

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

## 1. Overview

For the Northeast Regional Cod Tagging Program (NRCTP) the period of April-May 2004 has been a time of preparation and training for the spring 2004 tagging season, and as the area reports indicate, numerous tagging trips have been undertaken. The season began quietly with cod being slow to show, but tagging during more recent weeks has proved highly productive in some areas. Decisions made at the End of Year 1 Meeting in December have been incorporated into our current tagging protocol, specifically:

- 1) Keeping tows strictly to a 20-minute maximum
- 2) Also measuring all cod which are not tagged (i.e. small cod or cod of poor condition).

Tag returns continue to be reported every week; the breakdown of returns to date is presented in Table 1.

**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, 827 tags have been physically received by GMRI; recaptured double-tagged fish amount to n=142; and recaptures which were re-released total n=70.**

	NRCTP Tags			DFO Tags			Total
	F*	P**	O***	F	P	O	
<b>DFO</b>	44	139	1	14	54	0	252
<b>Isl. Inst.</b>	13	4	1	0	0	0	18
<b>DMR</b>	187	32	19	18	3	0	259
<b>CCCHFA</b>	329	26	33	0	0	0	388
<b>SMAST</b>	193	71	9	0	0	0	273
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>766</b>	<b>272</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>0</b>	
<b>Total</b>		<b>1101</b>			<b>89</b>		<b>1190</b>

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

## 2. GMRI's priority tasks for the next two months

- GMRI will continue to focus on entering recaptures into the database; the modified recapture tab is now available and some final tweaks to the report map are being made by Northern Geomantics.
- GMRI will be begin coordinating and working with a group of data analysts as recommended by the Research Steering Committee in response to Shelly's presentation on April 30<sup>th</sup>. The role of this group is to verify our capacity to answer specific research questions with the current data and determine the data analysis needs for the program in future months.

### **3. Program Update Overall – Gulf of Maine Research Institute (GMRI)**

Date	Progress
<p><b>Apr - 04</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>DMR:</b> Shelly has been chasing up contract and insurance paperwork required for the vessels recruited to tag with DMR.</li> <li>• <b>High-reward tagging:</b> In the last week of April, GMRI had official approval that we could proceed with the high-reward tagging study. Shelly placed a rush order for 10,000 high-reward tags that same day. The revised datasheets for the high-reward component of the study were also ordered and distribution has begun.</li> <li>• Shelly spent considerable time tweaking and updating presentations (2 oral and 1 poster) for upcoming conferences, tailoring each to the theme/audience for the venue being attended.</li> <li>• GMRI (Shelly and Laura) and Tom Rudolph (CCCHFA) attended the NEFMC Research Steering Committee Meeting where Shelly gave an in depth presentation of the program; she reviewed the initial aims, and provided considerable detail on the infrastructure which has been established to meet our goals in terms of outreach, data collection, database design and management and facilitation of update meetings. Considerable time was also spent discussing the data analysis needs of the program. As a result, the Research Steering Committee have elected a group (led by committee member Les Kaufmann) to address this issue further. Shelly will be working directly with Les in future weeks to begin making some basic queries of the data.</li> </ul> <p><b>Database:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pat has focused on processing the tag returns, which have been coming in at a very steady pace. She has also been trouble-shooting the entering of recaptures. As the tagging trips have become more productive, error-checking the tagging data has again become a relevant task.</li> </ul> <p><b>Outreach:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shelly gave a presentation of the program - with emphasis on the theme of “collaboration” – at the Northeast Fish and Wildlife Conference, in Ocean City, Maryland (25-28<sup>th</sup> Apr). This event also gave Shelly the opportunity to meet Ken Beal, who is taking over Earl Meredith’s responsibilities with regard to the Northeast Regional Cod Tagging Program.</li> <li>• Five new winners were drawn for April 2004’s lottery. The list of winners thus far can be seen online at <a href="http://www.codresearch.org/Winners_to_date.htm">http://www.codresearch.org/Winners_to_date.htm</a>.</li> </ul> <p><b>Tagging:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tagging was carried out by DMR, CCCHFA, SMAST and the Island Institute.</li> </ul>
<p><b>May - 04</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May began with Shelly presenting the Northeast Regional Cod Tagging Program at the World Fisheries Congress in Vancouver (2-6<sup>th</sup> May). This was an opportunity provided by David Hall from Hallprint Tags Pty. Presenting alongside Jon Lucy (Virginia Institute of Marine Science), a long-term Hallprint client who runs the Virginia Game Fish Tagging Program, the Hallprint booth displayed an example of both a commercial and a recreational tagging program. By presenting during the trade show sessions, the posters were on display for four full days in a prime location right by the lunch line! The feedback received was very positive, and there were particular comments regarding the magnitude of the program and the sophistication of the database/GIS mapping interface. Thank you David and Leanne for giving the program the opportunity to present at the WFC and for being such accommodating booth hosts!</li> </ul>

**May – 04  
continued**

- **High-reward tagging:** Hallprint met GMRI's challenge of a rush order for high-reward tags. As a result, Shelly was able to ship high-reward tags directly from Vancouver, across to Don Clark (DFO) just in time for their main tagging trip of 2004; high-reward tags started hitting the water on Saturday May 15<sup>th</sup> (the first high-reward tag recapture was called in on Monday 17<sup>th</sup>!). Thank you to David and his staff at Hallprint for making this possible!
- Continuing on this theme, Shelly has revised the program's Tagging Protocol with changes made during Year 1 and the new high-reward tagging component. These are being printed and will be ready for distribution at the upcoming 6-month review meeting on June 10<sup>th</sup>.
- **DMR:** The finalization of vessel contracts for DMR has continued through May...
- **Training:** Two more field technicians were recruited and trained for DMR on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> May.

**Database:**

- GMRI and Northern Geomatics met on May 20<sup>th</sup> to review the changes made to the database and to begin outlining potential needs for 2005.
- Shelly has modified the data entry protocol to reflect the addition of the high-reward tagging study; these instructions have been distributed to all data entry personnel.

**Outreach:**

- The website has been updated considerably this month, adding new images of the vessels involved, in addition to explaining the new high-reward tagging component of the study.
- Shelly and Pat made a journey with Ben Neal down to Newburyport, MA. The mission was to present the program's progress to the members of the Northeast Charterboat Captain's Association; Ben was also able to recruit new captains into the program through this event. The invitation to attend the evening was gratefully received from Michael Sosik and Nola Rule, owners of the charter vessel *FV Bigger 'n Better*, who tagged for Ben Neal (Island Institute) during 2003 and will soon begin tagging again.
- Shelly joined CCCHFA for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Maritime Festival, the weekend of May 22<sup>nd</sup>. This was an interesting day, with a mix of educational displays and fishing related contests (shucking, filleting, net-mending, etc.) and was a good opportunity for Shelly to catch up with the fishermen involved in tagging in the Cape Cod region.
- Responses to tag returns continue.
- Five new winners have been drawn for May's 2004's lottery.

**Tagging:**

- During May, tagging was undertaken by DFO, Island Institute, DMR, CCCHFA and SMAST.

## 4. Program Update by Tagging Organization

### 4.1 Canada Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO)

- A trip was undertaken from May 14-24<sup>th</sup> on the *RV J. L. Hart*. The intentions were to tag cod from both sides of the mouth of the Bay of Fundy; high-reward tags were released during this trip.
- To date tags from 166 fish tagged with yellow GMRI tags have been returned, 17 of which were double tagged fish. There have also been 146 tags returned from fish tagged with DFO tags associated with the project, 18 of which were double tagged fish. All but one of the 35 double-tagged fish which have been returned had retained both tags.
- The majority of the DFO tagging was conducted in May of 2003 and May of 2004. In the first year post-tagging, the return rate was ~8% and did not appear to differ noticeably between tag types (DFO or NRCTP).

### 4.2 Island Institute

- Charter boat fishing has begun, with the fish being present but patchy. Trips have produced as many as 78 fish, and as few as one. However, this aspect of the tagging program does seem to generate good outreach possibilities; in particular, Maine's local Channel 8 filmed TV footage on one trip in late May.
- It is hoped that as the spring continues more fish will show up in the inshore areas generally fished by these vessels.

### 4.3 Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR)

- Tagging for 2004 began with a trip in April (16-19<sup>th</sup>) to Jeffreys Ledge and yielded 367 fish tagged (an earlier trip to Jeffreys in March was ended early due to illness and lack of fish).
- To date in 2004, DMR has tagged 1,028 cod over 13.5 vessel-days (Table 2).
- The fishing captains DMR has been communicating with have not reported large numbers of cod. It is hoped that more cod will start to be seen as water temperatures rise.
- Vessel availability was very limited in March-April; many vessel owners expressed their intent to utilize as many days-at-sea as possible prior to May 1<sup>st</sup>.
- DMR is in the process of recruiting two new vessels to fish the nearshore grounds off eastern Maine; this is easier said than done since only three draggers from downeast Maine are still actively targeting groundfish.

**Table 2 : Summary of DMR tagging to date in 2004.**

Vessel	Gear	Area	Date	Days	Tagged	Recaptured
<i>FV Leslie Ann</i>	Trawl	Jeffreys Ledge	Mar 18-20	1.5	1	0
<i>FV Leslie Ann</i>	Trawl	Jeffreys Ledge	Apr 16-19	3.0	367	2
<i>FV Robert Michael</i>	Trawl	Jeffreys Ledge	Apr 20-23	3.0	283	4
<i>FV Perseverance</i>	Hook	Platts Bank	Apr 30	1.0	26	0
<i>FV Titan</i>	Trawl	Fippennies, Platts, Jeffreys	May 9-11	2.0	75	
<i>FV Leslie Ann</i>	Trawl	Jeffreys, Bigelow Bight	May 10-13	3.0	276	

#### **4.4 School for Marine Science and Technology (SMAST)**

- SMAST has been very busy with the completion of four cod tagging trips to Georges Bank over the latest two month period. The cod numbers were phenomenal and the weather could not have cooperated more.
- During the last week of March, Dave and Darin accompanied the *FV Trident* out to Closed Area II on the eastern end of Georges Bank and found incredible numbers of cod. After a slow start (the water pump broke and the vessel returned to port about 6 hours out!) the trip began to gain momentum. Fishing began just outside and to the west of the closed area and only a couple of cod were caught per haul, so the captain headed east. After crossing the “fence” the catch increased 10 fold, though was still less than 30 cod per haul. Considering the meager landings and the late hour, fishing stopped for the day and started fresh in the morning. The first haul in of the morning netted 266 cod! Over the next two days the catch averaged 344 cod per haul, with a total of 3,145 cod tagged for the trip. Since this volume of fish was unexpected, after two days of tagging there were no more tags left to deploy; SMAST had to call an end to the trip.
- Fortunately, the cod were still around for SMAST’s first trip in April aboard the *FV Voyager I*. Ross and Darin went out with SMAST’s final tag supply and headed to the same location. After 16 hauls SMAST had once again used up all 5,000 tags, with an average number of cod per haul of 284. The challenging part of this trip was getting the captain to shorten up the tows! It was claimed that the winches would burn up if haul-back was too soon after setting! Nonetheless, on one haul he was talked into a 5 minute bottom time (that’s right 5 minutes!) and the catch totaled 453 cod!
- After restocking our tag supply yet again, Dave and Darin headed back out aboard the *FV T-Luis* in the first week of May. The trip began on the western edge of Closed Area I, with sporadic catches of up to 60 fish. Because of the “low” numbers, it was decided to head east to see if the fish were still in the vicinity of Closed Area II. Since the previous two trips had hit the northern tip of Closed Area II so hard, a location further south towards the middle of the closed area was focused on. The fishing inside the middle of Closed Area II was lower than Closed Area I, with cod numbers in the teens and twenties. Therefore, on the third day the Captain ventured out and fished just to the west of the closed area; the average was ~71 cod per haul. The trip wrapped up with a total of 902 cod tagged.
- As this update is being written, Dave and Ross are out once again aboard the *FV Sao Paulo*. After quick action by Shelly and Ben, we received a box of high-reward tags to start deploying within this trip. Because so many fish have been released in the closed areas over the last few months, this trip will target the northern flank and mid-sections of Georges Bank.

#### **4.5 Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen’s Association (CCCHFA)**

- Late March continued the winter’s trend of very cold water and poor fishing, but things improved in mid-April, and CCCHFA tagged several thousand fish off Nauset beach towards the end of the month and into the early part of May. Efforts to target an abundance of fish in a different area finally paid off in mid-May when the fleet was able to start tagging fish on the eastern part of Nantucket shoals, from the northern part of Fishing Rip (the Cove) south to Middle Rip. Totals for April were and 2,519 fish tagged; May’s total to date is 11,756 fish.
- CCCHFA will next deploy a limited number of tags inshore in the southern/western Gulf of Maine waters, as identified at the End of Year 1 Meeting in Portland (Dec 03), and the Great South Channel. Permits and vessel contracts for the western Gulf of Maine work are in place and CCCHFA expects to begin trips there in the final week of May. A dedicated trip to the Great South Channel tagged 85 fish on 5/21/04, and vessels from Chatham and Harwichport are following up on this at present.
- The increase in personnel in the form of technicians recruited from the local fishing industry has been helpful this spring. An additional priority will be to quickly train these technicians to handle the additional logistics and duties associated with high-reward tagging.
- During March and April, 93 fish were tagged on Coxes Ledge; the boats of the Frances Fleet found some good fishing and the crews and clients worked together to tag the below legal sized cod.