industry in the Northeast. One focus was on small-mesh fisheries, with the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF), University of Massachusetts Dartmouth School for Marine Science and Technology (SMAST), and Maine Department of Marine Resources looking into re-developing a sustainable Gulf of Maine redfish fishery, and Cornell Cooperative Extension, Rutgers University, and the Garden State Seafood Association (GSSA) working on the Mid-Atlantic squid and whiting fisheries.

For New England groundfish, the Gulf of Maine Research Institute (GMRI), DMF, and SMAST focused on conservation engineering to reduce bycatch of choke stocks, specifically for sectors.

Contracts also supported information sharing networks headed by GMRI and what was at the time called the Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen's Association to improve real-time reporting, avoid choke stocks, and conduct analyses supporting "move-on" rules.

Smaller contracts addressed protocols for scup and black sea bass ventless trap surveys by providing two years of supplemental research on gear density and sampling randomization. Most of these programs are wrapping up or will be completed by June 2015.

Addressing data gaps

Several cooperative projects and pilot industry-based surveys (IBS) now in their final stages are expected to help fill important data gaps and develop a better understanding of Science Center trawl survey catch efficiency for certain species.

A two-year (2011-2012) program tagged almost 35,000 spiny dogfish, including some that were injected with oxytetracycline (OTC) to mark calcium deposits in the backbone for age validation.

An analysis is underway on the 756 tag returns to help answer questions about stock structure, seasonal movement patterns, and age and growth. As of 2013, 125 OTC-injected fish had been returned for age validation.

In November, the NCRP completed a two-season pilot longline IBS in the western and central Gulf of Maine to provide information on hard-bottom areas not well sampled by trawl surveys.

In the spring of 2014, two commercial vessels sampled 45 stations, and, in October and November, the longline IBS team again sampled over 70 stations, adding experiments with cameras to verify bottom types. The team also used different bait types to examine their effect on catches.

In addition to answering questions about species distribution in hard-bottom areas of the western Gulf of Maine, this project also supports work on age, growth, and maturity for data-poor species such as cusk, Atlantic halibut, thorny skate, and wolffish.

With the Science Center survey system aboard the research vessel Henry B. Bigelow, a several-part study is underway to improve our understanding of flatfish catchability.

In 2013, two commercial fishing vessels completed a Georges Bank flatfish IBS that used a net similar to one used during the 2003-2005 Southern New England yellowtail flounder IBS. The net was modified to ensure the catch of smaller, younger flatfish. This fall, cooperative studies are being completed to compare the

See CO-OP RESEARCH, next page

Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan Annual Management Areas Summary

The Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan (ALWTRP) was implemented to reduce serious injuries and deaths of right, humpback, and fin whales due to entanglement in commercial trap/pot and gillnet gear from Maine through Florida.

The ALWTRP's requirements are seasonal and area-specific. The following table lists upcoming dates for Northeast and Mid-Atlantic area restrictions. Additional management areas are also in place in the Southeast (North Carolina through Florida).

For more details, please visit the NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office ALWTRP website at <www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/Protected/whaletrp>.

Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan

Trap/Pot Management Areas & Requirements

Management Area	Dates	Closure or Gear Modifications
Northern Inshore State Trap/Pot Waters	Year-round	Gear modifications and markings
*Massachusetts Restricted Area (formerly Cape Cod Restricted Area)**	*Feb. 1- April 30*	***CLOSED** to ALL trap/pot fishing*
*Massachusetts Restricted Area (formerly Cape Cod Restricted Area)**	*May 1-Dec. 31*	*Gear modifications and markings*
Stellwagen Bank Jeffrey's Ledge Restricted Area	Year-round	Gear modifications and markings
Great South Channel Restricted Trap/Pot Area	April 1-June 30	**CLOSED** to ALL trap/pot fishing
Great South Channel Restricted Trap/Pot Area	July 1- March 31	Gear modifications and markings
Northern Nearshore Trap/Pot Waters (Northeast)	Year-round	Gear modifications and markings
Southern Nearshore Trap/Pot Waters (Northeast)	Year-round	Gear modifications and markings
Offshore Trap/Pot Waters (Northeast)	Year-round	Gear modifications and markings
Southern Nearshore Trap/Pot Waters (Mid-Atlantic)	Sept. 1- May 31	Gear modifications and markings
Offshore Trap/Pot Waters (Mid-Atlantic)	Sept. 1- May 31	Gear modifications and markings

**Pending final rule publication. To see the final rule when it is published, visit: <www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/whaletrp>.*

Gillnet Management Areas & Requirements

Management Area	Dates	Closure or Gear Modifications
Cape Cod Bay Restricted Area	Jan. 1- May 15	**CLOSED** to ALL gillnet fishing
	May 16- Dec. 31	Gear modifications and markings
Stellwagen Bank Jeffrey's Ledge Restricted Area	Year-round	Gear modifications and markings
Great South Channel Restricted Gillnet Area	April 1- June 30	**CLOSED** to ALL gillnet fishing
	July 1- March 31	Gear modifications and markings
Great South Channel Sliver Restricted Great South Channel Sliver Restricted Area	Year-round	Gear modifications and markings
Other Northeast Gillnet Waters (Northeast)	Year-round	Gear modifications and markings
Other Northeast Gillnet Waters (Mid-Atlantic)	Sept. 1- May 31	Gear modifications and markings
Mid/South Atlantic Gillnet Waters	Sept. 1- May 31	Gear modifications and markings

New England Aquaculture Conference to be held in Portland in January

The Northeast Aquaculture Conference & Exposition and the Milford Aquaculture Seminar will take place Jan. 14-16 at the Holiday Inn by the Bay in Portland, ME.

This event is being held in conjunction with the Aquaculture Association of Nova Scotia, the Prince Edward Island Aquaculture Alliance, and the Atlantic Canada Fish Farmers Association.

The conference will include talks, training opportunities, and a trade show. Topics include: machinery and automation technology; farm modeling and site selection; permitting; finfish farming 101; kelp farming 101; mussel farming; a recirculating aquaculture systems workshop; shellfish farming 101; and other subjects of interest to both established farmers and to newcomers interested in getting into the field of aquaculture.

For more information on the conference, visit <www.northeastaquaculture.org>.

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Co-op research

Continued from previous page

catch of flatfish with commercial gear to that of the Bigelow and to an image-based survey using a towed camera set-up known as HABCAM.

Fishery-dependent data

To improve monitoring tools, the NCRP has focused on increasing the use of real-time reporting systems by fishermen and helping them provide better fishery-dependent data.

For the past year, the program's field staff has been working with groups such as GSSA, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and Rutgers to equip and train commercial vessels to use the Fisheries Logbook and Data Recording System (FLDRS) for electronic reporting.

Electronic vessel trip reporting (eVTR) promotes a more cost-effective and sustainable data collection system with less reliance on paper vessel trip reports and fewer errors from factors such as illegible handwriting and manual data entry.

Fishermen involved in the project work in a variety of Southern New England and Mid-Atlantic fisheries, including squid, mackerel, herring, flatfish, monkfish, and Northeast multispecies in ports from New Bedford, MA to Barnegat Light, NJ.

In partnership with the North Atlantic Clam Association, software revisions are currently underway to fulfill the reporting needs of the surf clam and ocean quahog fisheries.

The NCRP also has expanded its Study Fleet Program, which uses the FLDRS software and other specialized equipment to record fishery and associated environmental data.

The Study Fleet Program now consists of 37 vessels from New Hampshire to New Jersey. These vessels record tow-by-tow catch and discard data, information that can now be used to compare captains' reported discards with those of Science Center observers. These expanded data sets can reduce the margins of error in estimating fishery discards and could lead to less expensive monitoring methods for some fisheries.

The Study Fleet Program also has proven to be an ideal tool to collect year-round biological samples for the Science Center and several academic research partners. Study Fleet vessels and NCRP field staff help obtain samples of dogfish, wolffish, cusk, halibut, cod, and several species of flatfish to aid studies on age, growth, and reproduction, and have helped re-evaluate the reproductive potential and spawning cycles of yellowtail and winter flounder.

Environmental models

Over the past two years, Study Fleet vessels also have assisted with the development of a new, affordable wireless temperature-depth probe to collect information on ocean bottom temperatures. This information can help improve the understanding of fish distribution and hot-spot mapping to avoid bycatch, and is proving to be a key factor in improving oceanographic models to better incorporate environmental factors into fishery stock assessments.

The Study Fleet Program is sharing over 3 million bottom temperature records with modelers from the Science Center, SMAST, Rutgers, and the Mid-Atlantic Regional Ocean Observation System to help remove sources of bias from their oceanographic models.

These real-time observations helped remove bias from the Regional Ocean Modeling System (ROMS) model of the Western Atlantic and eventually led to an estimate of butterfish habitat suitability that could be compared to patterns of butterfish distribution in Science Center bottom trawl samples.

This allowed for an informed opinion as to whether the presence or absence of butterfish in a particular sample was due to the abundance of butterfish or to unsuitable butterfish habitat.

These environmental modeling efforts are the next step in refining fishery stock assessments and developing a more comprehensive understanding of the forces affecting fish distribution at any given time.

On the water, in the lab

In addition to supporting these efforts, NCRP field staffers also have worked with fishermen to develop an easy-to-use "Commercial Species Guide" to help them identify less familiar species at sea and improve the accuracy of their reporting. And, they have participated in other projects, including a Gulf of Maine Closed Area study, Apex Predator Program shark survey, and Cornell projects.

Off the water, recent staffing transitions at the Science Center will provide the NCRP with more expertise for: completing analyses on all field projects; mapping bottom temperatures for bycatch avoidance; conducting mark-recapture studies; and continuing to explore relationships between environmental drivers and fish populations.

These activities will provide the focus for program activities in 2015, while the Science Center and NRCP conduct and complete strategic planning processes for the next five-year period.

For more information on the projects described here and all NCRP activities, please visit our website at <www.nefsc.noaa.gov/coopresearch> or e-mail NCRP Director John Hoey at <John.Hoey@noaa.gov>.

Harbor Porpoise Take Reduction Annual Management Area Summary

The Harbor Porpoise Take Reduction Plan was implemented to reduce bycatch of harbor porpoise in gillnet fisheries from Maine to the North Carolina/South Carolina border. Management measures under the plan include pinger requirements, seasonal closure areas, and consequence closure areas.

The following table lists upcoming dates for Northeast and Mid-Atlantic Harbor Porpoise Take Reduction Plan management area restrictions that gillnet fishermen need to know.

Further details on gear modifications, pinger specifications, and management area maps are available on the plan website at <www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/protected/porptrp>.

For more information on how to comply with these regulations, call the fishery liaison in your area:

- New England – John Higgins at (207) 677-2316;
- Mid-Atlantic – Glenn Salvador at (757) 414-0128;

or

- Southeast – David Hilton at (252) 921-0142.

Or call NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Region Take Reduction Plan Coordinator Kate Swails at (978) 282-8481.

Harbor Porpoise Take Reduction Plan

Northeast Gillnet Fisheries (All)		
Management Area	**Dates**	**Closure or Gear Modifications**
Northeast Closure Area	Aug. 15- Sept. 13	**CLOSED** to ALL gillnet fishing
Mid-Coast Management Area	Sept. 15- May 31	Pingers Required
Massachusetts Bay Management Area	Nov. 1- Feb. 28/29	Pingers Required
	March 1-31	**CLOSED** to ALL gillnet fishing
	April 1- May 31	Pingers Required
Stellwagen Bank Management Area	Nov. 1- May 31	Pingers Required
Southern New England Management Area	Dec. 1- May 31	Pingers Required
Cape Cod South Closure Area	March 1-31	**CLOSED** to ALL gillnet fishing
Offshore Management Area	Nov. 1- May 31	Pingers Required
Cashes Ledge Closure Area	Feb. 1-28/29	**CLOSED** to ALL gillnet fishing
Mid-Atlantic Gillnet Fisheries (Large and Small Mesh Requirements)		
Area	**Dates Gear Modifications Required**	**Dates of Gillnet Closure**
Large Mesh Gillnet (Mesh Size 7-18 inches)		
Mudhole North Management Area	Jan. 1- Jan. 31; March 16-March 31; April 21- April 30	Feb. 15- March 15; April 1-April 20
Mudhole South Management Area	Jan. 1- Jan. 31; March 16-March 31; April 21- April 30	Feb. 1- March 15; April 1-April 20
Southern Mid-Atlantic Management Area	Feb. 1- Feb. 14;March 16- April 30	Feb. 15-March 15
Waters off New Jersey Management Area	Jan1- Mar 31, April 21-30	April 1-April 20
Small Mesh Gillnet (Mesh Size >5 " to < 7")		
Waters off New Jersey Management Area	Jan. 1- April 30	-
Mudhole North Management Area	Jan. 1-Feb 14, March 16-31, April 21-30	Feb. 15- March 15
Mudhole South Management Area	Jan. 1- Jan. 31; March 16-April 30	Feb. 1- March 15
Southern Mid-Atlantic Management Area	Feb. 1-April 30	-

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