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2015 Sea Scallop Research Set-Aside Awards Announced

NOAA Fisheries Service, in coordination with the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC), is pleased to announce that 10 research projects have been selected for support through the [Sea Scallop Research Set-Aside \(RSA\) program](#). The projects address NEFMC-established research priorities for one of the nation's highest-valued single species commercial fisheries.

"The Scallop RSA program has played a very important part in the successful recovery of the sea scallop fishery," said Thomas Nies, Executive Director of the New England Fishery Management Council. "It provides a consistent source of funding for collaborative research projects specifically designed to solve scallop management needs."

Fourteen researchers from four organizations in Massachusetts and Virginia will be working as investigators on the 10 projects, which are valued at just over \$10 million (detailed in [table](#) below). These projects are funded by proceeds from selling RSA quota that they are awarded from that portion of the sea scallop quota "set aside" reserved annually for this purpose.

"The Atlantic Sea Scallop Research Set-Aside Program is unique in many ways. In particular, the industry deserves credit for supporting research that improves our understanding of scallop stocks," said Bill Karp, Science and Research Director of the Northeast Fisheries Science Center. All of the projects partner researchers and fishermen, and at-sea operations are conducted using fishing vessels as research platforms.

The New England Fishery Management Council sets the research priorities for the sea scallop RSA, and researchers compete for funding. The grant awards are made based on technical merit, responsiveness to council research priorities, and input from a panel of subject matter experts, including members of the sea scallop fishery, who are actively involved in the management of the resource. NOAA Fisheries manages the competition and provides oversight of the awards, but all of the funds derived from the RSA quota are used to support research. NOAA Fisheries does not retain or use any of these funds.

In 2015, several surveys of the scallop resource were funded—each adding to the overall picture of the sea scallop resource. "The area rotation system used in this fishery requires reliable biomass estimates to set catch limits," Nies said. "A variety of survey methods are used in this region and each one provides an important contribution. Overall this is probably the most data rich assessment in the region and the Scallop RSA program contributes greatly to the overall wealth of information available."

During the upcoming fishing year, the Virginia Institute of Marine Science will conduct a fine-scale industry-based dredge survey of the entire sea scallop resource off the Mid-Atlantic coast, while Arnie's Fisheries, Inc. of Massachusetts will conduct a late-season industry-based survey of each of the Mid-Atlantic access areas using a digital imaging system. These two surveys will support Mid-Atlantic scallop biomass and fishing mortality estimates in a region that is currently of particular importance to the scallop fishery.

The University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth School for Marine Science and Technology (SMAST), as part of a 2015 RSA grant and a multi-year 2014 RSA grant, will be funded to conduct an industry-based video survey of the entire Georges Bank resource area, including a high intensity survey of the Closed Area 2 scallop access area, an important area that is scheduled to open in 2016. Arnie's Fisheries will conduct a focused imaging survey to monitor a very strong scallop recruitment event first identified in 2013.

All of these surveys, combined with a Maine Department of Marine Resource Gulf of Maine dredge survey funded through a 2014 scallop RSA grant and the annual NOAA Fisheries scallop survey, will provide a comprehensive picture of the scallop resource by the end of this summer, and are expected to support the Council's area management decisions for 2016 and beyond.

The Sea Scallop RSA program will also continue to support bycatch reduction research in 2015 through dredge conservation engineering, a fleet communication network, and research into the distribution patterns of key bycatch species relative scallop fishing grounds.

In response to sea scallop fishermen's interest in improving the performance of a dredge designed to reduce bycatch called the Turtle



Deflector Dredge, Coonamessett Farm Foundation will investigate the effect of dredge tow speed on capture of target and non-target fish species. They will also continue testing general category scallop dredge bag and twine top modifications to reduce finfish bycatch, with particular focus on yellowtail, winter, and windowpane flounders.

For the fourth consecutive year, SMAST will receive RSA funding to help support their yellowtail flounder bycatch avoidance system. By maintaining a fleet communication network, sea scallop vessels can share information during fishing operations about "hotspots" where high yellowtail bycatch is occurring. This helps vessels ensure that the fishery does not exceed its yellowtail bycatch limit. This funding year, SMAST will also conduct a comprehensive review of this bycatch avoidance network to evaluate program performance.

Coonamessett Farm Foundation of East Falmouth, Mass., will evaluate seasonal variance in sea scallop meat-weight and yellowtail flounder catch-per-unit-effort on northern Georges Bank, a large area that is under review by the Council for potentially significant changes to where scallops can be harvested. These researchers will also be collecting data useful for a variety of other investigations, including gear technology, yellowtail flounder biology and liver disease, and occurrences of "gray meat" in scallops, a condition that discolors the meat and lowers its market quality.

For the fifth consecutive year, Coonamessett Farm Foundation received support for their ongoing sea turtle tagging program. This effort collects information on sea turtle distribution and behavior in the Mid-Atlantic and southern New England where there is overlap between sea scallop fishing activity and turtle distribution.

Coonamessett Farm Foundation also received support to extend for a third year its research into factors that may stabilize and enhance scallop recruitment on Georges Bank, and identify factors that affect scallop seed survival.

For more information about these awards and the Scallop RSA Program, please contact Ryan Silva (ryan.silva@noaa.gov, 978-281-9326), or Cheryl Corbett (cheryl.corbett@noaa.gov, 508-495-2070).

To learn more about work funded through the Sea Scallop RSA program, or through the NEFSC Northeast Cooperative Research Program, use our [searchable project list](#).

2015 Sea Scallop Research Set-Aside Projects

Project	Organization	Principal Investigators	* Set-Aside Award based on \$12 per lb. R=research, C=compensation fishing, and T=total budget
Optimizing the Georges Bank Scallop Fishery by Maximizing Meat Yield and Minimizing Bycatch	Coonamessett Farm Foundation, Inc.(CFF)	Carl Huntsberger, Farrell Davis, Shea Miller, Chris Parkins	R-\$499,958 C-\$1,499,874 T-\$1,999,832 166,653 lbs. of scallops
Habitat Characterization and Sea Scallop Resource Enhancement Study in a Proposed Habitat Research Area –Year Three	Coonamessett Farm Foundation, Inc. (CFF)	Daniel Ward, Liese Siemann, Christopher Parkins	R-\$244,920 C-\$734,760 T-\$979,680 81,640 lbs. of scallops
Determination of the Impacts of Dredge Speed on Bycatch Reduction and Scallop Selectivity Weights of NW Atlantic Sea Scallops via Paired Field Surveys and Laboratory Experiments	Coonamessett Farm Foundation, Inc.(CFF)	Farrell Davis, Christopher Parkins, Daniel Ward	R-\$237,528 C-\$712,584 T-\$950,112 79,176 lbs. of scallops
Understanding Impacts of the Sea Scallop Fishery on Loggerhead Sea Turtles through Satellite Tagging	Coonamessett Farm Foundation, Inc. (CFF)	Shea Miller	R-\$199,260 C-\$597,780 T-\$797,040 66,420 lbs. of scallops
Determining the Impacts of Dredge Bag Modifications on Flatfish Bycatch in the LAGC Scallop Fishery	Coonamessett Farm Foundation, Inc. (CFF)	Christopher Parkins and Farrell Davis	R-\$77,050 C-\$231,150 T-\$308,200 25,683 lbs. of scallops
Optical Survey of the Resource in the Elephant Trunk Scallop Access Area	Arnie's Fisheries, Inc.	Paul Rosonina, Karen Bolles Hopkins, Norman Vine, Jui-Han Chang, Richard Taylor	R-\$157,332 C-\$471,996 T-\$629,328 52,444 lbs. of scallops
Optical Survey of Recent Scallop Settlement Areas Along the Southern New England Shelf Including the Southern Portion of the Nantucket Lightship Scallop Access Area	Arnie's Fisheries, Inc.	Paul Rosonina, Karen Bolles Hopkins, Norman Vine, Jui-Han Chang, Richard Taylor	R-\$202,140 C-\$606,420 T-\$808,560 67,380 lbs. of scallops
Broadscale Video Survey of Georges	University of	Kevin D. E. Stokesbury,	R-\$373,922

Bank Scallop Open Areas	Massachusetts, Dartmouth, School for Marine Science & Technology (SMAST)	Ph.D.	C-\$1,620,327 T-\$1,994,248 166,187 lbs. of scallops
Scallop Fishery Bycatch Avoidance System 2015	University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth, School for Marine Science & Technology (SMAST)	Catherine E. O'Keefe, Ph.D.	R-\$160,738 C-\$571,513 T-\$732,252 61,021 lbs. of scallops
Development and Implementation of a High Precision Resource Wide Dredge Survey of the Mid-Atlantic Scallop Resource Area	Virginia Institute of Marine Science	David B. Rudders, Ph.D.	R-\$173,965 C-\$792,507 T-\$966,472 80,539 lbs. of scallops

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