



New Hampshire Fish and Game Department

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UPDATE ON NANNIE ISLAND OYSTERS

To All Oyster Licensees

The Nannie Island oyster bed is the largest bed open to New Hampshire recreational oyster licensees. In the late 1960s it was said to be about 40 acres large and later in 2002 it was estimated to be about 25 acres in size. While the major portion of the bed lies southwest of the island there are oysters to the east of it as well. Because of the beds' large size it is an area well known to those who gather oysters from small boats using tongs.

When a New Hampshire Fish and Game program of annual oyster monitoring began in 1993 the Nannie bed was a reasonably healthy one with various size classes represented including the four to five inchers that comprised the major portion of a harvesters daily limit.

Oyster abundance went downhill beginning in 1995 when a combination of stressful environmental conditions (high temperatures and salinities), and pathogenic protozoans (MSX and Dermo) caused a mass mortality in the Great Bay system. Following this event, monitoring of the two protozoan pathogens has continued. Over the ten plus years this monitoring has determined that both protozoan pathogens remain in some Great Bay oysters. It is possible they may reach high levels within individual oysters and cause mortality in the future, however, since the mass mortality of the mid 1990s there has been no comparable die-off attributable to protozoan disease.

A letter was sent to all oyster licensees in 2007 asking for a voluntary avoidance of Nannie Island to conserve a very heavy 2006 spatfall. This letter has been posted in the NH F&G website also. As a result of the excellent cooperation of oyster licensees, the Nannie beds were generally avoided in 2008 and the growth of the 2006 and 2007 spat has now resulted in many oysters in the 3 to 4 inch size range. As a result it is now reasonable that some harvest of oysters at Nannie Island can resume.

There are, however, certain things that can be done to aid in the further restoration of the Nannie oyster bed as well as any other location where oysters are taken.

- Careful and complete culling of your tonged or raked catches such that all small oysters are returned.
- General avoidance of any area where oyster harvesting shows only small nonharvestable sizes.
- Oyster shell return to the beds by either use of the UNH Jackson Lab Shell Recycling Program (www.oyster.unh.edu) or by each oyster harvester when they return to the beds. This is important as it provides a favorable surface for settlement of oyster.

Thank you for your cooperation in our joint efforts to improve the Great Bay oysters.
Any questions, please contact the Marine Fisheries Division at 603-868-1095.

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