

2022-2023 Alabama Oyster Season Summary

Oyster Reef Sampling Results and Management Updates

The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Marine Resources (ADCNR/MRD) staff conducted 17 pre-season quadrat dives and collected 165 samples resulting in an initial harvest goal of 25,620 sacks for the 2022-2023 season. The goal was set at 33% of the estimated harvestable oysters in Heron Bay and the Cedar Point West and Cedar Point East areas.

The ADCNR/MRD held a pre-season public meeting in the Bayou La Batre Civic Center on September 13, 2022. The meeting was attended by approximately 75 people. During the meeting, ADCNR/MRD discussed the season dates and opening harvest areas which would include grids in Heron Bay, Cedar Point East, and Cedar Point West. In addition, ADCNR/MRD staff provided a refresher about how harvest would be monitored using the Oyster Management System (OMS) grids first used during the 2020 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 ADCNR/MRD staff via social media posts and by postings at the OMS station. The number of licensed commercial harvesters increased from 513 for the 2021-2022 season to 619 for the 2022-2023 season.

Based on the results of the annual SCUBA quadrat survey and input from industry partners, ADCNR/MRD decided upon a season opening date of October 3, 2022, with a 6 sack per person per vessel per day limit. Oyster reefs were open from 7:00 am until 2:00 pm and all oysters were required to be landed by 3:00 pm. The first four Saturdays of the season were open from 7:00 am until 12:00 pm to allow an opportunity for students, who are in school during the work week, to harvest oysters. During the 2022 – 2023 season, 3,260 sacks (approximately 7% of total harvest) were harvested on the first four Saturdays.

Harvesters collecting oysters recreationally were reminded they would be required to obtain a recreational harvest tag at the OMS station, a requirement beginning in 2021, and those harvesters would also be required to provide their fishing trip data to OMS station staff. This had been 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% of the volume 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 changes in the relative condition of the reef as harvest progressed. Combined with OMS harvest data for individual grids, including catcher harvest times and sack counts, the on-water inspections informed ADCNR/MRD staff when to close sufficiently harvested grids and when to allow harvesters to keep working in areas that had high densities of adult oysters. 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 61 working days with reef closures on Veteran's Day and Thanksgiving (Nov. 24 and 25). Grid closures occurred on October 25, November 1, November 8 with all grids in Mississippi Sound closed November 23. On December 21, Mississippi Sound grids (with the exception of several

previously closed grids) were reopened to harvest due to poor weather conditions until December 23, 2022, when all public reefs were closed for the season.

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

Table 1. Statistics of 2021 – 2022 and 2022 – 2023 Oyster Harvest Seasons.

Season Statistics	2021 – 2022 Season	2022 – 2023 Season
Commercial Oyster Harvest Licenses Sold	513	619
Start / End Dates of Season	10-4-2021 to 1-21-2022	10-3-2022 to 12-23-2022
Total number of harvest days	79	61
Total number of sacks harvested	50,020 (commercial + converted recreational sacks)	44,409 (commercial + converted recreational sacks)
Commercial Harvest Statistics		
Commercial sacks harvested	49,314	44,409
Average commercial sacks per day	624	732
Minimum commercial sacks per day	14	9
Maximum commercial sacks per day	1,035	1,355
Average commercial harvesters per day	112	145
Minimum commercial harvesters per day	4	3
Maximum Commercial harvesters per day	183	243
Total commercial trips	8,855	8,870
Recreational Harvest Statistics		
Recreational sacks harvested	1,177 (706 com equiv **)	562 (337 com equiv **)
Average recreational sacks per day	15 (8.9 com equiv **)	9 (5.4 com equiv **)
** Numbers shown in parenthesis are the commercial sack equivalent. A recreational sack is 0.6 of a commercial sack.		

Table 2. Summary of season length and sacks harvested each season from Fall 2011 through Spring 2023.

Commercial Harvest Season	# Days	# Sacks
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 *

Fall 2022 – Spring 2023	61	44,409*
* Total sack count includes commercial sacks + converted recreational sacks		

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

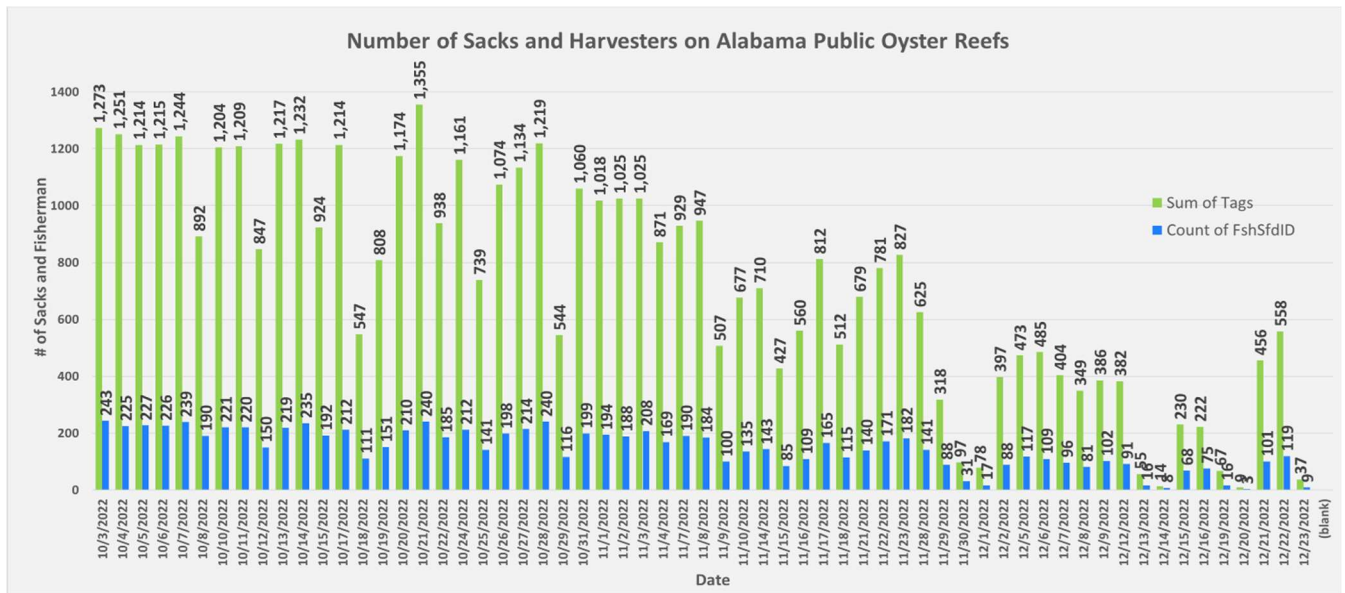


Figure 1. Chart of daily sacks harvested (green) and daily count of harvesters (aqua).

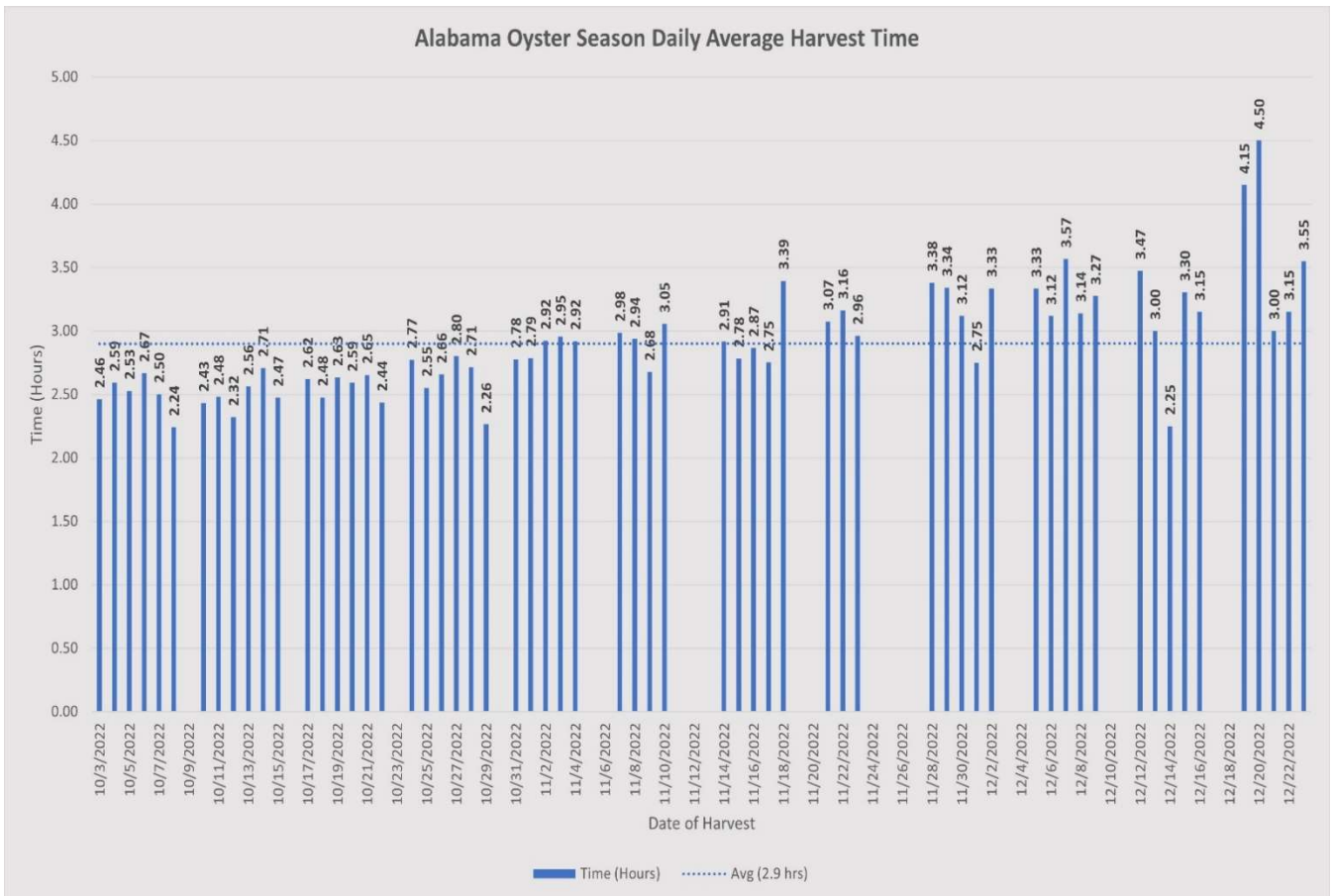


Figure 2. Chart of daily average fishing times of harvesters reaching the six-sack limit.

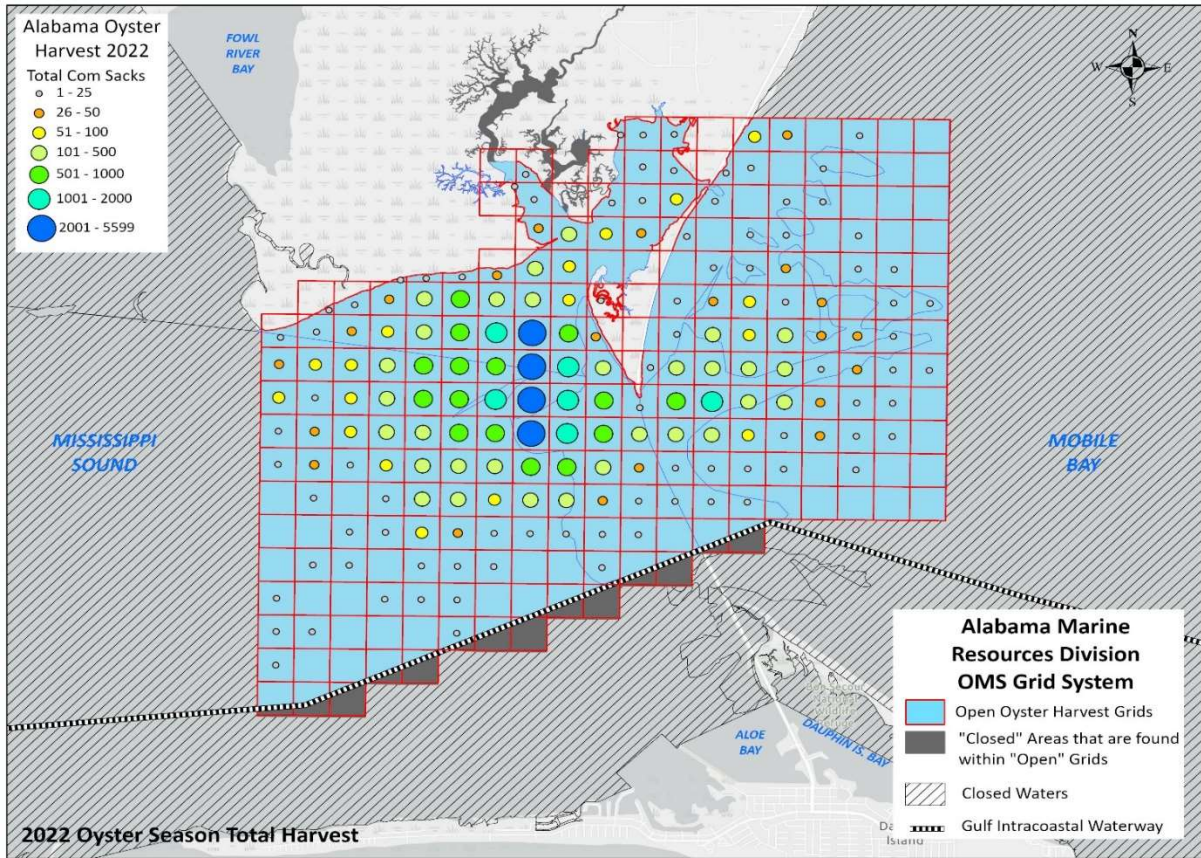
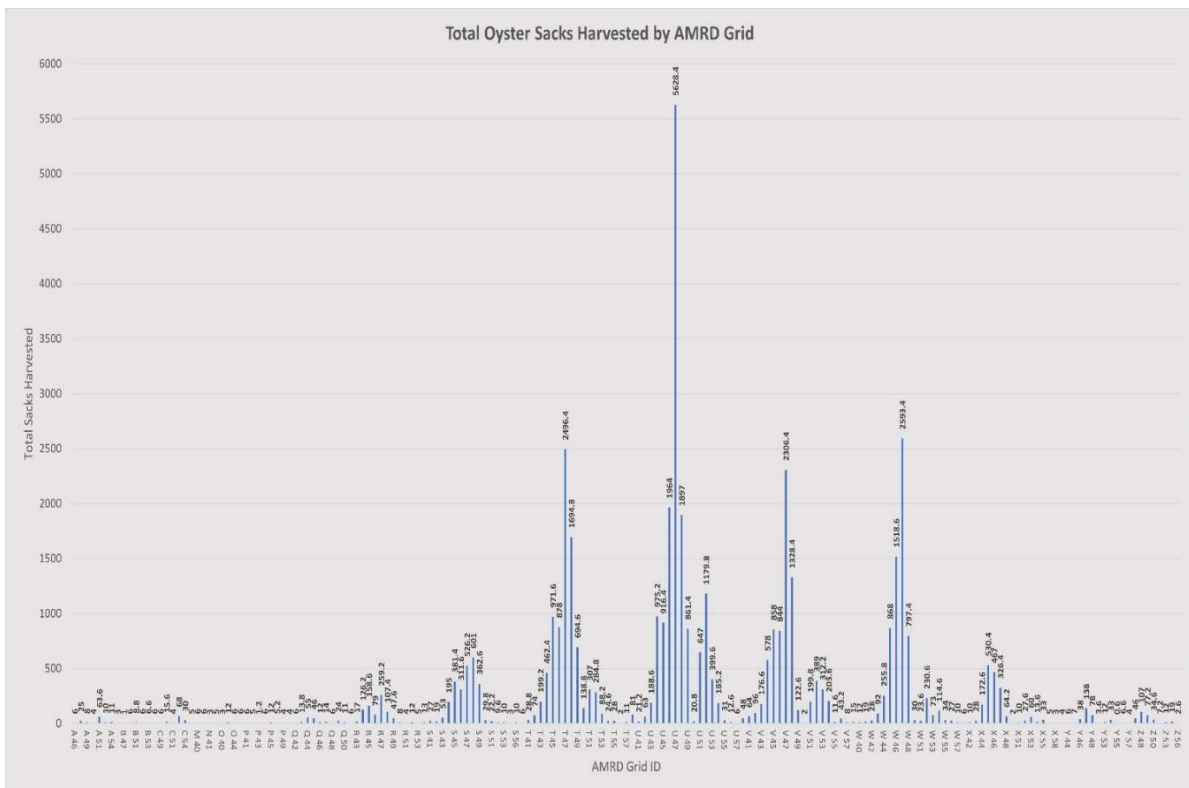


Figure 3. Map of total sacks harvested per OMS Grid as reported by commercial oyster harvesters.



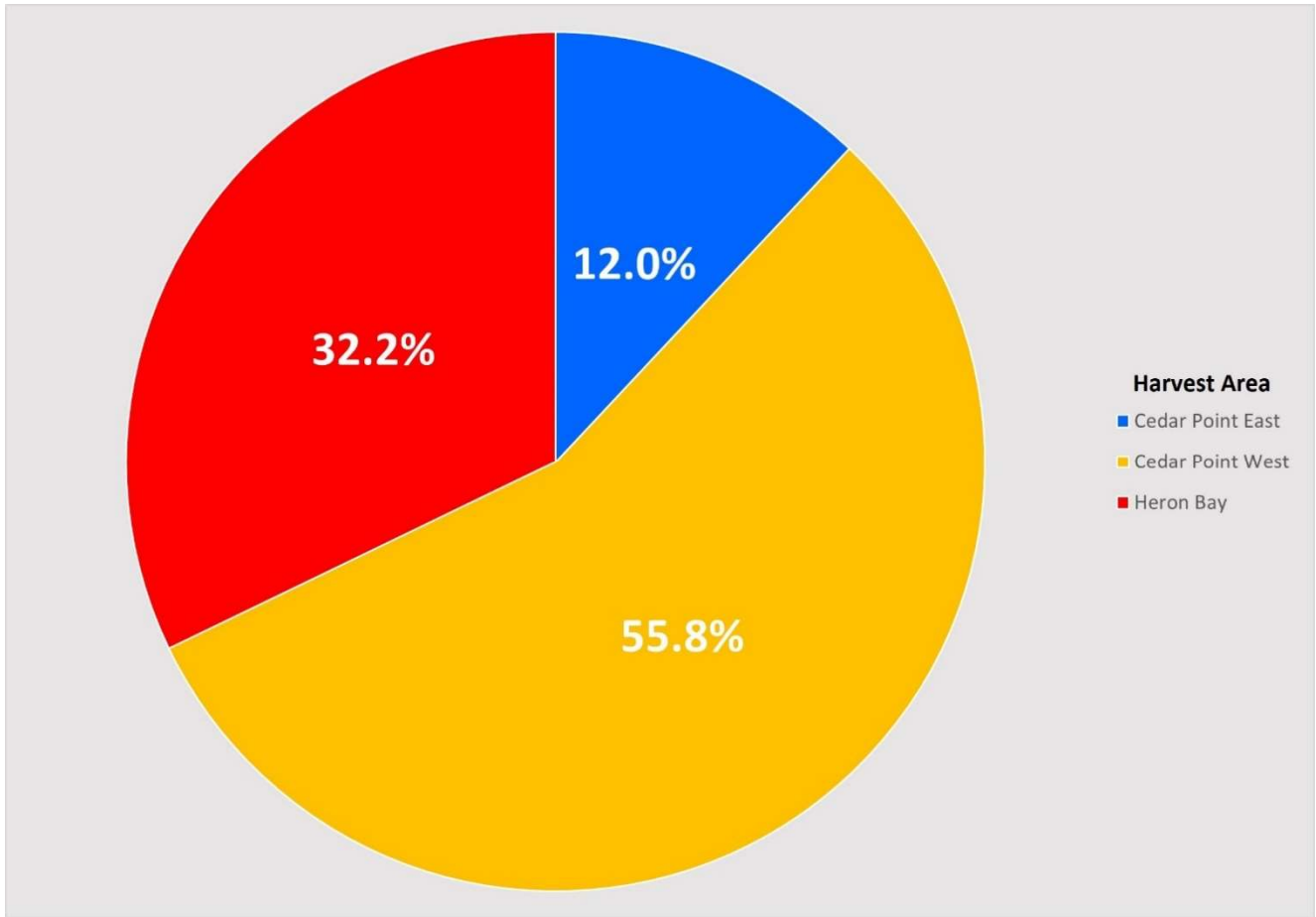


Figure 5. Distribution of commercial oyster harvest from all reef areas open to harvest through the final closure on December 23, 2022 during the 2022 - 2023 Alabama oyster season.