Young Professional Spotlight

Young Professional members of AIFRB represent the next generation of leaders in fisheries science and management. Through *Briefs* and our social media platforms we will be highlighting our Young Professionals as a way to introduce them to the full membership and create opportunities for collaborations. AIFRB's Young Professional Representative, Connor Capizzano (connor.capizzano001@umb.edu), will be showcasing a new Young Professional each month though a series of biographical interviews. This month's Young Professional Spotlight shines on Dr. Doug Zemeckis, Keystone District Director and Extension Professor at Rutgers University.

Doug Zemeckis – Keystone District Director

***What is your current position, with what company, and what do you do?***
In September 2017, I started as a County Agent III (Assistant Professor) in the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources, New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station (NJAES) in the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences at Rutgers University. As an Extension Professor, my primary responsibilities are to develop and implement educational programming and applied research appropriate to the needs of clientele in fisheries, aquaculture, and coastal resource management in New Jersey.

Where did you go to school, and what helped pave your way to your current position?
I completed a B.S. in Marine Sciences at Rutgers University in 2009 and a Ph.D. in Marine Science and Technology at the School for Marine Science and Technology (SMAST), University of Massachusetts Dartmouth in 2016. I then completed Postdoctoral Researcher positions at SMAST and in the Department of Marine and Coastal Sciences at Rutgers University from 2016 through 2017.

What is the focus of your research and/or work?
The focus of most of my current research involves field studies designed to inform the assessment and management of marine fishery resources. Example projects include an acoustic tagging study to estimate and reduce the discard mortality rate of black sea bass and working on a commercial fish trap survey of New Jersey's artificial reefs with a focus on black sea bass, tautog, and lobster. Additional research projects that will be starting soon include investigating discard mortality of summer flounder in rod-and-reel fisheries and marketing and promotion of locally harvested seafood in New Jersey from both commercial fishermen and aquaculture shellfish growers. I'm also continuing work with colleagues on ongoing projects related to New England groundfish on topics such as stock structure, spawning dynamics, or discard mortality of cod, haddock, cusk, and halibut. In order to inform the general public and industry stakeholders,

I'm organizing a new fisheries science course for the winter-spring of 2018 to educate New Jersey's commercial and recreational fishing industry stakeholders on the science and management processes impacting their industries, entitled "Introductory Fisheries Science for Stakeholders (IFISSH)". A second course that we're offering through Rutgers Cooperative Extension during the spring includes a program on shellfish restoration, estuarine ecology, and environmental stewardship as part of the Barnegat Bay Shellfish Restoration Program.
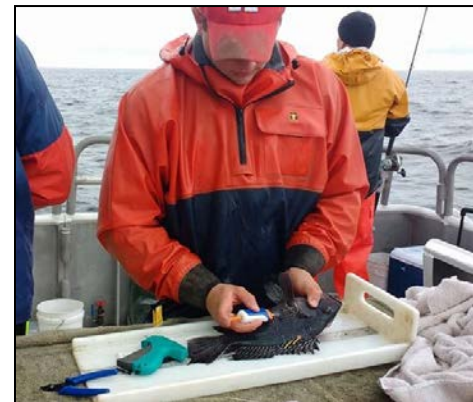
How does your research apply to fishery management—local, state or federal?
Results from our research project to estimate and reduce the discard mortality of black sea bass, which is part of a collaboration among Rutgers University, the New England Aquarium, and Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries with funding from the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, will be useful for quantifying total fishery removals and consideration in the development of management measures for recreational fisheries, including open seasons, minimum landing sizes, and possession limits. We will also educate anglers on best catch-and-release practices to reduce black sea bass discard mortality. The ongoing commercial fish trap survey of New Jersey's artificial reefs, which is a collaboration between Rutgers University and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), will provide valuable data for informing New Jersey's inshore recreational and commercial fisheries for species such as black sea bass, tautog, lobster, and scup, as well as the development of the NJDEP Artificial Reef Program.

What got you started studying fisheries?
I grew up fishing recreationally, mostly in New Jersey and in other northeast states, which created my initial passion for our marine ecosystems and fish populations. Then, I took courses on fisheries management and oceanography during my undergraduate studies, which provided the inspiration to pursue a career in fisheries science.

What do you enjoy most about being a fishery scientist?
I most enjoy working collaboratively with fishing industry stakeholders and other scientists to conduct research that addresses important data gaps in stock assessments or fishery management plans, thereby promoting the sustainability of both our marine fishery resources and the fishing industries that depend on these resources.

What drew you to AIFRB, and what does AIFRB do for you?
I was drawn to the New England District of AIFRB while working at SMAST by the camaraderie and events (e.g., workshops, dinners, seminars) hosted by the District. Involvement with the New England District provided many valuable opportunities for professional networking, education, and mentorship from other members. As the recently elected Director of the Keystone District, I am working to grow the District and provide similar experiences and opportunities in the Mid-Atlantic region.

Please contact Doug (zemeckis@njaes.rutgers.edu) to continue the conversation!