

*NORTHEAST CONSORTIUM*  
**2011 Progress Report**

**Project Title:** Spawning movements and habitat use of winter flounder in the southern GOM.

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**Principal Investigator:**

Elizabeth A. Fairchild, Assistant Research Professor

University of New Hampshire, Dept. of Biological Sciences

Spaulding Hall G47, Durham, NH 03824

Ph: 603-862-1244; Fax: 603-862-3784; E-Mail: [elizabeth.fairchild@unh.edu](mailto:elizabeth.fairchild@unh.edu)

**Other Project Participants:**

W. Huntting Howell, Professor of Biological Sciences

University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH 03824

Ph: 603-862-2109; E-mail: [whh@cisunix.unh.edu](mailto:whh@cisunix.unh.edu)

David Goethel, Commercial Fisherman

23 Ridgeview Terrace, Hampton, NH 03842

Ph: 603-926-2165; E-mail: [egoethel@comcast.net](mailto:egoethel@comcast.net)

Carl Bouchard, Commercial Fisherman

Epping Road, Exeter, NH 03833

Ph: 603-772-5047; Fax: 603-772-5370; Email: [cpbouch@aol.com](mailto:cpbouch@aol.com)

Charles Felch Sr., Commercial Fisherman

118 Centennial St., Seabrook, NH 03874

Ph: 603-474-7342; E-mail: [boat1151@aol.com](mailto:boat1151@aol.com)

Michael Armstrong, Program Manager

Recreational and Anadromous Fisheries, Annisquam River Marine Fisheries Station

Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries, 30 Emerson Avenue, Gloucester, MA 01930

Ph: (978) 282-0308 ext. 109; E-mail: [michael.armstrong@state.ma.us](mailto:michael.armstrong@state.ma.us)

Laughlin Siceloff, Technician, Dept. of Biological Sciences

University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH 03824

Ph: 603-862-4153; E-mail: [laughlin.siceloff@unh.edu](mailto:laughlin.siceloff@unh.edu)

Bill Hoffman, Technician

Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries, 30 Emerson Avenue, Gloucester, MA 01930

Ph: (978) 282-0308; E-mail: [bill.hoffman@state.ma.us](mailto:bill.hoffman@state.ma.us)

**Hypothesis: Winter flounder in the Gulf of Maine spawn in coastal and offshore waters rather than in estuaries.**

To test this hypothesis, we proposed the following objectives:

1. Acoustically tag 40 pre-spawning adult winter flounder (20 males, 20 females) in our selected study area in February 2009.
2. Track these fish over the next three months to determine their spatial distribution and movements.
3. Sample the adult population of winter flounder in our study site from February to May 2009 to quantify how the reproductive status of these fish changes over time in this offshore area.
4. Determine how the spatial distribution of spawning fish relates to attributes of the spawning habitat.

**Major Accomplishments and Milestones:**

Since this project is winding to a close, the major goal during this reporting period was disseminating information. Outreach was achieved through scientific presentations at the following meetings:

- Fisheries Roundtable Meeting – Aug. 26, 2010, Portsmouth, NH
- Annual meeting of the American Fisheries Society – Sept. 12-16, 2010, Pittsburgh, PA
- Northeast Consortium PI Meeting – Oct. 21, 2010, Portsmouth, NH
- Flatfish Biology Conference – Dec. 1-2, 2010, Westbrook, CT

**Unexpected difficulties and project alterations:**

There were no unexpected difficulties or project alterations during this reporting period.

**Next steps, tasks for next 6 months:**

During the next six months, manuscripts will be completed and submitted for publication.

**Impacts of the project to fishermen/fishing community and scientist/science community:**

This study contributes to a broader understanding of winter flounder spawning habitat, especially for those populations north of Cape Cod. Given that the long-term viability of marine resources depend on protection of their habitat, and that the Sustainable Fisheries Act requires regional fishery management councils to describe, identify, protect, conserve and enhance essential fish habitats (EFH), studies of winter flounder spawning habitat are necessary. Results of the research will be useful to fisheries managers. For example, there is good evidence that

southern winter flounder populations return to the same spawning area each year (Saila 1961a; Phelan 1992), and this may be true in the GOM as well. In addition, it appears that the northern populations do not undertake long migrations (Howe and Coates 1975). Therefore localized spawning areas, such as those we are identifying, are probably critical to local populations, and the fishery that depends on them. Clearly it is important to study and understand the essential spawning habitat associated with this area. State and federal fisheries managers and regulators will be able to use the data to identify, conserve and enhance the essential habitat for winter flounder.



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**Elizabeth Fairchild**  
**December 16, 2010**