



Position Statement on ASMFC Horseshoe Crab Draft Amendment VIII

September 2022

- The Horseshoe Crab Recovery Coalition strongly opposes the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (ASMFC) plan to change its Horseshoe Crab Fishery Management Plan, a move that would raise quotas on the killing of horseshoe crabs for use as bait by potentially reopening the harvest to include female horseshoe crabs.
- We remain concerned that the underlying data supporting the new draft addendum to the plan has still not been released to the public, so that conservation groups and concerned citizens have no way to truly understand the science on which the new proposal is based.
- Under the current framework there is no female crab harvest until female abundance reaches 11.2 million crabs or until the Delaware Bay total red knot stopover population reaches 81,900 birds. The proposed revision would allow the resumption of the female harvest, even though neither the red knot nor female horseshoe crabs of Delaware Bay are close to satisfying either metric.
- How can we comment meaningfully on a proposal when you are not releasing the data supporting the types of increases being proposed? With both red knots and horseshoe crabs at historically low numbers, we cannot take the commission's assertions on faith.
- Based on field work, including egg density studies conducted by the Delaware Bay Shorebird Project and other organizations, we do not believe that horseshoe crab populations are recovering from their population crash in the 1990s. Egg density data is the most reliable indicator of the horseshoe crab population, and importantly, it is the most reliable index of value for red knots and other shorebirds. Yet ASMFC has never included these surveys in its modeling. Making matters worse, ASMFC also does not include field survey data for Red Knots, and these show that Red Knot populations are at historic lows. In the 1990s, more than 90,000 could be found along Delaware Bay. This year, only 12,000 were counted, and in 2021, the number was estimated at an all-time low of 6,800. Evidence is now emerging that Red Knots are bypassing the Delaware Bay stopover altogether in search of life-sustaining food sources elsewhere. This makes their migratory journey all the more perilous.
- Shorebirds like the red knot are plummeting toward catastrophe, with their declines representing the world's number one conservation crisis facing birds today. And the killing of female horseshoe crabs all but assures that their population levels will never rebound.
- The joint collapse of red knots and horseshoe crabs is not inevitable. But this proposal propels them closer to that grim reality.