

Connecticut Shellfish Initiative

Tessa Getchis¹, Nancy Balcom¹, Anoushka Concepcion¹, Julie Rose², Sylvain De Guise¹

¹Connecticut Sea Grant, University of Connecticut ²NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service Milford Laboratory

Gathering of Shellfish Commissions, January 2015

Impetus

- Shellfish are an important resource in Connecticut
- Natural, commercial, recreational shellfish areas occupy over 70,000 acres (nearly 20% of total acreage)
- Interest in expanding three shellfish sectors
 - Commercial harvest and aquaculture
 - Recreational harvest
 - Restoration and enhancement
- Shared opportunities, challenges exist
- Limited coordination among sectors

Snapshot of Shellfish Sectors

- Aquaculture (oysters, quahogs)
 - ~45 companies, 300+ jobs
- Wild harvest (whelk)
 - ~90 licensed
- Recreational harvest (oysters, clams, mussels, scallops)
 - 7500 permits sold annually
 - Managed by towns
- Natural resource interests:
 - stock enhancement
 - habitat restoration
 - living shorelines
 - nutrient extraction

Purpose

- Assess and align needs of shellfish sectors
- Map out a vision plan for the future
 - documents importance of shellfish sectors
 - identifies and characterizes issues of importance
 - establishes long term goals
 - sets objectives
 - provides recommendations

Shellfish Species

<u>Table 1.</u> Common name

Eastern oyster Northern quahog Softshell clam Razor clam Surf clam Bay scallop Blue mussel Ribbed mussel Channeled whelk; conch*

Scientific name

Crassostrea virginica Mercenaria mercenaria Mya arenaria Ensis directus Spisula solidissima Argopecten irradians Mytilus edulis Geukensia demissa Busycotypus canaliculatus Busycon carica

 Includes species of commercial and recreational importance, non-harvested species

Geographic Focus



 Connecticut portion of Long Island Sound and tributaries (>400K acres)

Task Force

- Staff from Sea Grant, NOAA NMFS Milford Lab
- Role:
 - facilitate stakeholder engagement
 - coordinate development, review, adoption of plan
 - maintain website (<u>http://shellfish.uconn.edu</u>)
 - organize public, steering committee meetings



- 1. Identify key stakeholder groups
- 2. Propose work plan, timeline, principles, vision, ensure buy-in
- 3. Identify needs
- 4. Assess relevance
- 5. Align needs
- 6. Establish goals, objectives, recommendations
- 7. Review, Revise, Adopt, Implement

Timeline

2013



2015

Planning Stage

ldentify key stakeholder groups

Propose work plan, timeline, principles, vision, ensure buy-in Listening Stage

Identify needs

Talking Stage

Assess relevance

Align needs

Establish goals, objectives, recommendations Writing Stage

2016

Review

Revise

Adopt

Implement

Stakeholders

- Assigned representatives from key stakeholder groups to steering committee
- Individuals from shellfish sectors, industry associations, local, state, and federal regulators, eNGO, citizen action groups, farm service providers, food system experts
- Steering Committee Role
 - identify sector concerns and opportunities
 - assess relevance of public input
 - provide the context for issues identified
 - propose creative solutions (recommended actions)

Committee

Connecticut Department of Agriculture Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection Connecticut Farm Bureau Association Connecticut Northeast Organic Farming Association Connecticut Seafood Council Connecticut Sea Grant (*ex officio*) Connecticut Shellfish Commissions EPA Long Island Sound Study EPA Office of Ecosystem Protection Harbor Watch (representing community environmental monitoring groups) Industry liaisons (shellfish harvesting and farming) **NOAA** National Marine Fisheries Service Sustainable Food Systems LLC (representing food service) UCONN Extension, UCONN College of Agriculture and Natural Resources USDA Farm Service Agency **USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service** US Army Corps of Engineers-New England District US Fish and Wildlife Service

Buy-in

- Step one meet with individuals from key sectors
- Step two meet with full committee
 - comment on proposed process for developing the plan
 - accept responsibility for their role
 - adhere to a set of guiding principles
 - agree on a common vision

Principles

- Stakeholder-driven effort
- Public process
- All stakeholders have opportunity to contribute
- Process is transparent and flexible
- Contributors must follow ground rules (e.g. treat each other in a professional and respectful manner)



We envision a future in which Connecticut shellfish resources and uses are valued and honored, natural resources are protected and restored, prosperous businesses maintain a safe and sustainable seafood supply, and recreational opportunities abound.

Identify Needs

- Gathered information on specific needs, issues and opportunities
 - steering committee meetings
 - three public meetings
 - via website and email
- A very long list



Cross-cutting needs

- Improve communication among sectors, groups
- Increase public awareness of shellfish resources
- Assess economic importance of sectors
- Increase resources to support growth
- Offer more sector-based educational opportunities
- Reduce (all types) risk

Assess relevance, align needs

- Real vs. perceived challenges
- Prioritize issues
 - short-term
 - long-term
- Sort issues by sectors
 - Significant overlap
 - Some unique needs



Overarching Goals

- 1. The visibility and use of shellfish resources is measurably enhanced.
- 2. Shellfish resources are restored and protected for the benefit of people and the environment.
- 3. Shellfish resources are managed in a transparent and coordinated manner.
- 4. The potential risks to shellfish resources, uses and consumers are understood and minimized.

Goals (cont.)

• Shellfish resources stakeholders communicate in an open, ongoing and inclusive manner.



- Ex. 1. Document and raise awareness of all existing uses of shellfish resources in Connecticut.
 - Task a. Magazine issue devoted to all things shellfish
 - Task b. Statewide conference to promote sectors





- Ex. 2. Document the economic importance of shellfish harvest and cultivation to the State.
 - Task a. Economic assessment of recreational harvest
 - Task b. Economic assessment of aquaculture industry

Recommendations

- Short-term and long-term actions:
 - Ex. 1. Increase staffing/resources at Bureau of Aquaculture so that water sample collection, transfer and analysis can be expanded for recreational harvest areas.
 - Ex. 2. Map the distribution of natural oyster reefs.
 - Ex. 3. Establish a shellfish industry association.

Review, Revise, Adopt

- A lengthy process to ensure:
 - all issues are captured
 - context is included for all issues
 - goals, objectives are measurable and time-bound
 - recommendations are actionable
 - progress will be tracked
- A State Shellfish Committee will be formed:
 - evaluate progress on vision plan goals, objectives
 - address future shellfish issues and opportunities

Lessons learned (so far...)

- Avoid assumptions
 - Various levels of knowledge; understanding of issues
 - A lack of response does not equal agreement
- Avoid a "one size fits all" approach
 - For example, needs differ between oyster operations that rely on hatchery seed vs. those that rely on seed from natural beds
- Be flexible, give face time
 - new issues, new stakeholders, new views

Lessons learned (so far...)

- Underlying tensions can threaten process; "reboot"
- Learn from your neighbors

Shellfish Initiatives Across the Nation

- NOAA Aquaculture National Shellfish Initiative
- **Washington** protect, enhance shellfish resources
- **California** restore, expand shellfish resources
- Gulf of Mexico
- Alaska industry expansion and economics focus
- **Maryland** revision of lease and permitting process
- **Rhode Island** shellfish management plan

Session, 2015 NSA annual meeting, Monterey, California

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- Learn more: <u>http://shellfish.uconn.edu</u>