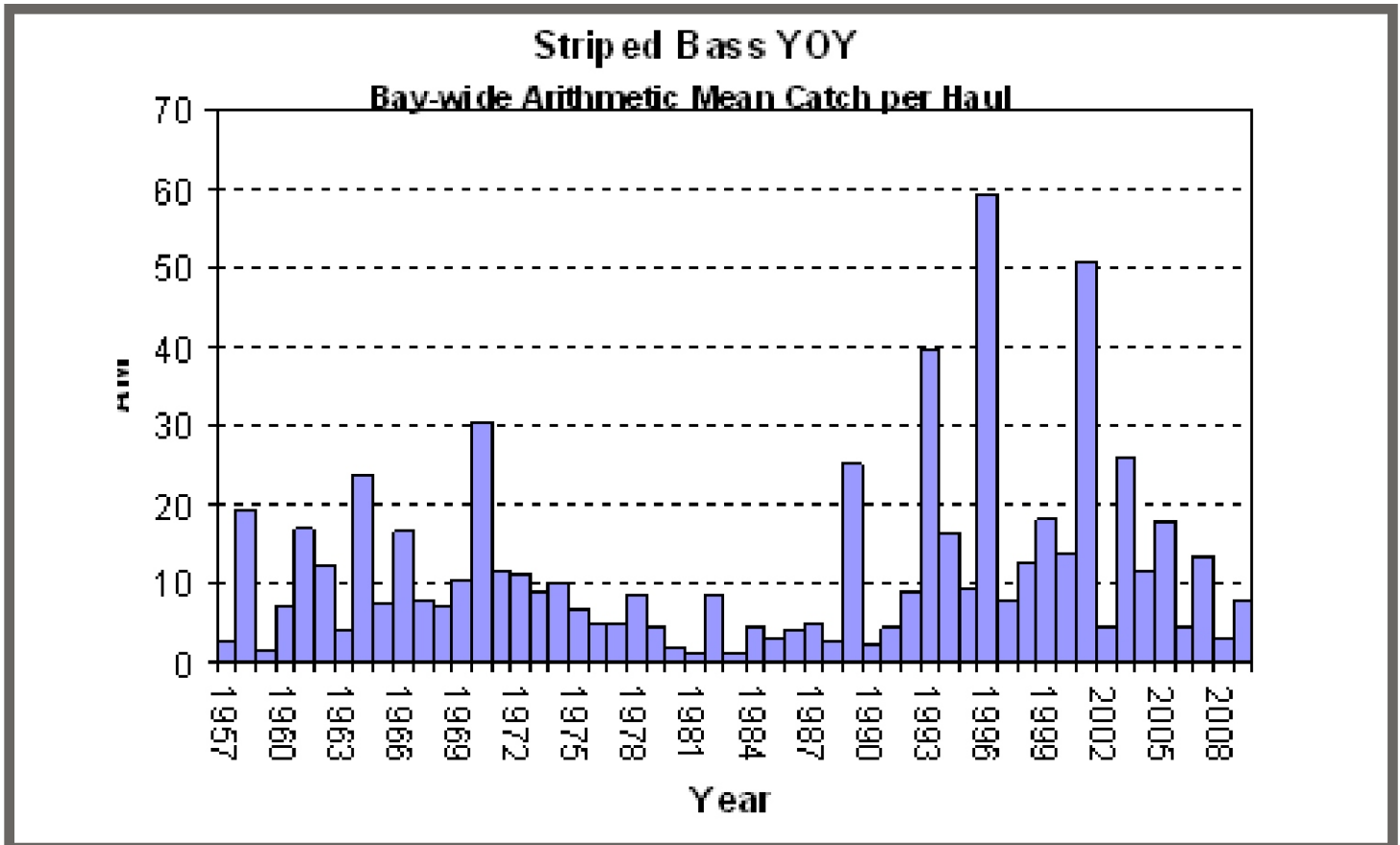




Anglers up and down the coast are concerned about the present and future of striped bass fishing. Most reports show that there were almost no small schoolie stripers to be had in 2009 and that bass fishing in general is deteriorating. Guides are also having a harder time showing their clients good fishing. None of that bodes well for the \$1.2 billion dollar recreational striped bass industry in Massachusetts. An important statistic recently released indicates what future runs of striped bass may look like along the coast. David Ross PhD comments on the graph (below) depicting striped bass spawned in Chesapeake Bay, the place where most of our Massachusetts stripers are born.



The Maryland Department of Natural resource has just released it's annual Young of the Year striped bass survey.

The department has been doing this survey for over 50 years and the resulting numbers are thought to be a good indication of spawning success.

*However, the trend of the recent data (2001 to 2009) seems to be more of a measure of spawning failure.*

Scientists, including oceanographers like me and fishery biologists, will often come up with reasons or hypotheses to explain unexpected changes or anomalies in their data.

In this instance, those reasons might include too much or too little rain, or temperatures that were too cold or too warm.

For fishermen these reasons have little importance - the fish are either there or not. I suspect that some fishery managers will see reasons to be optimistic about the recent data.

Others, especially those not involved with the MD DNR, should see reasons for concern.

If you look at the index from 2001, it has to be evident to even the most optimistic observer that the trend of the index is heading south - quickly.

It really does not matter what the reasons are - the recent spawning numbers are not good.

Look again at the graph: the highs (50.75 to 7.9 - an 84 per cent drop) and lows (4.73 to 3.2 - a 32 per cent drop) are clearly declining.

How can this be good for the future of the striped bass? -- David Ross Ph.D.

*"The Maryland striped bass young-of-the-year survey is a strong scientific argument for a more conservative management approach. This can only happen if wild striped bass are declared a game fish, thereby eliminating the commercial pressure to maximize the harvest exploitation." -- Dean Clark*