

SECTIONAL REVIEWS

Chesapeake

VIRGINIA: Fish continued to pour into the menhaden factories during July, according to the Service's Fishery Marketing Specialist in Virginia. Reports showed that the menhaden catch to August 1 had already risen above the amount considered as a season's normal production.

All menhaden factories in Virginia are located far up the Chesapeake Bay, because before 1900, when the sites were chosen, it was considered unnecessary to go outside of the Bay to fish. But during the past 30 years or more, there have not been fish enough in the Bay to keep the factories running throughout the season, and it has become necessary to send the boats outside.

The operation of the menhaden industry tends automatically to maintain abundant supplies of fish. In 1878, the industry was described as self-regulating by the Commissioner of Fisheries of Virginia when he made the statement that, "The outfit for purse-net fishing is so expensive that it cannot be maintained unless the fish are abundant, so that this industry will probably regulate itself."

The industry began in Virginia about 1869, when 21 men and 4 vessels became engaged in fishing. The number of fish taken the first year was 3 million, from which about 8,000 gallons of oil and 300 tons of guano were produced. At that time, an official report stated that the fish were caught chiefly in the Bay. In less than 10 years the industry grew to proportions exceeding those of the present year. Today fish scrap is not used for guano, but is ground into meal and used as an essential ingredient of stock feed.

The efforts of conservationists and legislators to regulate the crab population in the Bay satisfactorily has met with a fair measure of success this year.



Most of the hard crabs in Virginia are now being caught in crab pots. The law allows a licensee 50 pots and limits him to one license. Bait is often a great problem. Fish heads from fish-cutting houses are favored, but the supply is uncertain. Undersized, unmarketable fish caught by pound-netters are used when obtainable.

According to crab fishermen, a crabbing area in the lower Rappahannock River compares favorably with any in the Bay.

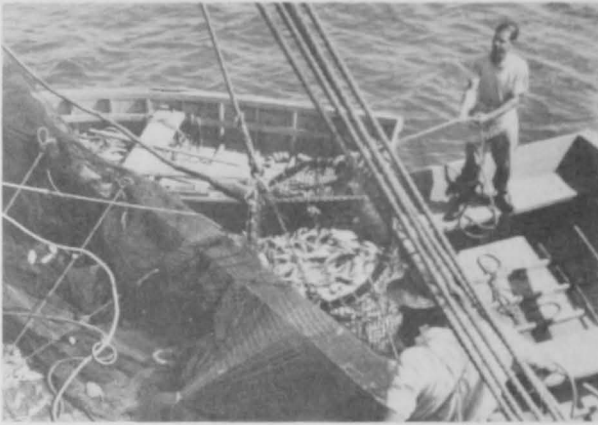
Sea-nettles, or stinging jellyfish, have been present in large proportions during the summer, damaging nets and other gear through sheer numbers and weight. Even a small object such as a crab pot is sometimes lost by action of the nettles. They pile up against it until their weight, aided by the current, turns it over continuously. If the marking buoy is pulled beneath the surface, the pot is never found.

South Atlantic

Rains and strong winds curtailed fishing activity along the South Atlantic Coast during the period July 16 to August 15, according to the Service's Fishery Marketing Specialist in that area.

The run of shrimp expected in North Carolina by the first week in August had not appeared on August 15. There was much conjecture among the fishermen as to whether the weather conditions may have influenced the run. The amount of fresh water in the rivers and sounds increased greatly during the period, with Southport, North Carolina, reporting that fresh water prevailed 28 miles off shore.

Seiners along the South Carolina coast reported that the catch of mullet, spots, and miscellaneous fish has been very good, but that bad weather generally had hindered activities. These fishermen have had to contend also with an abundance of sharks. These sharks average about 100 pounds and are very destructive, cutting the nets in many places, allowing the fish to escape.



At a meeting of the Commercial Committee of the North Carolina Conservation Commission, held in August, it was decided to prohibit once again the taking of food fish in menhaden purse seines. Formerly this was prohibited, but the great demand for seafood during the war caused the regulation to be amended to allow

greater production, and millions of pounds of food fish were caught by the purse seiners. The renewed action, becoming effective on October 1, 1946, holds that the taking of any food fish, except bluefish and mackerel, by menhaden purse seines is unlawful in any territorial waters of North Carolina, and the landing or possession, of any such food fish in North Carolina taken by menhaden purse seines in any waters is unlawful.



Gulf

Since 1941, the fisheries of the Gulf of Mexico have undergone many changes, according to the Service's Fishery Marketing Specialist in the Gulf area.

New and modern trawlers now go to sea in search of shrimp. The small shrimp boats have not entirely disappeared from the bays and open Gulf, but their scarcity is apparent along the coast. About a decade ago, the shrimp vessels were of barge type and contained various types of engines, but large diesel-type trawlers have gradually replaced these slower vessels.

Shrimp is the most important seafood produced in the Gulf, and activity in this fishery has increased to the extent that fear of overfishing has been expressed by some of the shrimp fishermen.

Oyster growers in the Gulf have complained that the oyster crop has been below normal during the past year and many think that this is due to too much fresh water on the oyster beds in the spring of 1945.

Texas' oyster production is limited to public beds, since no productive public grounds may be leased, owned, acquired, or otherwise used for private use. The peculiar terrain and climate of the Texas coastal plain are not particularly conducive to oyster farming. Wide fluctuations of salinity of the water in the bays, caused by long dry spells broken by tropical downpours, cause heavy mortality of oysters and destroy oysterfood, making farming in many localities hazardous.

Crabs have been quite plentiful in most of the Gulf area, except in the vicinity of Aransas Pass. The crab pots, or traps, used in Texas are of various styles. The Chesapeake-type wire trap is not satisfactory in this section due, it is claimed, to the shallow water. The fishermen believe that the crabs avoid the traps when they see other crabs already caught within the wire mesh.

Menhaden are perhaps the most important fish in the Gulf, but reports on July 1 showed that they were running small and that the oil yield was extremely low. For the first time since the big freeze in 1940, speckled trout were reported plentiful in the area in late summer.

New freezing plants along the Texas coast now handle much of the seafood production of the State.



POLLUTION

Domestic sewage and industrial wastes dumped into tidal waters ruin many valuable shellfish grounds. Some of the bays affected by domestic pollution may still be utilized as setting areas from which oysters can be later relayed to clean growing grounds; but many thousands of acres of formerly productive oyster beds have been so completely damaged by deposition of sludge and mud that all shellfish grown on them have perished, and these formerly valuable bottoms are beyond recovery.