

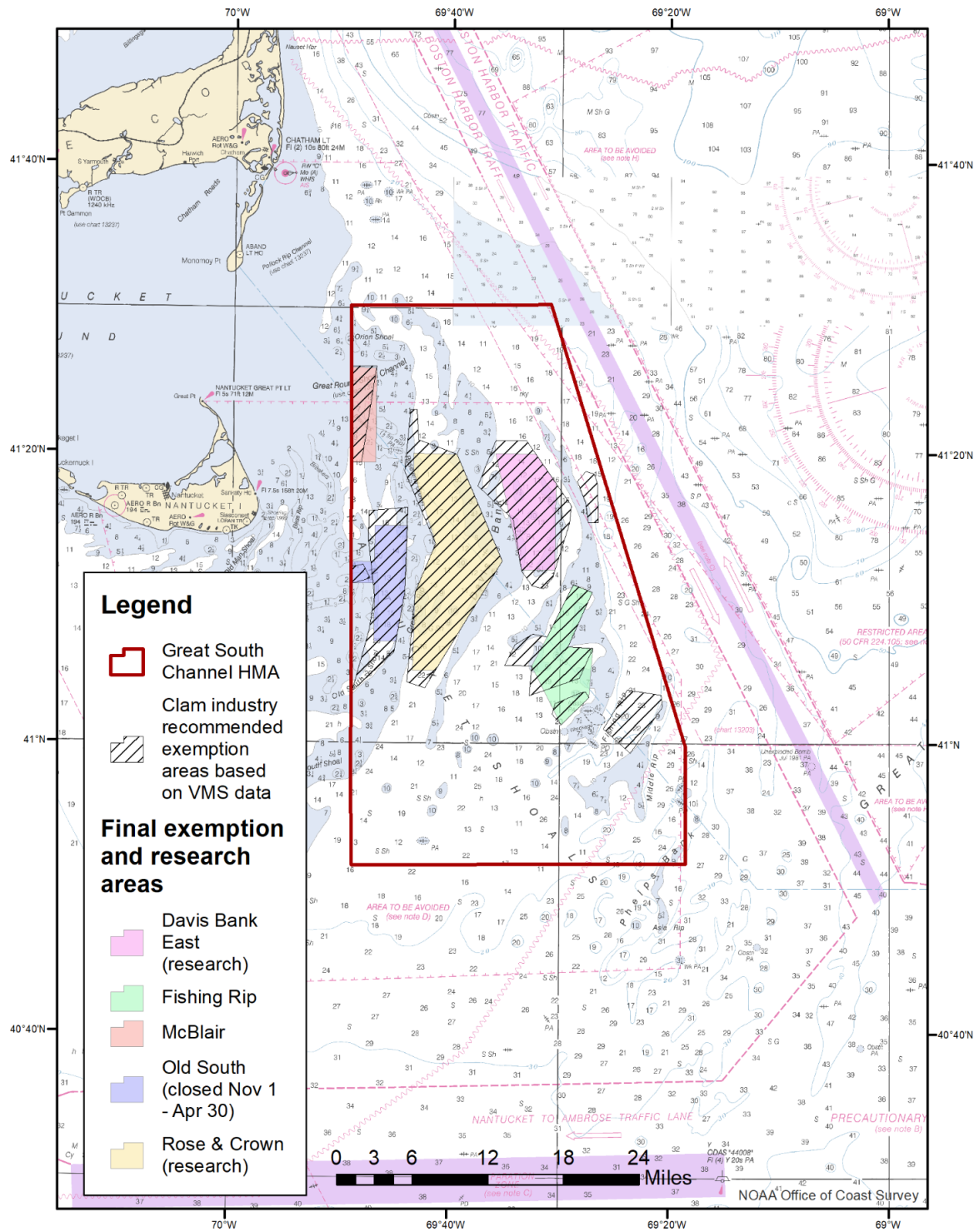
History of the Great South Channel Habitat Management Area (GSCHMA)

(As of January 2022)

- In 2004, the New England Council began work on Omnibus Essential Fish Habitat Amendment 2 (OHA2).
- In December 2014, as completion on OHA2 drew close, the Mid-Atlantic Council submitted comments to the New England Council requesting that, “sub-areas comprised predominantly of sand substrate be identified as clam management areas within the broader proposed habitat closure areas encompassing Nantucket Shoals, Georges Shoals, and Cultivator Shoals.” These areas were intended for clam dredge fishing access.
- At the April 2015 New England Council meeting, a large area east of Nantucket (GSCHMA) was approved for targeted habitat protection. The New England Council recommended the Northeast corner of the area be closed to all dredges and bottom trawls, and the remainder of the area be closed to bottom trawls and scallop dredges with a 1-year exemption for clam dredges. That year would allow for consideration of a different program for clam dredges to access portions of GSCHMA.
- The Council took final action on remaining portions of OHA2 in June 2015 and submitted the FEIS to NOAA Fisheries in January 2016.
- In September 2015, the New England Council initiated action on a framework to identify clam access areas within the GSCHMA. The Council considered multiple sources of information about habitats, managed resources, and fisheries during framework development, including a Science Center for Marine Fisheries analysis of clam dredge survey data. The framework, appendices, and other reports are available here: <https://www.nefmc.org/library/clam-dredge-framework>.
- The OHA2 FEIS was finalized in October 2017, and the proposed rule was published in November. In January 2018, NOAA Fisheries approved most of the recommendations contained in [OHA2](#) (new closures on Georges Shoals were not approved). NOAA Fisheries approved the recommendation that clam dredge gear be allowed in parts of the area for 1-year while the New England Council continued to consider refinements to clam fishing access through the framework. https://180103_OA2-Decision_Letter-to-NEFMC.pdf
- On April 9, 2018, OHA2 was implemented by NOAA Fisheries and prohibited the use of mobile bottom-tending gear within the GSCHMA, except for the surfclam fishery which was granted a 1-year exemption.
- On December 4, 2018, the New England Council completed work on the Clam Dredge Framework and signed off on new measures to allow surfclam fishermen to continue fishing within three exemption areas inside the Great South Channel HMA. Increased monitoring provisions including 5-minute VMS polling apply, and mussel fishermen are also able to fish in the areas. The New England Council also recommended designation of two research areas in the GSCHMA, with the following commitment: “The Council will develop a prioritized list of research

needs concerning Rose and Crown and Davis Bank East. The intent is to work towards an exempted fishing permit program for these areas, which will support the potential development of additional exemptions in the future.”

- On February 28, 2019, the New England Council submitted the draft Clam Dredge Framework and environmental assessment to NOAA Fisheries.
- On April 9, 2019, the clam dredge fishery exemption in the GSCHMA expired. Clam dredges were unable to operate in the GSCHMA until rulemaking occurred on the Clam Dredge Framework.
- On June 12, 2019, the New England Council approved a research plan for the GSCHMA. [190612-GSC-HMA-Research-Planning-Document.pdf](#)
- On July 23, 2019, the New England Council submitted the final version of the Clam Dredge Framework to NOAA Fisheries.
- On January 27, 2020, NOAA Fisheries published a Federal Register notice about an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) requested by Coonamessett Farm Foundation (CFF) to fish with dredge mounted cameras in the Rose and Crown area of the GSCHMA.
- On February 5, 2020, the New England Council provided comments on the EFP request to NOAA Fisheries.
- On May 26, 2020, NOAA Fisheries notified the New England Council that they intended to issue an EFP to CFF, allowing access to part of the Rose and Crown area.
- On June 18, 2020, NOAA Fisheries published the final rule for the framework, allowing surfclam and mussel dredging in the three exemption areas in the GSCHMA. <https://s3.amazonaws.com/nefmc.org/Final-Rule-2020-10566.pdf>
- In December 2020 CFF provided a progress report on their EFP research to the New England Council’s Habitat PDT. The Habitat PDT discussed this report on January 25, 2021. <https://s3.amazonaws.com/nefmc.org/3a.-210125-Habitat-PDT-Summary-FINAL.pdf>
- CFF has since discussed a Phase 2 EFP (extending their earlier work) with NOAA Fisheries. New England Council staff reviewed a version of the project description and provided some informal feedback to CFF staff in March 2021. A FR notice for the project has not been published.
- In December 2021, the Mid-Atlantic Council recommended that Council leadership prioritize a leadership level discussion about the Great South Channel Habitat Management Area between both Councils. This was in response to a letter received by the Mid-Atlantic Council.



Map: GSCHMA final exemption and research areas.