

Maine Fishing Gear Exchange and Research Program

Progress Report

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Reporting period: 10/01/2009 – 3/31/2010

Project accomplishments to date:

Gear Surveys

The effort to obtain fishery data from the lobster and gillnet fishery through the use of surveys is underway. Two methods were employed to collect two types of data. First, annual logs (see attached) were mailed to all commercial lobster license holders with their license renewal materials in October of 2009 (roughly 6,100 individuals). This log asks for a maximum number of traps and vertical lines fished by month in each of the following three areas: Exemption Area, Non-exempt State Waters, and Federal Waters. Licenses are obtained throughout the year in a rolling manner, so logs are still being received. To date the Department of Marine Resources (DMR) has received over 2,500 responses (1,880 prior to April 1). A database to deal with the information from the annual logs was set up in January and logs have been actively entered by a sub-contracted data entry technician since February. As of April 1, 2010 about 500 logs had been successfully recorded. This information will be used to track the use of traps and vertical lines seasonally in the different reporting areas.

The second initiative related to obtaining fishing industry data was the comprehensive gear survey (see attached). These surveys ask about the way in which gear is rigged, configurations, types of rope/mesh used, soak times, etc. Surveys were mailed to the entire lobster (roughly 6,100) and gillnet (roughly 300) industries. The due date for these surveys was March 15, 2010. DMR received just over 700 surveys from the lobster industry and 50 from the gillnet industry. The database to record this information was created in March. Beginning April 1, 2010 the priority of the database technician switched from annual logs to the gear surveys. The goal is to have all of these entered by July 1 in order to provide the information to Industrial Economics, the contractor working on the vertical line risk model for the National Marine Fisheries Service. This information will be used to document the configurations and uses of gear seasonally to develop ways in which regulations may be applied to reduce the risk of whale entanglements in vertical lines while minimizing the impact on fisheries.

Gear Exchange Program

For an update on the accomplishments of the gear exchange portion of the project please see the attached report by the Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation, a co-investigator and award sub-recipient on this project.

Deviations from work plan:

No deviations from the work plan occurred during the reporting period. There was a request for funds to cover a portion of a gear exchange that occurred prior to the start date of this award. This request was approved but Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation has not invoiced the DMR for this amount so it is not included here. The letter for that request is attached.

Work in Progress:

Gear Surveys

Work is continuing on entering both the annual logs and surveys into their respective databases. Work on this will continue throughout the year. We plan to have the gear surveys entered by July for use by Industrial Economics (NOAA Fisheries contractor) in the vertical line risk assessment model. After those are entered we will concentrate on analyzing the information and submitting a report to NOAA Fisheries and the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Team. Data entry for the annual logs will be an on-going process as they come in with license renewal applications. Preliminary results will be available in the fall from the 2009 data.

Gear Exchange

The gear exchange program is continuing to offer buy-backs to lobstermen on the waiting list to exchange float rope to sinking line. There is a buy-back being held in Ellsworth at the end of April/beginning of May that will address these fishermen. After that buy-back is complete, the need from other fisheries will be assessed and necessary buy-backs will be held. Any money that is not needed for buy-backs will be re-tasked to aid in research programs through the DMR in the summer/fall of 2010. For additional details please see attached Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation report.

GULF OF MAINE LOBSTER FOUNDATION



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The Bottom Line Project

Maine Fishing Gear Exchange & Research Program

Submitted by GOMLF, sub-recipient under
NOAA Award **NA09NMF4520418**
October 6, 2009 - December 31, 2010

Interim Progress Report
For the Period of 10/01/2009 - 3/31/2010

Submitted 4/30/10

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Background of Project

The Maine Groundline Exchange Program, better known as the Bottom Line Project, is a federally-funded program administered by the Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation (GOMLF) which, since June 2006, has:

- 1-- reduced the entanglement risk to large whales in the Gulf of Maine by removing and recycling over *one million five hundred (1,500,000) pounds of floating groundline* from the Maine lobster industry and replacing it with sinking groundline;
- 2-- mitigated the *economic hardship for the Maine lobster industry* of complying with the federal groundline regulation of the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan (ALWTRP) by issuing *over two million dollars* worth of vouchers toward the purchase of sink rope in exchange for the removal of floating groundline; and
- 3-- worked with contractors to ensure *all collected float rope is recycled or re-used* in value-added products, and that no rope is put in a landfill, sent overseas, or returned to the ocean.

Funds for the program have been administered by the National Marine Fisheries Service's Office of Protected Resources through several different awards, which GOMLF has managed from the inception of the program. To date over the course of the project, GOMLF has hosted eleven groundline exchanges and has removed more than 1,500,000 pounds of floating groundline from active use by the Maine lobster industry.

The Bottom Line Project has provided substantial economic assistance to the Maine lobster industry as it has come into compliance with the Final Whale Rule: over \$2,342,000 of federal funds have been distributed in voucher form directly to lobstermen toward the purchase of sinking groundline.

Summary of the Project Period

This progress report covers the period of 10/1/09 – 3/31/10, the first period under a sub-award administered by the Maine Department of Marine Resources, NA09NMF4520418. During this period, two groundline exchanges were held, and a total of \$320,100 was billed to this award: \$240,000 was expended to issue sink rope vouchers and an additional \$80,100 was used to cover salaries, contract labor, indirect and travel.

Because GOMLF did not have enough money from the remaining two grants to bill for all of the rope costs from the Sept 2009 exchanges, a request was submitted to NMFS in December 2009 to move the contract start date to Sept 1, 2009, which was approved and thus allowed for a back-payment of an additional \$32,000 of rope purchases. This amount has not yet been billed to Maine DMR and is therefore not accounted for in this progress report.

Outreach

GOMLF has maintained a waiting list throughout the project, with hundreds of lobstermen interested in bringing their floating groundlines in for exchange; therefore little outreach was done for the fall 2009 exchanges. GOMLF issued a direct-mail piece to all individuals on the waiting list (+/- 600,000 lbs) (sent in electronically for the first time to lobstermen with email addresses) to apprise them of the upcoming opportunity, and requiring them to return a registration form indicating their estimated rope amounts and eligibility.

GOMLF issued press releases about the groundline exchanges for Maine lobstermen to all media, and sent faxes and/or emails to inform rope dealers, co-ops and buying stations of the two groundline exchanges.

Participation by Lobstermen

Groundline exchanges for lobstermen were held in November and December as depicted below:

Date of Exchange	Collection Location	Number of Days	Number of Lobstermen	Pounds Collected	Vouchers Distributed
11/11/2009	Ellsworth	2	158	168,084	\$235,319
12/11/2009	Waldoboro	1	81	72,950	\$102,129

At the time of the two rope exchanges discussed in this report (and in addition to the actual participants) there were approximately 500 people on the waiting list to bring in floating groundline. Even though the sinking groundline provision of the Final Whale Rule went into effect for the Maine lobster industry (and other trap fisheries) on April 5, 2009, there were many lobstermen who had been fishing either inside the exemption line with floating groundline during the

summer months, or who had yet to convert all their groundline for fishing outside the exemption line. Those who were preparing their rope throughout the spring and summer were eager to set their traps with the mandated sinking rope once they moved outside the exemption line.

Lobstering in Maine is a year-round day-fishery where fishermen shift their gear during different parts of the fishing season to follow the lobster migration. In order to accommodate the greatest number of eligible lobstermen in the exchange of their floating groundline, GOMLF has offered the rope collections at various times of year and at three different locations. This has helped lobstermen phase out their floating groundline over time, so that they wouldn't be required to remove all of the floating groundline at once before re-rigging with sinking groundline.

Even though GOMLF announces the Bottom Line Project dates well in advance, fishing practices within the Maine lobster industry make it very difficult for individuals to move their traps on a pre-determined schedule. Some lobstermen will haul gear every day the weather allows, particularly in the winter; others may try to only fish on certain days of the week – but weather conditions, lobster migration, boat repairs, juggling finances and other unforeseen events all require flexibility in a hauling schedule. With respect to the Fall 2009 exchanges, many fishermen were unable to bring their floating because their gear was still being fished and they couldn't cease their harvesting to remove the float rope.

Whether due to the time of year or lack of momentum, there was a weak response for the Waldoboro collection. GOMLF redoubled the outreach effort for this event in order to involve enough lobstermen to make holding the collection worthwhile.

Groundline Exchange Planning and Outcomes

The two groundline exchanges conducted during this reporting period were held in Downeast and Midcoast Maine (two days in Ellsworth and one day in Waldoboro). Of the lobstermen on the Bottom Line Project waiting list, these two regions represented the majority of lobstermen still needing to exchange their floating groundline. As was the case in earlier reports, there were a few lobstermen from the western-most (or southern) zones.

For both the exchanges, GOMLF arranged with doormat manufacturing companies to take ownership of all the rope. All the rope from the November Ellsworth collection was shipped to the Maine Float Rope Company's storage facility in Waldoboro, and the Waldoboro collection was held at the Custom Cordage Company's storage sites in December. The two companies took all of the rope collected and are storing it for their use in making woven doormats.

The rope at each exchange was prepared by the lobstermen in the manner outlined in advance mailings and communication: it was all floating groundline (polypropylene or a polysteel mix) free of any sinking rope (such as gangions); and it was all coiled so as to be handled readily at the collection. With one exception, all lobstermen prepared their rope so that the vast majority of it will be useable by the doormat manufacturers; the small amount of rope that was received in a loose format (i.e. non-coiled) was set aside in bags and will be processed with the waste rope as described elsewhere in this report.

At the Ellsworth collection (November 11-12, 2009), all rope was obtained by the Maine Float Rope Company by mutual agreement between the two mat makers. The Project Director worked very closely with the Maine Float Rope Company to ensure a smooth collection and transportation arrangement. To that end, GOMLF made the trucking arrangements and worked through the details of the requisite forklift specifications to guarantee they would be able to load the trucks. Trucks were leased through the H.O. Bouchard transportation company, in Hampden ME. Xactics, two forklifts and operators were provided by a bait company in Jonesport ME. GOMLF rented and delivered the pallet scale. All rope was collected in Xactics, weighed, and then dumped loose over the side of the tractor trailers. (See attached photos.)

This was the first time we had ever tried to ship the rope loose, and we adjusted our techniques as we went through the two-day exchange event. Initially we were told that loose rope would not transport well in anything other than a dumping trailer, so two such trailers were arranged for and used during the first part of the exchange. We soon recognized that a) the dumping trailers had a small capacity (approximately 16,000 pounds), b) the turn-around time (round-trip from Ellsworth to Waldoboro) was too great to wait for the return of the empty trailer after such a small load, and c) some rope did get caught during the first dumping at the storage site and delayed the return of the truck even further.

After lengthy and thorough discussions with both H.O. Bouchard and the Maine Float Rope Company, the Project Director decided to try the second truck-type, a

53-foot trailer with a “walking” floor. These are high-sided trailers used to ship gravel or crushed tires, for example, and we were uncertain as to how they would function for off-loading loose rope. However, they were much more spacious (capacity of nearly 50,000 pounds of rope) and with the volume of groundline we anticipated from the two-day event, we felt obliged to try the alternative to the dumping trailer.

The “walking” floor trailers performed supremely well, and we encountered no problems with the loading or off-loading of the rope. The forklifts had been chosen for their ability to raise a load at least 15 feet overhead and then turn to dump out their load; and they were operated by expert handlers.

The first day in Ellsworth (November 11th) we received, weighed, loaded and shipped our greatest volume of rope ever for a one-day event: just over 99,000 pounds.

As with earlier rope exchanges, GOMLF hired lobstermen or workers from prior rope exchanges to assist with each collection, and their familiarity with handling rope was particularly important given the volume of rope handled each day.

The Waldoboro event (December 11, 2009) was postponed early in the week due to harsh weather conditions forecast for the appointed day; it was held two days after the scheduled date and all lobstermen were notified either by email or phone calls. The Project Director arranged with the contractor, Custom Cordage Inc., to receive any rope deliveries on the originally scheduled day, and five lobstermen did indeed deliver rope that day. Their rope was weighed on the main collection day, and vouchers were mailed to those individuals.

All of the rope collected was stored on-site by the contractor in an outdoor area created for this purpose. GOMLF rented a pallet scale for the event; all other materials and equipment were provided by the contractor. Large Xactics (plastic bait boxes) were loaded with rope, weighed, dumped in the fenced-in storage area, and then returned to the receiving line to take the next load. Two forklifts operated by the contractor’s staff made easy work of the system despite poor driveway conditions (snow, ice).

Rope Disposition

Virtually all of the rope collected during this performance period will be woven by Custom Cordage and the Maine Float Rope Company into rope doormats.

GOMLF issues a separate contract for each collection (see attached sample contracts) to accommodate any variation in location, collection process, or responsibility.

If any of the rope used to make doormats is deemed "unusable" due to its condition or size, GOMLF has agreed to facilitate its collection and transportation to a waste-to-energy facility, or to a plastics recycling company, depending on the volume and condition of the rope. To date, none of the collected rope has been sent to a landfill.

At each collection GOMLF reserves the right to secure two or three thousand pounds of the rope for other purposes, and has had doormats made from some of that rope for internal use or sale. Individuals who contact the Project Director with special requests for rope (such as for making dog toys, securing land-based ramps and floats during the winter, tree-felling operations, or smaller mat-making enterprises) have all been accommodated as well.

GOMLF also makes arrangements with individual lobstermen to take delivery of the rope at a time other than the scheduled groundline exchange, in order to accommodate smaller requests for rope or the idiosyncratic requirements of a lobsterman; i.e., the Project Director coordinated a separate rope delivery for a Matinicus Island lobsterman whose only opportunity to participate in the Bottom Line Project was contingent on the ferry schedule that month (October). In such cases, rope is contained in the back of a truck which is weighed (first laden, then emptied) on a truck scale at the local transfer station, and a voucher is issued on the day the rope is weighed.

In January, the Project Director worked with an individual from California to take delivery of 1,000 pounds of floating groundline from a lobsterman from Midcoast Maine, and have it shipped directly to California for use in a solar-panel array. All shipping costs were borne by the recipient; and the lobsterman received his voucher on the day of delivery.

In March, the curator of the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art invited GOMLF staff to attend the gallery opening which featured the rope we had provided to artist Orly Genger during the summer of 2009. She provided photos of the work in progress (attached) and the Project Director will attend the opening in April 2010.

Sinking Rope

GOMLF sends a list of pre-registered lobstermen to all participating rope dealers along with the voucher numbers prior to each collection. Dealers find this to be helpful in preparing for potential sink rope orders from their customers. After each collection, the final voucher list is sent out with actual voucher amounts. Lobstermen have 90 days from date of issue to redeem their vouchers, generally enough time to order and retrieve the rope if it was not already in stock.

Rope dealers submit detailed invoices to GOMLF, including the voucher or a copy of it, in order to be reimbursed for the value of the purchased sink rope or the voucher value, whichever is less. GOMLF works closely with the dealers on any questions they have regarding the voucher redemption. If there are outstanding vouchers that have not been redeemed by the 90-day expiration date, GOMLF makes phone calls to the individuals holding those vouchers and gives the lobsterman a drop-dead date for using the voucher. While this has rarely occurred, it is an effective method for ensuring voucher redemption.

Additional Activities

In addition to working with the contractors, lobstermen, rope dealers, media and colleagues on Bottom Line Project rope exchanges, the Project Manager was involved in other activities related to fixed-gear fishing issues:

- wrote articles about the Bottom Line Project for the GOMLF quarterly newsletter, *Lobster Lines*;
- sent informational bulletins and/or press releases about the Bottom Line Project for use in association newsletters and news publications;
- conducted interviews with news media about the Bottom Line Project, the rope doormats, and gear loss issues;
- met with the GOMLF web designer to update the GOMLF Bottom Line Project website, www.gomlf.org;
- submitted a funding applications for state and collaborative regional derelict fishing gear initiatives to the NOAA Marine Debris Program;
- received funding from National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for gear recovery project;
- discussed the Bottom Line Project and the voluntary sinking groundline tracking effort with interested and participating lobstermen;
- attended lobster science and management conferences in Maine, Massachusetts and Canada;

- attended the annual Right Whale Consortium meeting in New Bedford MA.
- communicated with hundreds of Maine lobstermen and others regarding questions about sinking rope, the exemption line, groundline exchanges and derelict fishing gear clean-up;
- assisted GOMLF Director in processing float rope doormat orders;

Attachments to DMR Progress Report, 4/10:

- Press Release 10/09
- Letter/registration form to lobstermen 11/09
- Waldoboro reminder card 12/09
- Maine Float Rope and Custom Cordage contracts 11/09 and 12/09
- Bangor Daily News article 11/09
- Pre-spending Request letter 12/09