

The Lobster Conservancy

Sustaining a thriving lobster fishery through science and community

March 2007

Dear Volunteers and Friends of The Lobster Conservancy,

The Lobster Conservancy's (TLC's) mission is to sustain a thriving lobster fishery through science and community. This newsletter keeps our friends and volunteer research team informed of our activities. Here's what we've been up to over the past few months.

Research



Diane traveling to field site for winter lobster census. Photo by Pam Cabanas.

The first scientific paper from the Sonar Tracking Project is officially in print. The citation is: Cowan, D.F., W.H. Watson, A.R. Solow, and A.M. Mountcastle. 2007. Thermal histories of brooding lobsters, *Homarus americanus*, in the Gulf of Maine. *Marine Biology* 150:463-470. Thanks again to Northeast Consortium, Darden Restaurants Foundation, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and Davis Conservation Foundation for funding the project and to Town of Friendship Lobstermen who made it possible to tag and recover data from a high percentage of egg-bearing lobsters.

The juvenile lobster census entered its 15th year with high winds and bitter cold temperatures that prevented tagging on some evenings. Diane braved the weather, determined to celebrate her anniversary at Lowell's Cove – the original Juvenile Lobster Monitoring Program site. Although some juvenile lobsters stuck around to be sampled,

winter densities were lower this year than last at both Lowell's Cove and the other year-round site.

In addition to sampling, we've been working on compiling lobster data gathered over the past 15 years. TLC received a challenge grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) for a Juvenile Lobster Habitat Mapping Project. The scope of the project is to identify and describe habitats critical to juvenile lobster. The project will create interactive GIS-based maps that will be useful to policy makers, resource managers, lobstermen, and others. JLMP volunteers will distribute the maps to local community stakeholders throughout the Gulf of Maine.

Draft maps of New England and Massachusetts made their debut at the annual meeting of the Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association in February. A draft map of New England was also presented to Friendship at the town's 200th birthday celebration on February 25th.

We will be printing final maps in early March and providing them to our JLMP volunteer teams to distribute the maps to their communities in April. We are grateful to the Darden Restaurant Foundation, the Boston Foundation Fund for the Environment and the Anderson Foundation for providing matching monies toward the NFWF grant. The Gulf of Maine Council on the Marine Environment is also sponsoring the project.

Juvenile Lobster Monitoring Program (JLMP)



Handful of juvenile lobsters

The volunteer-based Juvenile Lobster Monitoring Program will begin its 15th season with Volunteer Kick Off Meetings on March 24th at the Seacoast Science Center in Rye, NH, and March 25th at the Hahn Center in Friendship, ME. In addition to reviewing the results of the 2006 sampling season and our sampling protocol, we will be providing teams with the New England Lobster Nursery Habitat Map, as well as the appropriate regional map to present to their local government. Regional maps from Southwest to

Northeast are for MA, NH/Southern ME, Casco Bay, Mid-coast ME, and Penobscot Bay/Downeast ME. We will be discussing talking points and strategy to utilize these maps to the fullest to protect intertidal lobster nursery habitats in their local communities.

This year, over 100 volunteers will again monitor 23 juvenile lobster nursery sites from Dobbins Island in Downeast Maine to Green Harbor, MA from April through November 2007. Two additional sites at Lowell's Cove in Harpswell and Deep Cove on Friendship Long Island are monitored year round by TLC scientists who also tag and recapture juvenile lobsters.

We are thrilled that we will have almost 100% of our volunteers returning for another sampling season. We continue to be amazed by the dedication of our JLMP volunteers and look forward to seeing many of them at our upcoming Kick Off meetings.

Outreach and Education

On January 25th, Diane participated in “Zoey’s Room” as one of Maine’s “Fab Females”—an online Q & A chat room with girls interested in science and technology. It was a blast to chat about lobsters and answer the island girls’ questions using satellite communication from one island to instantaneously communicate with another island – typing as fast as we could while ignoring grammar and punctuation!



Youthlink group visits TLC. The names starting in the back row heading left to right are: Ashlee, Michael, Taylor, Elleson, Robbie, Sarah. The front row going left to right is Joel, Kate, and Peter

Youthlinks - an organization serving young people in Knox County (www.youthlinksonline.org) - visited TLC on February 23rd to learn about lobster life,

science and TLC programs. This was another rewarding event thanks to the level of intelligence and interest provided by the students! The live lobster show and tell was a hit!

We've also been busy educating the public by sharing lobster science with the press including Diane's "Ask the Lobster Doc" column for Commercial Fisheries News. The March column entitled "Lobster maps show nursery habitats" is now available and will soon be posted at www.lobsters.org.

Diane has also written two letters to the editor at the Portland Press Herald and will participate in a "Lobster Learn-in" to share information about lobster biology in response to what's being written and said by proponents of LD 170 – a Maine state legislative bill that would legalize the landing of dragger caught lobsters in Maine. We will also provide testimony at the March 5th public hearing scheduled for 9 am at the Augusta Civic Center. It is important for The Lobster Conservancy to share knowledge that we've learned through our own studies and based on the research of others in order to protect and preserve the traditional trap-based lobster fishery.

There are at least three sound biological reasons that trapping is safer for lobsters than dragging.

- 1) Trapping is passive – the lobster is invited into the trap for a meal and incidentally gets caught. Dragging is active – the lobster is scooped up from its home. In the act of dragging both lobsters and lobster habitat are damaged.
- 2) Traps are scaled to lobster body size and have escape vents to let small lobsters escape resulting in a method that targets lobsters of legal size and leaves other lobsters to go about their business of growing up and making more lobsters.
- 3) Where dragging for lobsters is permitted, large brood (parental) stock lobsters are targeted. Brood stock lobsters are critical to the sustainability of the lobster fishery.

As you can see it has been a busy winter. We're looking forward to another exciting and productive year.

Yours in TLC,

Diane Cowan, Jane Roundy, and Sarah Lash