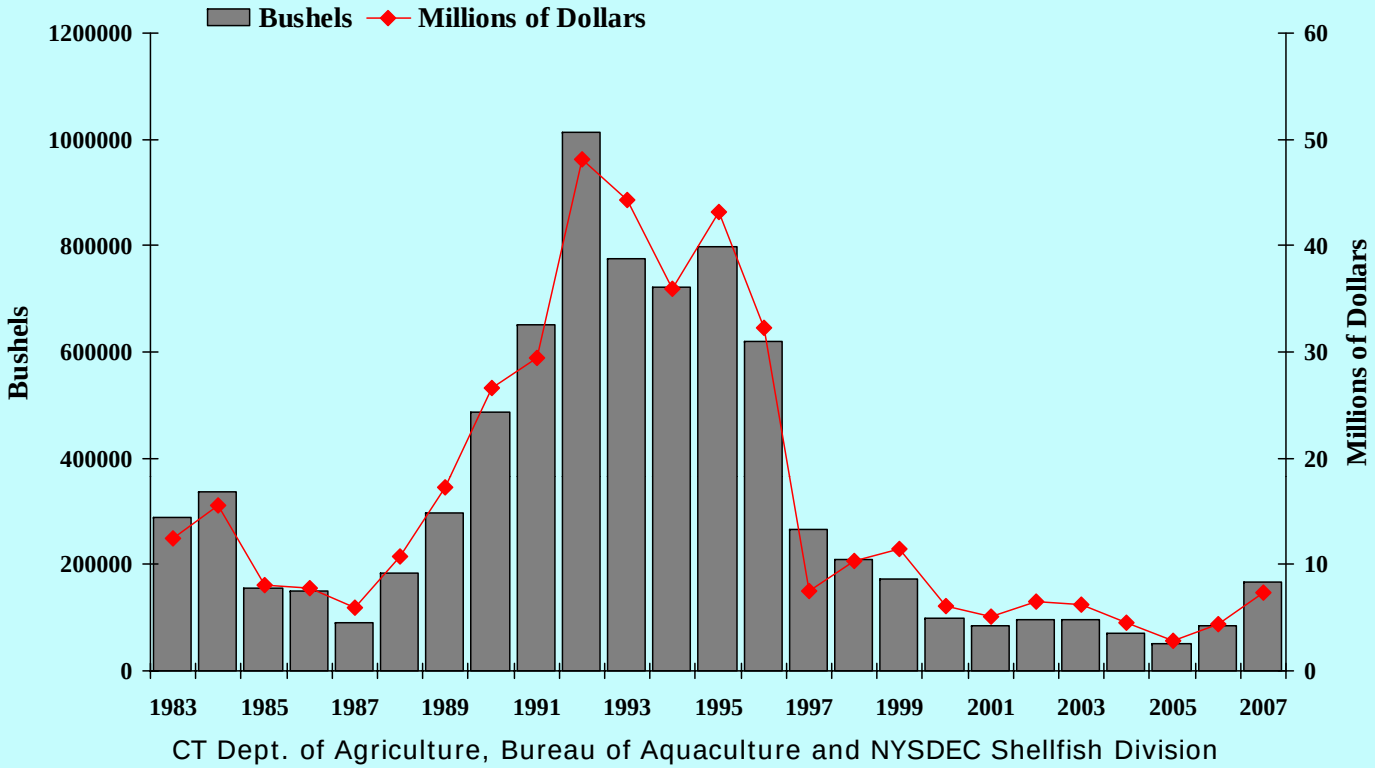
Oyster Harvest



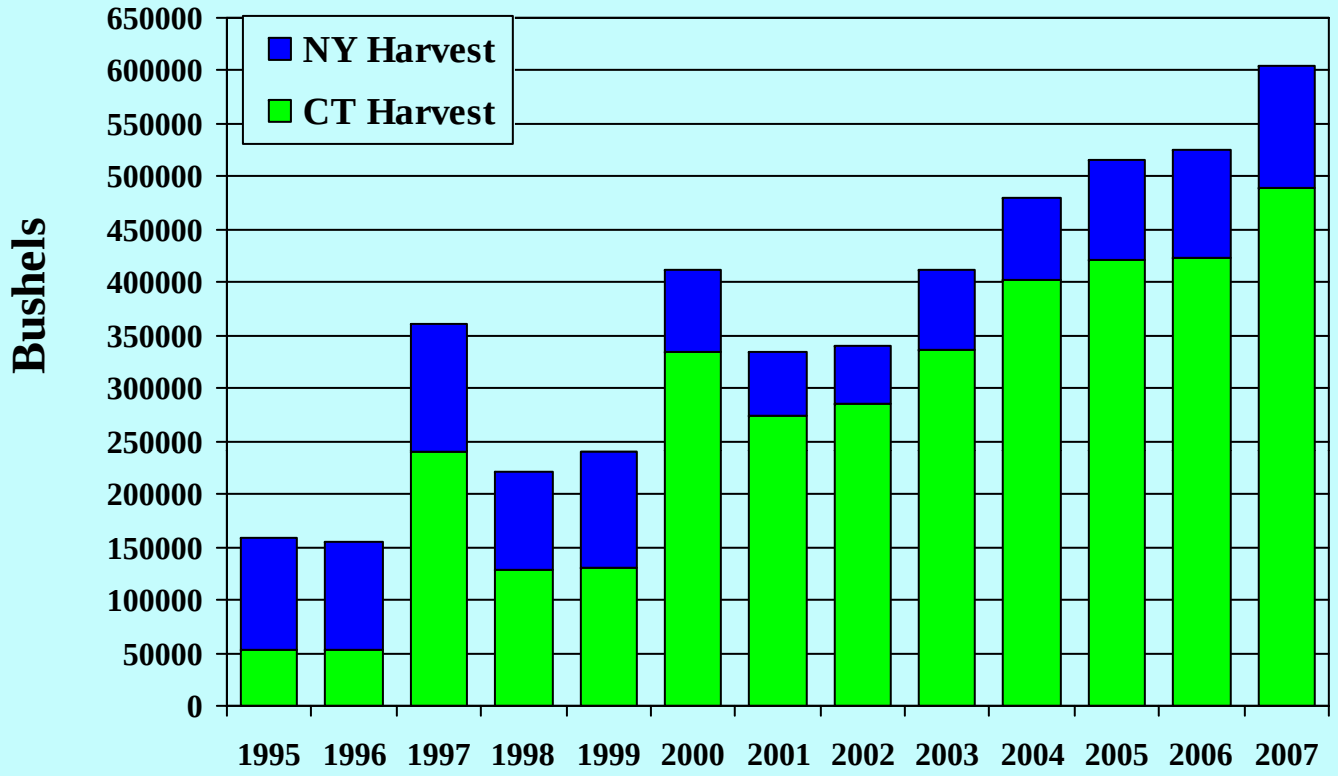
CT Dept. of Agriculture, Bureau of Aquaculture and NYSDEC Shellfish Division

The Sound was well known for its oystering trade from the 19th to the early 20th century. It saw a resurgence in the 1980s and 1990s due to successful oyster culture practices.

The eastern oyster are bivalves (mollusks having two hinged shells). They live at or below tide level and are attached to rocks, pilings, and older oyster shells> A large commercially fishery peaked in 1992 and has declined since mainly due to two parasitic diseases, MSX and Dermo. Officials, scientists, and citizens are working together to develop oyster habitats, such as constructed reefs, as well as disease-resistant oysters. As a result, oyster harvests are beginning to rebound.

Indicator Type: Impact-human

Hard Clam Harvest

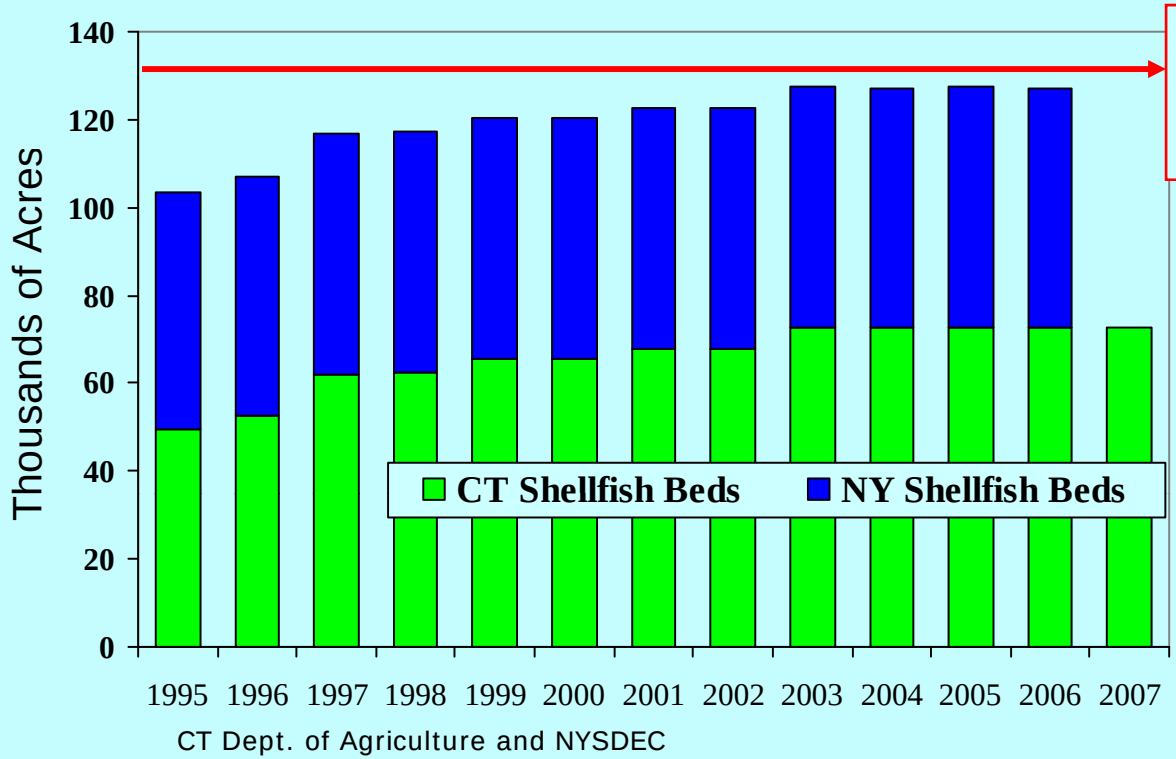


CT Dept. of Agriculture and NYSDEC

Hard-shell clams, a commercially important shellfish, are common in shallow and offshore waters. When they are small, they are known as “little necks” or “cherrystones” and may be eaten raw if taken from unpolluted waters. Larger clams or “quahogs” are eaten cooked. The hard clam harvest has more than tripled in the past decade, in part because some lobster fishers have turned to clamming as lobster harvests have declined.

Indicator Type: Impact-human

Acreage/Classification of Shellfish Beds

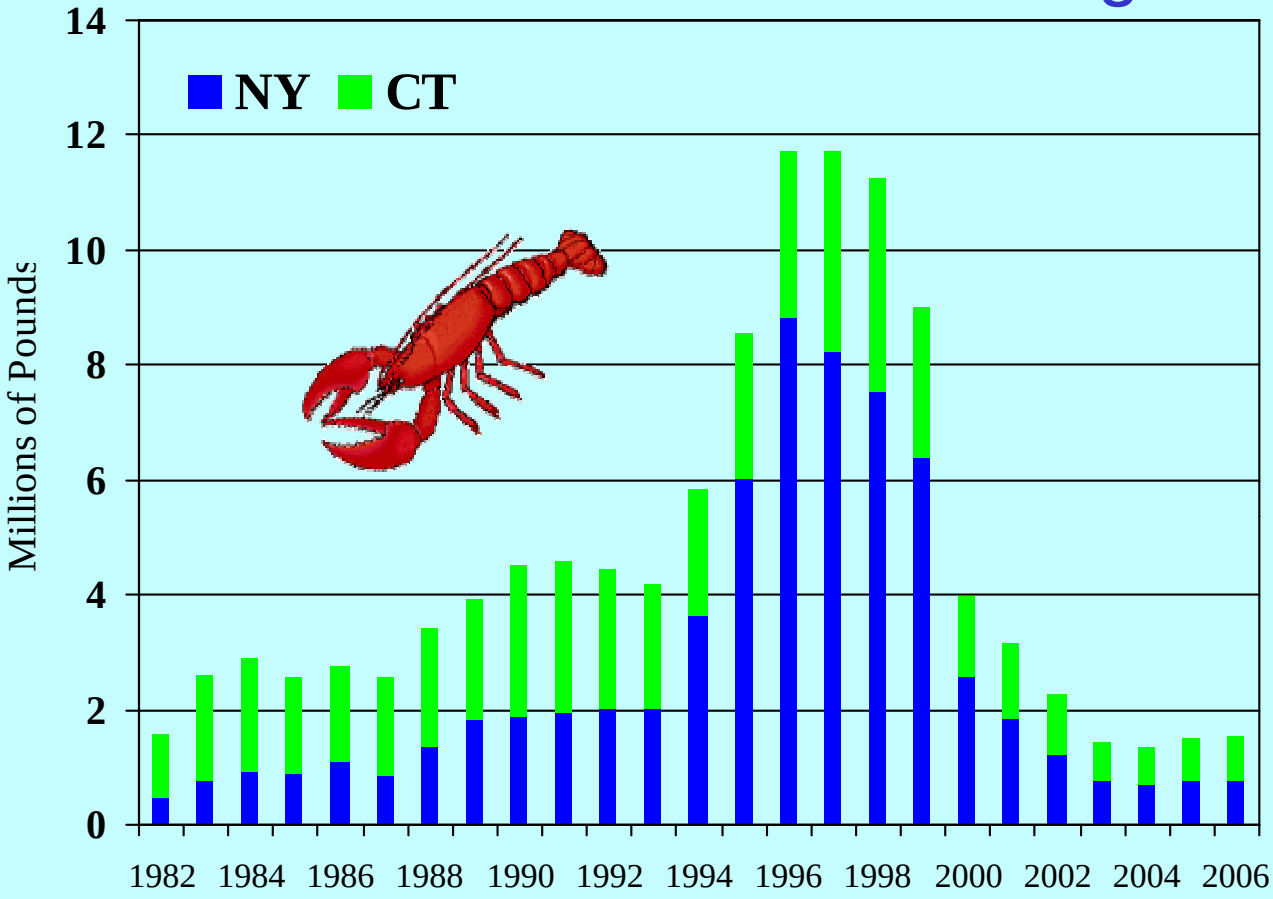


CT Dept. of Agriculture and NYSDEC

CT has surpassed its goal to have 60,000 acres by the year 2000. Today, over 72,000 acres of state- and town-leased shellfish grounds are cultivated in Connecticut's coastal water by the aquaculture industry with additional acres cultivated in New York. Another 11,000 acres of beds in CT waters are under cultivation for growing seed stock. Of the beds that are used for harvesting, approximately 80% are approved or conditionally approved and the remaining 20% are restricted or conditionally restricted. Though both states have seen marked increases in shellfish bed acreage in the last ten years, it is far fewer acres than were open a hundred years ago.

Indicator Type: Impact-human

Lobster Landings

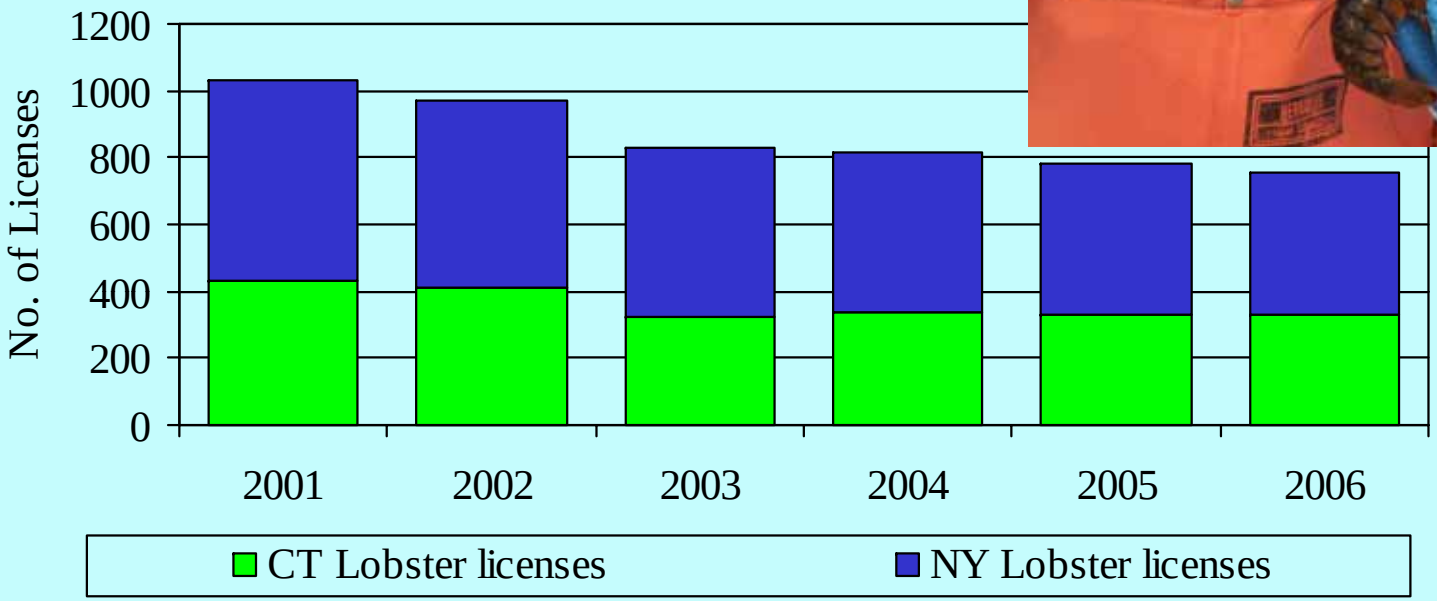


Source: CT DEP Marine Fisheries/ NYSDEC, Bureau of Marine Resources

Beginning in the 1980s, the Sound experienced increasing American lobster harvests, with the peak occurring in 1997. Lobster die-offs in 1999 and 2002, most severely in the western Sound, reduced the harvest to early 1980s-levels. Scientists concluded that a combination of warmer temperatures and impaired water quality stressed lobsters, making them susceptible to disease. Increased size restrictions and limits on catching adult female lobsters are two of the management controls being tried to help restore the lobster population.

Indicator Type: Impact-human

Lobster License/Permit Trends



CT DEP and NYSDEC

With less lobsters to harvest, the number of lobster licenses issued have also declined. The rate, however, is slowing. Regulatory restrictions and increased fees for licenses have also contributed to the decline in the number of licenses issued.

Indicator Type: Impact-human