



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Marine Resources Commission

380 Fenwick Road

Building 96

Fort Monroe, VA 23651

Stefanie K. Taillon
Secretary of Natural
and Historic Resources

Jamie L. Green
Commissioner

July 11, 2025

MEMORANDUM

TO: Virginia Blue Ribbon Oyster Panel

FROM: Blue Ribbon Oyster Panel Subgroup on Rotational Harvest Strategies

SUBJECT: RECOMMENDATIONS ON ROTATIONAL HARVEST STRATEGIES

BACKGROUND

At its May 9, 2025 meeting, the Blue Ribbon Oyster Panel (BROP) supported a dedicated subgroup to explore the feasibility and potential benefits of implementing rotational harvest strategies within the public oyster fishery. Panel members Dr. Jim Wesson and Dr. Roger Mann were tasked with leading this effort and reporting their findings and recommendations back to the full Panel.

The subgroup convened on July 9, 2025, with participation from Dr. Wesson, Dr. Mann, and staff from the Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC) and Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS). The discussion focused on the biological, operational, and economic implications of rotational harvest management.

There was broad consensus among the group that a three-year rotational harvest strategy can provide measurable benefits to oyster populations, as evidenced by recent research, including a 2024 VIMS study by Alexandria R. Marquardt [[Link](#)]. The study, along with long-standing observations from Virginia's managed harvest areas, supports the conclusion that rotational strategies improve resource stability, enhance sustainability, and provide predictability for industry stakeholders.

In addition to promoting long-term resource health, this strategy can help buffer the public fishery against episodic environmental events such as freshwater inflow or disease outbreaks that may temporarily impact localized oyster resources.

Adopting a structured three-year rotation within the public fishery will also improve the efficiency of resource planning, shell replenishment, and restoration activities, while offering financial and operational benefits to the fishery as a whole.

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Rappahannock River

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- The map displays the New River area with three designated New Areas. New Area 8 is a blue-shaded region on the left. New Area 10 is a green-shaded region on the right. New Area 7 is an orange-shaded region located between Areas 8 and 10. The map includes several labels: 'Mountain Bar' in the upper left, 'Mountain Bluff' in the upper right, 'Parrot Creek Channel' in the lower left, and 'Cold Water Creek', 'Sugar Point', 'Stone Point', 'Big Wicks', and 'Little Wicks' in the lower right. A scale bar at the bottom indicates a distance of 1 mile. The map also shows various geographical features like 'Pine Bluff' and 'Pine Creek Channel'.

Figure 1. New rotational areas in upper Rappahannock

York River and Mobjack Bay

- Implement a three-year rotation strategy involving:
 - York River Area 1 (Pages),
 - York River Area 2 (Timberneck), and
 - Existing and newly designated areas in Mobjack Bay (including Pultz and Tow Stake).
- Add at least one new management area to Mobjack Bay to bring rotational parity with the two York River areas. This would include potential areas inside of Piankatank River or areas inside the Expanded Patent Tong Area described below.
- Limit harvest in each area to no more than two months per season.
- Harvest schedule:
 - York River Area 2 (Timberneck), to open in 2025–2026,
 - York River Area 1 (Pages), to open in 2026-2027,
 - Mobjack Bay areas (including any additions) to open in 2027-2028.

Great Wicomico River

- Return to a 2-year rotation. The upriver area (Area 1) should be open for the 2025-2026 season, with Area 2 open for the following season.
- Consider a 3-year rotational management approach if additional areas in the vicinity of Blackberry Hangs can be replenished to create areas comparable to current Area 1 and Area 2.

James River

- No changes to current management are recommended. The area appears to self-regulate based on where replenishment has occurred and market conditions.

Pocomoke and Tangier Sound

- Maintain the current 2-year rotation in the Pocomoke and Tangier Sound management areas.
- Pocomoke areas should be open for no more than three months.
- Any season extension into November or March should only occur in the areas scheduled to be open in the current rotation in Tangier Sound.
- Areas 9 and 10 in the Pocomoke should only be open to hand tong for the 2025-2026 season.

Patent Tong Area

- There was a consensus that it would be appropriate to open considerably more area to harvest, both north and south of the Deep Rock area.
- Harvest activity in the new area should be observed and documented. If harvesters can identify suitable areas, future replenishment and survey efforts should be expanded.

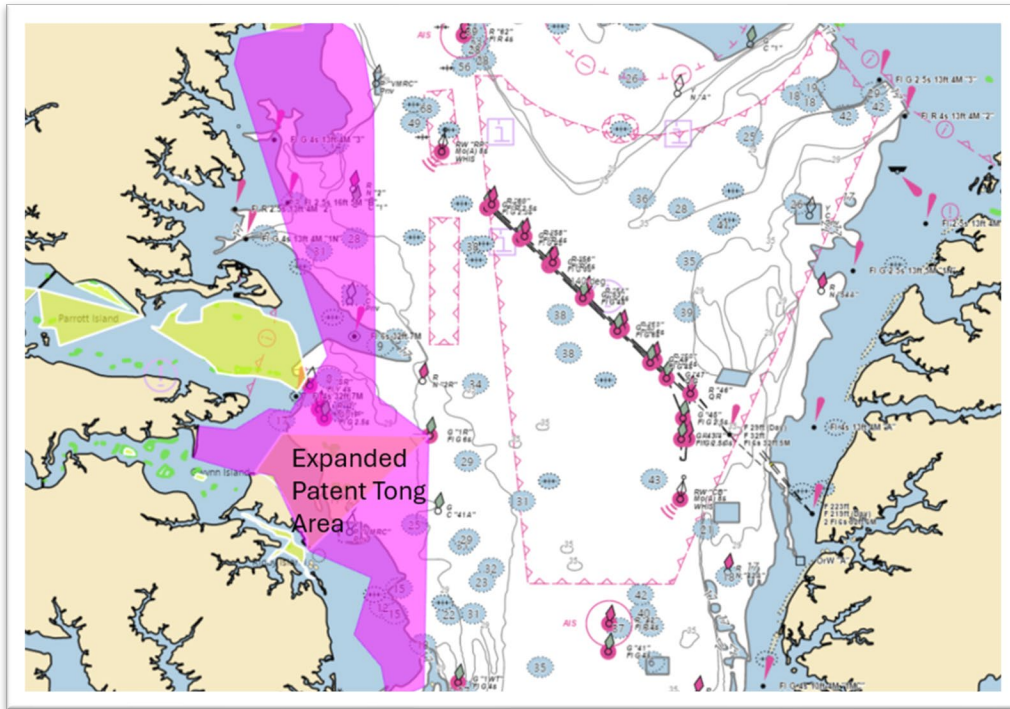


Figure 2. Expanded Patent Tong Area

Additional Considerations and Recommendations for Rotational Management

- Areas should not be opened outside of their scheduled rotation.
- Rotational management is effective when consistently supported by post-harvest replenishment.
- Reduced spat set or a reduction replenishment resource may have negative long-term impacts on the fishery.
- Vessel monitoring could be used to enhance the ability to target replenishment efforts and maximize returns on replenishment investments while providing fisheries managers with additional valuable information.