

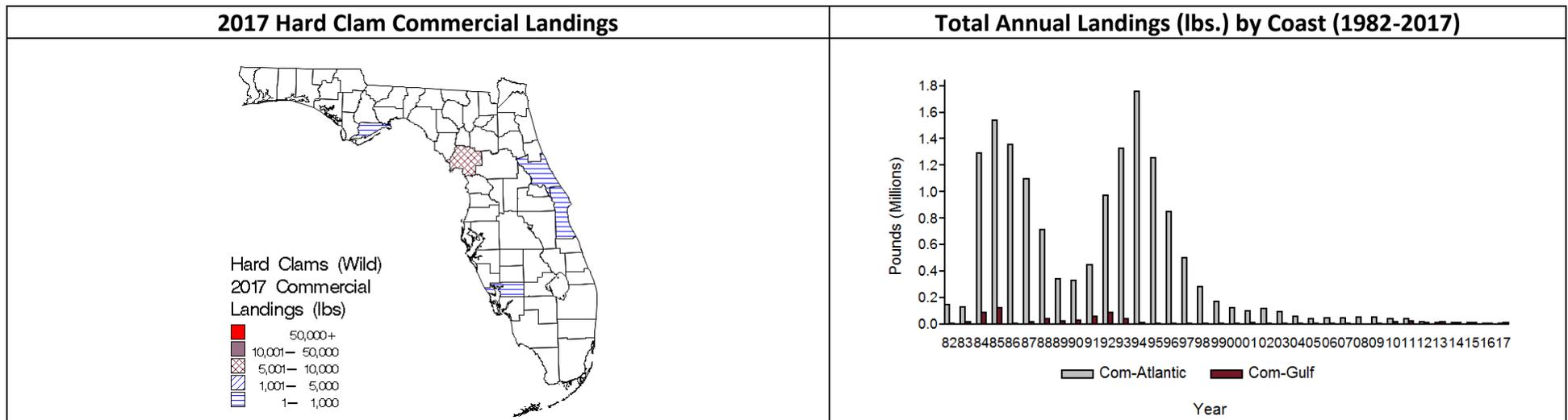
## Hard Clams

*Mercenaria mercenaria* (Linnaeus 1758)

*M. campechiensis* (Gmelin 1791)

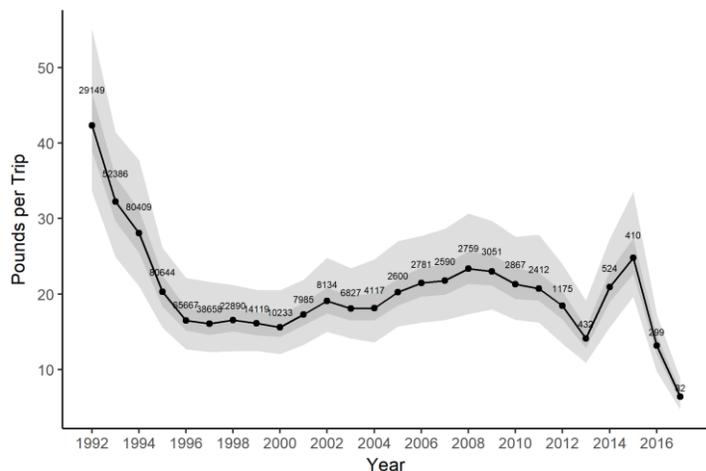
### Life History

Two Hard Clam species occur in Florida waters. The northern Hard Clam, *Mercenaria mercenaria*, is the most common and the most commercially important. It ranges from the Gulf of St. Lawrence to the Gulf of Mexico. The southern Hard Clam, *M. campechiensis* occurs from New Jersey to the U.S. Gulf States and replaces the northern Hard Clam in certain areas along the Gulf coast of Florida. The two clams readily hybridize in areas where their ranges overlap. Hard Clams can apparently live at least 22 years in Florida (Saloman and Taylor 1969). Hard Clam growth is fastest during winter and spring, but in general, it is greater in deeper areas and in areas with submerged aquatic vegetation (Arnold *et al.* 1991). In Florida, southern Hard Clams appear to grow faster (1.2"/yr shell height) than northern Hard Clams (0.6"–0.8"/year; Arnold 1986). However, growth of Hard Clams in the Indian River depended on genotype and habitat, e.g., southern Hard Clams grew faster in deep-water unvegetated habitats (Arnold *et al.* 1996). Hard Clams are protandric hermaphrodites; although, about 2% of the population develops directly into females during their first winter (Loosanoff 1937). Males can initially spawn when less than 0.6" shell length, whereas females initially spawn when greater than 1.2" shell length. In Florida, spawning occurs from December through April; a secondary spawn occurs in September.

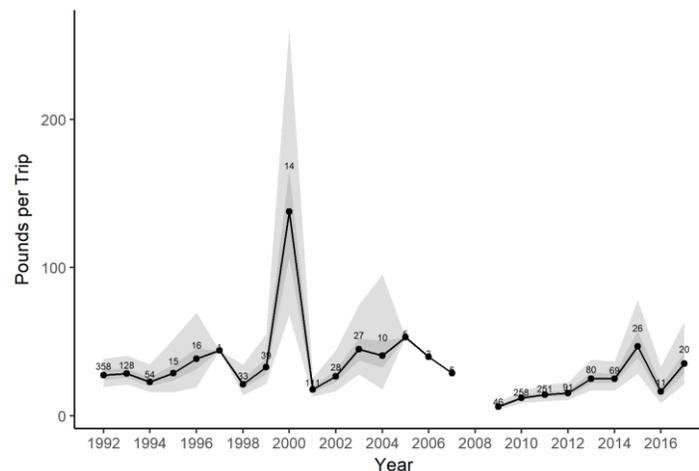


Fishers landed 6858 pounds in 2017 which were 58.7% lower than the previous 5-year average (2012-2016). Coastwide, 95% of these were from the Gulf and 5% were from the Atlantic. Commercial landings constituted 100% of the total landings. There are no known recreational or subsistence landings of Hard Clams in Florida.

**Atlantic Coast**



**Gulf Coast**



**Standardized Commercial Catch Rates:** Commercial catch rates for wild-caught Hard Clams declined from 1992 through 1996 on the Atlantic coast falling to below 20 pounds per trip in 1996, showed an upward trend from 2001-2008, and a declining trend from 2009-2013 before increasing again in 2014-2015. However, catch declined steeply in 2016-2017. On the Gulf coast, wild harvest rates were variable and averaged less than 40 pounds per trip throughout the time series, with the exception of a marked increase in 2000; recent rates show a slight increasing trend from 2009-2017. Dark grey error bands represent first and third quartiles while the light grey error bands represent the 2.5% – 97.5% quantiles.

**Stock Status**

**Current Condition:** There is no assessment information for wild clam populations in Florida.

**Management History:** Hard Clams harvested from culture activities have expanded since the early 1990’s but have been removed from the Hard Clam landings (wild and aquaculture) reported to the FWC since the responsibilities for monitoring Hard Clam aquaculture was transferred to the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACs) and reporting to the FWC on trip tickets of aquacultured clams is voluntary. Historically, Gulf coast landings (wild harvest) of Hard Clams have been low, and the wild harvest has dropped to essentially zero from 2000-2009. After elimination of entangling nets in 1995, some fishers received training in culture methods, and these efforts helped produced some of the aquaculture landings on the gulf coast. However, because the reporting of cultured clam harvest to the FWC on trip tickets is voluntary, the landings statistics for cultured clams from that reporting is most likely incomplete. The statistics on aquaculture clam harvest should be from the DACs.