

# **2021-2022 Alabama Oyster Season Summary**

## **Oyster Reef Sampling Results and Management Updates**

The Alabama Marine Resources Division (MRD) staff conducted 18 pre-season quadrat dives and collected 178 samples resulting in an initial harvest goal of 20,464 sacks for the 2021-2022 season. The goal was set at 33% of the estimated harvestable oysters in Heron Bay and the Cedar Point West areas. The harvest estimate for Cedar Point East was zero oysters. Staff estimated spat recruitment and sublegal oysters to be lower than the 2020-2021 season.

MRD held a pre-season public meeting in Bayou La Batre Civic Center on September 15, 2021. The meeting was attended by approximately 75 people. During the meeting, MRD discussed the season dates and that all harvest areas in Heron Bay, Cedar Point East, and Cedar Point West would be open. In addition, MRD staff provided a refresher about how harvest would be monitored using the Oyster Management System (OMS) grids first used during the prior oyster season and stressed the importance of accurate reporting. Season openings and closings would be through press release while grid closures would be announced as necessary by MRD staff via social media posts and by postings at the OMS station.

Based on the results of the annual SCUBA quadrat survey and input from industry partners, MRD decided upon a season opening date of October 4, 2021, with a 6 sack per person per vessel per day limit. Oyster reefs were open from 7 a.m. until 2 p.m. and all oysters were required to be landed by 3 p.m. The first four Saturdays of the season were open from 7 a.m. until 12 p.m. to allow an opportunity for students, who are in school during the work week, to harvest oysters.

Harvesters collecting oysters recreationally were advised they would be required to obtain a recreational harvest tag at the OMS station, a new requirement, and those harvesters would also be required to provide their fishing trip data to OMS station staff. This was put into place to reduce risks to human health and to assist with determining overall harvest. The daily recreational limit was 100 oysters per person which was estimated to be 60% (0.6) of an average commercial sack. One commercial sack is equivalent to  $\frac{1}{4}$  Alabama Barrel.

## **In-Season Management**

During the season, staff conducted on-water inspections of oyster harvesters' catches and culling boards to ascertain the condition of the reef. Combined with OMS harvest data for individual grids, including catcher harvest times and sack counts, the on-water inspections informed MRD staff when to close sufficiently harvested grids and when to allow harvesters to keep working in areas that had high proportions of adult oysters or areas that had not been surveyed. The on-water inspections gave managers more confidence in extending the season and exceeding the initial harvest goal.

During the season, public reefs were open to harvest for 79 working days with reef closures on Veterans Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Eve holidays. Grid closures occurred on November 10, November 23, December 8, December 17, and January 6. All public reefs were closed for the season on January 21, 2022.

The dockside price of harvested oysters ranged from \$0.70 - \$1.00 per pound throughout the season.

<b>Season Statistics</b>	<b>2020 – 2021 Season</b>	<b>2021 – 2022 Season</b>
Start / End Dates of Season	10-12-2020 to 12-23-2020	10-4-2021 to 1-21-2022
Total number of harvest days	47	79
Total number of sacks harvested	22,070	50,020 (commercial + converted recreational sacks)
<b>Commercial Harvest Statistics</b>		
Commercial sacks harvested	22,070	49,314
Average commercial sacks per day	470	624
Minimum commercial sacks per day	6	14
Maximum commercial sacks per day	853	1,035
Average commercial harvesters per day	78	112
Minimum commercial harvesters per day	1	4
Maximum Commercial harvesters per day	144	183
Total commercial trips	3,884	8,855
<b>Recreational Harvest Statistics</b>		
Recreational sacks harvested	data not available *	1,177 (706 com equiv **)
Average recreational sacks per day	data not available *	15 (8.9 com equiv **)
* Data was not recorded for recreationally harvested oysters prior to the 2021 – 2022 commercial harvest season.		
** Numbers shown in parenthesis are the commercial sack equivalent. A recreational sack is 0.6 of a commercial sack.		

**Table 1.** Statistics of 2020 – 2021 and 2021 – 2022 Oyster Harvest Seasons.

<b>Commercial Harvest Season</b>	<b># Days</b>	<b># Sacks</b>
Fall 2011 - Spring 2012	38	48,581
Fall 2012 - Spring 2013	81	42,047
Fall 2013 - Spring 2014	63	12,274
Fall 2014 - Spring 2015	56	7,151
Fall 2015 - Spring 2016	13	369
Fall 2016 - Spring 2017	35	1,280
Fall 2017 - Spring 2018	6	136
Fall 2018 - Spring 2019	0	0
Fall 2019 - Spring 2020	36	11,333
Fall 2020 - Spring 2021	47	22,070
Fall 2021 - Spring 2022	79	50,020 *
* Total sack count for Fall 2021 – Spring 2022 includes commercial sacks + converted recreational sacks		

**Table 2.** Summary of season length and sacks harvested each season from Fall 2011 through Spring 2022

### **Enforcement Actions**

58 enforcement warnings or citations were issued during the season:

Oystering in a closed area	= 33
Unculled/Improperly sacked oysters	= 13
Oystering without a license	= 8
Possession of undersized oysters	= 2
Improperly identified oysters	= 2

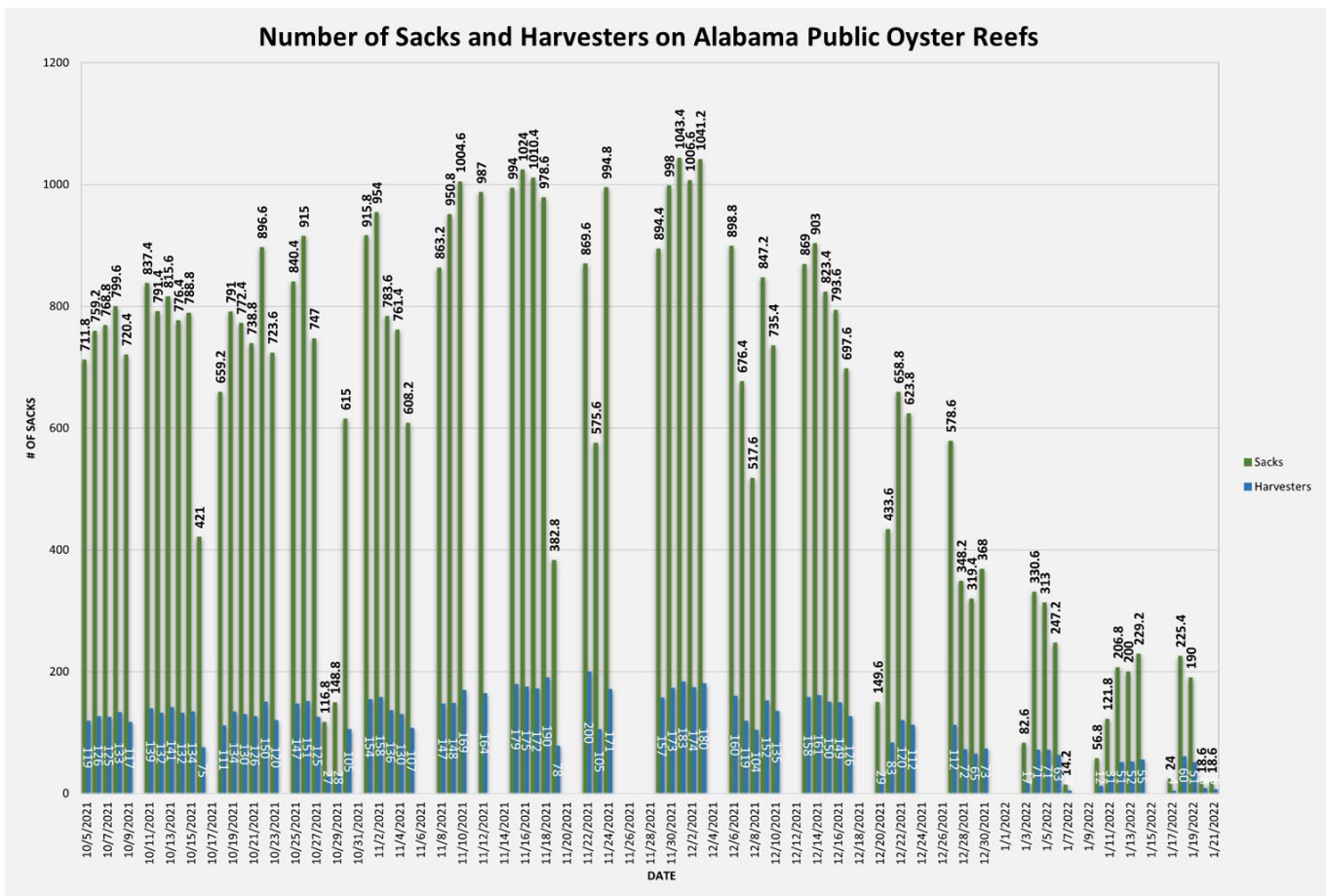


Figure 1. Chart of daily sacks harvested (green) and daily count of harvesters (blue).

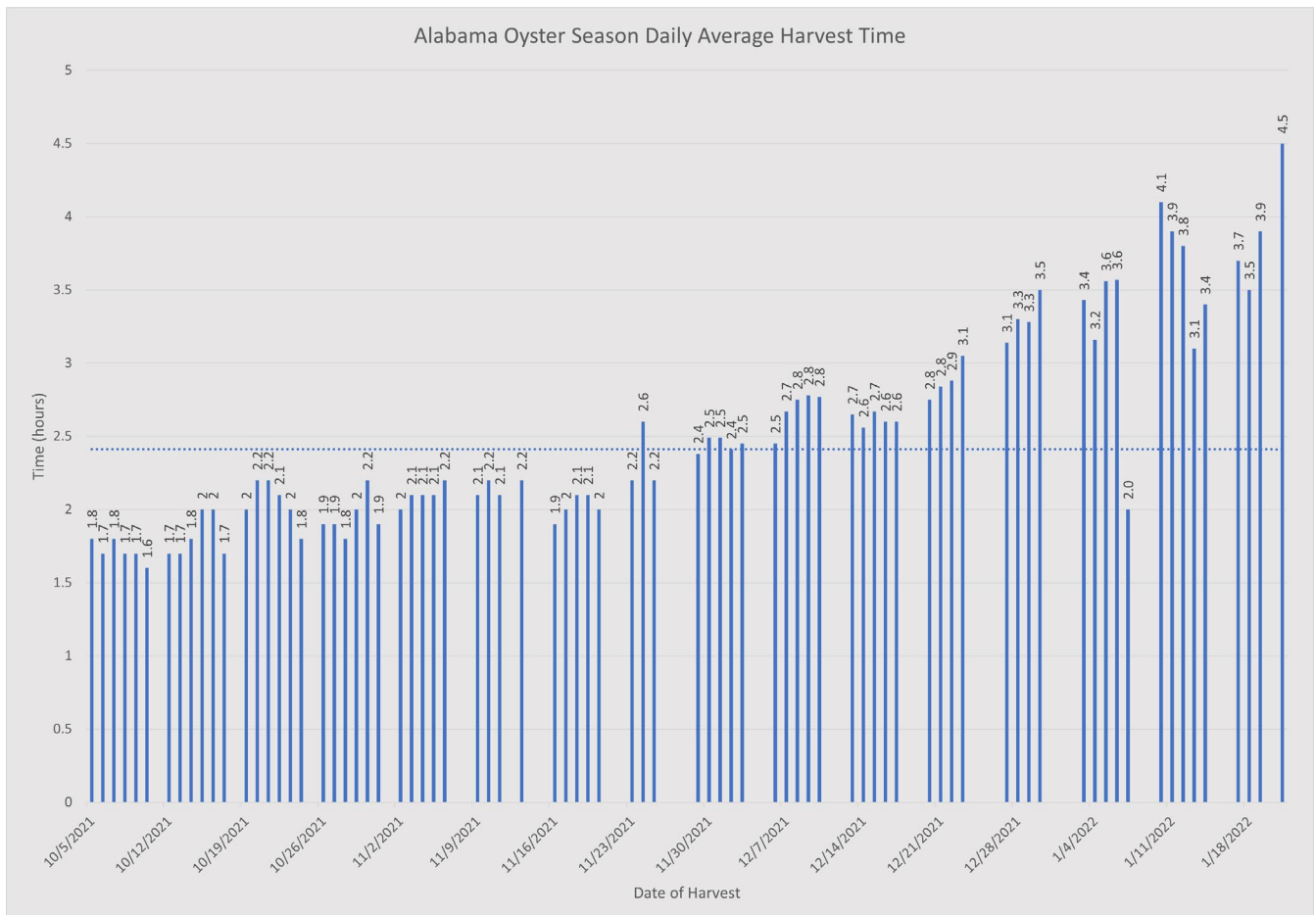
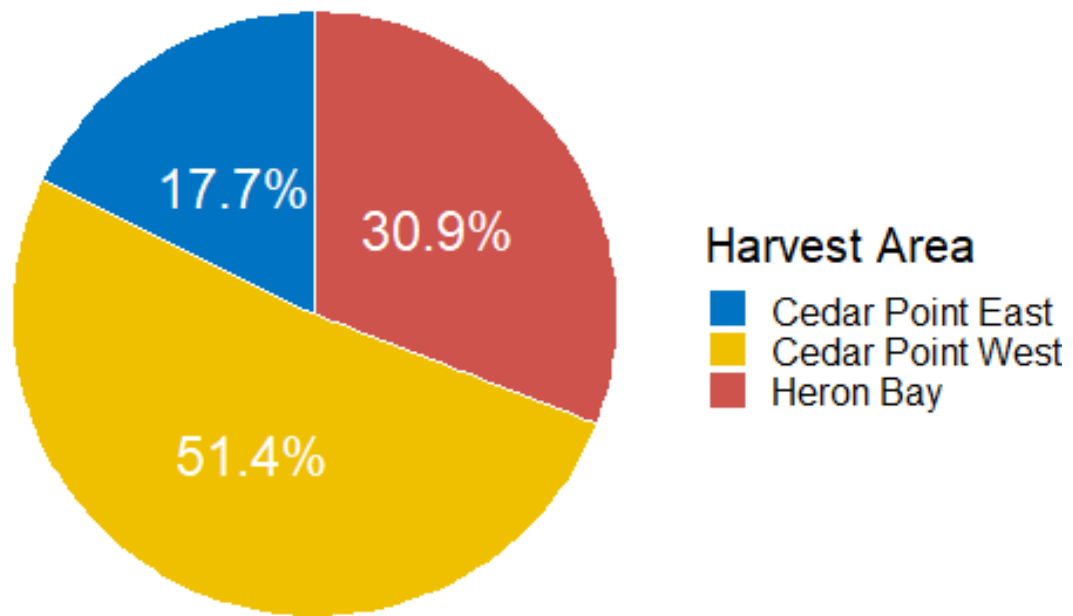


Figure 2. Chart of daily average fishing times of harvesters reaching the six-sack limit.





**Figure 5.** Distribution of commercial oyster harvest from all reef areas open to harvest during the 2021-2022 Alabama oyster season.