



New England Fishery Management Council

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Northern Edge: Council Adopts Goal, Objectives for Action to Consider Scallop Access to Tip of Georges Bank Closed Area II

The New England Fishery Management Council has initiated a management action to consider allowing scallop fishery access into the habitat management area (HMA) on the Northern Edge of Georges Bank.

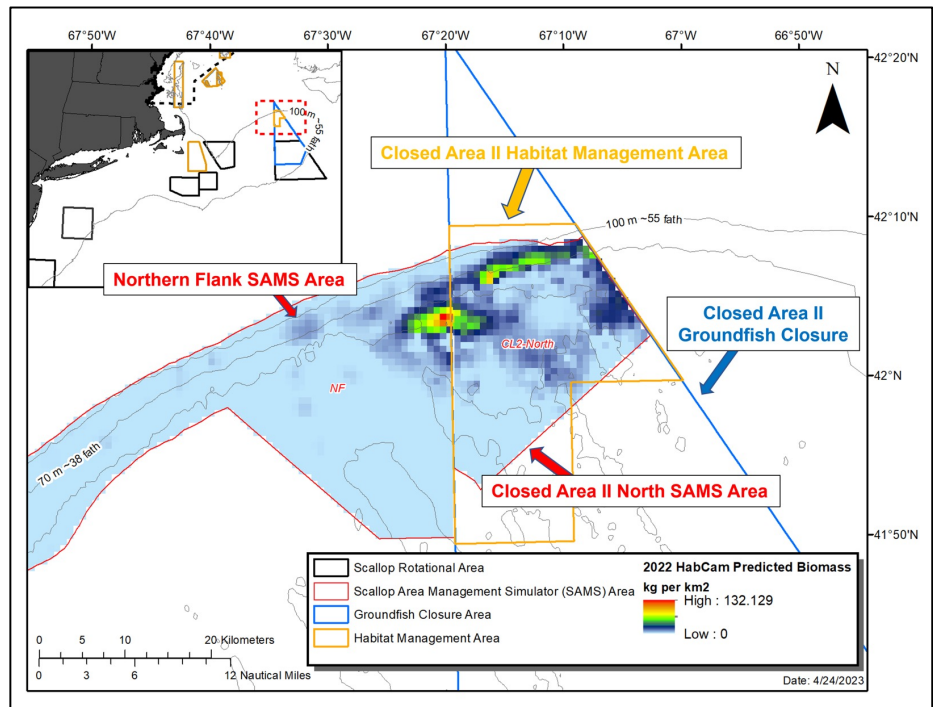
During its [April 18-20, 2023](#) meeting in Mystic, Connecticut, the Council first approved a goal and objectives for this action and then initiated a habitat-scallop framework to develop a range of alternatives that will continue to address habitat protection while balancing controlled harvest of the valuable scallop resource within the HMA.

The Closed Area II Habitat Management Area covers a large part of what is commonly referred to as the Northern Edge of Georges Bank (see map below). It has the same boundaries as the Council's Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC) in Closed Area II and is designated in regulation as the Habitat Closure Area.

GOAL: The goal of the framework, as approved by the Council, is to:

“Develop a scallop rotational harvest program within and/or around the Closed Area II Habitat Closure Area that avoids habitats important to juvenile cod, minimizes adverse effects to essential fish habitats, minimizes adverse biological and economic impacts to other managed fisheries, and contributes to optimum yield for the scallop fishery.”

OBJECTIVES: The Council approved seven objectives for this action, which are fully outlined in the document titled [Northern Edge Habitat-Scallop Framework Goal and Objectives](#). The objectives are:

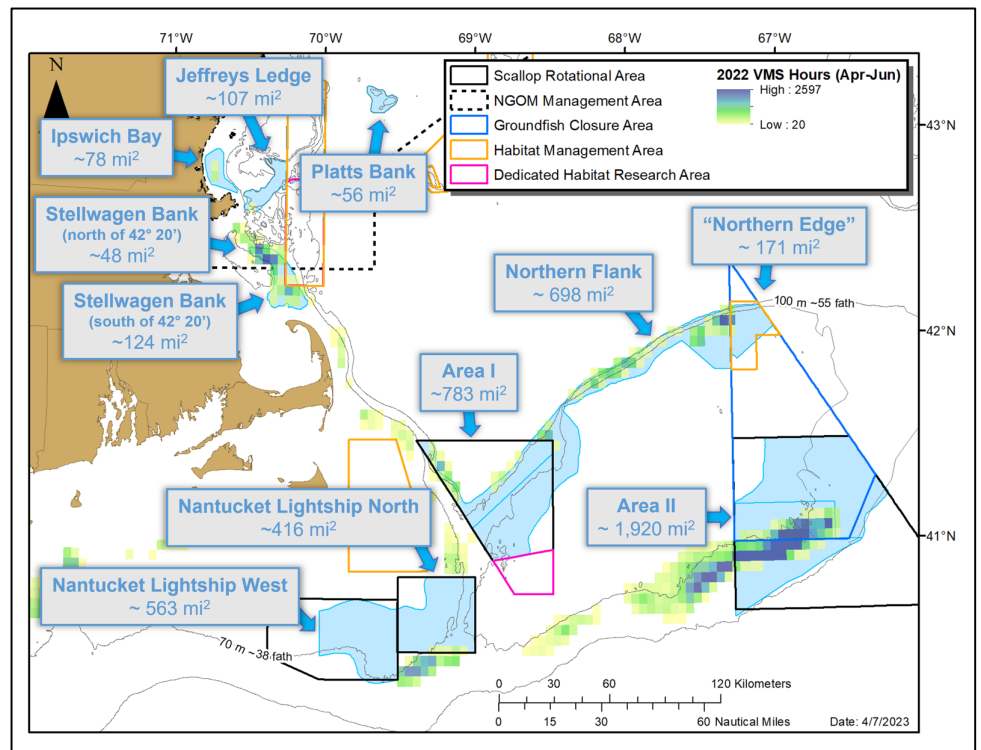


The Northern Edge is roughly defined as the area encompassed within the Closed Area II Habitat Management Area (HMA) and the adjacent portion of the Northern Flank of Georges Bank. — New England Fishery Management Council graphic



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1. Establish a scallop access area or areas, which may be located within and/or outside the existing Closed Area II Habitat Closure Area, including in areas that are currently open to the scallop fishery. Consider both the distribution of scallops and maintaining protection of habitats that are highly vulnerable to dredge fishing impacts and provide functional value for managed fishery resources, taking into account the ecological value of the Northern Edge to juvenile cod and other managed species.
2. Review current boundaries for the Closed Area II Habitat Closure Area and consider whether modifications might be considered in a future action.
3. Develop a scallop rotational harvest program, including the geographic extent, duration, and frequency of scallop dredge activity relative to habitat and recovery time on the Northern Edge.
4. Manage harvest from the Northern Edge scallop resource in the short- and long-term by considering the size distribution of scallops, seasonality of fishing with regard to meat yield, spawning and recruitment potential (in this area and other areas of the scallop resource across Georges Bank), and fishing behavior. Rotational fishing should consider how to achieve harvest from a small area in an equitable and sustainable manner.
5. Develop management area boundaries that are enforceable. This may include developing additional monitoring requirements specific to this area.
6. Accurately monitor and minimize bycatch of non-target species.
7. To the extent possible, consider gear interactions including between scallop dredges and lobster traps, and the impacts of dredge gear on ovigerous lobsters in the Northern Edge HMA.



NORTHERN EDGE HISTORY: The Northern Edge has a long and complicated history that began in December 1994 with the designation of Closed Area II as a year-round groundfish closed area. Next, in 1996, the

The map above shows approximate area sizes for productive scallop grounds (blue outlines) with recent Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) data, which is representative of scallop fishing between April and June 2022. The size of the Northern Edge is similar to areas that have experienced concentrated fishing, such as Stellwagen Bank. Area sizes are based on the boundaries used in the Scallop Area Management Simulator (SAMS) model, which is used to project scallop biomass. — New England Fishery Management Council graphic



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Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) required the nation's [eight](#) regional fishery management councils to identify essential fish habitat (EFH), which led the New England Council to develop the [Omnibus Essential Fish Habitat Amendment 1](#), known as OHA1. This amendment led to the designation of the Juvenile Cod Habitat Area of Particular Concern.

The Closed Area II Habitat Closure Area, which has identical boundaries to the Northern Edge Juvenile Cod HAPC, was designated in [Scallop Amendment 10](#) and [Groundfish Amendment 13](#). As a habitat closure, the use of mobile, bottom-tending gears was prohibited to minimize the adverse effects of fishing on EFH.

The Council began working on [Omnibus Essential Fish Habitat Amendment 2](#), known as OHA2, in 2004. In this action, the Council proposed a series of changes to Closed Area II that were intended to allow for access to fishing grounds on the Northern Edge while maintaining some habitat closures and gear restrictions to protect essential fish habitat. This portion of OHA2 was [disapproved by NOAA Fisheries](#).

When it disapproved access to the Northern Edge, NOAA Fisheries stated:

“... any future action should thoroughly evaluate the geographic extent, duration, and frequency of any future scallop dredging activity within any new access area on the northern edge of the bank and the habitat features that are used by groundfish at critical life stages that need to be protected from impacts.”

The Council will consider these concerns as it develops the [Northern Edge Habitat-Scallop Framework](#). New data has [become available](#) since the disapproval to help guide the Council's decision-making. The Council

must determine if adequate justification exists for revising the current Georges Bank habitat management measures to allow for scallop fishery access.

The Habitat Plan Development Team drafted a [white paper](#) in 2021-2022 to support the discussion, and the Council voted in December 2022 to make this issue be a [2023 Council priority](#) under both habitat and scallops. This is a multi-year priority that may continue into 2024.

[~ Visit the Northern Edge webpage. ~](#)



The Council will be hosting a [Scallop Research Share Day on May 10, 2023](#). Researchers will be sharing results of their recent work to better inform fishery managers of ongoing research and help identify future research priorities. [Tune in!](#) – UMass Dartmouth School for Marine Science and Technology (SMAST) photo

Habitat Questions?
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Scallop Questions?
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