

Striped Bass Cooperative Angler Program

2016 Season Newsletter

NYS DEC Diadromous Fish Unit, Division of Marine Resources

March, 2016

Fellow Cooperative Anglers,

The Diadromous Unit wants to thank all of you for your continued efforts in providing us vital information from the recreational striped bass fishery. We hope that you had a successful 2016 season and are ready to get back on the water.

As a member of the Striped Bass Cooperative Angler Program (SBCA), you are part of an endeavor to help manage and maintain a healthy striped bass population. Following a sharp decline in the 1980's, the US government deemed it necessary to save this keystone species and passed the Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act in 1984. This act is enforced by the Atlantic State Marine Fisheries Commission and mandates that each state develop and support programs that monitor striped bass recruitment and fisheries data. One of the programs that keeps New York in compliance with the management plan is the SBCA program.

The SBCA Program has been running since 1985, relying on recreational fishermen like yourselves to inform us about your fishing habits. The information that is provided, including the number of fishing trips, hours spent fishing, and the number of fish caught, allows us to determine catch per unit effort (CPUE=fish caught / hours spent fishing) or fishing success for striped bass in

New York's marine waters. Additionally, scale samples and the associated length information is used to create length-at-age keys which are incorporated in striped bass population assessments and ultimately help guide fishery management decisions. Consequently, the data you send helps us monitor the striped bass population and gives you an active role in striped bass conservation and management.

We are happy to see that more people are becoming aware of the program. This year alone we had an influx of approximately 100 new cooperative anglers! We encourage everyone to continue to spread the word to other anglers about the program and get involved. Remember, the more participants, the more information we can gather to better understand exactly how the striped bass population is doing.

During the upcoming season, please remember to fill in as much information as you can in the logbook or on the scale envelopes. The logbooks we provide, are created for you to keep track of your fishing trips through the year, and serve as your own personal reference. Feel free to record any information you think is important; however, make sure to fill in all of the information that we have headings for. Also, NO CATCH information is just as important as successful trip logs. Even if you have not had success, we ask that you log your trip in the NO



CATCH section. We can incorporate this into the overall catch per unit effort (bass per hour) which will make our overall numbers more accurate. Equally as important is to make sure you fill in the primary and/or secondary species you are targeting. There are instructions included with your logbooks on how to collect data so we can insure data collection is standardized between all participants.

We greatly appreciate the time and effort all of you take to provide us with information each year. Through this past year we have now received information on over 15,000 striped bass from you! No matter what level of involvement you have, each bit of information contributed is equally important.

The results from the 2016 fishing season saw some improvement in overall catch rates; however, it still remains below average. Although the fishing wasn't what many hoped, most of you were still able to find some stripers around. Speaking of which, let's get to the interesting part, some numbers and highlights from our cooperative anglers!

The Numbers

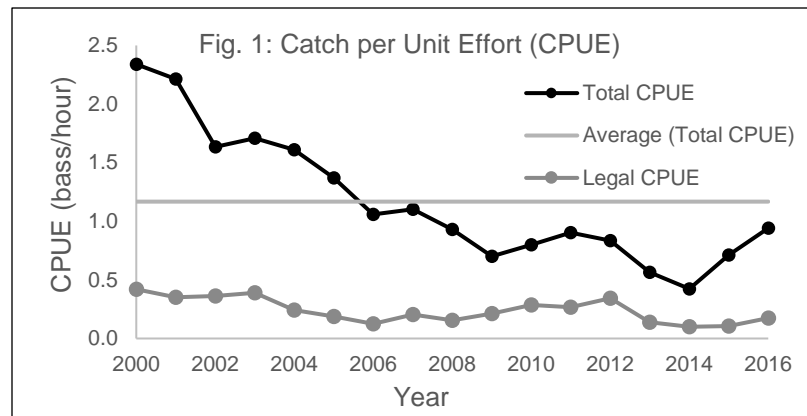
2016 had a total of 167 active anglers out of which only 24 sent us fishing logs and/or striped bass scale samples. We also had over 100 of people sign up recently and hope to see them participate in the coming year. Over the past few months we have been compiling your data and aging the 418 striped bass scale samples we received from you. Table 1 shows how many fishing trips, hours fished, bass caught, legal bass (28"+), and how many bass were kept by zone. We tabulate all of the data you provide into

zones, based on the locations provided in your catch data. Please see the included map at the end of this report to see what zone you fish in. From these numbers we calculated the CPUE for 2016 at 0.9 bass/hr (Figure 1), meaning on average, it took just over an hour to catch one striped bass.

Collectively, anglers averaged 3.3 hours a trip and caught approximately 3 fish each time out. Of the 222 legal bass caught, only 80 fish (36%) were kept. This percentage dropped from previous years and may indicate an increase in more anglers releasing legal size fish.

Table 1: 2016 Fishing Effort by Zone

Year	Zone	Fishing Trips	Hours Fished	Bass	Legal Bass	Kept
2016	1	85	297.0	160	38	25
	2	135	438.8	529	67	20
	3	31	137.0	27	14	11
	4	37	112.0	115	2	0
	5	94	282.0	363	101	24
	6	0	0.0	0	0	0
	Total	382	1266.8	1194	222	80



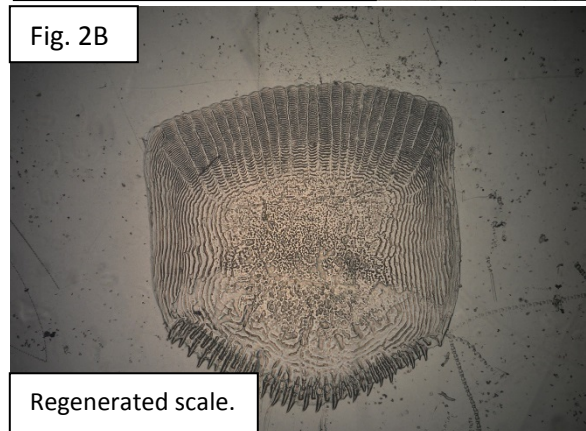
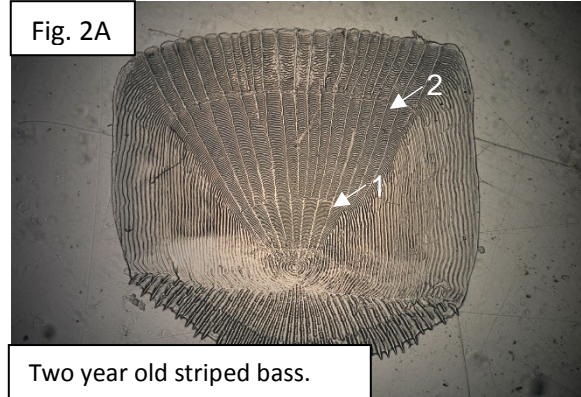
Fishing Methods

Similar to previous years, most bass in 2016 were caught from shore (51%). The second most bass were caught by boat (33%), and the remaining 16% from kayak. The most commonly used bait was artificial lures (67%). Others used live (bunker, eels, etc.) and real (dead) (clam bellies, worms, etc.) baits.

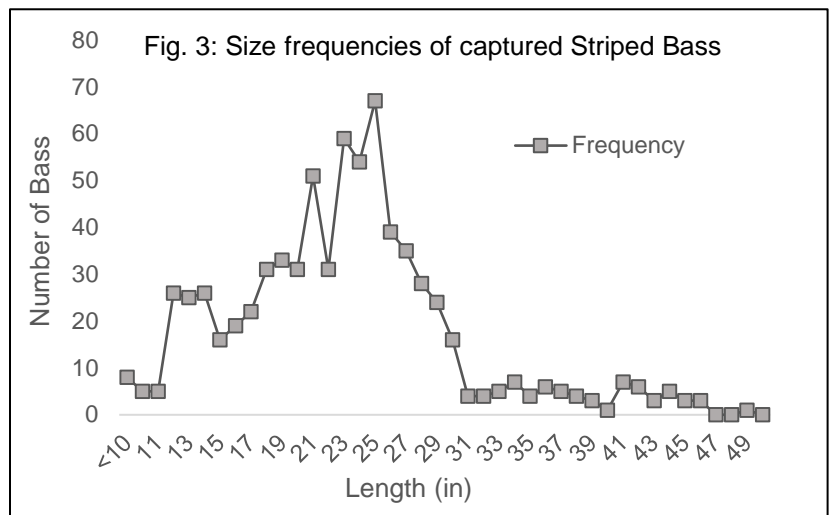
As is probably no surprise to most of you, certain locations and months of the year are better for finding striped bass than others. The greatest number of striped bass were caught in May and October corresponding with the spring and fall runs. The greatest number of legal-sized bass were caught in July. This year, the most striped bass were caught on the north shore of Long Island between the Throgs Neck Bridge and Rocky Point (Zone 2); this area also had the most hours fished. The second most successful area was the south shore of the island in the area east of Smith Point, including Montauk and the Peconic Bays (Zone 5).

Age/Size Information

We stated earlier that you sent us back scale samples from a total of 418 fish. We were able to get ages on 399 of them. We age the scales by first pressing them on a plastic sheet and then counting the annuli (rings) on the scale, in the same way one would count rings on a tree (Fig. 2A). Sometimes scales are not able to be aged due to poor scale quality or regeneration (Fig. 2B). When a scale falls off a fish, it begins to grow back; during this regeneration time the growth pattern that was previously on the scale is not recognizable.



From the 399 fish aged, the youngest bass caught was 1 year old and 8" long. The oldest fish aged was 16 years old and 45" long. If you look at Figure 3, you can see the size distribution of the fish caught. Notice the



spike around the 23" - 25" mark? The majority of fish in this length range were 5 years old. These fish are a result of the strong recruitment (spawning success) in 2011.

Ideally, we would like to see more fish caught in each age class, which would indicate consistent recruitment and strong numbers of both young and older fish. However, this rarely occurs because recruitment success is determined by a wide range of environmental and biological factors that change from year to year. We also have to keep in mind that this survey is just a small snapshot (723 fish measured) of a much larger picture. With all of that said, I am hopeful that you will begin to see more fish of different sizes and ages in the coming years.

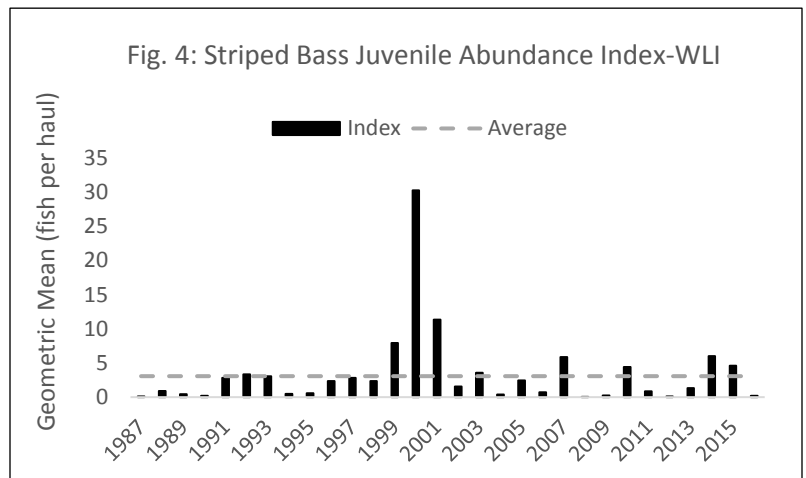
The average size of all of the bass cooperative anglers were able to measure was 23.0 inches. The smallest fish caught was 8.0", and the largest was a 49" fish that weighed about 38 pounds. When we have both age and length information, we are able to create length-at-age keys. These keys help scientists estimate growth rates and the abundance of particular year classes over time. Thus, the information you provide plays an important role in monitoring and managing striped bass.

NYS DEC Sampling

In addition to this program, the DEC also conducts a survey for juvenile striped bass on the Hudson River and in the western bays on Long Island. These surveys are used to create an index of abundance for young striped bass helping us to assess striped bass spawning success. Our unit runs the survey on Long Island and we sample in Little Neck Bay, Manhasset Bay, Hempstead Harbor, Oyster Bay, and

Jamaica Bay. In each bay, we set a beach seine at fixed stations from May-October. All of the fish we capture in our seine are counted, measured, and released. When we catch striped bass, we measure, weigh, and take scales from them to age them. Additionally, if the bass is 6" or greater, we tag it. You may occasionally catch a striper with a tag. A variety of different agencies tag them and if you catch a fish with a tag, please report it to the appropriate agency as these tags help us understand striped bass migration patterns and survival rates.

We wanted to share some of our findings with you from our 2016 sampling. We tagged 750 bass, and caught a total of 1,314 striped bass ranging in size from 2" to 38". The abundance index for juvenile striped bass on Long Island in 2016 was below average (Figure 4).



Regulations

The 2017 striped bass regulations in marine waters, will be 1 fish at 28" from April 15-December 15. This means you can only keep one striped bass per day, per person, that is 28" or greater. For information on other regulations check the NYS DEC website (www.dec.ny.gov). Please

remember to sign up for the no cost recreational fishing license/registry before heading out to fish.

Important Reminders

- If you are collecting scales from a fish, make sure to take a bunch (10-15). This will help insure that we will be able to age at least one of them.
- Report all of your trips, even when you catch nothing. Zero catch trips are just as important as ones when you catch fish.
- Fill in the “hours fished” in your logbook and/or on the scale envelopes.
- Take the time to fill in as much information as you can provide in the logbook or on a scale envelope.
- If you need a new logbook or more scale envelopes, email Zach or give him a call.

New Staff/Closing Remarks

Zachary Schuller recently joined the Diadromous Unit at the DEC and will be taking over the everyday aspects of the SBCA program. His contact information can be found at the end of this newsletter.

We hope that you enjoyed this newsletter. As always, feel free to contact us with comments, ideas, suggestions, or stories. We hope that the striped bass fishing will be better this year and in the future. Thanks for taking the time to read the newsletter, and for your continued participation in the Striped Bass Cooperative Angler Program. Best wishes for a safe and successful fishing season!

-The Diadromous Fish Unit



Contact Information:
Zachary Schuller
NYS DEC Diadromous Fisheries
205 N Belle Mead Rd. STE 1
East Setauket, NY 11733
631-380-3314
zachary.schuller@dec.ny.gov

Striped Bass Cooperative Angler Fishing Zones

