

Shellfish Advisory Panel

November 12, 2025; 4:30PM

URI Bay Campus Large Conference Room/

Virtual public meeting - Zoom webinar

MEETING SUMMARY

RIMFC members: K. Eagan (Chair)

DEM: A. Gerber-Williams, S. Olszewski, P. Barrett, D. Borkman, E. Schneider, J. Livermore, C. Truesdale, J. Lake, J. Beuth (DLE);

SAP members: B. Bica, J. Gardner, D. Ghigliotty, J. Grant, J. McDonald, M. McGiveney, G. Schey;

Scientific Advisor: Dr. Rice

Public: J. Boyd, B. Eastman, E. Soranno, 1 additional attendee in person and 2 attendees online.

Link to meeting recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a0UCcZWx9ao>

1. Providence River Shellfish Management Area/Area E Harvest January – April Harvest Schedule.

A. *Gerber-Williams* presented an overview of the Providence River Shellfish Management Area commercial landings to date. She shared the realized hours (45 hours) and unrealized harvest hours (24) for the 2025 season. This hourly framing was prefaced for the upcoming discussion of the schedule using hours rather than days for scheduling.

Two Providence River harvest schedules were presented for the February through April of 2026. Proposal 1 was presented by *M. McGiveney* on behalf of the Rhode Island Shellfishermen's Association. The February openings were adjusted to 9:00 – 11:00 AM due to later sunrise and hazardous winter driving conditions. March – April openings revert to 8:00 – 10:00 AM. The intent of the schedule is to increase realized harvest opportunities during a period with significant rainfall-related closures, provide more predictable weekly access, spread harvest pressure evenly without overwhelming dealers. The schedule projects 24 total hours of potential harvest if all days open, yielding an estimated 1.7 million clams based on historical harvest rates. *J. Beuth* on behalf of enforcement noted the challenges associated with changing harvest times between months and asked that industry communication networks work to distribute such updates. Discussion points were made about market considerations in February (slow demand except around Valentine's Day), frequency of rainfall closure and likelihood that not all proposed days would be realized

(approximately 70%). It was noted that long-term declines in quahog landings and the need for more consistent Providence River access to buffer the collapsing industry.

Proposal 2 was presented by *B. Bica* and largely mirrored the RISA proposal, but a correction was made to the initially listed proposal, which listed a three-hour opening period. He clarified that the intent of the proposal was to use the same two-hour openings and the same times as Proposal 1, except that the week of February 16-20 would be omitted, reducing total proposed hours from 24 to 22. Discussion points focused on market weakness the week after Valentine's Day, the tradeoff between fewer February days versus maximizing total opportunities.

Motion made by M. McGiveney to recommend to the Marine Fisheries Council adopt the following schedule for Providence River Area E:

Commercial boat harvest/other than shoredigging harvest schedule, February – April 2026: Open one (1) weekday Monday through Thursday, excludes Friday, from 9:00 A.M. until 11:00 A.M. on the first available weekday that is not closed due to water quality impairment at a 6-bushel limit during the following weeks:

- **February 9 through 12**
- **February 16 through 19**
- **February 23 through 26**

Open one (1) weekday Monday through Thursday, excludes Friday, from 8:00 A.M. until 10:00 A.M. on the first available weekday that is not closed due to water quality impairment at a 6-bushel limit during the following weeks:

- **March 2 through 5**
- **March 9 through 12**
- **March 16 through 19**
- **March 23 through 26**
- **March 30 through April 2**
- **April 6 through 9**
- **April 13 through 16**
- **April 20 through 23**
- **April 27 through 30**

2nd by *M. McDonald*; The motion passed 7 – 0 – 0.

2. Any Other Matters

B. Bica noted concerns with shoredigging and dealer reporting when they arrive at the dealers around 6:00 -7:00 P.M. with product allegedly dug hours earlier. Dealers cannot verify when product was harvested, creating food safety and recall liability risks. The concern is that warm-weather landings held on boats, during transport from shore or at home may exceed allowed temperature windows. It was also noted the large discrepancy in available time where shorediggers may work an entire tide cycle (4-6+ hours) and boat harvesters receive a 3-hour window to harvest. *J. Beuth* on behalf of enforcement reported no significant increase in shoredigging effort but the main violation observed is individuals harvesting recreational limits during commercial closures, then attempting to tag as commercial the next day. The overall Panel consensus was that this issue should be further discussed and added to the February 2026 SAP agenda with updated data from the Division of Marine Fisheries on actual shore-harvest participation.

A. Gerber-Williams shared and summarized previously submitted written public comments from both the Rhode Island Shellfishermen's Association and *Mr. J Boyd*. *M. McGiveney* presented the Association's comments. For the Providence River Shellfish Management Area, industry strongly supports counting total annual hours, not days because it allows more flexibility to match market conditions, more equitable distribution of effort, ability to spread smaller 2-hour openings across more weeks (this proves beneficial for industry in more realized time in the Providence River). *A. Gerber-Williams* agreed that that the Division supports transitioning back to hour-based accounting, consistent with early Area E modeling efforts and stated that the Division would work with industry to design an annual hours framework. Initial planning discussions will begin during the Spring 2026 scheduling for the Providence River. *M. McGiveney* also stated that industry requests that for the Providence River Shellfish Management Area, a single annual schedule, rather than separate winter and summer cycles potentially with a mid-season check-in to address unused hours. *A. Gerber-Williams* on behalf of the Division agreed that moving toward a full-year scheduling beginning fall 2026 would be beneficial to all and that a mid-season reassessment option could be incorporated. *S. Olszewski* suggested using sub-period rollovers, allowing unused hours in one period to roll forward into the next without triggering regulatory amendments. *M. McGiveney* raised the industry request to allow steamer harvest during Providence River openings. Division staff presented that there is no known steamer abundance data for that area but would be willing to work with industry to perform a fishery-dependent steamer survey in Spring 2026 with volunteer diggers accompanied by DMF staff. It would require developing a statistically valid sampling method; intended for exploration, not immediate harvest authorization. *E. Schneider* further stated that Soft-shell clams have faced major disease-driven collapses across the Northeast ("steamer neoplasia") and that it's unknown whether Providence River supports any surviving or resistant population.

J. Boyd summarized industry concerns about the Providence River dredging and shellfish relocation worked planned with the Corps, which intends to dredge the Edgewood Shoals CAD cell and connecting channel. He reiterated the number of clams to be removed and the testing required in advance of such relocation work and urged the Division that this is a timely manner with suggested dredging could begin November 2026. *E. Schneider* provided an update from the

Corps with the revised timeline of earliest dredging in the Spring of 2027, not 2026. He also shared that the Corps is revising the Dredged Material Management Plan using RIDEM and RISA comments and that the funding is expected to be closer to \$200K plus a large contingency. He also stated that some funds may be made available before construction, allowing early pathology and contaminant testing. Coordination is ongoing; another meeting with the Corps is scheduled within two weeks. *E. Soranno* of the Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation (CFRF) described ongoing research proposals to evaluate the Potowomut Spawner Sanctuary population structure, other potential transplant receiving sites and population baseline assessments to avoid overcrowding or unsuitable placement from the transplant efforts. *G. Schey* shared that dredging sedimentation poses serious mortality risk to Area E clams; Barrington/ Upper Bay was severely impacted the last time dredging occurred. *J. Boyd* presented the topic of establishing a permanent Quahog Advisory Committee/Commission, which is support unanimously by industry members to coordinate research priorities, long-term recruitment studies, transplant program oversight, and policy development. *D. Borkman* stated that DEM has pursued funding through several budget cycles but has been unsuccessful. *E. Schneider* shared that the Division has been discussing that the Rhode Island Marine Fisheries Institute (RIMFI) may serve as an administrative home.

3. Adjourn

Adjourned at 6:40 PM.

Minutes prepared by Anna Gerber-Williams, the Division of Marine Fisheries