

2009 COBSCOOK SCALLOP CONSERVATION PLAN

To secure our future well-being those of us who live in fishing communities need to take responsibility for the resources on which our livelihoods depend. In the Cobscook Bay region scallop fishermen have protected the scallop resource over the last ten years. We have reduced the size of the drag gear used in the Bay, set a daily catch limit on ourselves, allowed no shucking until all culling is done, established a scallop meat count, and increased penalties for violations of these scallop conservation measures. We have done this without excluding anybody from fishing in the Bay. Anyone can fish scallops here as long as they abide by Cobscook rules. Some of these rules have worked well enough that they have been applied in the rest of the state, as well.

Over the last seven years these measures and Mother Nature have increased the number of scallops in the Bay substantially, allowing local boats and boats from neighboring towns to fish for much longer than the one or two week “fishing derby” of the late ‘90s. Unfortunately, the scallop resource in the rest of the state has collapsed, which, coupled with a decline in lobster landings, resulted in well over 90 boats fishing here in the 2007-2008 season. With the economy going to pieces and lobster markets collapsing, we can expect even more boats here in the future, leaving us trying to figure out how to protect and to increase our scallop stocks in the face of such pressure. After much consideration and too many meetings, we propose the following:

Establish a Cobscook endorsement

Any one who wants to fish scallops in Cobscook Bay will have to apply for a “Cobscook endorsement” when they renew their scallop license. The proposed fee will be \$200. Holding a Cobscook endorsement will require you to place a Cobscook tag on the bow of the boat. With the endorsement you will have to fish by Cobscook rules wherever you fish for scallops in the state of Maine. The exception to this will be for the meat count. The money from the endorsement will be allocated to stock assessment, stock enhancement and enforcement in Cobscook Bay. The endorsement will be on the boat. A mandatory loss of endorsement will occur for violations of the meat count of 60 meats/pint or higher or for violations of the 15 gallon daily catch limit of 5 gallons or more. Loss of endorsement would be for one year.

Create a closed area

We propose a conservation closure area north of Liberty Point, Robbinston, out to the International Line at the northern end of Navy Island, St. Andrews, and continuing up the St. Croix River to Calais. Until 2002 and 2003 that area was traditionally a good scallop fishing ground. In 2002 and 2003 fishermen found a number of “clappers”, dead scallops with empty shells, in that area. The DMR scallop survey done in that area at that time also found significant numbers of dead scallops. More recently, lobstermen that fish this area have reported finding a good number of juvenile scallops in their traps..

Establish a two month split season

Create a two month season for the Cobscook area, December 1 through December 31 and March 15 through April 15.

Reform the Maine Scallop Advisory Council

All harvesters that are members of the MSAC should be elected from amongst the license holders, with the allocation of harvester seats roughly corresponding to the geographic distribution of license holders, as well as to the dragger/diver license ratio. The dealer, science, and public members of the MSAC should be nominated by the Commissioner and approved by the Legislature. Meetings of the Council should be held in locations to encourage attendance and participation of license holders.

Conclusion

This proposal is meant to allow access to the Cobscook scallop resource in a way that protects it and allows it to grow. These Cobscook conservation measures will contribute to scallop recovery in the rest of the state.