

Gulf of Maine groundfish trawling studied

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University of Maine scientists say they have completed a long-term study of the effects of groundfish trawling on the sea floor of the Gulf of Maine.

Working with the Gulf of Maine Research Institute, graduate student Emily Knight and Marine Science Professor Les Watling examined the effects of groundfish trawling on the ecology of the gulf.

Based on the gradual increases in complexity and diversity of seafloor communities that have been protected from bottom trawling for years, Watling estimated it will take roughly a decade for the surface-dwelling organisms to reestablish themselves and much longer for a full recovery.

"I am pretty firmly convinced that if the groundfishing industry doesn't soon begin to undertake measures to conserve complex bottom habitat, there will be little chance that fishery will ever recover to levels seen 50 or 100 years ago," said Watling. "Small, bottom fish need complex habitat and it is clear that rock hopper gear reduces habitat complexity."

Knight said the good news is that recently protected habitats are recovering. While anything resembling a "natural" condition would certainly be far in the future, Knight found significant gains had been made in the short term.

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