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Zone C Lobster Hatchery Revs Up for New Season
Hatchery upgrades for 2007 season, hires new hatchery staff and releases 10,000 babies in the first month of operation

Stonington, ME - The Zone C Lobster Hatchery is off and running this season. Ten thousand Stage IV lobsters (a pound of small creatures) went overboard in the first release of the summer on June 27, off Donald Jones' boat, F/V Blue Diamond. The production, from just two tanks, is one of three scheduled in the next week and makes up the first full run of production from the hatchery this year.

"The many modifications we have made in the hatchery this year, learning from last year, appear to be really paying off," said Hatchery Director, Ted Ames.

"Last year, we released 40,000 lobsters; this year, we will release around 30,000 from the first run." Ames said they are getting a very high survival rate in the hatchery this year, too.

Three new staff members are assisting Ames this year: Rich Crowley, hatchery manager, and Natalie Banks, hatchery technician. Both were hired in early spring. Crowley is a Colby College graduate in environmental science who previously managed Mt Desert Oceanarium Lobster Hatchery in Bar Harbor. Banks holds a bachelor's degree in biology from Queens University in Ontario, and served in 2005 as fisheries observer for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. They have been joined by Helen Kydd, a teacher who has recently moved to the island from Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts.

The hatchery will continue to release on good juvenile lobster habitat in districts throughout Zone C from Matinicus, to Vinalhaven and North Haven, all around Isle au Haut and Deer Isle, and up Blue Hill Bay.

Raising Stage Vs

In addition to churning out Stage IVs the Zone C Lobster Hatchery is expanding operations this year to raise lobsters to both Stage IV and Stage V.

Raising to Stage V means doubling the time the hatchery must care for larvae before release (from two weeks to four or five) and constructing specially designed containers to ensure the baby lobsters stay separated from one another to avoid cannibalism.

"The reason we are doing this is that Stage Vs are more likely than Stage IVs to settle immediately on the ocean bottom where we can find them and track their survival to adulthood," said Ames. "This is a critical step for the work we are doing to determine whether hatcheries can successfully enhance the fishery."

Penobscot East Resource Center is again raising funds for having Dr. Rick Wahle from Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences and volunteer fishermen conduct dive surveys and track released lobsters. The Stage Vs will be used for that work.

Raising lobsters from Stage IV to Stage V is a significant challenge. Because Stage Vs are highly cannibalistic, they must be grown in separate compartments. They are also ravenous, requiring significantly more food than Stage IVs and potentially overtaxing the hatchery food growing systems. For this reason, Ames and Crowley plan to raise the lobsters from Stage IV to Stage V in the ocean. They are constructing specially designed trays with multiple compartments that will be stacked inside bottomless barrels and moored in the harbor off the end of the Co-op 1 dock outside the hatchery. There, the young lobsters will feed on marine growth inside the compartments as well as food washed through the trays by the tide until they reach Stage V and are released.

The decision to upgrade to Stage V came after results from last year's 2006 releases and follow up dive surveys. The hatchery staff and collaborating scientists from the Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences conducted suction sampling at three research sites following the release of Stage IV lobsters in July and August of 2006. The fact that few released lobsters were found at those sites supported the theory that Stage IVs are still too mobile to track reliably. "Stage IVs are what we call super swimmers. While they touch down, they just don't settle on the bottom," said Ames.

Designing new tanks and protocols for Stage Vs began on March 30 at a unique collaborative workshop hosted by Penobscot East Resource Center in Stonington. The 2007 Collaborative Lobster Enhancement Evaluation Workshop brought together Zone C fishermen, scientists from Bigelow Lab and the University of Maine, and researchers from England and Norway to share information and brainstorm best practices for this year's hatchery operations. Fishermen and scientists worked together in breakout sessions to create designs for Stage V tanks, explore sterilization techniques, and brainstorm ideas for financing hatchery operations.

Tours

You may have noticed the pink and blue balloons on the hatchery railing last week denoting the birth of our "babies". It is a most exciting time at the hatchery. If you'd like to schedule a visit please call the office.

Tours are being offered on Tuesdays and Thursdays throughout the summer and by chance. The cost is \$10 for adults and \$5 for children, with all proceeds going directly to the hatchery.

Stop by our booth on the Stonington Fish Pier at the Boat Races and on Fishermen's Day. We look forward to seeing you! Community and fishermen's support is what makes this hatchery possible.

Penobscot East Resource Center is a nonprofit organization established in 2003 to help secure a future for fishing communities from Penobscot Bay islands east to Jonesport, Maine. The center builds alliances among fishermen and community members, fosters community-based science projects, and works to strengthen and diversify marine economies. In the spring of 2005, the center helped fund and build the Zone C Lobster Hatchery.