

CRAB ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT

July 27, 2010

PRFC Office, Colonial Beach, VA

Members Present

Robert A. Boarman – Chairman
Elgin H. Nininger – Vice Chairman
Dean E. Bowie – Upper River Hard Crab Potter
Herman Delvo – Recreational Crabber
Arthur L. Loving – Crabber-At-Large
John B. Morris, Jr. – Crabber-At-Large
James B. Berthe – Lower River Peeler Potter
George W. Smith – Upper River Hard Crab Potter
Larry W. Thrift – Lower River Peeler Potter

Members Absent

Mark G. Hunter – Recreational Crabber

Press

None

PRFC Commissioners

Robert H. Bowes

Support Staff Present

Dr. Tom Miller – CBL
Eric Johnson – SERC
1st Sgt. Adam Friend – VMRC Law Enf.
Capt. Quincy Shockley – MdDNR Law Enf.
Lt. Charles Sauter – MdDNR Law Enf.
Lynn Fagley - MdDNR
Kirby A. Carpenter – PRFC Executive Secretary
Becky Butler – PRFC Staff
Ellen Cosby – PRFC Staff

Others Present:

Charles Clift, Mike Gadwill and Diana Gadwill

Chairman Boarman called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. He welcomed and thanked everyone for attending.

2010 Crab Harvest Report

Mr. Carpenter presented a preliminary crab harvest report for the months of April, May and June of this year. He noted the harvest for this year was slightly up from last year. So far this year 16,098 bushels of hard crabs, 19,507 pounds of peelers and 997 pounds of soft crabs have been harvested. The CPUE and the effort are also higher than they were at this time last year.

Winter Crab Dredge Survey – Dr. Tom Miller, CBL

Dr. Tom Miller from the Chesapeake Bay Biological Laboratory (CBL) gave a presentation on the 2009 winter crab dredge survey. He reported to the committee how the survey is conducted his findings were as follows:

- The abundance of mature females, the target of the conservation measures increased by 202% from 2008
- Males did not show appreciable increase
- New recruits increased by 107% over 2008, noting however that similar increases have been observed in the past
- Conservation measures were effective

- But, one year of increased recruit abundance is not sufficient evidence to sunset management measures on mature female crabs, we need to see additional, sustained increases

Smithsonian Potomac River Crab Tagging Study – Eric Johnson, SERC

Dr. Eric Johnson from the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center (SERC) presented some background information on the 2009 female crab tagging study and a detailed analysis, by harvest areas, of the three management options to conserve female crabs for 2010 based on the results of last year's study. The three options are: an early rolling closure, a late rolling closure and a river-wide early season closure. Based on the average daily harvest (2000-2007): the early rolling closure would conserve about 3,400 bushels of females with a recoupment of 22% for a net savings of 2,659 bushels, the late rolling closure would conserve about 3,250 bushels of females with a recoupment of 15% for a savings of 2,775 bushels, and the river-wide season closure would conserve and net about 1,635 bushels of females because there would be no recoupment. He also analyzed the annual variation for each option. The late rolling closure conserved the most crab and was the most consistent from year to year. The early rolling closure conserved fewer crabs and was more variable from year to year. While, the early river-wide closure conserved the fewest crabs and was the most variable, making it the most unpredictable.

Chairman Boarman thanked Mr. Johnson and Dr. Miller for their presentations and stated that they were very informative and provided a lot of information that would be helpful for the committee to make its decisions.

Bob Bowes noted that crabs released in areas 2, 3 and 4 were released on the Virginia side of the Potomac River but most of the recaptures were from the Maryland side of the river. He thought that was a unique piece of information.

Arthur Loving asked if any of the crabs that were tagged were male crabs. Mr. Johnson stated the Potomac study was conducted with female crabs to study the migration and determine when and where the crabs go during certain times of the year, but they have tagged males in other areas.

Chairman Boarman asked law enforcement for their opinion about a possible rolling closure for female harvest. First Sgt. Adam Friend stated a complete closure would be easier to enforce because it provides a single specific date of closure for the entire Potomac River. Lt. Charles Sauter agreed with 1st Sgt. Friend and added with the budget cuts and lack of law enforcement, it would be difficult to enforce a rolling closure. However, law enforcement would support any regulation or order the Commission adopts and would do their best in enforcing the laws.

Chairman Boarman asked Mr. Carpenter if there was an option to leave the closure the same as it was last year. Mr. Carpenter explained if the committee were to leave it the same as last year, he would recommend an October 31, 2010 closure because the studies show there has been slight improvement in the stock.

James Berthe and John Morris both agreed that Option 1 – Early Rolling Closure would be the best for everyone involved. It would allow the crabbers to still be able to sell their harvest when the market has a higher value.

A motion was made by George Smith, seconded by Elgin Nininger and passed to recommend an Option 1 – Early Rolling Closure as follows:

Areas 3 & 4 combined – 7 day closure (Sept. 22- 28)

Area 2 – 11 day closure (Sept. 26 – Oct. 6)

Area 1 – 10 day closure (Oct. 4 – 13)

Mr. Carpenter stated he would also present to the Commission the option of only having 2 areas versus 3 areas when implementing the closure. Trying to enforce 2 areas is easier than trying to enforce 3 areas with different dates.

The committee agreed on presenting both options.

Update on the PRFC Crab Buy-Back Program

Ellen Cosby provided the update stating there were 64 bids received. The range of the bids vary from \$2,500 to \$475,000 and they totaled \$3.1 million, with only \$200,000 in funds available. The Commission is in the process of reviewing each bid and will have more information after the September Commission meeting.

New Business

There was general discussion on being able to submit seafood catch reports via internet. Mr. Carpenter explained the software and the security question of that doing were costly at this time.

Lynn Fagley from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources stated they currently use a software that is free and would talk to Mr. Carpenter and Ellen Cosby about possibly seeing if the Commission could benefit from that.

It was also suggested that the Commission may consider allowing watermen to fax in their reports to save on postage and time. Mike Gadwill recommended that the size of the catch reports should be reduced down in size in order to accommodate home copy and fax machines. Mr. Carpenter stated he would look into that as well, but had concerns with reducing the size because of all of the information needed on the report.

The meeting adjourned at 7:42 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

Robert A. Boarman, Chairman