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PRELIMINARY REPORT

THE IMPACT OF THE EXTENDED SEASON FOR DREDGING SEED
OYSTERS IN THE JAMES RIVER VIRGINIA.

By

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and
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November 13, 1981

Marine Resource Report #81-11

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INTRODUCTION

In the 1976-77 season the tonging season in the James River was extended one month, from 30 May to 30 June.

Data

The harvest for seed has declined from 506,000 bushels in the 1975-76 season to 288,000 bushels during the 1979-80 season. Incomplete data for the 1980-81 season indicates a further decline to about 200,000 bushels.

From 1976-77, when the season was extended one month to June 30, the June catch was from 4% to 12% of the annual total (Table 1).

We believe the decline in catch largely reflects a low demand for seed by the planters. However, there is evidence that James River seed may not be as available to the tonger today (1980-81) as it was during the 1975-76 season.

Catch per boat data are available from the VMRC. These data show a decline in catch per boat day from 92 bushels during the 1975-76 season to about 62 bushels during the 1980-81 season (Table 2).

Additional Information Related to the Problem

- A. The landing data utilized in this preliminary report are incomplete for the 1980-81 season; no data are available for 1981-82. Moreover, data for boat days worked have a similar void. We strongly suggest that these data continue to be collected and made current so we may better evaluate the situation.
- B. The 1981 set in the James River was far above average and this seed should contribute (in volume) to that tanged during the 1982-83 season.

CONCLUSION

We recommend that the 1981-82 season should end on 1 July as usual since we have no real evidence of a negative impact. However, we advise that the catch per unit of effort be followed closely during the 1982-83 season.

Table 1¹

Harvest of seed oysters by month in Virginia bushels from the James River, Virginia² from 1975 to 1981. Data from Virginia Landings and Virginia Landings Annual Summaries.

	<u>1975-76</u>	<u>1976-77</u>	<u>1977-78</u>	<u>1978-79</u>	<u>1979-80</u>	<u>1980-81</u>
Oct	116,223	91,759	36,127	105,514	62,812	1,425
Nov	87,914	78,272	62,612	87,613	41,457	106,248
Dec	No harvest	No harvest	44,254	54,663	30,763	34,908
Jan	2,153	76	13,442	16,294	18,273	156
Feb	37,333	4,725	1,603	3,411	5,132	1,467
Mar	42,072	39,622	43,519	32,292	15,340	7,670
Apr	121,866	36,359	77,233	80,404	23,925	14,974
May	98,746	83,815	94,026	76,396	59,381	29,720
Jun	No harvest	17,508	48,887	20,464	30,682	MSG
Total	506,304	352,134	421,703	477,052	287,770	196,568 ³
% harvested in June	0%	5.0%	11.6%	4.2%	10.7%	

¹Data does not agree with White Paper from 1975 to 1978 due to differences in data reports between NMFS and VMRC. Totals reported in White Paper are NMFS.

²Seed from public in VA Landings considered to be from the James River.

³Harvest for June 1981 not available.

Table 2

A comparison of boat days' with annual harvest of seed oysters from Table 1.

<u>Season</u>	<u>Annual harvest in VA bushels (Table 1)</u>	<u>Total number of boat days worked²</u>	<u>Catch per boat days (Bu)</u>
1975-76	506,304	5,496	92
1976-77	352,134	MSG	--
1977-78	421,703	3,769	112
1978-79	477,052	4,445	89
1979-80	287,770	4,911	59
1980-81 ¹	151,874 ³	2,464 ³	62 ³

¹Harvest for June 1981 not available.

²Data from files of VMRC.

³Based on October 1980 to March 1981.