

Regional Ventless Trap Program: Seeking Industry Participants

The Department of Marine Resources, in cooperation with the Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation, seeks four industry participants for the Regional Ventless Trap Program through a competitive bid process. This is an opportunity to participate in a cooperative research project between industry and scientists from Maine through Rhode Island.

Four of nine legs are open for bid, covering (1) S. Penobscot Bay, (2) Metinic – Muscongus Bay, (3) Pemaquid – Harpswell, and (4) Cape Elizabeth – NH Border. Each leg will have 80-100 small mesh traps rigged as triples randomly located at three depths. Sampling will take place during June, July and August 2026. Each trap will be baited and hauled twice each month on three night soaks making a total 3 day commitment each month. The lobster catch will be measured by a sea sampler and immediately returned to the ocean. All traps, line and buoys will be supplied to participating fishermen. Interested parties will need to complete the application to identify vessel specifications, daily rate and preferred sampling leg.

Application materials and additional information can be found at:

<https://www.maine.gov/dmr/about-us/rfps>

All applications must be received via mail, email, texted picture or fax by March 20, 2026.

Please send applications to:

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Questions can be directed to Kristyn at the above phone or email.

Background

In the review of the most recent Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) stock assessment one of the strongest recommendations made was that the data quality needs to be upgraded significantly. This upgrade is particularly important for the spatial distribution of lobster length frequency and estimates of relative abundance.

Fisheries-dependent trap sampling data have not historically been used to generate relative abundance indices for American lobster because of biases associated with the way these data are collected. Lobstermen fish their gear in locations where lobsters are known to congregate in order to maintain optimal catch rates. As lobsters move, lobstermen move their gear. To address the need to develop a robust time series of relative abundance a cooperative random stratified ventless trap survey has been designed to generate estimates of lobster relative abundance and recruitment.

Project Objectives

- 1) Accurately characterize relative abundance and size distribution of American lobster from Maine through New York.
- 2) Develop a coast-wide fishery independent monitoring program for American lobster using ventless traps.
- 3) Improve collaborative relationship between the commercial lobster industry, fisheries scientists and managers in the interest of strengthening our combined understanding of the lobster resource.

Survey Design

The DMR seeks to contract industry participants to cover one or more of the following sampling legs:

Leg 1 – Canadian border to Addison

Leg 2 – Addison to MDI

Leg 3 – MDI to Isle au Haut

Leg 4 – North Penobscot Bay

*Leg 5 – South Penobscot Bay

*Leg 6 – Metinic – Muscongus Bay

*Leg 7 – Pemaquid – Harpswell

Leg 8 – Casco Bay

*Leg 9 – Cape Elizabeth to New Hampshire Border

* legs open for bid in 2026

Requirements

1. A vessel ready for work at agreed-upon dates, times and places including:
 - a. Coast Guard Safety Inspection at the time of the survey
 - b. Protection and Indemnity Insurance (please provide the DMR with a current Certificate of Insurance)
 - c. Capacity to transport and haul approximately 80-100 lobster traps
 - d. Working electronics to provide depth, location and to facilitate safe navigation
 - e. Safety equipment for the captain, crew and up to two scientific staff (survival suits for scientific staff will be provided)
 - f. Adequate fuel and bait
 - g. Adequate crew to perform work
2. A captain who is able to:
 - a. Provide knowledge of the Maine lobster fishery practices
 - b. Complete the specified trips on schedule, except if delayed by weather (Vessel bears risk and expense of weather delays.)
 - c. Record location, depth, and counts of lobsters and crab in the logbook
 - d. Participate in project meetings
 - e. Rig specified number of traps, buoys and line for each leg under contract

Application Review, Contract and Payment

Applications will be reviewed and ranked given the following guidelines:

- A. Experience of captain in lobster fishery and Marine Patrol recommendation (30 points)
- B. Vessel specifications (size, cruising speed, electronics etc) (30 points)
- C. Experience and commitment of captain to fishery research (10 points)
- D. Vessel charter day rate (30 points)

Contracts will be signed with the Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation. Payments will be processed within 7 business days of invoice.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How many days total am I bidding for on each leg?

There we will be total of nine contracted days per year (3 days per month, June – August). Each month participants will schedule a week to bait traps and haul traps twice on three nights set. If funding is available, the contract will last for 3 years before the survey leg is put out to bid again.

2. Can we haul/bait on Sundays?

Yes, we will be operating under a special license that will allow us to haul survey gear on Sundays during the summer months.

3. Can I haul my normal traps the same day I haul ventless traps?

During the time that the sampler is aboard, the vessel will be expected to haul exclusively ventless traps. However, you could haul ventless traps in the morning, bring the sampler to port, and go out and haul your gear in the afternoon.

4. Each leg covers a large area, are we expected to haul all traps in a single day?

Yes. In some cases nearly 100 miles may be covered (70-80 miles is the typical distance). Extremely isolated sites may be eliminated simply because of logistical constraints.

5. What if we miss a day due to weather or a breakdown?

We would go the next available day.

6. Who is picking the locations to set traps?

The locations will be randomly selected by the DMR. Participants will be asked to set gear as near as possible to selected coordinates to ensure sites are “random.”

7. Are the traps left in the water between months?

Yes, unless it is convenient to bring the traps ashore. We may need to shift some traps out of high traffic areas to reduce chances of trap loss.

8. Who measures the lobsters we catch?

A DMR sea sampler will be on board each hauling day to measure all lobsters and fish bycatch, but the captain and crew are responsible for recording counts for lobsters and crabs in the logbook.

9. Can we keep legal lobsters we catch?

No, all lobster and crabs will be returned immediately to the water.

10. Will experimental traps count towards my personal trap limit?

No.

11. What kind of bait will be used?

Salted herring is preferable, but other bait types may be used in the absence of herring.

12. I have a lobster/crab conviction, can I participate?

Generally a lobster or crab conviction (within the last seven years) will prevent participation in experimental projects; however, an appeal can be made to the commissioner. A conviction will not impact your ranking within the application process. All participants will be approved by the Maine Marine Patrol.

13. Why is the project only in the summer months, when fishing doesn't pick up in my area until the fall?

We are limited by funds to three months, and it was decided that collecting data before and immediately after the summer molt would provide the most valuable information in the limited time period.