

Northeast Regional Cod Tagging Program: Bi-monthly Update – January 2004.

1. Overview

The Northeast Regional Cod Tagging Program (NRCTP) held its first annual meeting in early December. This two-day event was highly productive and interactive. The take-home message was that the program has come a long way and is well on track for meeting its goal of tagging 100,000 cod in the Gulf of Maine and neighboring Canadian and Southern New England waters within two years. The ultimate success of the program will be highly dependent on a good return rate of tagged cod and as such, the program's outreach efforts over the next year will be key.

The program's tagging efforts during December and January have been low, but the tagging organizations are gearing up to a new tagging season in the spring. The number of tagged cod to date is just over 47,000. The number of reported recaptures is presented in Table 1.

The January 2004 issue of *Fisheries* (Vol. 29, No. 1) features the work of Ted Ames on "Atlantic cod structure in the Gulf of Maine"; congratulations Ted, this article is a considerable achievement. This article can also be viewed online through our website at http://www.codresearch.org/Relevant_Publications/Ames_2004_F2901p10-28.pdf.

As a reminder, the program's debut on television, a short section in *Quest*, will be airing on February 10th at 9.00pm on both Maine PBS and Vermont Public Television.

Table 1: Tag returns reported to date for both Northeast Regional Cod Tagging Program tags (NRCTP) and DFO tags associated with this program. Of these, 449 tags have been physically received by GMRI; recaptured double-tagged fish amount to n=65; and recaptures which were re-released total n=45.

	NRCTP Tags			DFO Tags			Total
	F*	P**	O***	F	P	O	
DFO	36	85	1	0	0	0	122
Isl. Inst.	9	1	1	0	0	0	11
DMR	125	9	11	14	2	0	161
CCCHFA	184	14	18	0	0	0	216
SMAST	113	56	5	0	0	0	174
Sub-Total	467	165	36	14	2	0	
Total		668			16		684

* F=Fishermen ** P=Processors ***O=Observers

2. Program Update Overall – Gulf of Maine Research Institute (GMRI)

Date	Progress
Dec - 03	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• GMRI hosted the End of Year 1 Meeting on the 3rd and 4th December.• Shelly put together a summary of the End of Year 1 Meeting; this can be found at http://www.codresearch.org/Updates_Meeting_summaries.htm.• A new order of tags was placed on December 5th – Hallprint anticipates delivering these extra 55,000 tags in late February 2004.• GMRI and Ben Neal (Island Institute) began working on how to maintain the Island Institute’s component of the program, despite Ben’s plans for leaving the Island Institute at the end of December 2003. <p>Database:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Data approval continued. <p>Outreach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The website has been updated with changes as suggested in the End of Year 1 Meeting; a few more fishing vessels have been added.• Five new winners were drawn for December 2003’s lottery. The list of winners thus far can be seen online at http://www.codresearch.org/Winners_to_date.htm. <p>Tagging:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tagging was carried out by DMR, CCCHFA and SMAST.
Jan - 04	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• GMRI ordered and distributed new tagging equipment to tagging organizations.• Shelly met with Earl Meredith to review decisions from the End of Year 1 Meeting. <p>Database:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• GMRI hired Tamsin Chance to assist with data approval. Tamsin has worked hard to error-check the submitted data and the number of approved trips in the database has increased greatly. The online mapping interface now shows that over 40,000 cod have been tagged. Thank you Tamsin – good work!• GMRI and Northern Geomatics have begun making some of the database changes suggested during the End of Year 1 Meeting. In particular: the time field has been fixed so that AST is now recorded and reported correctly; and the mapping tool now produces a map of more informative resolution when creating a report for a tagged cod. <p>Outreach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shelly and Pat have worked on the mass-mailing for January 2004. The list of recipients is just shy of 5,000 people including all Federal multi-species permit holders, in addition to individuals not on this list, but who have reported tagged cod.• Similar information packages have also been sent out to >100 fish processing plants and fisheries associations throughout the study region.• The second Newsletter has been designed and produced. This was included in the mass-mailing packages, but is also available online at http://www.codresearch.org/Updates_Newsletters.htm.

- The Northeast Regional Cod Tagging Program now has its own official letterhead – the mass-mailing was sent on this and this will be used for all future correspondence on behalf of the program.
- The January 2004 New England edition of *Fishermen's Magazine* features an article written by Captain Al Anderson, on cod tagging programs in the Gulf of Maine. The article is aimed at improving recreational fishermen's awareness of tagging programs.
- Shelly and Earl Meredith did an interview with Rick Morris for inclusion in his cod tagging footage. This outreach effort, initiated by the CCCHFA, is still in the filming stage – no dates are yet set for viewing.
- Shelly met with Amy Sinclair of WGME with regard to her program, "Where's Amy?", featuring the Northeast Regional Cod Tagging Program. Amy is very interested in the program and since each "Where's Amy?" is less than 5 minutes, she is hoping to make more than one program, covering a different aspect of the tagging program each time. Shelly and Amy will touch base again in the spring, once tagging trips are more plentiful.
- The program's website (www.codresearch.org) has become more visible; it is now the 1st result on "Google" when you do a search for "cod tagging".
- Five new winners have been drawn for January 2004's lottery.

Tagging:

- During January, tagging was undertaken by CCCHFA and SMAST.

3. GMRI's priority tasks for the next two months

- GMRI will be reacting to decisions made during the End of Year 1 Meeting. In particular, the Data Management committee will meet via a conference call on February 2nd to discuss the logistics of 1) implementing a high-reward tagging scheme, 2) designing a study on tagging-mortality, and 3) incorporating the quantification of bycatch during routine tagging trips.
- GMRI will be generally offering support to tagging organizations as the new 2004 season of tagging begins. Specifically, Shelly will be working closely with DMR for the next month, as contracts with tagging vessels are drawn up/renewed.
- GMRI will be preparing outreach materials for the upcoming Maine Fishermen's Forum which will take place in Rockland, ME from March 4th-6th.
- Additional program supplies will also be ordered over the next few weeks. For example, a new round of datasheets will be ordered; these will feature an additional checkbox beside every 5th fish which will act as a verification box for tag numbers when tagging fish, as agreed upon in the End of Year 1 Meeting.
- GMRI will develop a list of standardized comments for data entry.
- GMRI will improve the trip summary template for distribution to regional tagging coordinators; it is hoped that all future trips will be summarized for the vessel owner and crew.

4. Program Update by Tagging Organization

4.1 Canada Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO)

- No additional tagging was undertaken in December 2003 or January 2004.
- Tag returns continue to arrive in fairly high numbers. DFO has received about 50 additional tags since the beginning of December. The return rate from tagging in May 2003 is now roughly 6%.

4.2 Island Institute

- Tagging in the inshore area of Maine is at a wintry standstill; participating volunteer lobstermen, recreational and hook fishermen are waiting for spring before resuming tagging efforts.
- Ben Neal is no longer working for the Island Institute full time, but looks forward to continuing to coordinate this aspect of the tagging project as a sub-contractor.
- Additional recreational hook fishing boats are being sought along the coast from Eastport on down into New Hampshire. Any charter or personal vessels likely to see codfish for tagging are welcome to call and see how they can participate in the study.

4.3 Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR)

- Fall tagging picked up again after a multi-day trip to Jeffreys Ledge at the end of November yielded 1,337 cod over 3 days. Two subsequent day-trips to Jeffreys Ledge yielded 193 cod (Nov. 26, trawl) and 14 cod (Dec. 9, hook), respectively. Sea conditions and extreme cold temperatures have prevented any tagging since the December 9th trip. We are eager to resume tagging in February, conditions allowing.
- We are pleased to introduce Kerrie O'Donnell as the new tagging coordinator for the eastern sector. She is stationed in Boothbay Harbor and will be resuming all of the duties of Amy Winkle, the former coordinator.

All data from our trips has been entered into the database and are pending approval. A total of 11,626 cod were tagged in 2003. No cod have been tagged to date in 2004.

4.4 School for Marine Science and Technology (SMAST)

- Harsh weather in December and January hampered SMAST's ability to tag fish on Georges Bank. Nonetheless, following the End of Year 1 Meeting, Darin and Ross were able to sneak out to sea for 5 days aboard the *FV Voyager*, during a break in the weather. Not only did the weather not cooperate, but neither did the fish. A total of 28 tows were made mostly north of Closed Area I and along the eastern edge. Despite their best effort 171 fish were caught mostly at the NW peak of the closed area. The eastern edge is where most of the "zero" tows were reported.
- SMAST submitted a request to NMFS for a Letter of Authorization for tagging in Year 2. SMAST's petition was sent to just prior to Christmas and was received by the second week of January. The LOA approved by NMFS includes provisions to tag in the permanent closed areas.
- With the LOA in hand SMAST is planning their first trip aboard the *FV Inheritance* in early February. The vessel scheduling for Year 2 will follow the order in which they were deployed in Year 1.
- On a personal note, CONGRATULATIONS to David Martins and his wife on the birth of their first-born; Sofia Eve Martins was born on Friday 2nd January 2004!

4.5 Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen's Association (CCCHFA)

- CCCHFA has started to sail dedicated trips as the winter-spring tagging season begins in earnest, with water temperatures off the Cape getting quite low. The non-dedicated effort has also been ongoing throughout the early winter. Ice has set in many of the harbors, so CCCHFA will take advantage of this time to conduct a series of classroom trainings, targeted at fishermen new to the program in addition to veterans who are trying to improve their paperwork and refresh techniques.
- New this year for the CCCHFA will be technicians recruited from the ranks of local fishermen. These folks will be selected based upon scientific background or relevant experience and with additional training, will be sent out to provide quality control, field instruction, and an extra set of hands. These individuals have been selected and classroom training has begun with additional training on the water.
- Also new this year for the fleet is a comprehensive effort to acquire USCG FV Safety Compliance Decals. The vessel Captains have been working with the Auxiliary to ensure that these research vessels are safe working platforms for everyone on board.
- Tagging efforts have yielded 723 tagged cod in December 2003, and 1240 tagged cod in January 2004.