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WELLS RESERVE LOBSTER RESEARCH GETS A BOOST FROM SEA GRANT AWARD

WELLS, Maine, September 10, 2019 — The Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve will receive about \$250,000 over 2 years to study how warming coastal waters are affecting lobsters in the Gulf of Maine, the National Sea Grant Office announced on Tuesday.

The Gulf of Maine is warming faster than most waters around the world, but lobsters thrive in cold water. This has raised concern about the future of the Gulf's lobster fishery. Southern New England has already seen dramatic declines in lobster counts and the fishery there is in jeopardy.

“Lobsters prefer cold water and will move to deeper, offshore areas to find it,” explained Dr. Jason Goldstein, research director at the Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve. “We plan to discover how the inshore and offshore movements of female lobsters are affected by warming waters, and whether their young can settle and grow in shallow nursery habitats as coastal waters become warmer.”

Lobster abundance estimates are at an all-time high in the Gulf of Maine, but an all-time low in southern New England. Warming waters over the past 15 years have reduced the number of young lobsters found in nearshore nursery areas. The persistently low number of young lobsters in the population has managers concerned about sustaining the fishery.

American lobster supports the most valuable single-species fishery in the country. Today, the value of the American lobster fishery is estimated at about \$667 million, according to Sea Grant. In 2016, more than 80 percent of U.S. lobster landings were in Maine.

“Our research will help lobstermen and fishery managers prepare for the uncertain future of the Gulf of Maine lobster industry,” Goldstein said.

Wells Reserve collaborators on the 2-year project include the University of New Hampshire, Saint Joseph's College of Maine, the New England Aquarium, the Maine Department of Marine Resources, and the New Hampshire Department of Fish and Game.

Sea Grant's new American Lobster Initiative is funding research into stressors that impact the lobster fishery both ecologically and socio-economically. The science being supported is critical to the sustainable management of the fishery and for ensuring resiliency in the communities that depend on this valuable resource. The research competition was informed by listening sessions with regional fishing industry stakeholders, state and federal fisheries managers, and university, state, and federal fisheries researchers.

The Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve works to understand, protect, and restore coastal ecosystems of the Gulf of Maine through integrated research, stewardship, environmental learning, and community partnerships. The Wells Reserve at Laudholm is funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the member-supported nonprofit Laudholm Trust.

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