FiTREP- Fish Tagging Research and Education Program

Project leads: Dr. Douglas Zemeckis, Dr. Sarah Borsetti, Chase Wunder, Joey O'Brien, Andre Ascura

Project partner: Dr. Eleanor Bochenek

Project Description:

Rutgers University's Fish Tagging Research and Education Program (FiTREP) is a volunteer-driven pilot initiative aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of the movement and migration patterns of summer flounder within New Jersey's coastal estuaries. FiTREP brings together charter captains, recreational anglers, and volunteers from four coastal counties in New Jersey. Using conventional T-bar tags and acoustic telemetry transmitters, the project seeks to explore the interconnectivity of these ecosystems and track the seasonal migration patterns of summer flounder. With a focus on enhancing public awareness and increasing volunteer tagger participation, we aim to continue expanding FiTREP to study how summer flounder move within and among New Jersey's estuaries and ocean waters.
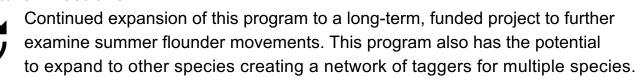
Key Take-Aways:

- To date, >2,500 Summer flounder have been tagged by volunteers since 2022.
- Recovery rates have increased annually, with the highest so far in 2024 with 74 recaptures out of 1,290 tagged fish (5.7% recovery rate).
- Volunteer tagging programs can be a cost-effective way to study fish movement patterns and to educate volunteers as citizen scientists.
- Combining conventional tagging and acoustic telemetry data is a great approach for studying fish movements and population structure using multiple technologies.

Future Directions:

Continued expansion of this program to a long-term, funded project to further examine summer flounder movements. This program also has the potential to expand to other species creating a network of taggers for multiple species.

CURRENT RESEARCH 2025