Clam Dredge Framework Update

Michelle Bachman

NEFMC Staff, Habitat PDT Chair

NEFMC Habitat Committee
October 4, 2017
New Bedford, MA

New England
Fishery Management Council

Timing

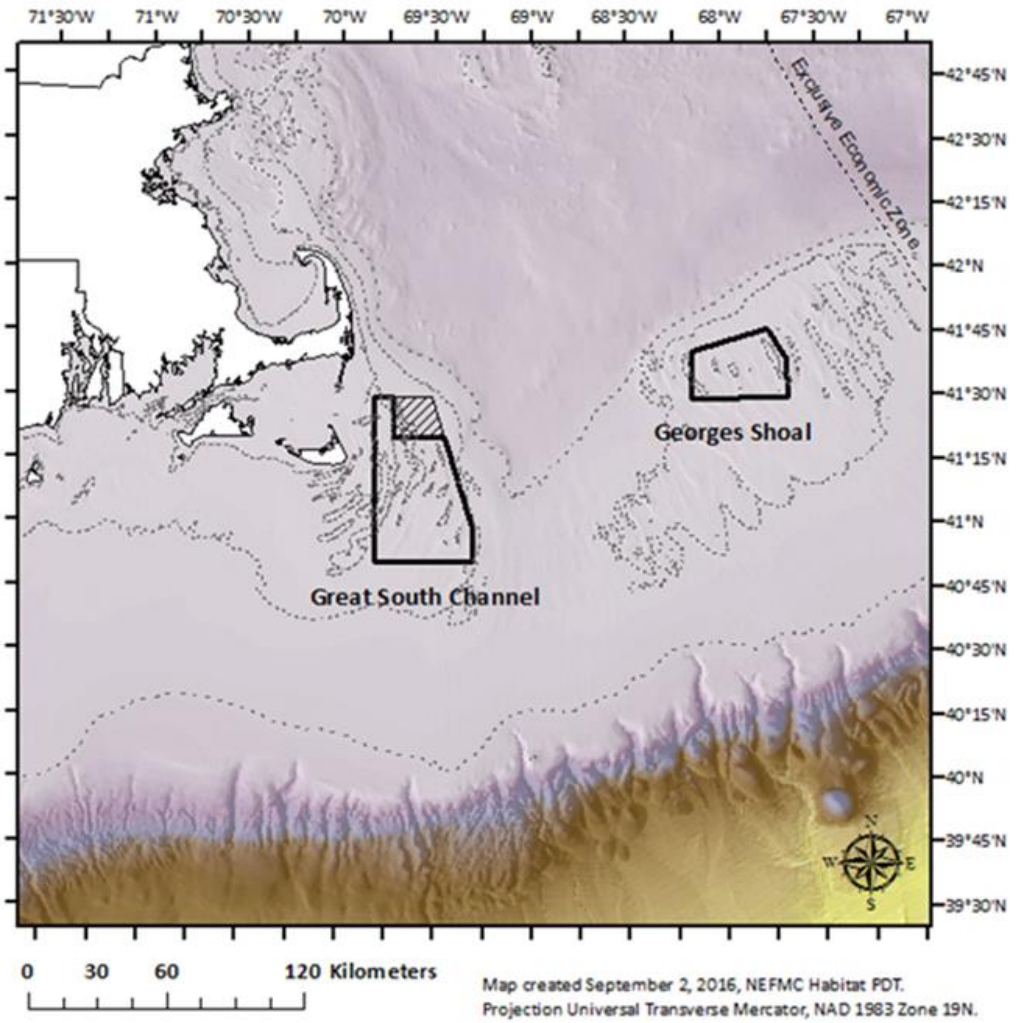
- Trailing to OHA2
- Can work on alternatives now, but suggest holding off on Council review of alternatives until there is a decision on OHA2 (at least the January 2018 meeting)
- One year clock won't start until amendment implementation (spring 2018 ??)
- Need to finalize action in time for rulemaking process to be completed

Statement of work

The SC/OQ fishery will be granted a one year exemption for the Great South Channel and Georges Shoal Habitat Management Areas (HMAs) following implementation of OHA2, which will allow NEFMC to consider development of an access program for this fishery. The Council intends through this action to identify areas within the HMAs that are currently fished or contain high energy sand and gravel that could be suitable for a hydraulic clam dredging exemption that balances achieving optimum yield for the SC/OQ fishery with the requirement to minimize adverse fishing effects on habitat to the extent practicable and is consistent with the underlying objectives of OHA2.

Management areas

- Great South Channel area is used by a number of smaller vessels, and has been fished consistently for years
- Georges Shoal effort is more recent, following changes in PSP-related restrictions. Only a few large vessels use the area at present.



Sources of information to consider

- Habitat characteristics
  - Sediment, epifauna, depth, flow
- Fish distributions
  - Groundfish, other managed resources – focus on juveniles, structure-associated species
- Clam distributions
  - Federal survey
  - Recent Nantucket Shoals survey (SCEMFIS, August 2017)
- Fishing effort distributions
  - VTR, vessel track data (?), VMS (?)

Next steps

- PDT continues to assemble data on habitat characteristics and fish distributions
- Source data on clam distribution from SCEMFIS
- Generate mapping products
- Develop quantitative metrics to summarize data in different portions of the HMA
- Compare results of analysis to determine which areas are best suited for access or closure
- Recommend draft alternatives and gather feedback