

Blue Crab Management Advisory Committee

July 29, 2024



Meeting Goals

- Provide an opportunity for inclusive input on future crab fisheries by committee members and the public.
- Learn what information the committee, public, and VMRC need to provide recommendations.
- Goals for **next** meeting
 - Provide recommendations on how to implement crab dredge fishery.
 - Provide recommendations for future winter crab fishery.

Timeline

- June 2024: Commission repealed 4 VAC 20-1140 “Prohibition of Crab Dredging in Virginia Waters”
- July 29, 2024: CMAC lays groundwork for developing winter fishery recommendations
- August 20, 2024: CMAC develops recommendations for winter fishery
- September 24, 2024: Commission hears Request for Public Hearing to provide input on dredge regulation
- October 25, 2024: Commission votes on new dredge regulation

Management Possibilities

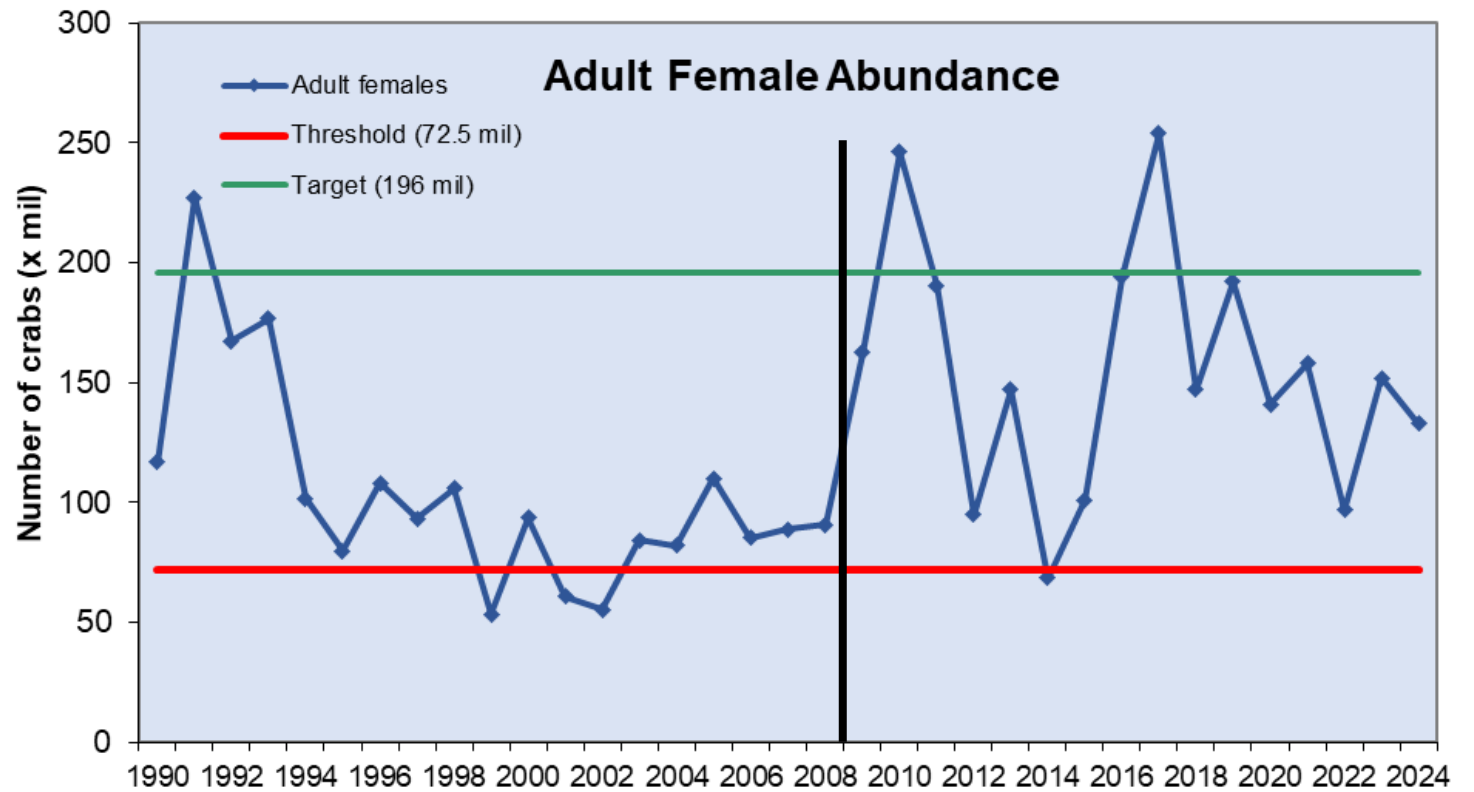
- VMRC adopts regulation with dredge fishery framework and opens 2024-25 winter dredge fishery.
- VMRC adopts regulation with dredge fishery framework but closes the 2024-25 season.
- VMRC adopts regulation with dredge fishery framework but closes the 2024-25 season. VMRC extends winter dates for crab pot fishery.

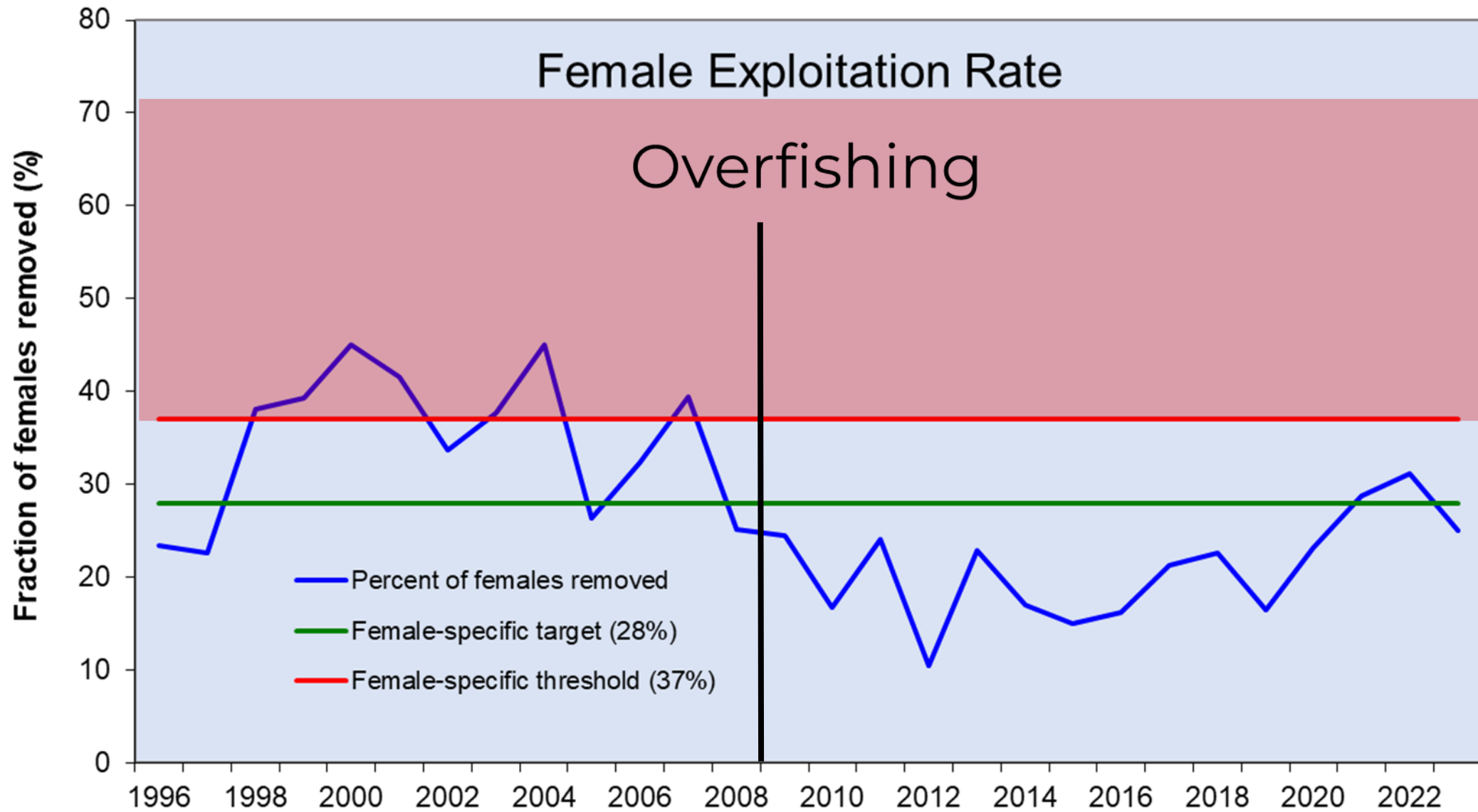
Implications of Management Possibilities

- Adopting a new dredging regulation
 - The Commission can decide annually whether to open the dredge fishery and if they do, management structure will already be in place.
- Opening the dredge fishery
 - Reduce effort in other sectors to offset increase in harvest (conservation equivalency).
- Extending crab pot fishery
 - Depending on harvest amounts, may need to reduce bushel limits elsewhere to offset increase in harvest (conservation equivalency).

How we got here

- 2008 Blue Crab Fishery Resource Disaster
 - Jurisdictions required to take 34% reduction in effort
- Commission voted to close dredge fishery every year since until 2024



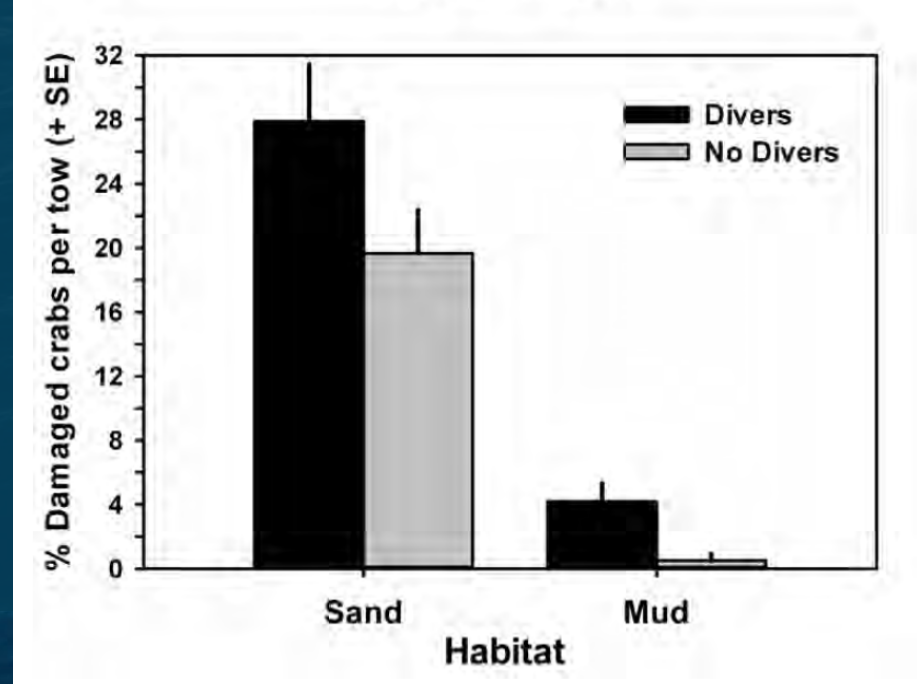
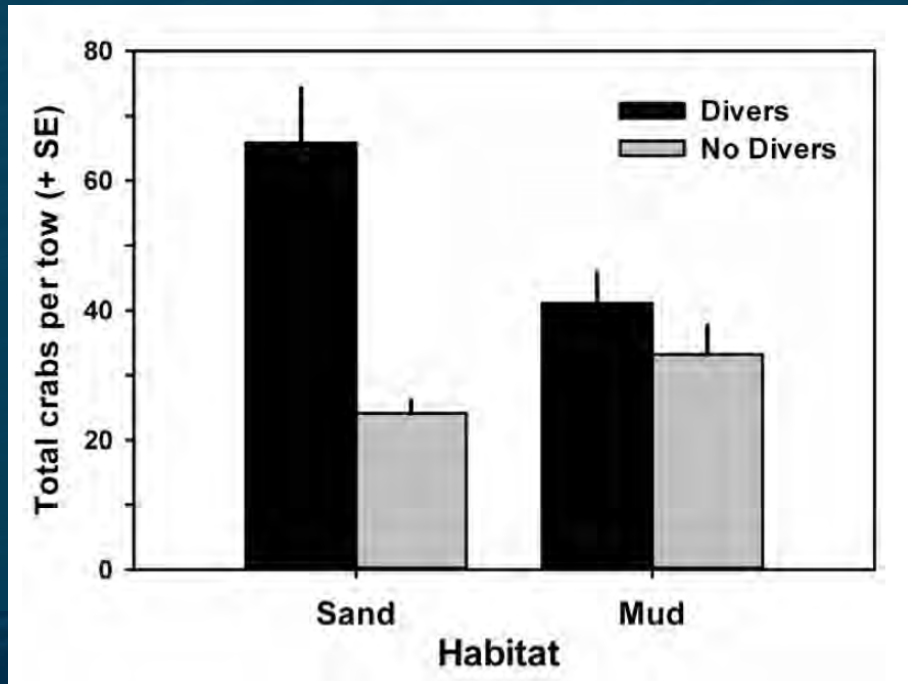


Reasons to Close Fishery

- Highest ratio of female:male crabs harvested
 - Mature females will spawn in spring or summer, many for the first time
- High degree of wastage
- Value of product lower than by other gears
- Fewest fishermen involved
- Strong public support against
- Some processors no longer interested in product
- High overhead costs

2013 Dredge Mortality Study

- Four vessels chosen from volunteer pool
- VMRC and VIMS observers
- Vessels reported number of bushels and discard mortality

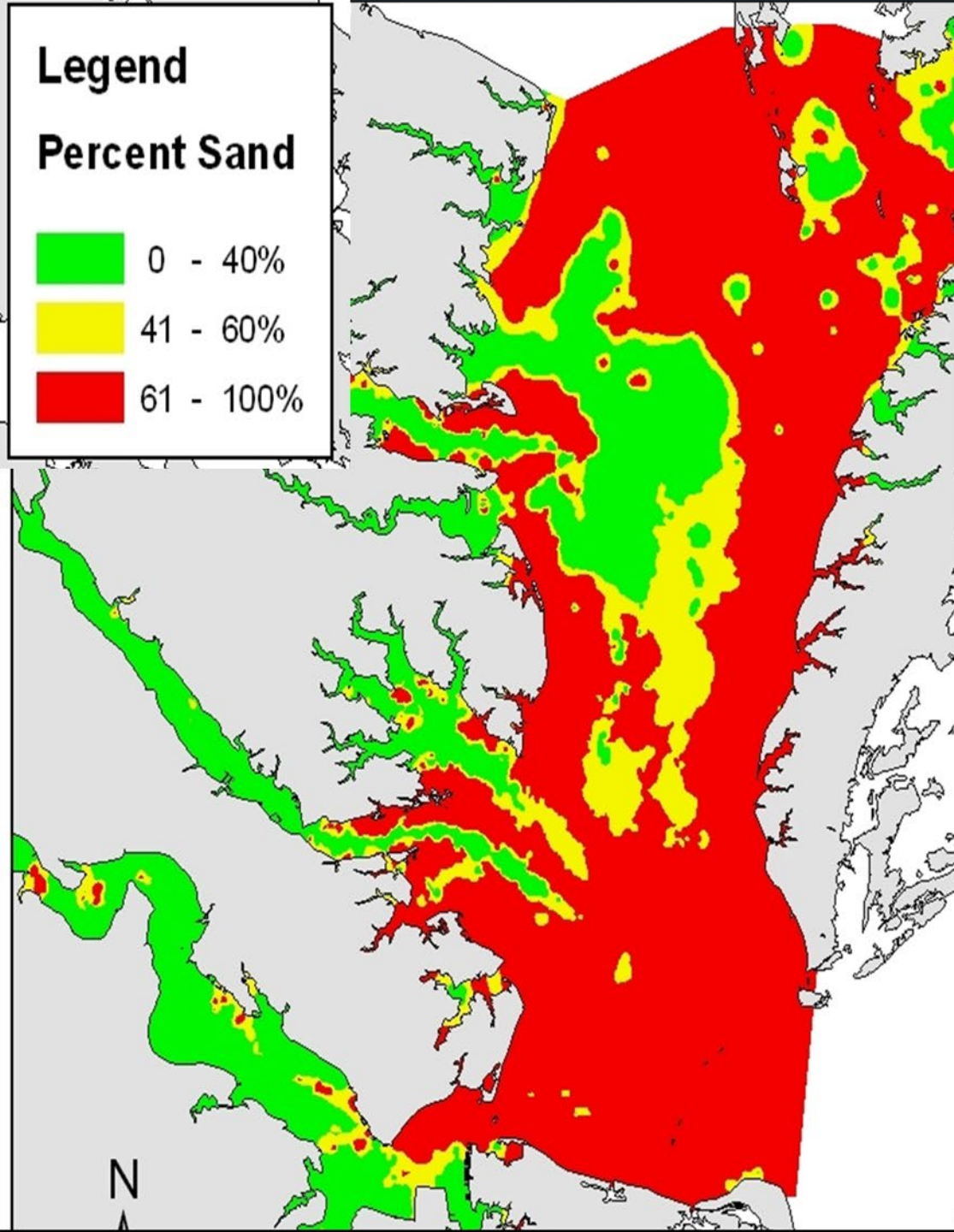


2013 Dredge Fishery Plan

- 37 participants (based on participation in last 5 dredge seasons)
- Season: December 16-February 28
- 1.5 million pound (37,500 bu) sector limit
 - 1,000 bushel maximum for each licensee
 - Issue licensees tags for each bushel
- Conservation equivalency to offset dredge harvest
- Area: Centered on mud bottoms

Legend

Percent Sand



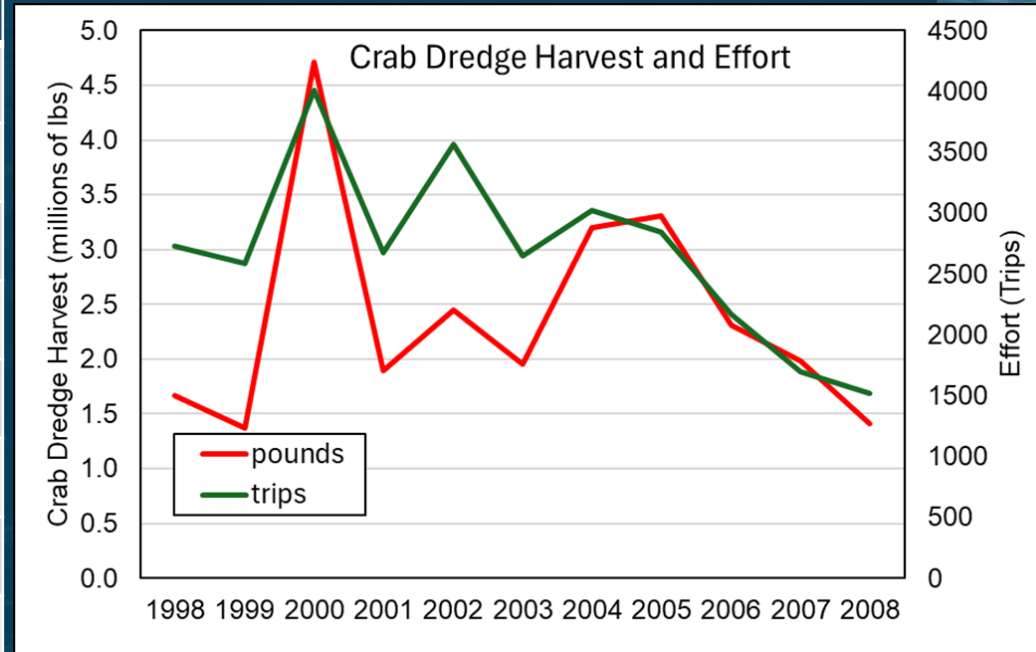
2013 Dredge Fishery Plan

- Whelk and horseshoe crabs bycatch allowed with valid permit
- Dredges:
 - 2 dredge maximum
 - 8 feet maximum width
 - 6 inch maximum teeth length
 - No divers
- Daily time limit: sunrise to sunset
 - Offload no more than three hours after sunset

Winter Crab Dredge Data

	Harvest (lb)	Harvesters	Trips	CPUE
2000	4,989,489	228	4236	1178
2001	1,916,937	205	2707	708
2002	2,487,791	196	3641	683
2003	2,064,498	176	2810	735
2004	3,390,835	174	3199	1060
2005	3,409,207	95	2923	1166
2006	2,396,114	85	2236	1072
2007	2,045,446	69	1755	1165
2008	1,433,720	73	1529	938

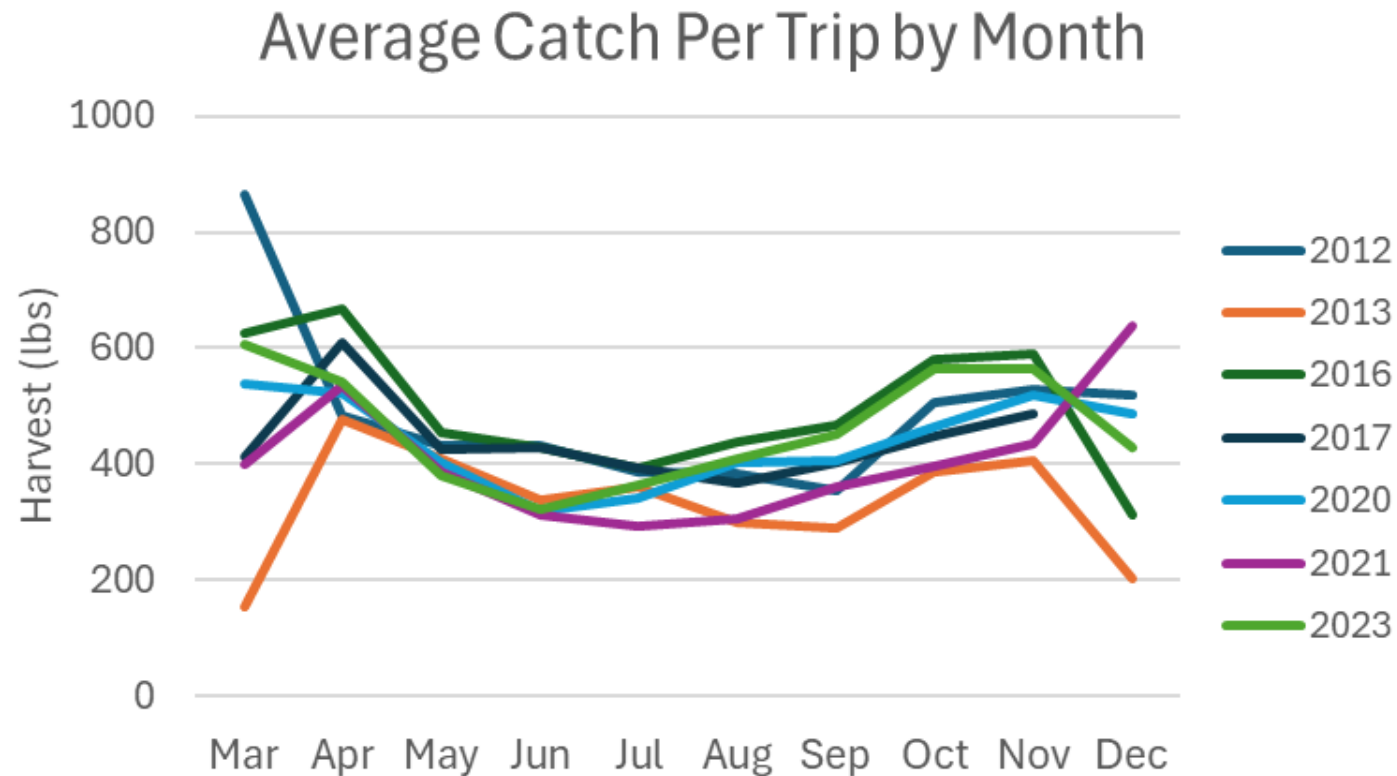
***December trips included in following calendar year**



2024 Dredge Fishery Survey

- 24/45 individuals surveyed responded
- 23/24 said they would participate in dredge fishery
- All said initial licenses should first go to those who fit 2008 limited entry criteria
- 22/23 would participate with a season landing limit of 35,000 lbs (~875 bushels) per person
- 21/23 would participate if required to have an observer on board
- Start up costs
 - \$3-15,000: 8 individuals
 - \$15-30,000: 11 individuals

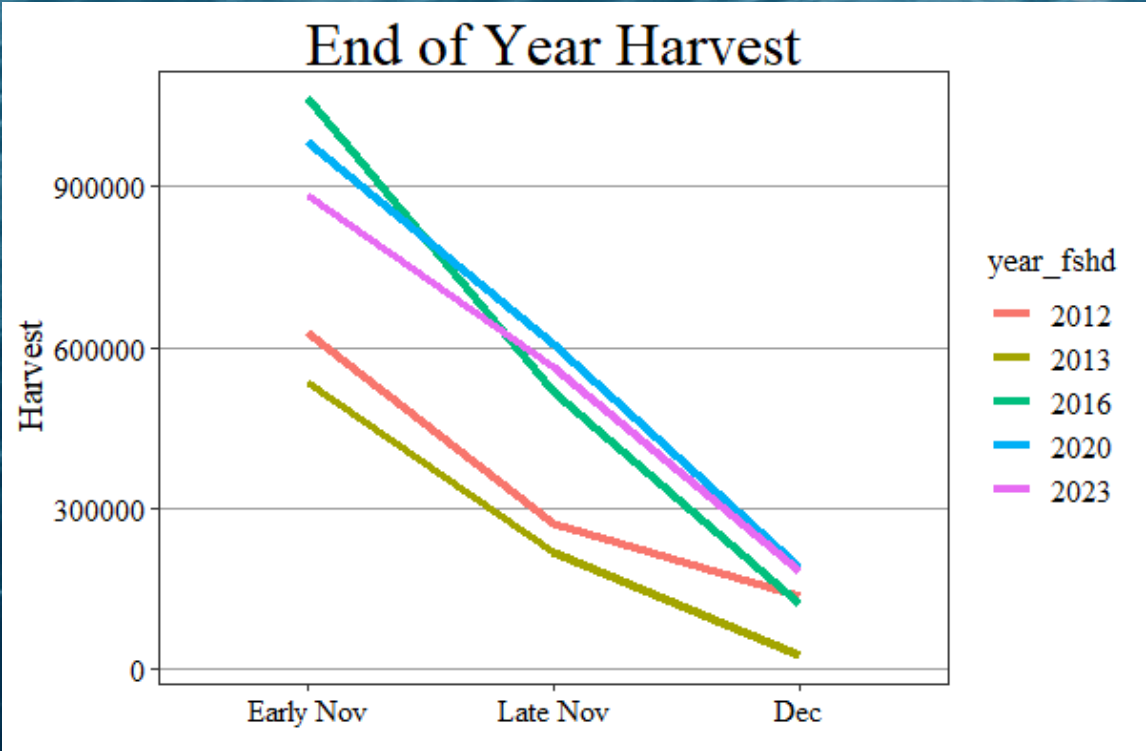
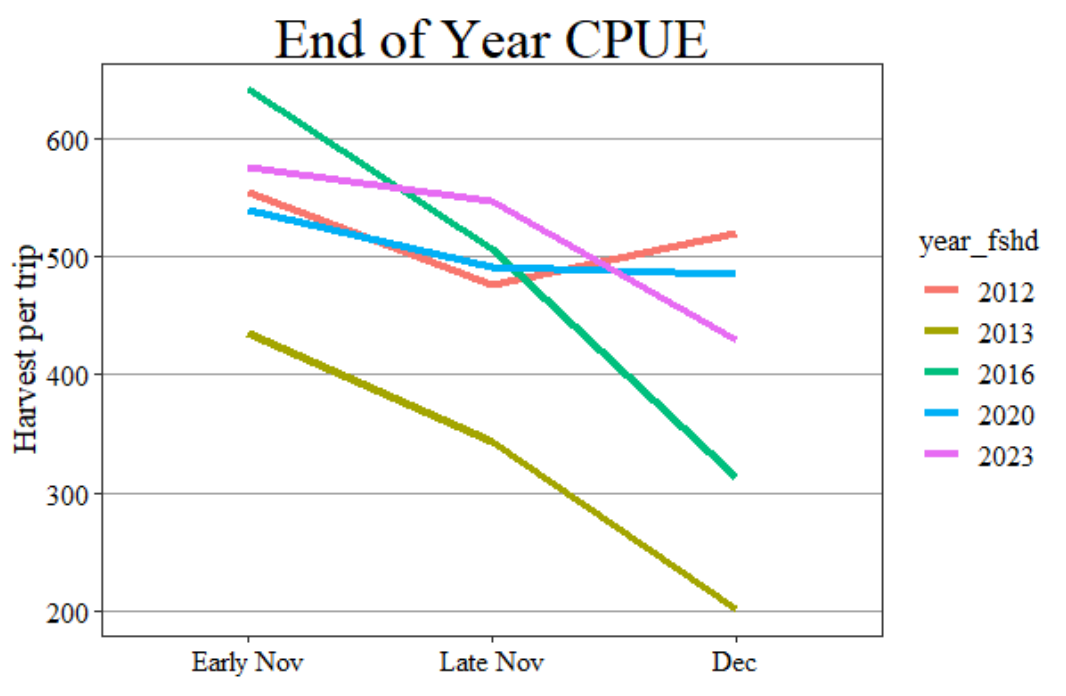
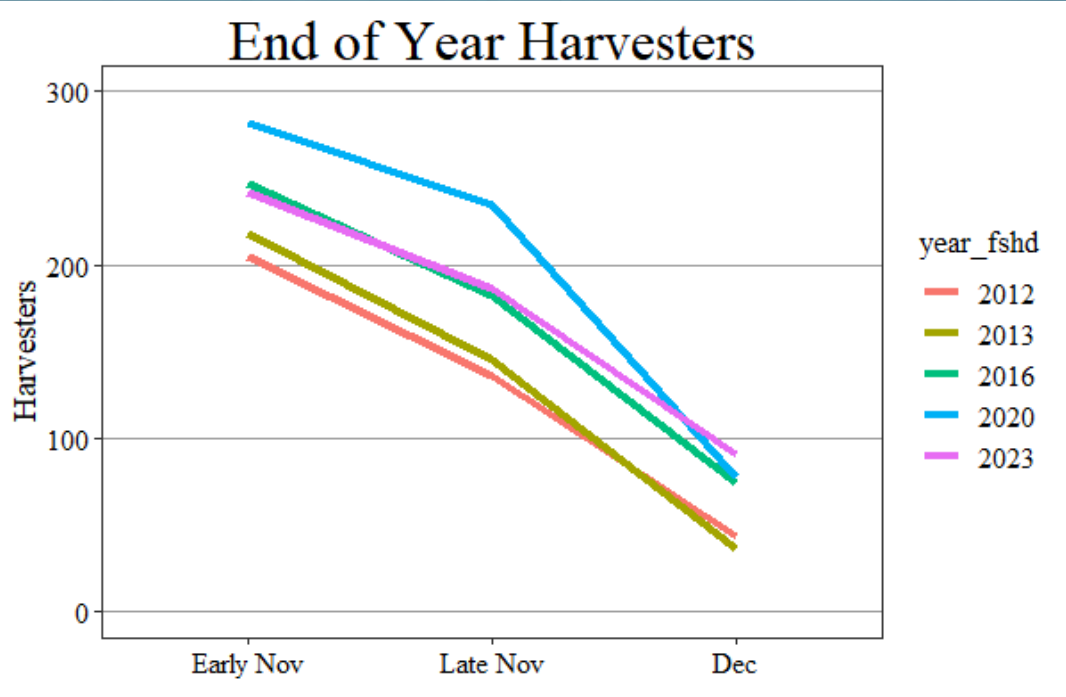
Winter Crab Pot Data



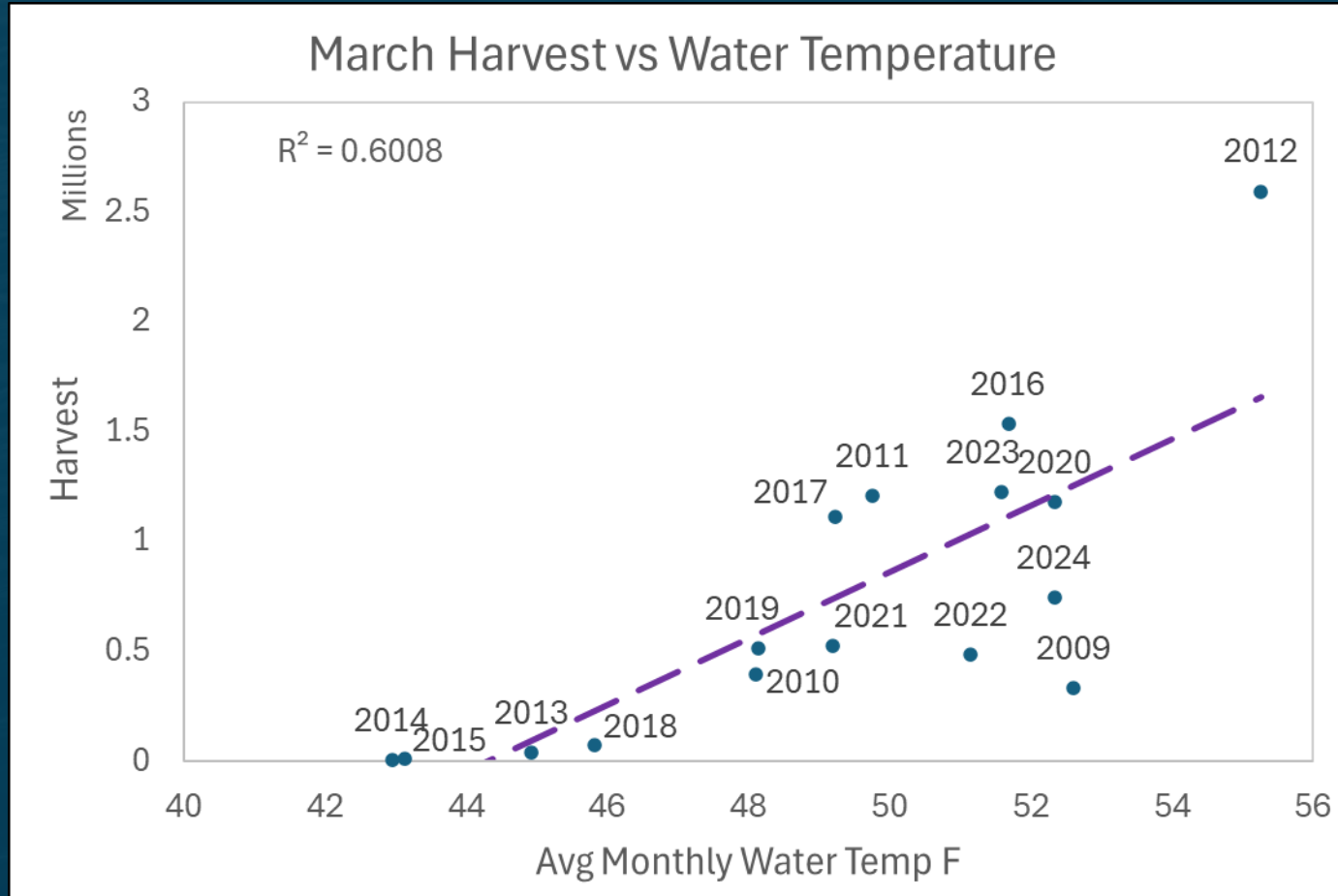
Year	Season Open	Season Close
2012	3/17	12/15
2013	3/17	12/15
2014	3/17	11/30
2015	3/17	11/30
2016	3/17	12/20
2017	3/1	11/30
2018	3/17	11/30
2019	3/17	11/30
2020	3/17	12/19
2021	3/17	11/30
2022	3/17	11/30
2023	3/17	12/16
2024	3/17	12/16

December Extensions

Year	Harvest (lb)	% of Annual Harvest	Harvesters	Trips
2012	137,852	0.6%	44	265
2013	24,875	0.1%	36	124
2016	122,801	0.5%	74	393
2020	190,301	0.9%	77	392
2023	182,638	1.0%	91	426

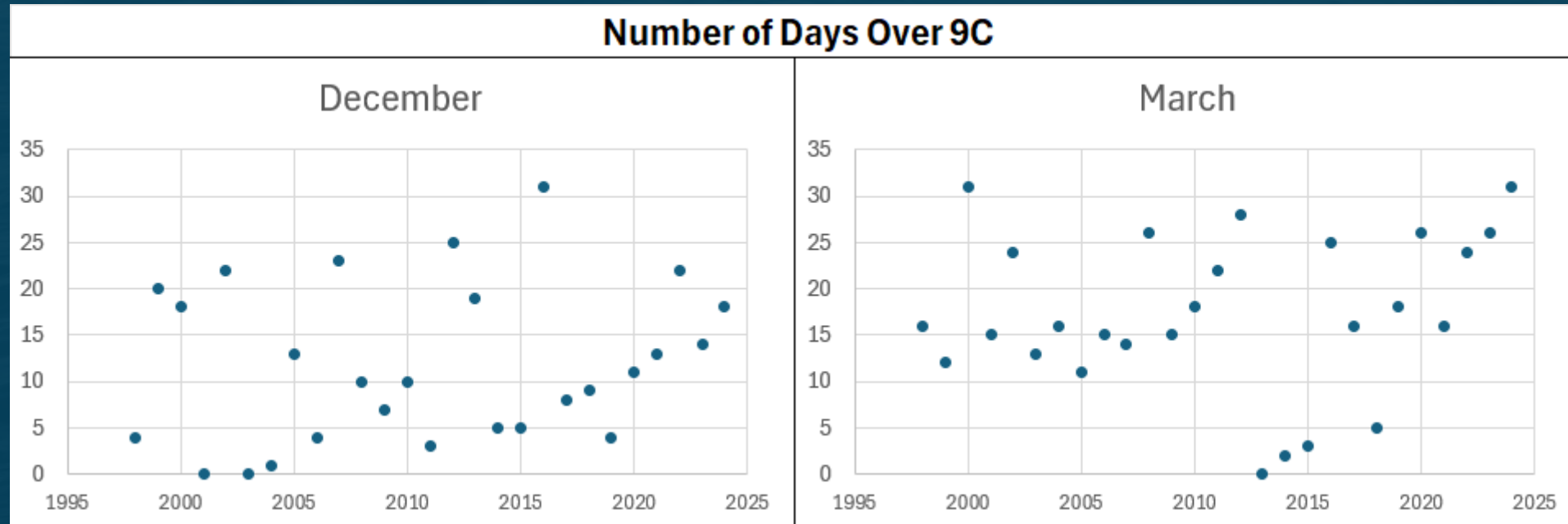


March Crab Pot Data



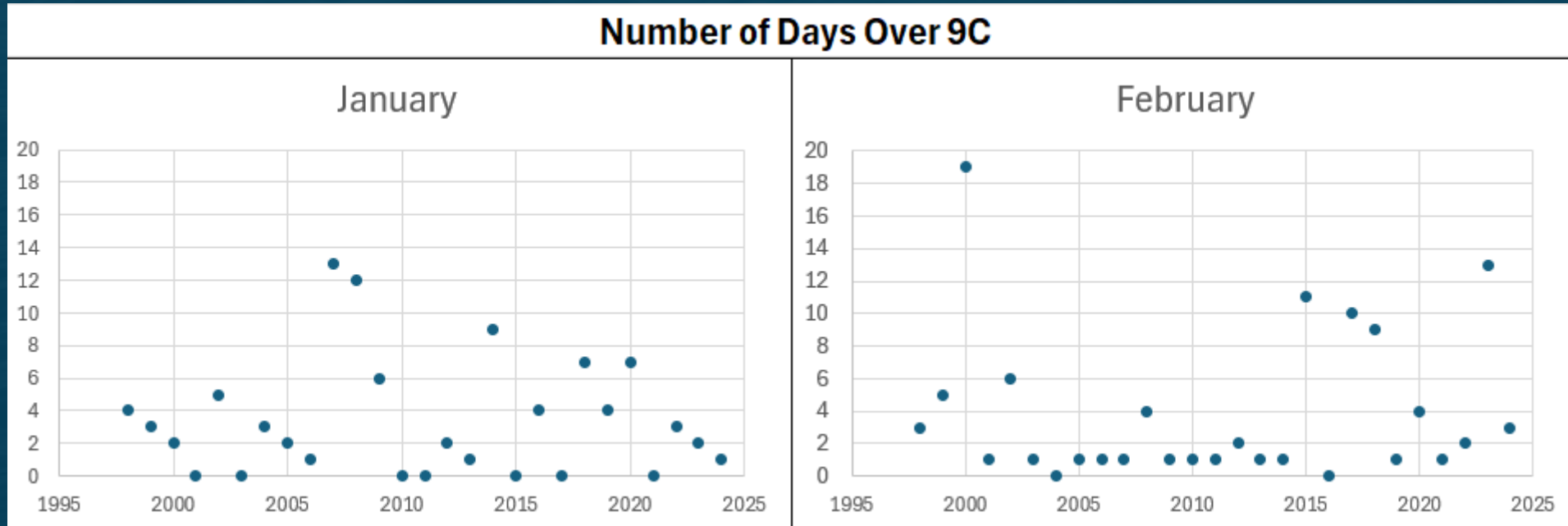
- March harvest increases when water temperature is higher
- Winter harvest likely temperature dependent.
- As water temperatures continue to increase, so will harvest.

Change in Winter Temperatures



- 9° C (~48° F) is temperature crabs begin to go dormant.
- The number of days over 9° C per month in December and March have been increasing over time.

Change in Winter Temperatures



- 9° C (~48° F) is temperature crabs begin to go dormant.
- The number of days over 9° C per month in January and February do not seem to have changed over time.

Thoughts?

- Take five minutes to write down thoughts and questions from this presentation.
- Committee forms into breakout groups for ten minutes to discuss presentations and each member's thoughts and questions.
- Public can write down on provided paper or flipboard their questions and requests for additional information.
- Committee will reconvene and each member can present their questions and suggestions.
- Facilitator will present public's thoughts.

Discussion

- Write down the following:
 - Questions about the presentation
 - Data not presented that you would like to see before making recommendations
 - What do you want us to know to inform staff recommendations?
 - What options for management measures and conservation equivalency do you want staff to gather information on?
- Committee break out groups:
 - Commercial crabbers who have dredged
 - Commercial crabbers who have not dredged
 - Those who have not participated in commercial crab fisheries

Topics for Second Meeting (August 20, 2024)

- Dredge fishery
 - How many licenses and who can participate
 - When will fishery be open
 - Where will fishery take place
 - User conflicts
 - How much quota for crab dredge fishery
 - Conservation equivalency for fishery
- Extended crab pot fishery
 - Alternative to crab dredge fishery