

reTURN the FAVOR

Executive Summary 2015

INTRODUCTION

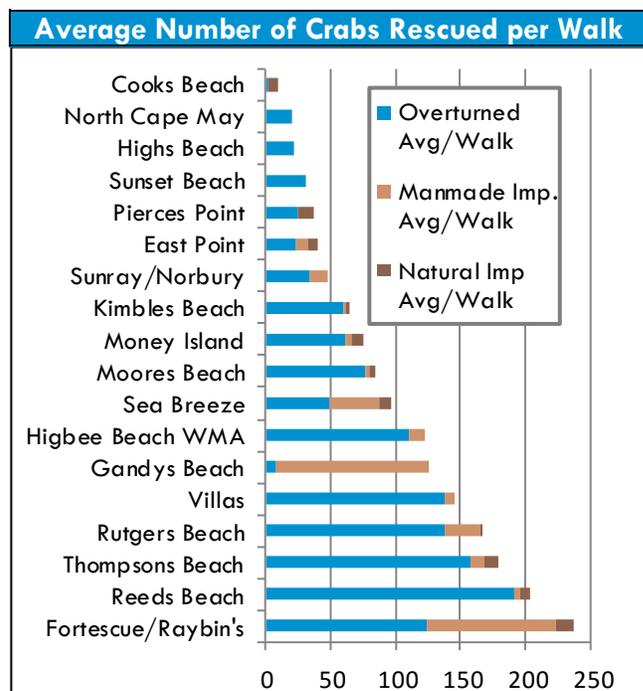
For millions of years, the Delaware Bay has hosted some of the largest concentrations of spawning horseshoe crabs in the world. Since the early 1990s, the species has experienced a drastic decline due to a combination of factors, including overharvest. With the population struggling to recover, thousands of horseshoe crabs die every year after being overturned by waves or getting stuck in bulkheads or other hazards. Due to the existing policy to prevent disturbance of migratory shorebirds, many of New Jersey's Delaware Bay beaches are seasonally closed to human activity, making it challenging to rescue stranded crabs.

The reTURN the Favor program was developed in 2013 to aid recovery efforts for the Delaware Bay horseshoe crab population. A partnership of nine organizations and sanctioned by the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife, reTURN the Favor utilizes volunteers to rescue stranded horseshoe crabs on New Jersey beaches at times when shorebirds are unlikely to be present.

RESULTS

Eight participating organizations sponsored beaches, organizing volunteers to lead and participate in rescue walks at their selected beaches.

In 2014, volunteers identified hazards at several beaches that trapped large numbers of crabs, most notably, East Point Lighthouse and Thompsons Beach. These beaches were targeted for increased effort in 2015. Restoration activity at East Point Lighthouse resulted in a decline of 67 crabs rescued per walk between years. Newly sponsored Thompsons Beach rescued 4,116 crabs in 2015.



Results represent all data submitted to the reTURN the favor program through September 1, 2015.

reTURN the Favor 2015 Project Totals		
	Average/Walk	Total
Rescue Walks	-	252
Rescue Walk Time (hrs)	1.2	304
Distance Traveled (km)	1.0	261
Volunteer Hours (hrs)	5.0	1,270
Crabs Rescued	121	30,526

SUMMARY

In its third season, reTURN the Favor results show that the program continues to grow, engaging more volunteers, and saving imperiled crabs. Since 2013, participants have rescued over 70,000 crabs. For the horseshoe crab population in New Jersey, these numbers matter, cementing the reTURN the Favor program as an important component of the conservation efforts on the Delaware Bay.

In total, reTURN the Favor walks occurred at 18 New Jersey beaches in 2015. More than 250 rescue walks were conducted and over 30,500 crabs rescued. Most crabs (81%) were overturned, but significant numbers were caught on man-made (14%) and natural (5%) hazards.