



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

NEWS RELEASE

ASMFC Vision: Sustainably Managing Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

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ASMFC Presents Annual Awards of Excellence

Alexandria, VA - The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission presented members of the American Lobster Trap Tag Team, Jason McNamee, Chief Deputy Kurt Blanchard, and Special Agent Todd Smith with its Annual Awards of Excellence for their outstanding contributions to fisheries management, science, and law enforcement along the Atlantic coast.

“Every year a great many people contribute to the success of fisheries management along the Atlantic coast. The Commission’s Annual Awards of Excellence recognize outstanding efforts by professionals who have made a difference in the way we manage and conserve our fisheries,” said ASMFC Chair Douglas Grout of the New Hampshire Fish and Game. “This evening, we honor several exceptional individuals for their contributions to the management and conservation of Atlantic coast fisheries.”



AAE Recipients from left: Special Agent Todd Smith, Peter Burns, Mike Cahall, Cheri Patterson, Allison Murphy, Deputy Chief Kurt Blanchard, Jason McNamee, Chip Lynch

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission was formed by the 15 Atlantic coastal states in 1942 for the promotion and protection of coastal fishery resources. The Commission serves as a deliberative body of the Atlantic coastal states, coordinating the conservation and management of nearshore fishery resources, including marine, shell and anadromous species.

Management & Policy Contributions

American Lobster Trap Tag Team -- Mike Cahall, Nicholas Mwai and Karen Holmes of the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP); Peter Burns, Chip Lynch, Allison Murphy, Julie Mackey and Ted Hawes with NOAA Fisheries; Cheri Patterson and Renee Zobel with NH Fish and Game; Tom Hoopes, Story Reed and Kerry Allard with MA Division of Marine Fisheries; Scott Olszewski, Daniel Costa and John Lake with RI Division of Fish and Wildlife; Mark Alexander and Colleen Giannini with CT Dept. on Energy and Environmental Protection; and Kim McKown with NY State Dept. of Environmental Conservation

The American Lobster Trap Tag Team is a group of 19 state and federal fishery and data managers and ACCSP staff responsible for the creation of the first of its kind cooperative permitting and trap allocation tracking database for American lobster. As a result of this ground breaking state/federal partnership, state and federal American lobster permits and associated trap tags can be managed in a coordinated way for the first time. This is not an easy accomplishment given the complexities of American lobster management, which restricts the number of traps fished in its various Lobster Conservation Management Areas (LCMAs) but allows the transfer of trap allocations among permit holders. The task of creating a multi-jurisdictional program among the states and NOAA Fisheries was challenging because of the differences between their permitting approaches. States typically issue permits in the name of the permit holder, while NOAA Fisheries issues permits by the name of the vessel. In order to be efficient for administrators, business friendly for fishermen, and achieve the goals of the lobster management plan, the transfer program had to seamlessly dovetail the differing rules and policies of the states and NOAA Fisheries. Further, the transfer database had to address issues such as matching state and federal permits that could be in different names; fixing differences in data fields across jurisdictions; and reconciling problems associated with a single fisherman having multiple corporations with permits. The database became fully operational in late 2015 and provides the Commission, ACCSP, and associated partners a central database to manage and track trap tag transfers and allocations between commercial lobstermen across jurisdictions, while improving effort data essential for making informed management decisions.

Scientific & Technical Contributions

Jason McNamee, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management

Jason McNamee is being recognized for his unparalleled technical abilities, exceptional leadership, and unwavering energy. For over a decade, Mr. McNamee has served as a contributing member and in a leadership position on numerous Commission species technical committees, stock assessment subcommittees, and science advisory committees. He consistently provides thoughtful and unbiased insight into committee discussions and regularly volunteers for additional work to achieve the committee objectives, using his technical abilities and analytical skills to address challenging issues. In addition, he has a superlative ability to disengage from the political aspects of fisheries management to focus on technical and biological issues to ensure the well-being of our fisheries resources. He is an effective leader, able to find compromise in almost every situation, as well as a skilled communicator at all audience levels.

He has played a key role, as either committee chair or lead assessment scientist, on a number of benchmark stock assessments including the 2013 summer flounder assessment, the 2015 tautog assessment, and the upcoming black sea bass assessment. Notably, he led the Tautog Stock Assessment Subcommittee in developing an assessment that incorporated regional structure to address management board concerns. Further, he helped develop and implement a novel model approach to provide another method to assess this data-poor stock and further corroborate assessment results. As Chair of the Atlantic Menhaden Technical Committee, Mr. McNamee has taken a leadership role in working towards the development of ecosystem-based reference points, offering innovative ways of incorporating ecosystem function into the stock assessment process.

In addition to his abilities and commitment to sound fisheries management, Mr. McNamee is an outstanding colleague, who is enthusiastic about his work, thoughtful and articulate in his speaking, considerate of others' viewpoints, and able to maintain a calm demeanor even under the most adversarial conditions. Highly regarded by

committee members, Commission staff, and Commissioners, Mr. McNamee is an enormous asset to the Commission process and science-based fisheries management in general.

Law Enforcement Contributions

Deputy Chief Kurt Blanchard, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management

For more than 20 years, Deputy Chief Kurt Blanchard has been an outstanding member of Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management's Environmental Police as well as an active member and past chair of the Commission's Law Enforcement Committee. Throughout his two decades of involvement, Deputy Chief Blanchard has provided leadership and insight on issues involving American lobster, Atlantic striped bass, American eel, tautog, and safe harbor concerns. His institutional knowledge of the Law Enforcement Committee and the Commission has been invaluable, making him the go to person on marine fisheries matters. Deputy Chief Blanchard has been an avid proponent for consistent, and easily understood and enforced management measures. He brings to every discussion the importance of balancing commercial, recreational, and resource concerns.

Deputy Chief Blanchard serves as an important member of a working group charged with providing feedback to NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement related to joint enforcement agreements between that agency and the states. Having served in that capacity since the working group's inception, he has been invaluable in elevating the states' role in enforcing federally managed fisheries. His intimate knowledge of marine affairs and related communities has been an integral part in designing a reasonable and effective approach to protecting natural resources and the people that rely on them.

Committed to ensuring that the next generation of environmental police are given the necessary tools and education to succeed in conservation leadership, Deputy Chief Blanchard also serves as a steering committee member and executive advisor to the National Conservation Law Enforcement Leadership Academy. In this capacity, he has provided guidance on curriculum, scheduling, candidate selection, instructor evaluation and budget management.

Deputy Chief Blanchard is being recognized today for his outstanding leadership in conservation law enforcement at the state, regional, and national levels, and for his passion and dedication to protecting marine fisheries resources.

Special Agent Todd Smith, NOAA Office of Law Enforcement

Since 2010, Special Agent Todd Smith has worked tirelessly to reveal significant quantities of summer flounder were being taken illegally under the cover of quota acquired through the Mid-Atlantic Research Set Aside (RSA) Program. Through his investigation, Special Agent Smith identified 12 persons and entities exploiting the RSA Program for personal gain, uncovering nearly 600,000 pounds of unreported summer flounder, worth an estimated \$1.2 million. Special Agent Smith highlighted the RSA Program's vulnerability to abuse through under-reporting and non-reporting of catch, ultimately resulting in the Program's suspension in 2015.

Special Agent Smith served 120 subpoenas which produced 12,500 documents and identified four vessels that sold unreported summer flounder to four federally permitted dealers. He managed the execution of seven simultaneous search warrants, the largest number ever executed in one day in the history of NOAA's Northeast Region, which resulted in further proof that eight individuals and four corporate entities continued to conceal illegal landings of summer flounder caught under the guise of the Program.

To date, Special Agent Smith's dedication and perseverance has resulted in charging nine defendants with 24 felonies. All nine have pleaded guilty. So far, seven sentences have been rendered totaling 16 months of prison time, \$1.2 million in fines, and \$550,000 in restitution. Furthermore, Special Agent Smith has shared his investigative experiences with NOAA Fisheries to aid in its efforts to formulate regulatory changes to the RSA Program. Special Agent Todd Smith achievements are notable and all our Atlantic fisheries are better off thanks to his hard work.

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