

Shorts

Lobster meeting

**MOUNT DESERT** — The results of a study that could affect the way lobster licenses are allocated will be presented in a meeting on Jan. 9 at the Mount Desert Elementary School beginning at 5 p.m.

The event is one of many community meetings being held by the Maine Department of Marine Resources on the study conducted by the Gulf of Maine Research Institute. That study suggested a "tiered" entry system that would distribute licenses according to the number of traps used by a fisherman.

For more information or a copy of the study visit the Maine DMR website at [www.maine.gov/dmr](http://www.maine.gov/dmr).

Dive activities

**BAR HARBOR** — Local dive club, the League of Underwater Superheroes, hosts underwater hockey Thursday nights from 7 to 8:30 p.m. at the Mount Desert Island YMCA.

Underwater hockey gear is provided but participants must bring their own snorkel equipment. For YMCA members the event is free. For non-members the cost is \$9.

For other events hosted by the dive club, call master diver Ed Monet at 288-DIVE (3483) or email him at [ed@divered.com](mailto:ed@divered.com).

Volunteers needed

**HALLOWELL** — The Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR) is seeking volunteers for a pilot project on tracking vessels and data collection technologies. The purpose of the study is to develop and regulatory measures and data collection techniques. Interested individuals can contact Heidi Bray by Jan. 2 at (207) 592-4082 to volunteer or request more information.

Illegal fishing

**UNION** — A father and son were recently charged with illegal possession of v-notched and mutilated lobsters, according to a press release published by the Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR) on Dec. 21.

During a Marine Patrol inspection of their vessel *North Star*, Todd Curtis, of Union, and his son and Ricky Curtis, of South Thomaston, were found in possession of more than 400 illegal lobsters. That could result in a fine of \$190,000, the press release said.

"The v-notch" requirement in Maine mandates that egg-bearing females caught have a notch cut in their tails and that they be released to encourage high rates of reproduction.

"We consider this a very serious crime for a number of reasons," said chief of the Marine Patrol Colonel Joseph Fessenden in the press release. "The illegal taking of any lobster negatively affects the resource and is a direct theft from those lobstermen who abide by the laws every day that they fish."

It is illegal to keep a lobster that has already had its tail v-notched or to mutilate a v-notch to make it unrecognizable. An arraignment has been scheduled for the two fishermen on Jan. 14 in the Knox County District Court.



# Maritime

## Sailing centers join forces on teen 'tack'

By Blake Davis  
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**SOUTHWEST HARBOR** — Sailing centers around Mount Desert Island are investing in teenage sailors with a swift new fleet of 420 sailing dinghies. The 21 boats will be moored in a central location and act as hub for youth sailing, project coordinators say.

"In sailing, as in many sports, there is a dropout rate as they [participants] get into their teenage years," said Franny Charles, the director of the Northeast Harbor Sailing School (NEHSS), one of the four sailing centers involved in the purchase.

Rondar Raceboats in Peabody, MA is designing the new sailing dinghies to be faster, and presumably more exciting, than the old 420s models.

According to Mr. Charles, that could increase the level of competition and create a more compelling reason for teenagers to stay involved in the sport.

NEHSS is collaborating with the MDI Community Sailing Center, the Little Cranberry Yacht Club and the Seal Harbor Yacht Club. All but three of the boats would be moored near Greening Island, an area equally accessible to all those organizations to further encourage participation.

The other three vessels would stay in waters off of Little Cranberry Island.

"We noticed all the clubs and sailing centers being remotely located didn't have any social inertia," said Mr. Charles, recalling a meeting between him and representatives of the other organizations. By encouraging a more cohesive sailing community he hoped teens would "stay with it longer."

*"We're not looking to create Olympic sailors. We're looking to teach a life skill."*  
— Fran Charles

The NEHSS plans to purchase nine vessels, the same number as the MDI Community Sailing Center. Little Cranberry Yacht Club would purchase three of the sailing dinghies, which are already being built of more modern materials than most 420 style club boats.

That construction entails a lightweight skin vacuum molded over a foam core. The design is both lighter and more rigid than the traditional "heavy duty" construction employed for club boats. Combined with lightweight masts and booms, the new 420s could be just half the weight of the boats they are replacing.

Among other benefits, the new 420s would be more stable, easier to repair, and more durable, designers say. Though not yet complete, they have been affectionately dubbed "Turbo Twinks" by Mr. Charles.

Each boat costs \$9,000. The MDI Community Sailing Center has raised nearly \$50,000 of the \$150,000 it needs to purchase and maintain the new vessels. The other sailing centers have just begun fundraising.

While the purchase may be the largest collaboration between the sailing clubs, it is not the first. "In 1999 we bought 12

boats that have been used for the high school sailing team," said Glenn Squires, executive director of the MDI Community Sailing Center. "But this will be more cohesive," Mr. Squires said.

The age of boats originally bought by the sailing centers in 1999 is another reason for the new fleet. Those vessels are "at the end of their shelf life," Mr. Charles said. The Mount Desert Island High School team anticipates using the new fleet beginning for their largest Regatta this coming spring. That is tentatively scheduled May 25.

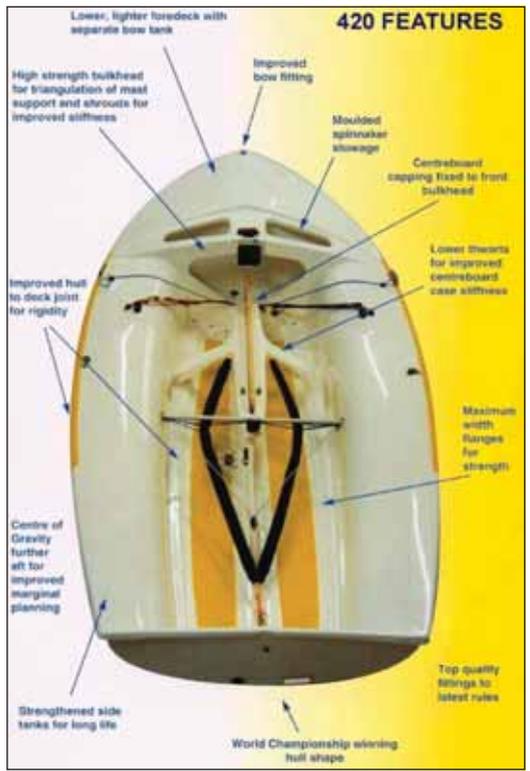
While the sailing clubs considered repairing their old boats, they determined the new 420s would be a more sound investment. According to David W. Schoeder, commodore of the Northeast Harbor Fleet, those repairs would have only given his boats another 5 years of use "without elevating the level of competition."

He said the collaboration brought on by the purchase would further benefit the school. However he added that the sailing centers would continue to operate independently with separate programs for the youngest sailors and their own summer programs.

"We want this to be openly accessible to anyone who has learned how to sail," said Mr. Charles. "We're not looking to create Olympic sailors. We're looking to teach a life skill... this is a very unique opportunity to bring everyone together."

The first half of the new fleet is scheduled to be complete in early April, in time for the high school sailors to take to the water.

[maritimes.fenceviewer.com](http://maritimes.fenceviewer.com)



## Japanese seaweed reaches Maine

By Stephen Rappaport  
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**CAPE ELIZABETH** — Like the creatures in many a cheap, 1970s horror movie filmed on some Tokyo backlot, another alien from Japan is threatening the world as we know it.

This time, though, the alien is no 6-inch replica of some fictional prehistoric reptile eating its way through a miniature fantasy city or a fictional slime that devours all it touches. This time, the alien is a filamentous red algae called *Heterosiphonia japonica* that has recently been discovered in Maine waters and that could foul the state's beaches and ruin its fishing industry.

Late last summer, researchers from the Shoals Marine Laboratory run by Cornell University and the University of New Hampshire, discovered the algae along the shores of Appledore Island — one of the Isles of Shoals situated about 10 miles off the coast at about the latitude of the Maine-New Hampshire boundary. At the time, it was the farthest north the algae had ever been seen.

In October, though, a group of marine biology students from South Portland High School, discovered the

invasive seaweed on Crescent Beach on the shore of Cape Elizabeth. They reported their find through the Gulf of Maine Research Institute's statewide Vital Signs program, a community of students, educators, professional scientists, and citizen scientists that, among other projects, studies invasive species in Maine.

Not long afterwards, Matthew Bracken a Northeastern University scientist, confirmed that he and his colleagues had encountered the *japonica* algae growing in large quantities while diving in several locations around Cape Elizabeth.

The algae poses a number of potential problems. Perhaps the most serious is that after growing in deeper water, it comes loose and washes up onto beaches where it accumulates below the high tide line and rots. The stench is overpowering. Scientists fear that the fast-growing invasive can outcompete native seaweeds, disrupt the delicate balance of the ocean ecosystem and impact the fisheries it supports.

As its name suggests, *Heterosiphonia japonica* is not indigenous to the North Atlantic but is a species of algae native to Japan. Scientists who study the organism, first spotted

by Trinity College biologist Craig Schneider in 2009 along the coast of Rhode Island, think it probably reached the North Atlantic in ballast water pumped from the tanks of some ocean-going ship.

Just what impact *japonica* might have in Maine is unclear.

Although there have been reports from a few southern New England lobstermen of finding their traps clogged with the red algae, Larry Harris, professor of biology at the University of New Hampshire's Center for Marine Biology, works with Linda Mercer of the Department of Marine Resources (DMR) on invasive species issues and isn't too concerned.

"It will grow in dense populations under some conditions but that will only provide cover for small crabs and lobsters," Dr. Harris said in a recent email, "so it is not a negative there."

According to Dr. Harris, the algae might possibly be a food source for the state's beleaguered sea urchin population, if there are any urchins around to eat it.

Red algae "seem to do very well in overfished bottoms where urchins are lacking, and dense algae cover is not going to help them come

back" Harris said.

The good, or at least not so bad, news, said Harris, is that "I am not so sure this species will be a major pest for shellfish. At least it is not likely to be as much of a problem as the tunicates are."

Tunicates are yet another invasive species that, like the Chinese mitten crab and the green crab before it, is rapidly expanding its range.

So far, the mitten crab hasn't been reported to have reached Maine waters, but scientists at DMR are definitely on the lookout.

Green crabs, originally indigenous to northern Europe, have been a serious soft-shell clam predator in Maine since at least the 1950s. With warming waters, the lack of ice along the shore and the decline in the populations of finfish that used to eat them, the number of green crabs has exploded in recent years. Clammers and shellfish committees throughout the state expend huge efforts to protect shellfish beds from the voracious predators.

The Freeport Shellfish Commission recently announced that it would spend some \$500,000 over the next five years to fight the ravages of the green crab on the town's extensive shellfish beds.

## Groundfish industry thriving NOAA says

**BOSTON** — Who says numbers don't lie?

Last week, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Northeast Fisheries Science Center released its annual report on the economic performance of the New England groundfish industry. On its face, the news was good.

According to the report, landings, gross revenues and net revenues per vessel reached three-year highs for the Northeast groundfish fleet during the fishing year that began May 1, 2011, and ended April 30 of this year. Against that background, the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) is expected to announce drastic cuts in the landings quotas for cod and haddock at its next meeting, scheduled for Jan. 29-31 in Portsmouth, N.H.

During that 12-month period, about 800 groundfish vessels earned \$330.9 million in gross revenues from all species landed. That was an increase of \$36.4 million over the 2010 fishing year. Revenues just from groundfish species such as cod, haddock and flounder increased to \$90.1 million, about \$7 million more than in 2010.

Those results suggest that economic conditions generally improved for the groundfish fleet between 2009 and 2011 for vessels that remained active

in the fishery. But there's a rub. Over the same three-year period, the number of groundfish boats that participated in the fishery decreased significantly continuing a long, downward trend.

In 2009, a total of 957 boats fished for groundfish in New England waters. By last year, that number had dropped to just 805.

As might be expected, few boats fishing meant fewer fishermen had jobs, at least in the groundfish industry. In 2009, the groundfish fleet gave employment to 2,260 fishermen including both captains and crew. By 2011, that number had dropped to 2,179.

That decrease, though apparently small, reflects a trend that disturbs many fishermen and regulators. Smaller, owner-operated vessels of the kind most common in Down East Maine are leaving the fleet while large boats fishing out of ports such as Gloucester and New Bedford are taking an increasing share of the catch.

Since the 2007 fishing year, New England's active groundfish fleet has shrunk by more than 25 percent. Between 2009 and 2011 alone, Maine's groundfish fleet dropped from 114 boats to 88. Two of the boats that left the fishery were based in Portland. The rest came from smaller harbors along the coast.



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