Partnership for Research Excellence in Sustainable Seafood (PRESS)

Funded Projects Through Fall 2025

The Partnership for Research Excellence in Sustainable Seafood (PRESS), a University of Rhode Island (URI) initiative, is a grant program funded by the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) that supports the development of innovative solutions to challenges facing the state's seafood sector.

About PRESS

PRESS, launched in 2023, is led by Marta Gomez-Chiarri, professor of Aquaculture/Fisheries in the URI College of the Environment and Life Sciences. It provides funding to projects proposed by teams of industry members and researchers regarding sustainable seafood production in Rhode Island. Each proposal is reviewed by an interdisciplinary advisory board, and funding is distributed rapidly to respond to urgent issues. Proposals will be accepted and reviewed through March 2026.

Here are the projects funded to date:

Award: $68,750

Team: William Goldsmith, Pelagic Strategies LLC; The New England Aquarium; NOAA Fisheries; Capt. Rick Bellavance (Priority Charters, Pt Judith, RI; Chair of the New England Fishery Management Council [NEFMC] and President of the Rhode Island Party and Charter Boat Association); Capt. Mike Pierdinock (CPF Charters, New Bedford, MA; NEFMC member and President of the Stellwagen Bank Charter Boat Association); Ten recreational for-hire (charter) captains in Southern New England (predominantly Rhode Island)

Recreational Biological Sampling Program (RecBio): Leveraging the recreational community to improve stock assessments in the Northeast

Recreational fishery-dependent data are an important input into the stock assessment process, but such data are often limited for popular species such as Atlantic cod. Long-term research and monitoring programs collect catch, effort, and biological data from the commercial fleet, but no such programs exist for the recreational fleet. If developed and sustained, such recreational data streams will help stock assessment scientists more accurately evaluate fishery status and trends.

The team will continue and expand the Recreational Biological Sampling Program (RecBio), which has been collecting data on recreational Atlantic cod catch in southern New England since November 2023. RecBio enables participating for-hire captains to collect location-specific information on Atlantic cod recreational catch and fish length while at sea. Biological samples for aging and genetic stock ID are also collected. NOAA Fisheries will collect age samples from up to 100 harvested Atlantic cod in southern New England during dedicated research trips (with RecBio participating vessels) from May 2025 through April 2026. RecBio data will be used by NOAA Fisheries scientists and will be considered for inclusion in future assessments.

Award: $25,542

Team: Dr. N. David Bethoney and Dr. Susan Inglis, Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation; Rhode Island commercial fishing partners, and the University of Rhode Island Ocean Engineering Department

Testing Materials for Developing a Low-Cost Recovery Tag for Ghost Traps

Rhode Island supports several commercial trap-based fisheries. The traps, with their associated lines and buoys, are deployed in coastal waters and left to soak unattended. They are therefore very susceptible to damage and loss due to marine traffic and tidal and storm events. Once lost, these traps and trawl lines are challenging to locate for removal. This project will provide a proof of concept study to develop non-electronic trap recovery tags that can aid in locating lost gear using existing sonar equipment on commercial fishing vessels. The results of this project will provide a baseline for the use of commercial fishing materials and technology to locate lost traps quickly. Developing a low-cost tag that can be deployed and located using existing commercial fishing gear and technology will help reduce the impacts of ghost fishing and facilitate the recovery of lost fishing gear. This project will also involve a student from the URI Ocean Engineering program, providing them with hands-on experience in conducting experiments to answer specific questions.

Award: $12,150

Lead: Riley Secor, doctoral candidate, URI Graduate School of Oceanography

Team: Michael Foley, Lobsterman, Owner/Operator of F/V Staunch, Narragansett, Rhode Island; Candace Oviatt, URI Graduate School of Oceanography

The Impact of Epizootic Shell Disease on the Growth of the American Lobster in Nearshore Rhode Island Waters

Epizootic shell disease has been a threat to lobster populations in Rhode Island since the late 1990s, yet its impact on lobster growth has yet to be fully quantified in the area. The present study will define the impact of shell disease on lobster growth increment using a quantitative disease index. The current growth transition matrices used in management do not include a term for shell disease, which may cause managers to overestimate the productivity of the stock. Results from this study will be shared with state agencies including the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management for inclusion in the American Lobster stock assessment in 2025. Wild lobsters will be collected by lobsterman Michael Foley and URI GSO student Riley Secor and held in seawater facilities at GSO to observe molting events. Growth increments will be calculated in both length and weight, and shells will be retained for determination of percent coverage of shell disease. Shell disease prevalence can be as high as 30% and primarily affects the fecundity of egg-bearing females, but its exclusion from current growth models can overestimate population productivity. If a sustainable fishery for lobster is to continue in Rhode Island and Southern New England as a whole, accurate estimates of growth and productivity are imperative. Consumers of lobster as well as local lobstermen that depend on this crustacean for their livelihoods have a vested interest in sustainable management of the population.