

THE STRIPED BASS DESERVES GAMEFISH STATUS.

Game On. Again



Thanks to visionaries like Lee Wulff, we have learned the true value of a fish swimming in the water. When Wulff declared, “a fish is too valuable to catch only once,” he was referring to all fish. However, it still seems that with salt water fish the value to the recreational/personal use angler is perceived to be social and the value to the commercial user is

deemed to be economic. This is not the case!

There is one fish that has been a major socio/economic engine that has propelled the recreational/personal use fishing industry for the last 10 years—the striped bass, a fish that has been or is available to the average angler in every coastal state in the lower 48. Along the East Coast it has revved up tackle sales, boat sales and charter fishing trips. This fish accounted for over 11 million fishing trips. It generated approximately \$6.63 billion in economic activity from the personal use fishery, which is 26.5 times more than the economic activity generated by the commercial users.

A pound of commercially caught striped bass has a retail sales value of \$6. Recreationally caught striped bass has a staggering retail sales value of \$105 per pound. Commercial use of this fish creates approximately 5,000 jobs and recreational/personal use fishing creates approximately 63,000 jobs. Yet time and time again, we hear the mantra that the recreational user is “merely out playing with their food” and the commercial user is “creating jobs and supplying a product to feed a hungry world.” The fact is that recreational/personal use fishing lands and consumes 26 million pounds of fish and commercial users land 7 million. So, who puts more meals on the table?

The unanswered question is why this fish continues to be managed to support a commercial fishery? Because it always has and because it can are the only reasonable answers. In those states where striped bass has been declared a gamefish, there has not been massive dislocation of commercial effort. Outside of Chesapeake Bay, no commercial user is making a living entirely on striped bass. All along the coast many charter captains, tackle shop owners and tackle manufactures are making a living from striped bass.



A recent study done by the respected economics research firm Southwick Associates for Stripers Forever, an organization that advocates gamefish designation for striped bass, highlights some important points. If striped bass were made a gamefish along the East Coast “a total of \$1.79 billion in new economic activity and 14,400 new jobs would be created by eliminating commercial fishing for striped bass and reallocating the present commercial allotment to recreational fishing.”

Looking at the raw numbers the average recreational/personal use angler takes home 7.8 pounds of striped bass per year and the average size for striped bass in the coastal fishery is approximately 9.5 pounds. So, on average, recreational/personal use anglers do not catch one whole legal sized striped bass per year. Is it fair to allocate fish to commercial

Conservation



use when average citizens cannot take home one legal fish per year in a fishery that is deemed one of the major fisheries management successes in modern history?

It's no secret that our coastal population grows at an ever-increasing rate. There will be more people wanting to actively enjoy the benefits of our coastal resources. Unless something drastic happens, this is a trend that we are not going to change very easily. Over time, those living along the coasts will demand more and better access to coastal resources and at the same time will be putting ever increasing pressure on the healthy environment those resources need to thrive.

Fisheries managers will have to change how they manage these resources and how they make allocation decisions. In cases like striped bass, the decision to maximize the socio/economic benefits derived from this resource is easy—it should be given gamefish designation. Fisheries managers will likely not be able to make that decision. It will have to be made legislatively and that is why I support the efforts of Congressmen Frank Pallone (D-NJ), Tom Allen (D-ME) and Michael Michaud (D-ME) for their sponsorship of HR 2625, a bill to prohibit the sale of Atlantic striped bass. This bill will

face an uphill battle, but most legislation does. If you agree that this is the best way to manage striped bass, contact your Representative and ask them to co-sponsor this legislation.

We have heard all the arguments for and against the concept of gamefish for striped bass. For me it comes down to the best socio/economic use of our limited resources. The numbers show that recreational/personal use with no sale for striped bass is the way to go. These things don't happen without a lot of effort. Stripers Forever and the American Sportfishing Association have been working on this for a long time. We will need many more recreational/personal use organizations to get the job done. Let's just do it. ▲

CONTACT YOUR REPRESENTATIVES

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