



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Marine Resources Commission

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VMRC Announces Extension and Adjustment of Oyster Harvest Areas

Fort Monroe, VA. – In consultation with the VMRC Shellfish Department and the Virginia Oyster Industry, the Virginia Marine Resources Commissioner will close Rappahannock Rotation Area 4 at 12 PM on February 10th, 2023. Citing an abundance of caution for Virginia’s oyster resource, this management measure will help ensure the oyster resource in Area 4 remains in a sustainable condition for future harvest rotations.

Utilizing rotational shellfish harvesting areas, oyster stock in Area 4 has continued to grow at a promising rate during 2022 and into 2023. Because of that growth, the VMRC is closing Area 4 and extending the public oyster season in other areas, encouraging the continuation of a healthy oyster bottom and reduction of the environmental footprint from harvesting. VMRC Shellfish Department Chief Adam Kenyon was encouraged by the resiliency of the oyster stock in Rappahannock Area 4 and stated that he was “thankful for the collaborative effort between industry, watermen, and the public to work for long-term, sustainable oysters. This collaboration shows that our efforts are producing long term growth of Virginia’s public oyster stock”.

The VMRC Commission approved at their January meeting an industry request to extend the public oyster harvest season in other areas located in both the James and Rappahannock Rivers that have shown an abundant stock. The VMRC Shellfish Department made the determination that the standing stock of oysters in the Rappahannock River Rotation Area 4 will meet the closure criteria by February 10th, 2023, and should be closed to conserve long-term oyster resources. This determination is based on the stock assessments conducted jointly by Virginia Marine Resources Commission and the Virginia Institute of Marine Science.

As established in Chapter 4 VAC 20-720-30 “Standing Stock Criteria”, “Any public oyster ground or unassigned ground may be closed to harvest by the Commissioner of Marine Resources, when it is determined by the Oyster Replenishment Department that the standing stock of oysters has been depleted by 50% or more”. Based on the survey conducted on January 5th, 2023, ~47% of the standing stock of oysters had been removed from Area 4 during the open season. Given the

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anticipated effort in this area, it is probable that the 50% threshold criteria will have been exceeded by February 10th, 2023.

This collaborative management approach will ensure that marketable oysters will be available for harvest from areas that continue to show late season productivity. VMRC Commissioner Jamie Green conveyed his continuing appreciation for all the stakeholders serving the Commonwealth on the VMRC Shellfish Advisory Committee as well as the agency's Shellfish Department staff for their hard work and professionalism. The VMRC will continue its commitment to ensure a sustainable oyster stock for the economic and environmental benefits that this treasured renewable resource provides to The Commonwealth of Virginia.

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