Oyster funding is sought

By JEAN JONES
Staff Writer

COMMERCIAL TWP. — Efforts to find money to continue oyster research and projects vital to the future of the oyster industry have taken a new tack.

Dr. Eric Powell, executive director of the Haskin Shellfish Research Laboratory at Bivalve, told the Delaware Bay Section of the Shellfisheries Council on Tuesday that New Jersey and Delaware have been working together for two years to find money to develop a shell planting program.

“We have finally put together a formal proposal.

“The idea is to obtain money from the Army Corps of Engineers. They have funds for reef restoration.

“There is $8, $10, $12 million there every year. We think they would be interested in some sort of supportive role in the Delaware Bay,” he said.

“The corps requires a private partner that could represent both states to be involved,” Powell said, and the Delaware River and Bay Authority would fill that requirement. A proposal has been made to DRBA.

“Their board would have to approve it and their board would submit this to the Corps of Engineers,” Powell said.

“The proposal would be for $2 million, $1 to each state, spread over three years.

“That would represent from 220,000 to 225,000 bushels of shells planted in each state.

“Empty shell is planted to give larval oysters a clean, hard surface to which they can attach for continued growth.

“Powell said the corps requires matching funds in cash or in kind contributions. The intermediate transplant program being conducted by New Jersey could be a component of the proposal and could serve as matching money.

“It would be useful to get a letter from the council supporting the intermediate transplant as a match,” he said.

“Jim Joseph, chief of the Bureau of Shellfisheries, said it would mean using $100,000 to leverage $1 million.

“Powell said it would probably take six to eight months for the financing proposal to work its way through corps machinery. It might be available next summer.

“There also is an effort to obtain funds from the US Fish and Wildlife Service, he said. Senators in New Jersey and Delaware are working on that.

“We expect to know in a month or two how it is going to work out,” he said. “Those monies would definitely be available next summer. It would be $500,000 split between the two states.”