

Sustaining a thriving lobster fishery through science and community

Fall 2010

Dear Volunteers and Friends of The Lobster Conservancy,

The Lobster Conservancy's mission is to strive to sustain a thriving lobster fishery through science and community. Our quarterly newsletter aims to keep members and volunteers informed.

Notable Summer Events

On Friendship Day, Saturday, July 31st, The Lobster Conservancy hosted a touch tank at the Lobster House on the corner of Rte 220 & 97. Highlights from this year's touch tank featured juvenile cod and flounder, in addition to adult lobsters and myriad critters from our local shores. Thanks to all those who visited – especially the children!

Wolfie aerates touch tank

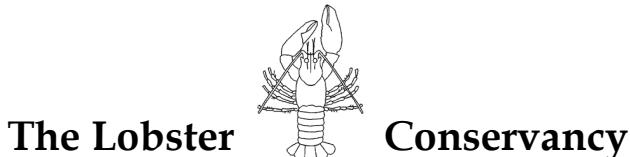


On Wednesday evening, September 1, 2010, the Friendship Museum hosted a presentation entitled “120-Years of Lobster Pounds in Friendship,” by The Lobster Conservancy intern Maira Seeley at the Friendship Town Office. Sixty people attended to see the slide show and hear Maira’s comprehensive summary of what she learned from interviewing former poundkeepers, their friends and family; wading through deeds; and studying in the library. A written report is available by request – just email dcowan@lobsters.org.

History of Friendship's Lobster Pounds

The Friendship Lobster Pound History Project is completed. The Lobster Conservancy intern Maira Seeley gathered information through interviews and documentary research since January 2010, and wrote a paper describing the history and development of the lobster pounds in Friendship.

There is significant community interest in the project. On June 9th, Maira gave presentations on the history of the pounds to students in grades K-1 and 3-6 at the Friendship Village School. The students were very interested in the historical pictures and descriptions of exactly how a lobster pound functioned.



Friendship Long Island lobster pound in the early 1900s. The poundkeeper, John Thompson, lived with his family in the yellow house in the far left of the picture.

Maira and Diane spent June 8 handing out surveys to interested voters at the gubernatorial primary election to assess how much knowledge Friendship residents have of the pounds' history (and of pounding in general). Many thanks to the voters who completed surveys and to all of those who participated in Maira's pound history project.

Will Threats to Lobster Population Travel Northward?

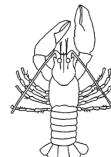
Based on a report dated April 17, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission proposed a moratorium on harvesting lobsters in Southern New England (SNE) from North Carolina to Cape Cod (<http://www.asmfc.org/> april2010_SNE_Recruitment_Failure).

Proposed Moratorium on Lobster Harvest in Southern New England

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission website states that: "The 2009 peer-reviewed stock assessment report indicates the American lobster resource ..., continued low abundance and recruitment in Southern New England (SNE), and decreased recruitment and abundance in Massachusetts Bay and Stellwagen Bank (Area 514). Of particular concern is SNE, where depleted stock abundance, low recruitment, and high fishing mortality rates over the past few years have led the Peer Review Panel to call for additional harvest restrictions." In response, the most restrictive measure – a moratorium – was proposed for SNE. In the end, it was not enacted.

The abovementioned report, "Recruitment Failure in the Southern New England Lobster Stock" is available on the lobster page at the ASMFC website. Although the report takes many data sets into consideration, in my opinion, the data presented in the report do not allow for a comprehensive evaluation regarding whether a moratorium on landing lobsters in SNE (1) is warranted, (2) will do any good and (3) can be evaluated for success.

Without scientifically valid information from *a variety of sources*, it is difficult if not impossible to assess what's going on and make intelligent decisions regarding course of action. In the case of responsible management of fishing stocks, reliable long-term monitoring data from both fisheries dependent and fisheries independent sources are critical. The problem is that such data are really difficult to get. The report on "recruitment failure" is based largely on settlement data from new sources of data; some being used for the first time in lobster stock assessment. I still remember when similar data were used to predict a decline in lobster landings for the Gulf of Maine back in 2001 (see Ask the Lobster Doc, February 2001, "Juvenile Lobster Abundance")



The Lobster Conservancy

<http://www.lobsters.org/lodoc/lodocindx.php>; and 2001 Maine Sunday Telegram, February 11, “Some research predicts decline, Lobster Conservancy detects no decrease”; Courier-Gazette, February 3, “Lobster in decline or census undercounts?”; Chronicle of Higher Education, January 5, “Scientists warn that lobsters in danger, but nobody told the lobsters”

The predictors of decline were apparently incorrect as evidenced by landings in the Gulf of Maine remaining high for a decade since. Back then, The Lobster Conservancy had data that told a different story – we saw no signs of decline. This time, The Lobster Conservancy has no special knowledge to offer specific insights because we don’t monitor lobsters in Southern New England. However, I am certain that baseline data on what is there is critical to knowing what may be lost.

News from the Board of Directors

This year, The Lobster Conservancy suspended most of its monitoring sites in Northern New England due to insufficient funding. In the face of what is happening in Southern New England, we are more concerned than ever about decreasing our sampling efforts during 2010 (this puts a gap in an 18-year monthly time series!) I feel strongly that it is vital to get back up and running by 2011! We need your help. If you are not already a member, please visit our website at <http://www.lobsters.org/misc/membshp.html> or go to our homepage to use Paypal.

The Lobster Conservancy recently landed two small grants in June: one from the Davis Conservation Foundation and the other from the New England Biolabs Foundation. Funds will be used to strengthen the volunteer-based Juvenile Lobster Monitoring Program by making improvements during 2010 and gearing up for the 2011 season. We have also received support from the UpEast Foundation to sponsor the Juvenile Lobster Census on Allen Island.

Unfortunately, these grants do not cover the cost of resuming the excellent program that covered the New England coastline from Massachusetts, through New Hampshire to downeast Maine in the past. Also, to our great disappointment, Darden Restaurants Foundation has made the decision to cease their support of our programs and is focusing on large scale farming of lobsters.

Juvenile Lobster Census

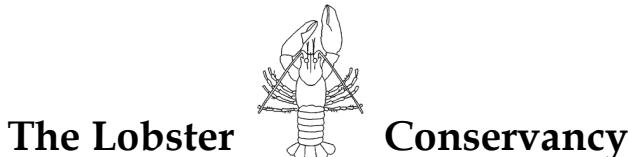
A brief summary of lobster counts in the last few months...

June: *Harpswell:* Minimum size 10.8 mm CL (~1.25 inches long), maximum size 72.8 mm CL (~8.5 inches long), mean (average) size 29.2 (~2.5 inches long); a total of 60 lobsters were found in 14 squares yielding a density of 4.3 per square meter.

July: Settlement of postlarval lobsters from the surface to the bottom was early and remarkable in both Friendship and Harpswell. There was also a peak in molting activity. *Harpswell:* Minimum size 5.5 mm CL (~3/4 inch long), maximum size 38.0 mm CL (~4.5 inches long), mean 20.8 mm CL (~2.5 inches long), a total of 35 lobsters were found in 17 squares yielding a density of 2.1 per square meter.

Friendship: Minimum size 4.0 mm CL (<3/4 inch long), maximum size 46.1 mm CL (~6 inches long), mean 20.7 mm CL (~2.5 inches long), a total of 42 lobsters were found in 11 squares yielding a density of 3.8 per square meter.

August: Settlement of postlarval lobsters from the surface to the bottom continued in both Friendship and Harpswell. *Harpswell:* Minimum size 5.5 mm CL (~3/4 inch long),, maximum size 49.5 mm CL (~6 inches long), mean 17.6 mm CL (~2 inches long), n = 74 in 17 squares.



Friendship: Minimum size 6.9 mm CL (~1 inch long), maximum size 54.5 mm CL (~6.25 inches long), mean 24.9 mm CL (~3 inches long), a total of 32 lobsters were found in 11 squares yielding a density of 2.9 per square meter.

Allen Island: Minimum size 7 mm CL (~1 inch long), maximum size 57 mm CL (~6.5 inches long), a total of 51 lobsters were found in 11 squares yielding a density of 4.3 per square meter.

Project Update

Lobster and Cod Interactions

In September and October of 2009, graduate student, Marissa McMahan, did a pilot study on the interaction between lobsters and groundfish. Marissa has been testing the hypothesis that lobsters will not travel as far or as frequently when natural predators are present. Using acoustic tracking, she observed lobster movement before and after groundfish (cod) were added to The Lobster Conservancy's lobster pound on Friendship Long Island. Marissa tagged five lobsters and tracked their movement for three weeks before and up to one week after the addition of three cod. The cod were also tagged to record their movements. Preliminary results indicate that lobster movement decreased in the presence of cod. We're very excited to continue the project by analyzing these data and replicating the experiment this year. Stay tuned!

Recent Publications & Press

Cowan, D.F. (2010) Lobsters on the move. **The Lobster Newsletter** 23(1):14-17. go to http://www.fish.wa.gov.au/the_lobster_newsletter/Index.html and download latest issue

Cowan, D.F. (2010) Juvenile lobster census: the first 17 years. **Maine Lobstermen's Association Newsletter** Feb:7.

Cowan, D.F. (2010) Why the spring fishery falls short. **Commercial Fisheries News** May:15B. http://www.lobsters.org/l/doc/l_docindx.php

Researchers give attention to worthy claws. by Beth Quimby, Maine Sunday Telegram, July 11. http://www.pressherald.com/news/researchers-give-attention-to-worthy-claws_2010-07-11.html

Saved by the shell – calico lobster gets new lease on life. by Beth Quimby, Portland Press Herald, August 28. http://www.pressherald.com/news/saved-by-the-shell-calico-lobster-gets-new-lease-on-life_2010-08-28.html

Cobalt crustacean to be spoiled rather than boiled. Village Soup, September 2. <http://www.topix.com/city/castine-me/2010/09/cobalt-crustacean-to-be-spoiled-rather-than-boiled>

Yours in TLC,

Diane F. Cowan, Ph.D, Executive Director

Maira Seeley, Intern

Marissa McMahan, Graduate Student