

Overharvesting (marine)

Human Health Risk

Ecological Risk

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Socioeconomic Risk

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Harvesting of species such as clams, crabs, eels, and tuna at a greater rate than they can replace themselves is known as overharvesting. Overharvesting has been blamed for a decline in commercial fishing yields. Harvesting of horseshoe crabs was used as an example of overharvesting marine resources.

What's at risk?

Groups at risk include species with commercial value, such as horseshoe crab, tuna, clam, and eel. A critical aspect of overharvesting crabs is the annual reliance of more than a million migratory shore birds on horseshoe crab eggs as a food source to sustain the trip to their Arctic breeding grounds.

What are the ecological impacts in New Jersey?

Horseshoe crab eggs help maintain a healthy ecosystem by being a source of food for migratory shore birds, raccoons, foxes, turtles, and moles. Reduced availability of food for these species may result in decreased numbers, and a decline in ecological complexity and quality.

What are the socioeconomic impacts in New Jersey?

Employment impacts include the loss of several hundred commercial fishing jobs and declines in tourism income from birdwatching and recreational fishing. Aesthetic impacts of decreased bird nesting at Cape May are also notable, although very difficult to measure.

What's being done?

New Jersey requires a horseshoe crab permit and mandatory monthly reporting. Harvest by trawling or dredging is prohibited, and only hand harvesting is allowed. The harvest season has also been limited to April 15 to August 15. In addition, the National Marine Fisheries Service has recently established a horseshoe crab sanctuary off the mouth of Delaware Bay.