

# reTURN the FAVOR 2016 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## 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 and habitat degradation. During spawning, crabs may also die from exposure and predation when they become overturned by waves or stuck in impingements on beaches. Stranded crabs can easily be rescued, but access to many of New Jersey's Delaware Bay beaches is seasonally restricted to prevent disturbance of migratory shorebirds.

The reTURN the Favor program was developed in 2013 to orchestrate a solution to this challenge and aid recovery efforts for the Delaware Bay horseshoe crab population. reTURN the Favor is a collaborative program, sanctioned by the **New Jersey Division of Fish & Wildlife** and supported by nine organizations, that enables volunteers to rescue horseshoe crabs stranded on New Jersey's spawning beaches, including those that are seasonally closed to protect shorebirds. While doing so, the program raises awareness of horseshoe crab and shorebird conservation, and collects data to improve conditions for spawning crabs.

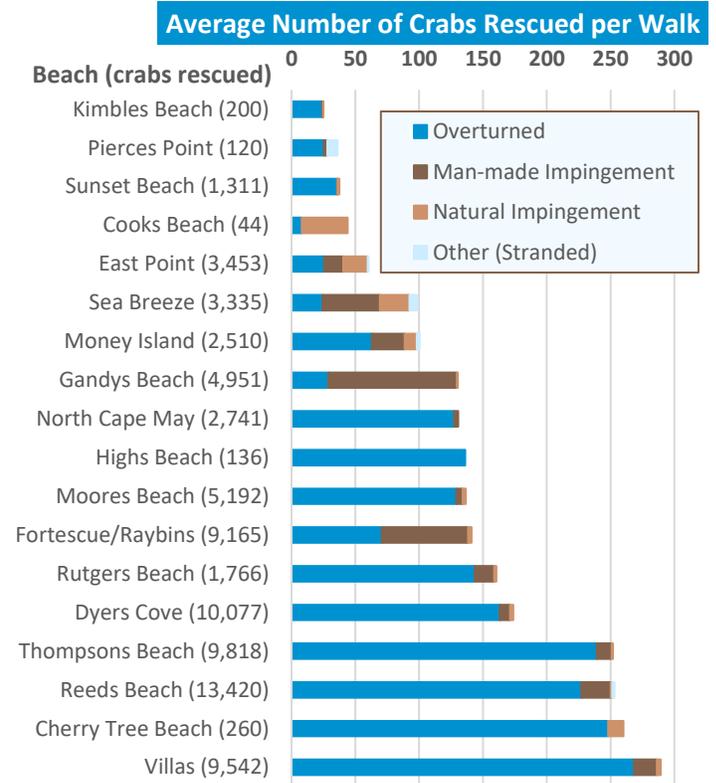
## Results

reTURN the Favor walks occurred at 18 New Jersey beaches in 2016. More than 520 rescue walks were conducted and over 78,000 crabs rescued. Most crabs (77%) were overturned, but significant numbers were caught in man-made (19%) and natural (4%) hazards.

reTURN the Favor 2016 Project Totals		
	Average/walk	Total
Rescue Walks	-	524
Rescue Walk time (hrs)	1:18	712
Distance traveled (km)	0.78	400
Volunteer hours (hrs)	3.8	1,981
Crabs rescued	149	78,041

In 2016, three small-scale projects were conducted to address impingement hazards with funding through the

**New Jersey Corporate Wetlands Restoration Partnership.** Over four workdays, participants removed construction material, monofilament fishing line, marine debris, and hundreds of pieces of rubble from Moores, Kimbles, and Reeds Beaches before the start of the spawning season.



Results are preliminary and represent all data submitted to the reTURN the favor program through August 5, 2016.

## Summary

In its fourth season, reTURN the Favor results show that when more people are engaged, more walks are conducted, and more crabs are rescued. Volunteer effort has increased with each program year and more than doubled this year, as did the number of crabs rescued. In fact, the total number of rescued crabs in 2016 exceeds the previous three years combined. To date, the program has already rescued over 145,000 horseshoe crabs, and has developed a strong partner and volunteer base to continue rescuing stranded crabs in years to come. Learn more: [www.reTURNthefavorNJ.org](http://www.reTURNthefavorNJ.org)

