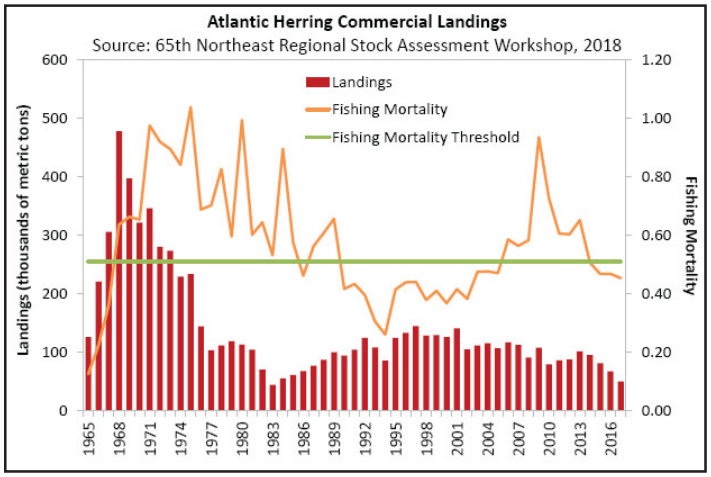
ATLANTIC HERRING (from page 8)

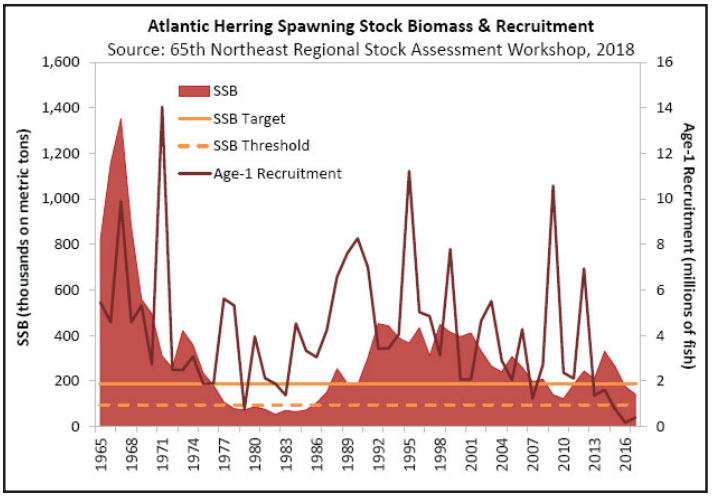
Catch declined in the 1980s, averaging 78,164 mt (172 million pounds). Landings in the 2000s were fairly stable around 113,358 mt (250 million pounds), but have decreased over the past four years to 50,250 mt (111 million pounds) in 2017.

The herring resource was once primarily used for the canning industry, but now provides bait for important fisheries such as lobster, blue crab, tuna, and striped bass. The fish are also a valued commodity overseas where they are frozen and salted.

Stock Status

The 2018 benchmark stock assessment, conducted by the Northeast Fisheries Science Center, provided an updated picture of stock health. While Atlantic herring were not overfished and overfishing was not occurring in the terminal year (2017) of the assessment, the report highlighted concerns about trends in recruitment and spawning stock biomass (SSB). Recruitment, a measure of how many herring are born into the population, has been well below the time series average for the past five years.





In particular, 2016 recruitment was the lowest on record at 1.7 million fish. While recruitment has been variable throughout time, recent and continuing low levels of recruitment indicate there will be fewer fish available to harvest in future years. SSB, the portion of the population that is capable of reproducing, has also declined in recent years.

In 2017, SSB was estimated at 141,473 mt (312 million pounds). Fishing mortality has also decreased in recent years, with a 2017 level of 0.45, below the fishing mortality threshold of 0.51.

Atlantic Coastal Management

Atlantic herring is cooperatively managed by the Commission and the New England Fishery Management Council (Council). The Commission's fishery management program seeks to prevent overfishing, provide protection to spawning herring, and promote full utilization of herring catch. Both the Commission and Council use annual quotas, called a total allowable catch (TAC), to manage catch in four areas.

Management of Atlantic herring includes conservation of its relatives, alewife and blueback herring, collectively known as river herring. River herring populations have declined and remained low in recent years. As a result, river herring and shad catch caps were implemented in order to minimize bycatch in the directed Atlantic herring fishery.

A key component of the Commission's Amendment 3 is the implementation of seasonal closures in the Gulf of Maine (GOM) to protect spawning herring. These closures use a modified GSI-based spawning monitoring system to track reproductive maturity and better align the timing of closures with the onset of spawning.

To address the fact that spawning generally occurs earlier in the eastern GOM, as opposed to western GOM, the closures are implemented in three distinct areas at different times.

At its most recent meeting, the Atlantic Herring Management Board initiated two addenda to strengthen the spawning protections in the GOM and consider establishing a spawning protection program in Area 3 (off of Cape Cod and Georges Bank). This was prompted by the results of the 2018 benchmark stock assessment.

In 2017, the Commission implemented Addendum I to Amendment 3 to establish management measures to stabilize the rate of catch in the Area 1A (inshore GOM) fishery and distribute the seasonal quota throughout Trimester 2 (June through September). The Addendum modifies the 'Days Out' program by adding management tools to the FMP, including a weekly harvester landing limit and potential restrictions on transfers-at-sea and carrier vessels. In addition, the Addendum allows state staff to access daily catch report data to better monitor landings in the fishery.

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