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Recommended Citation

Zeiber, Rebecca, "UNH Researchers Working to Restore Winter Flounder Populations on Martha's Vineyard" (2011). *UNH Today*. 3613.
<https://scholars.unh.edu/news/3613>

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Media Relations

UNH Researchers Working To Restore Winter Flounder Populations On Martha's Vineyard

March 8, 2011




DURHAM, N.H. – Winter flounder populations off the coast of Massachusetts are getting a helping hand from University of New Hampshire researchers.


Winter flounder populations in southern New England waters — also called the Mid-Atlantic Bight — have been steadily declining since the early 2000s, primarily due to overfishing, according to the National Marine Fisheries Service. UNH researchers have spent the last decade conducting research on establishing methods to effectively restore and enhance winter flounder populations. One community in the Mid-Atlantic Bight — Martha's Vineyard, Mass. — recently sought advice from UNH researchers, who have developed an enhancement project aimed at improving winter flounder stocks.


"Winter flounder stocks are in dire need of help," according to Elizabeth Fairchild, UNH associate professor of zoology and the project's principal investigator. "Cutting back on fishing alone will not restore these populations in a timely manner. All responsible management tools, including restocking, should be considered."

Volunteers for the UNH Winter Flounder Enhancement Project pull a seine to capture and inventory fish in Menemsha Pond on Martha's Vineyard, Mass. Photo credit: Andrew Jacobs

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With funding from the National Sea Grant College Program and the Science Consortium for Ocean Replenishment, volunteers on Martha's Vineyard have literally plunged into the project. Following a recent training session at the UNH Judd Gregg Marine Research Complex in New Castle, volunteers began collecting data in the icy waters of Lagoon Pond and Menemsha Pond on Martha's Vineyard. Two times a month, they take core samples to determine food availability for flounder, monitor water quality and pull seine nets through the shallow waters to determine what species of fish and macroinvertebrates are present. The core samples are sent back to UNH where Fairchild's lab assistants analyze the results.

Project participants will continue collecting data through November in order to determine the most appropriate winter flounder stocking strategies. If these sites show promise as enhancement locations, researchers and volunteers will stock the ponds with as many as 50,000 hatchery-reared winter flounder and monitor their populations to determine the stocking effectiveness.

"This study is a demonstration project, and this community is a testing ground to show how to start and implement winter flounder restocking programs," Fairchild said. "If this project is successful, it will serve as a model applicable to other New England fishing communities seeking to recover winter flounder populations."

On Martha's Vineyard, interest in and support for this project comes from residents of the island, fishermen and bay scallopers as well as from members of the Wampanoag Reservation, says UNH Ph.D. student Shelley Edmundson, who works closely with the volunteers on the island. "The public has been extremely supportive and excited about the project, particularly long-time residents who remember decades ago when the flounder fishery was successful," she says. "It's great to see people working together across the island to try to help the winter flounder and bring back the fishery."

To find out more information about the project, please visit Fairchild's winter flounder enhancement blog at <http://winterflouderenhancement.blogspot.com/> or contact her at elizabeth.fairchild@unh.edu. The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.

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Photo: http://unh.edu/news/cj_nr/2011/mar/bp07seagrant.jpg

Volunteers for the UNH Winter Flounder Enhancement Project pull a seine to capture and inventory fish in Menemsha Pond on Martha's Vineyard, Mass.

Photo credit: Andrew Jacobs

Photo: http://unh.edu/news/cj_nr/2011/mar/bp07seagrant2.jpg

Volunteer Andrew Jacobs prepares to take a core sample of the sediment in Menemsha Pond on Martha's Vineyard, Mass., as part of the UNH Winter Flounder Enhancement Project.

Photo credit: Curtis Chandler

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T-hall

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