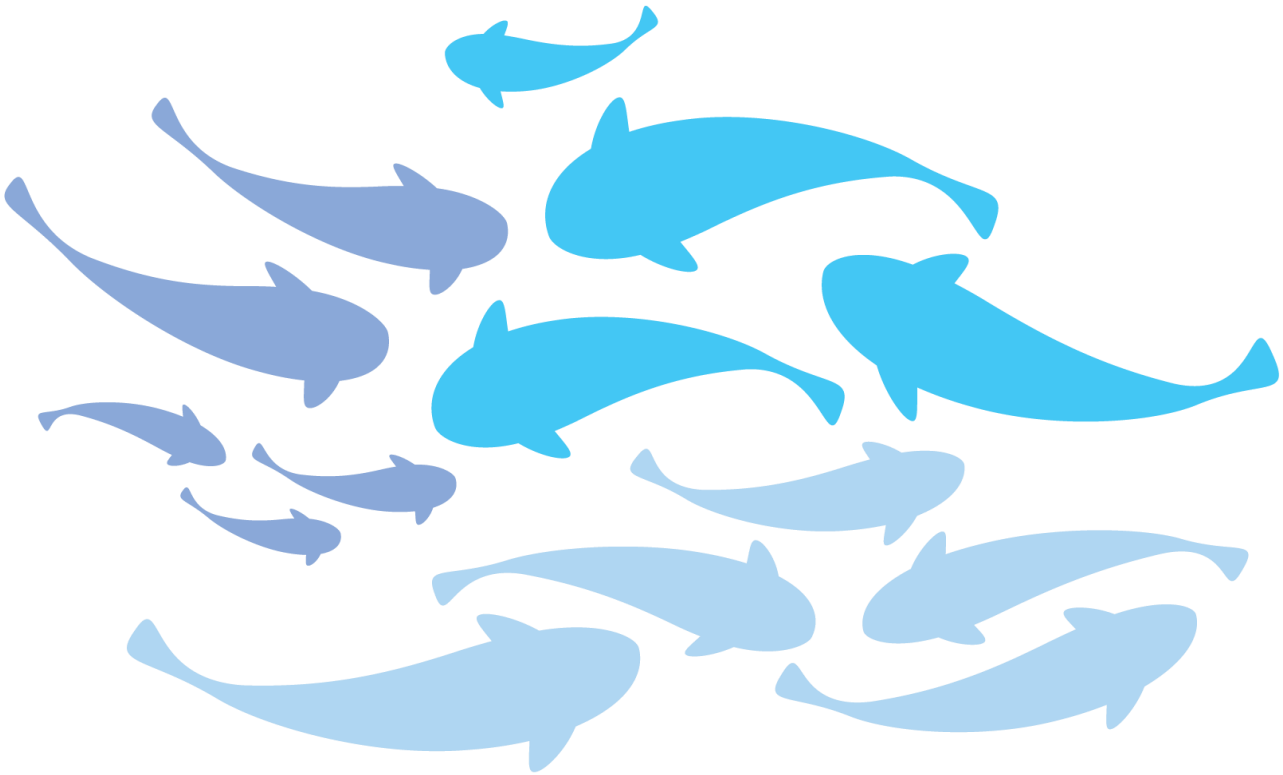
NOAA FISHERIES

Northeast Fisheries Science Center

Frequently Asked Questions

For NOAA's Pre-Trip Notification System (PTNS)



PTNS Notification Instructions

Q: How do I notify for a herring trip?

A: You can find the PTNS Vessel User Guide in the "Help" section on the PTNS website: https://appsnefsc.fisheries.noaa.gov/PTNS/index.php/help

Q: What login information do I need?

A: As of January 2023, we have transitioned our PTNS authentication system to align with the GARFO FishOnline authentication system. For FY26, you will log in to the **PTNS website** with your individual FishOnline credentials. Your FishOnline username as your PTNS website username and your FishOnline password as your PTNS website password.

To log into the PTNS, go here:

https://apps-nefsc.fisheries.noaa.gov/PTNS/

To retrieve your Fish Online username, go here:

https://apps-garfo.fisheries.noaa.gov/fishtank/login/forgot_username

To reset your Fish Online password, go here:

https://apps-garfo.fisheries.noaa.gov/fishtank/login/forgot

To create a Fish Online account, go here:

https://apps-garfo.fisheries.noaa.gov/fishtank/login/

Q: Who can I contact if I have questions about the PTNS system?

A: Call the PTNS Team at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371) or email at nefsc.ptns@noaa.gov.

Observer Coverage

Q: What is the status of IFM for fishing year 2026?

A: The IFM program in the herring fishery is suspended starting April 1, 2023. The program will remain suspended until federal funding becomes available to cover costs associated with administering the program. Please see updates on the website linked here: IFM Program Suspended.

Q: What coverage types are handled by the PTNS?

A: NOAA Fisheries uses the PTNS to assign Northeast Fisheries Observer Program (NEFOP) Standard Bycatch Reporting Methodology (SBRM) coverage, NEFOP Protected Species Branch (PSB) Limited Gillnet coverage, Industry-Funded At-Sea Monitoring (ASM) coverage, and certain types of Electronic Monitoring (EM) coverage to trips in the Northeast Multispecies groundfish and herring fisheries.

Q: What data does a NEFOP observer collect in the herring fishery?

A: NEFOP observers have undergone extensive training in the at-sea collection of commercial fishing trip data. Observers collect a multitude of data that includes but is not limited to, fishing effort data, economic data, data on incidental takes and protected species sightings, slippage event data, operational discard data, and biological samples.

There is no difference in the NOAA Fisheries standards pertaining to any observer's successful completion of training, maintaining high data quality, preserving data confidentiality, and adhering to safety measures. In addition, the same laws apply to vessel responsibility related to matters including accommodations, intimidation, and harassment of all observers.

Q: What are my requirements regarding interactions with observers on my vessel?

A: Work together to make sure the sea is a safe place for everyone to work. Observers are onboard to observe fishing operations and to collect catch data needed by NOAA to support our fisheries. Observers are trained fisheries professionals and should be treated with respect. For more information about NOAA's approach to observer safety and harassment prevention click the link here: https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/feature-story/noaa-increase-enforcement-actions-ensuresafety-federal-fishery-observers-monitors?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery.

Q: What is the NEFOP SBRM target coverage rate for the herring fishery?

A: There is not a set target coverage rate for NEFOP SBRM coverage. Instead, the SBRM allocates the Observer Program a certain number of sea days to observe each year. Based on historic effort, an approximate expected coverage rate can be calculated, but the actual realized NEFOP SBRM coverage rate depends on several factors, including the number of eligible herring trips that sail during the fishing year and the number of days each of those fishing trips is at sea.

Q: What are the target coverage rates for vessels in possession of a C, D, or E herring permit?

A: The combined target coverage rate does not apply to vessels that have a C, D, or E herring permit. Vessels that take a declared herring trip with a C, D, or E herring permit are required to notify PTNS and will be selected randomly for NEFOP coverage. Carrier vessels will be waived for coverage, but are still required to notify.

Q: How do midwater trawl vessels obtain Groundfish Closed Area observer coverage?

A: As of April 1, 2023, midwater trawl vessels must 1) be assigned a NEFOP observer through the PTNS and 2) carry a NEFOP observer on the trip. Vessels will no longer have the option to pay for supplemental coverage to access groundfish closed areas. Any vessel wanting to fish in these areas must be randomly assigned SBRM coverage in PTNS and carry a NEFOP observer on the trip.

PTNS Requirements

Q: Who is required to notify via the PTNS?

A: Vessels with any category of Atlantic herring permit (A, B, C, or E) intending to sail on a declared herring trip or herring carrier trip. Vessels with a D herring permit must notify for any declared herring trip using midwater trawl gear in herring management areas 1A, 1B, or 3.

Q: Who is NOT required to notify via the PTNS?

A: Certain vessels do not have a PTNS notification requirement:

- Vessels not fishing a declared herring trip or trip covered by the PTNS rules for groundfish trips.

- Category D vessels do not have to notify unless using midwater trawl gear to target herring on a declared herring trip in areas 1A, 1B, or 3

Q: What types of trips do not require a PTNS notification in the herring fishery?

A: You do not have to notify for trips that are not herring trips, including:

- DOF or other non-PTNS trips, including transit trips for which you have declared out of fishery in your VMS

Trips not requiring notification via the PTNS may still be subject to other types of notification and/or observer coverage based on the regulations of that fishery.

Using the PTNS

Q: Can I notify less than 48 hours in advance of a trip?

A: No, you must submit trip notifications at least 48 hours in advance of your planned sail time.

Q: How far in advance can I notify for a trip?

A: You can submit notifications up to 10 days prior to the planned sail date and time. This means that up to 8 day trips can be entered at one time. Notifications for dates more than 10 days in advance will not be accepted.

Q: Can I only call the PTNS line during business hours?

A: The PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371) is monitored 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and 365 days a year. When the PTNS Team is not answering calls and checking voicemails during business hours, an answering service takes calls. The answering service can enter notifications, help troubleshoot issues, and contact on-call NOAA Fisheries staff in the event of an urgent situation. PTNS staff can also be reached by email at NEFSC.PTNS@noaa.gov, which is also checked periodically after business hours and on weekends.

Q: I take short trips (1-2 days at sea). How should I notify?

A: Vessels that sail on 1- or 2-day herring trips should notify for day trips.

Q: I take short trips (1-2 days at sea), but I'm not planning on taking a trip every day this week. How should I notify?

A: You should still notify for day trips. All day trip vessels are encouraged to notify for a continuous 'block of day trips' that includes their planned sail dates, as well as the dates in between, because day trip notifications may not be delayed. If you do not sail on a PTNS-eligible trip on the calendar day of a day trip notification (i.e. between 00:00 and 23:59 on the indicated sail date), the notification/trip is considered canceled and cannot be pushed to another date. Because of the uncertain nature of fishing, notifying for a continuous block of day trips gives vessels the option to depart on a day trip on any day(s) they would like within that block.

Q: I am taking longer trips (3 or more days at sea). How should I notify?

A: Vessels that sail on herring trips that are 3 or more days long should notify for multiday trips. Only one multiday notification per vessel should be entered into the PTNS system at one time. Please contact the PTNS Team at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371) or email at NEFSC.PTNS@noaa.gov if you have any questions on how to properly notify.

Q: I am taking longer trips (3 or more days at sea), but want to have the option of leaving the dock for my next trip in less than 48 hours after the previous trip lands. How should I notify?

A: You should still notify for multiday trips. If you find you may need a fast turnaround time on a particular trip, depending on the options available to you at sea, you may call the PTNS line at 1-855FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371), send an email to NEFSC.PTNS@noaa.gov, or log into your PTNS web account on https://apps-nefsc.fisheries.noaa.gov/PTNS/ in order to enter a new multiday trip notification with at least 48 hours' notice. Multiday herring trips issued waivers in the PTNS can sail upon receipt of the waiver in the system or upon receipt of an emailed waiver alert from NEFSC.PTNS@noaa.gov. Multiday herring trips assigned observers in the PTNS can sail once the observer is onboard, however, observer providers are not required to deploy an observer before the time specified in the vessel's PTNS notification.

Q: I departed on a fishing trip, but had to return to port early because of weather/mechanical issues/crew needs/etc. and I want to go right back out. Do I have to notify again?

A: If you had nothing to offload or did not make your final offload (entire catch not removed from the boat), you do not have to submit a new notification with 48 hours' notice – an additional confirmation number will be added for you by the PTNS coordinators. You will keep the same coverage assignment status as your original trip; if you were assigned an observer, the assignment continues when you re-sail, and if you had a waiver, you may re-sail without an observer assigned. If you are breaking a trip, please send an email to NEFSC.PTNS@noaa.gov, or call the PTNS line at 1-855FISHES1(1-855-347-4371) for an additional confirmation number.

Q: I was late in notifying. Do I need to wait until the sail time of my notification to depart from the dock?

A: Vessels assigned an observer for a multiday trip may be required to wait until the sail time in the PTNS if an observer is not available before that time. If the trip has been delayed, they must give the provider sufficient notice of the new sail time so that an observer can be deployed.

Vessels assigned an observer for a day trip may be required to wait until the sail time in the PTNS if an observer is not available before that time. Vessels may not sail under a specific day trip notification on a different calendar day.

Vessels with a waived multiday trip may depart at any time upon receipt of a waiver email and/or the change of the notification's status in the vessel's PTNS web account to 'Waiver'.

Vessels with a waived day trip may depart at any time during that calendar day (i.e. 00:00 to 23:59). Vessels may not sail under a specific day trip notification on a different calendar day.

Q: Do I need to cancel day trips in the PTNS if I don't sail?

A: We strongly encourage you to maintain accurate information on your fishing activity, including the cancellation of trips that don't sail. However, we do regularly compare PTNS information to sailing records (VMS, VTR, etc.) and cancel trips that did not sail on a vessel's behalf. The performance of the PTNS hinges on the accuracy of the fishing activity reported by the fleet.

Do not cancel trips for dates on which you have sailed; you need an active notification in the system for each date on which you have departed on a PTNS-eligible fishing trip.

Q: I did not depart on a multiday trip on the PTNS sail date. Do I need to cancel the trip and provide another 48 hours' notice?

A: It is the nature of the industry to delay multiday trip departures, so if you are departing past the PTNS sail date of a multiday trip, you may keep the same confirmation number and do not need to renotify. However, you should delay the sail date either in your PTNS web account at https://appsnefsc.fisheries.noaa.gov/PTNS/, by sending an email to NEFSC.PTNS@noaa.gov, or by calling the PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371). Providing accurate trip information results in more accurate coverage rates and compliance assessments.

If a trip will be delayed for more than 48 hours, due to the need for major repairs or crew availability, for example, please use your PTNS web account on https://apps-nefsc.fisheries.noaa.gov/PTNS/, send an email to NEFSC.PTNS@noaa.gov, or call the PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371) in order to cancel the trip. You may then enter a new notification with 48 hours' notice when trip plans are known.

Trip Selection

Q: Why have my trips been assigned SBRM coverage and/or covered at a rate different from the target coverage rate for herring trips this month?

A: Target coverage levels apply to the fishing year as a whole, running from April 1 to March 30 of a year. NOAA Fisheries may adjust PTNS settings throughout the year in order to achieve the target coverage rates based on several factors, which include:

- The number of trips taken in the fishing year
- The average length of each trip
- The ability of providers to cover selected trips
- The cancellation of trips assigned observers
- Vessels' PTNS compliance

For these reasons, vessels should not assume that trip selection rates, observer assignment rates, or observer coverage rates will be constant and equal at all times throughout the fishing year.

Q: Why is my vessel being selected/assigned coverage/covered for a different proportion of trips than another vessel?

A: The PTNS selection process attempts to achieve the target coverage for the fishing year at the stratum level. The PTNS has capabilities to apply a second step in the selection process in an attempt to make coverage between vessels more equitable. It takes into account both the stratum coverage rate and the coverage rate of the individual vessel within that stratum. Vessels may fish in different strata throughout the fishing year, but only their coverage rate in the stratum for which a vessel notifies is the individual vessel coverage rate used in the two-step process. As more trips are taken within a stratum, individual vessel coverage rates tend to even out closer to target coverage levels, but they may still vary from the exact target. *For these reasons, vessels should not assume that trip selection rates, observer assignment rates, or observer coverage rates will be equal among individual vessels.*

Q: Will I continue to get selected for coverage if I cancel a trip assigned an observer?

A: PTNS uses a two-step selection process to promote equitability of individual vessel coverage.

First, when a notification is entered, it may be randomly selected for coverage. The probability of random selection is based on the difference between the realized stratum coverage rate and the target stratum coverage rate.

During the second step of selection, the system evaluates a vessel's individual stratum coverage rate. If the trip was randomly selected and the vessel's individual coverage rate for that stratum is above a high threshold, then the trip will be waived in the second step. If a trip was randomly waived of coverage, but the vessel's individual coverage rate for that stratum is below a low threshold, then the vessel will be selected in the second step.

If a vessel continually cancels trips that have been assigned coverage and only sails on waived trips and/or refuses coverage, then their individual coverage rate will fall below the threshold. As a result of the low coverage rate – rather than as a direct result of canceling or refusing trips assigned observers – the vessel's notifications will be selected until its coverage rate rises above the low threshold.

Q: Why did I just get selected for coverage a number of times in a row?

A: Due to the nature of random selection, there is a chance that you may be selected for coverage multiple times in a row.

For this reason, vessels should not assume that trip selection, observer assignment, or observer coverage will be equally spaced at all times throughout the fishing year.

Q: What happens when I cancel a trip assigned coverage?

A: Canceled trips occur when a vessel informs the observer provider that they are canceling the trip and does not sail on the trip. NOAA Fisheries monitors vessel cancellation rates of waivers versus trips assigned coverage and may contact vessel owners if there is a significant discrepancy. When calculating coverage to determine selection probabilities, PTNS does not take into account canceled trips.

The act of canceling a trip does not specifically trigger any PTNS functions.

Q: What happens when I don't inform the observer provider that I've canceled a trip that has been assigned coverage?

A: A No-Call/No-Trip (NCNT) occurs when a vessel is assigned coverage and the provider does not receive return contact from a captain, so an observer is deployed to the dock for the sail time (or land time for samplers) in PTNS. Then, the captain and crew do not show, and the vessel does not end up sailing at the anticipated time *(note that if the vessel sailed without an observer it would become a refusal - see question "What happens when I sail on a trip without my assigned observer?" below)*. These incidents are reported to NOAA Fisheries by the provider, and repeat incidents may be followed up on by NOAA Office of Law Enforcement. Some providers include in their contracts a charge for NCNTs, since the observer generally arrives one hour prior to the PTNS sail time and stays one hour past, without a trip occurring. NOAA Fisheries tracks all instances of herring trip NCNTs. When calculating coverage to determine selection probabilities, PTNS does not take into account NCNT trips because they are canceled.

The act of changing a canceled trip's status to NCNT does not specifically trigger any PTNS functions.

Q: What happens when I sail on a trip without my assigned observer?

A: Refusals occur when a vessel is assigned an observer and sails without the observer. These incidents are reported to NOAA Fisheries by the provider and may be identified by the PTNS Coordinators when reconciling notifications with actual fishing trips. Follow up may involve OLE. When calculating coverage to determine selection probabilities, PTNS counts refusals as sailed, unobserved trips.

Q: For observer coverage questions, who can I contact?

A: For more information about the observer coverage in the herring fishery please first refer to the GARFO help page linked here: https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/new-england-mid-atlantic/fisheriesobservers/industry-funded-monitoring-northeast. For additional questions about observer coverage in the herring fishery, please contact Sara Weeks at Sara.weeks@noaa.gov or Carrie Nordeen at Carrie.Nordeen@noaa.gov.

Troubleshooting

Q: I can't get to the login screen and am getting an error message. What's wrong?

A: First, try using this PTNS web address https://apps-nefsc.fisheries.noaa.gov/PTNS/.

If you still cannot get to the PTNS website, the system may be undergoing scheduled routine maintenance or there may be an unscheduled outage. In that case, please try to access the website later and email your notification to NEFSC.PTNS@noaa.gov or call the PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371).

If there is an outage with GARFO and FishOnline authentication through the PTNS website is compromised, please alert the PTNS team ASAP by email us at NEFSC.PTNS@noaa.gov, or calling the PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371). Please provide your notification details and we will enter your notification manually with your sail time as early as your initial time of contact. Please refer to PTNS trip entry emails for official notification entry details.

Q: Why can't I log into my PTNS web account? It says "Authorization Failed".

A: If you forget your username, please click here Retrieve FishOnline Username. If you forget your password, please visit Retrieve FishOnline Password. If this is a GARFO specific outage, the PTNS Team will still be able to access your PTNS account during this time and you can contact us by email us at NEFSC.PTNS@noaa.gov, or calling the PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371).

Q: I notified for my trip by sending an email or by leaving a voicemail on the PTNS line. If the PTNS team doesn't enter my trip right away, will I have to wait more than 48 hours to sail?

A: The 48 hour notification requirement is based on the time of your original email or voicemail, regardless of the time the new trip notification is entered into the PTNS by the PTNS team.

Q: I notified for a trip, and I have not received an entry confirmation email. Why?

A: When you enter your own notifications through your PTNS web account on https://appsnefsc.fisheries.noaa.gov/PTNS/, you receive an entry confirmation email within 15 minutes. When you email NEFSC.PTNS@noaa.gov or call the PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371)

to notify, the PTNS team must manually enter your trip, so receipt of the entry confirmation email may be delayed.

If it is 24 hours or less before your trip is set to depart, and you still do not know the status of your trip, call the PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371) as soon as possible in order to leave ample time to work out any issues before your departure.

Q: When am I supposed to get emails?

A: The PTNS will send an automated email when:

- A new notification is entered
- A trip is waived or assigned an observer
- A trip is canceled before the sail date

You may add or remove personal email addresses in your PTNS web account on https://appsnefsc.fisheries.noaa.gov/PTNS/, by sending an email to NEFSC.PTNS@noaa.gov, or by calling the PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371).

Q: It is 24 hours prior to the scheduled sail time for my trip assigned observer coverage, and I have not yet heard from an observer. What do I do?

A: Observer Providers have up to 24 hours prior to the PTNS sail time to accept a trip for coverage. The observer or provider will contact you as soon as possible after a trip is assigned coverage. You also have the option to contact the provider by calling the phone number provided in the trip's automated assignment email. Please call the PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371) if you are having trouble regarding contact with your observer or provider.

Q: I left a voicemail to notify for a trip. Why hasn't anyone called me back to give me my confirmation number and status?

A: When you call the PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371) to notify for a trip, your information is manually entered into the system by the PTNS team. Your trip status will be updated in your PTNS web account on https://apps-nefsc.fisheries.noaa.gov/PTNS/ and an entry confirmation email will be sent to your VMS, as well as any additional email addresses that you have registered in the PTNS.

Q: I am at the dock, and my observer is not here. What should I do?

A: Check your VMS, email account(s), and/or your PTNS web account on https://appsnefsc.fisheries.noaa.gov/PTNS/ to be sure that you were not issued a waiver for your trip.

If you have been assigned an observer and have been unable to make contact with the observer or provider, call the PTNS line at 1-855-FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371) to obtain clearance from NOAA Fisheries to depart on your trip.

Do not leave the dock without your assigned observer if you have not called the PTNS line at 1-855FISHES1 (1-855-347-4371).

Q: I have a problem with my VMS. What should I do?

A: Contact the NMFS Northeast VMS Office at 978-281-9213 or the VMS Support Center at 888-2199228. You may also send an email at any time to the NMFS Northeast VMS team at NMFS.OLE.NE@noaa.gov.