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Virginia Institute of Marine Science

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BULLETIN

VIRGINIA INSTITUTE of MARINE SCIENCE

Vol. 3, No. 19

December 6, 1971

ABUNDANCE OF BLUE CRABS EXPECTED

Blue crab catches in the Chesapeake Bay are expected to be more than 75 million pounds a year for the next two years according to VIMS scientists. Large hatches of crabs in the summers of 1970 and 1971 and good survival of young account for the high levels of abundance.

Virginia and Maryland landings since September 1967 have been between 47 and 67 million pounds per year, far below the 1960-70 average of 75 million pounds. The forecast for an increase in catch for the one-year period from September 1971 through August 1972 was made a year ago, in October 1970, following the scientists' observations of better-than-average numbers of young crabs hatched in 1970. The hatch of 1971 appears to have been as successful as that of 1970.

The catches over the next two years may not follow the usual seasonal pattern. The fall and winter catch of big crabs, 5 inches wide and larger, has not been unusually high. However, the rivers and bay waters contain countless numbers of three to four inch crabs which are expected to make up a superabundant crop of large-sized peelers and soft crabs in the spring and then produce a very large hard crab catch in the summer of 1972.

Crabs hatched in the lower Bay in 1971 were very late in migrating into the rivers this year. While normally the migration of one-third to one-half-inch-wide crabs occurs in early September, small crabs were not seen in the York and Rappahannock rivers until late October and early November. It is possible that an early normal hatch in June and July was killed by adverse environmental conditions, such as the low oxygen supplies in the Bay from July through early August, and that the crabs now seen are from a later hatch. Crabs smaller than two inches wide are very abundant in the York and Rappahannock river now, but are almost non-existent in the James. It is possible but not likely that the scientists' team missed the crop in their survey of the James. What this means for the James catch in 1972-73 is unknown.

* * * * *

OYSTER MEATS QUALITY INDEX November 1971

Oysters in the James River decreased again in quality during November in all sections of the river. They are below average now at all stations except Deep Water Shoals and Point of Shoals. Quality is far below that for November a year ago. The continuing decline in quality during October and November this year (instead of the expected increase) was due to the recent record rainfall which lowered salinity to such an

extent that oysters did not feed for several weeks in October. Salinities have now returned to near normal but it is expected that quality will not increase too much by winter when feeding will stop due to low water temperature.

Indices for oysters in the York River increased slightly at three out of four stations and meats are now rated average at all stations. Quality, however, is still lower than it was a year ago.

Oysters at all stations in the Rappahannock River showed a marked rise over the previous month and oysters are above average at all stations. Quality, however, is still slightly lower than it was a year ago.

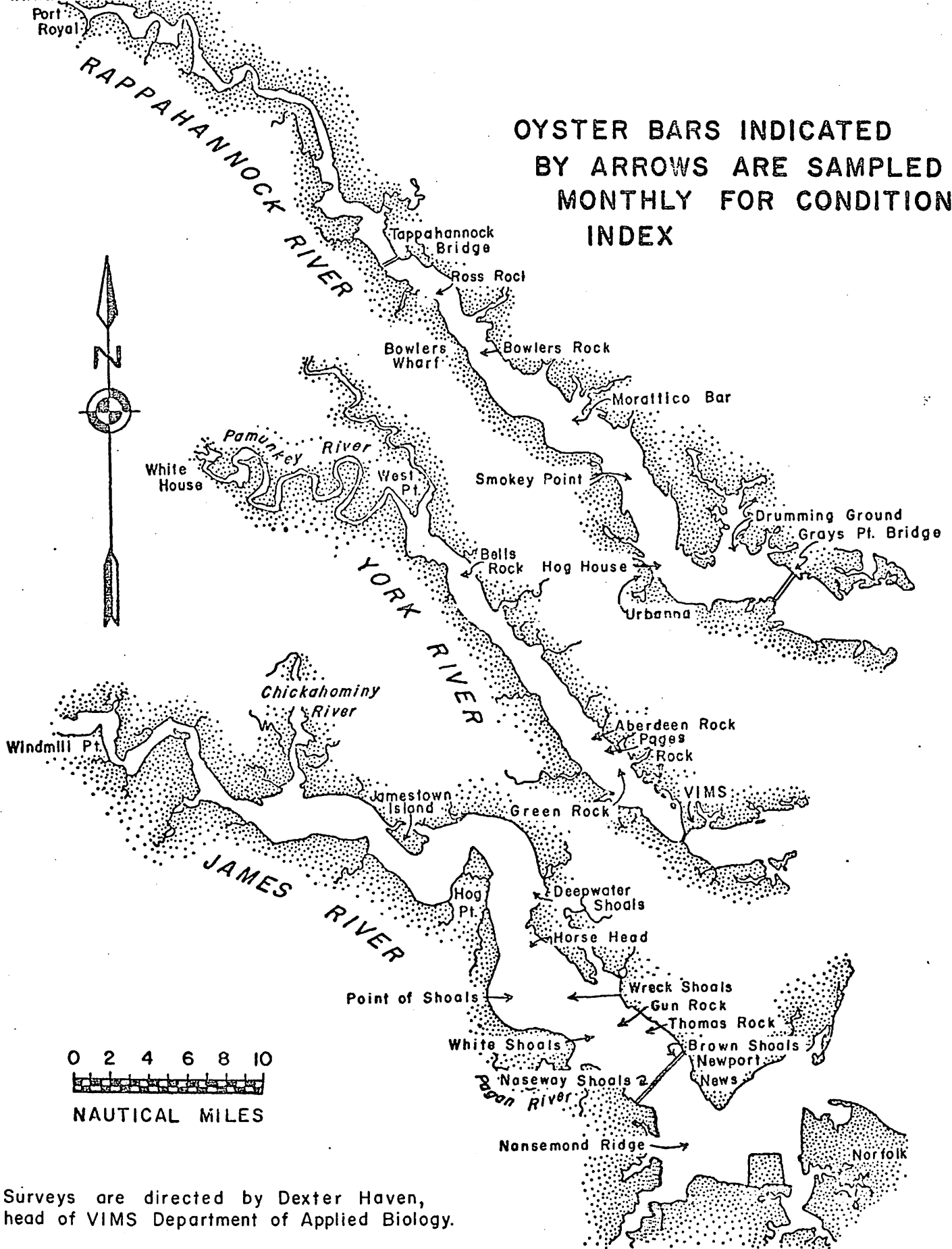
The following table shows the oyster meats quality at stations in the three rivers for October and November during 1970 and 1971. Please refer to the map on page 3 for locations.

KEY TO INDEX NUMBERS
3.0 to 5.5 -- Below average
5.6 to 7.5 -- Average
7.6 and up -- Above average

OYSTER MEATS QUALITY INDEX

	Oct.		Nov.	
	1970	1971	1970	1971
JAMES RIVER				
Brown Shoals	5.6	4.0	5.1	---
White Shoals	6.8	5.3	6.0	5.2
Wreck Shoals				
shallow	6.6	5.2	6.2	4.8
deep	6.2	5.0	6.1	4.5
Point of Shoals	9.3	7.3	9.1	6.8
Horse Head	6.8	5.4	6.7	5.1
Deepwater Shoals	8.6	6.4	8.2	5.8
YORK RIVER				
Green Rock	8.9	---	8.7	6.4
Pages Rock	7.8	6.6	7.7	6.6
Aberdeen Rock	7.9	6.2	7.9	7.0
Bells Rock				
deep	7.0	6.1	7.0	6.5
RAPPAHANNOCK RIVER				
Drumming Ground	---	---	---	---
Urbanna	12.9	7.4	12.9	10.2
Smokey Point				
shallow	9.8	8.5	10.8	8.9
deep	9.6	6.8	9.4	7.3
Morattico Bar				
deep	9.8	7.9	10.9	9.1
Bowlers Rock				
shallow	10.0	9.5	11.6	10.8
deep	10.2	8.6	11.4	---

OYSTER BARS INDICATED
BY ARROWS ARE SAMPLED
MONTHLY FOR CONDITION
INDEX



Surveys are directed by Dexter Haven,
head of VIMS Department of Applied Biology.

ADVISORY SERVICES IMPORTANT FUNCTION AT VIMS

Advisory services provided by the Virginia Institute of Marine Science are an integral part of the principal functions of the Institute. Together with research and education, advice rounds out the services available to users of the marine resources.

The number of services requested of VIMS through phone calls, letters, interviews and visits more than doubled between 1969 and 1970 and records for 1971 show that through the end of July, the VIMS staff handled almost as many requests for services and information as were recorded for the entire 1970 calendar year.

Increases are especially evident in services provided to federal agencies, newspaper reporters and free lance writers, the seafood industry, state and local governmental agencies, and commerce and industry.

The placement of two extension agents in the field to contact watermen, businesses and industries has greatly increased the capacity of the Institute to provide consulting services and information in such areas as developing and expanding fisheries, introducing gear and methods of mariculture new to this area, assisting packers and processors with special problems, providing information to governmental planning and regulatory groups, or simply clarifying for fishermen, as individuals and in groups, the reason for certain conservation measures.

Sportsmen, fish processors and sports writers often ask for information about the cause of unusual abundance or scarcity of certain fish or shellfish. Scientists answer these questions and also make periodic predictions about abundance of species, based on results of their studies. Frequent questions come in concerning low oxygen levels in the waters, fish kills, extent of pollution, aquaculture prospects, seafood regulation, beach erosion and information on wetlands.

The advisory services unit has further added to its program by giving talks on marine research programs and setting up exhibits at fairs and shows. These channels provide an opportunity to explain the VIMS operation and tell how research information obtained by scientists is passed on to users of marine resources.

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Dr. William J. Hargis, Jr., VIMS Director; David Garten, Editor