



Rhode Island
Department of Environmental Management

DIVISION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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TO: Janet Coit, Director

FROM: Mark Gibson, Deputy Chief

DATE: November 18, 2013

SUBJECT: Request for Decision regarding the proposed 2013-2014 Winter harvest schedule for Shellfish Management Areas

This item was brought to the RI Marine Fisheries Council (Council) for consideration at their November 4, 2013 meeting. Supporting documentation submitted along with this memorandum includes the November 4 Council meeting minutes and the Shellfish Advisory Panel meeting minutes from October 17, 2013.

On October 17, 2013, the Council's Shellfish Advisory Panel (SAP) convened to consider industry proposals for the 2013-2014 winter harvest schedules for Shellfish Management Areas. No official vote was taken at the SAP due to lack of quorum (three people in attendance), however those present voiced support for the following proposed changes:

- For **Greenwich Bay** (GB Sub Areas 1 and 2): Move the first opening in January from January 1 to January 6; also, modify the default harvest schedule (applicable in future years if no subsequent action is taken to address future schedules) from MWF 8-10 to MWF 8-12, while keeping December 25 and January 1 closed.
- For **Bristol Harbor**: Move the opening from December to January, while retaining the January (MWF 8-12) and February – April (M-F sunrise – 12) schedules; also, modify the default harvest schedule to keep December 25 and January 1 closed.
- For **Bissel Cove/Fox Island**: Repeal the December, January, and February-April schedules and replace with a full opening of the management area, i.e., seven days/week, sunrise-sunset, beginning the 2nd Wednesday in December and running through April.

At the November 4 Council meeting, a representative of East Bay shellfishermen recommended to the Council that the Bristol Harbor schedule be further modified by replacing the February-March schedule (M-F sunrise – 12) with a full opening of the management area, i.e., seven days/week, sunrise-sunset during that time period.

Given that the proposed changes involve modifications to approved Shellfish Management Areas, there was no need for a public hearing.

At the Council meeting, the Division noted that it has no scientific basis to evaluate the current schedules or any modifications to them and thus has no objection to the proposed changes offered by industry.

The Council unanimously recommended adoption of the proposed changes, as developed by the SAP and as further modified by the recommendation from the representative of the East Bay shellfishermen. Those changes are set forth in the table below.

	DEC	JAN	FEB	MARCH	APRIL
Greenwich Bay Sub Areas 1&2	CLOSED	Jan 2 nd : 8-12 Starting Jan 4 th 6 th : MWF 8-12	MWF 8-12	MWF 8-12	MWF 8-12
Bristol	Opens 2 nd Wed, then MWF 8-12 CLOSED	Starting Jan 3: MWF 8-12	M-F Sunrise-12 Open	M-F Sunrise-12 Open	M-F Sunrise-12 Open
Bissel/Fox	Opens 2 nd Wed, then MWF 8-12 Open, starting 2 nd Wed	MWF 8-12 Open	M-F Sunrise-12 Open	M-F Sunrise-12 Open	M-F Sunrise-12 Open

In addition, modify the default schedules for Greenwich Bay Sub Areas 1 & 2 and for Bristol Harbor, as noted earlier in this memo.

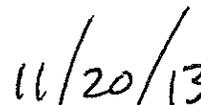
Consistent with the Council's recommendation, the Division recommends adoption of the proposed changes to the winter harvest schedules for the three Shellfish Management Areas. The Division's stock assessment indicates that, on a bay-wide basis, quahog abundance and mortality rates are at sustainable levels. We need to do more work in stratifying our assessment by area to provide more spatially explicit information but for now this schedule of access is acceptable. Greenwich Bay is of particular concern and close monitoring of fishery dependent and fishery independent data is warranted. If evidence of overfishing and depletion surfaces, the number of winter access days may need to be reduced.



Approved for filing as presented



Janet L. Coit, Director



Date