

**Stripers Forever** - Many of you will be interested in the results from the 2003 Stripers Forever fishing survey. We received 341 completed surveys before our deadline, with some from every state from NC to Maine. MA had the highest number of responses with 74, followed by NJ with 62 and CT with 47. It is our intention to take this survey each fall to see if any trends are developing. An Excel spreadsheet with complete results is attached – the additional comments are on tab 2 - and has also been posted to our website.

### State of The Fishery

#### Question #

1. 2. Overall, boat fishermen outnumbered shore fishermen almost 3 to 1. In NY and NJ there were almost equal numbers, but in some states like MD, ME, and CT shore fishermen were a very small part of the mix. It would take too long to analyze the fishery for each group, but since I entered all of the surveys, I can tell you that I don't think the results were much different between groups.
3. 2/3rds of the respondents have fished for stripers for more than 10 years. This is a sampling of experienced anglers.
4. The opinions regarding the quality of the fishery were very inconclusive. 115 thought things were worse or much worse, while 146 thought they had improved to some degree. These feelings were quite regional. In ME, MD, and VA anglers strongly viewed the fishery as worse, while in MA and NJ, they generally saw it as improved. This could be the result of Hudson and Delaware River contributions, from which neither MD nor ME are likely to benefit significantly.
5. 6. Coast-wide, 147 to 114 anglers viewed the fish as smaller, and 132 to 79, they said that they caught fewer per hour. Only in NJ did anglers report catching both larger fish and more per hour. Considering that a strong majority of the anglers saw smaller fish and fewer of them, you have to wonder what some folks meant by improved quality, so we may need to reword the question to better define "quality" next year.
6. About half the anglers surveyed had an unchanged interest in guided trips, while those whose level of interest in a guided trip had changed were 3 times more likely not to take one. This was partially reflected in the guides' sentiments, who felt their business was worsening by a 13 to 9 margin – some guides saw it as unchanged.

### Bag and Size Limit

#### Questions #

1. One of the really important goals of the survey is to measure the attitude of our membership about appropriate directions for future striped bass management. This question asked if the public should be able to keep a small striper for personal consumption. We specifically defined small as 20 – 28 inches, and the answer was yes, by a 3 to 1 margin. The states where fisheries managers have stuck by higher sizes for the public had only 2 to 1 margins, but still it was a strong majority, even in those states.
2. By almost 2 to 1, those who felt the public should be able to keep a small striper to eat, thought it should be *instead of* rather than *in addition to* a large striper. This was a checking question to #1 above, and the results were almost identical.
3. This question was designed to hear from those who oppose recreational anglers keeping small stripers, what they felt the minimum size should be. The results were spread between 28 and 40 inches, but were quite evenly spread. I noticed that a lot of folks who said that recreational anglers should keep only large stripers then said that they would like to see a slot limit. Since most anglers put a low minimum size as the bottom of the slot limit, I think this means that anglers are in favor of harvesting a smaller fish by an even greater margin than the 3 to 1. Some just prefer to do it via a slot limit. Again this is an area to improve on with next year's survey.
4. 7. A slot limit was approved of by about a 2.5 to 1 margin, but the desired slot sizes were all over the place. I personally had always thought of the slot as a way to take the harvest from non-breeding size fish while still allowing a true trophy to be landed. I was surprised, though, to learn that many anglers actually wanted quite a large slot fish. For instance the most popular upper size for the slot was for 29 or greater inches. The most popular overall slot size was 20-26 inches, though 24 – 30 was a close second. Many of the southern anglers just wanted a lower minimum size, and said no to a slot because it was unnecessarily complicated.
8. Of the 341 surveys that we recorded, only 1 person wanted to shift the entire commercial catch into an increased public bag limit. On average, recreational fishermen wanted to put 75% of the current commercial quota into expanding the conservation buffer, rather than just switch those fish to recreational harvest as our detractors claim. We would add that we would save even more fish by stopping commercial fishing because the illegal cash sales of striped bass would dry up very quickly once commercial fishing was halted and the sale of all wild bass made illegal. This sentiment should show skeptics that once gamefish status is achieved, the recreational approach would **not** be to kill all of the fish possible, but to be conservative and allow for a high quality public fishery.
9. In terms of possible future advocacy directions, the question about buying out the commercial fishery is very important. There is a strong school of thought that believes adding this approach to our current action plan would make the job much quicker. We haven't come out with a position yet as to whether or not we would welcome that approach, but our members favored a buyout by a 3 to 1 margin.
10. To my surprise, our members also voted 2 ½ to 1 that the stamp should continue after the commercial fishery is bought out for conservation and law enforcement work.

## **Guides Section**

I was happy to see that almost 30 guides responded to our survey. The guides tended to see their business as having worsened a little – some a great deal. The guide's view of what was important to their clients was varied, and they were only slightly less likely to make new investments than they had been. Many, though, expressed apprehension about the direction that they have seen the striper fishery moving in the last year or two. As in the quality of fishing issue, the most pessimistic guides were at the southern and northern ends of the striper's range.

### Summary –

I think that we now have some valuable insight into how this fishery is viewed coast-wide, and in what directions our members would like to see the fishery move. If I had to sum it up, I would say that membership would like to see us lay off the big breeders, and give those that want it, a small striper for the table. They would turn a small portion of the commercial quota into an increased public bag limit, but they want most of the commercial quota reserved for conservation. SF members are willing to pay a fee to buy out the commercial fishery, and many would be happy for that fee to continue if it is used to benefit the quality of striped bass fishing.

Additional Comments – on the attached spread sheet, Tab #2 is a list of many of the additional comments received.

They make for some interesting reading and give you a flavor for the opinions of our members. There are some very good management suggestions there too.

We encourage your comments for improving any aspect of the survey, and will try to improve our survey before next season. We thank all of the participants for their time and efforts.

Brad Burns

~



instead of	25	3	42	13	22	19	17	1		12	1	1			156
in addition to	5	1	10	8	7	10	29	3	2	8	3	2			88
<b>3. Keep only large</b>															
yes	5	4	25	13	19	20	15			3		1			105
No	31	3	47	19	26	26	42	4	2	18	5	1			224
<b>4. Minimum size of large</b>															
28		1	10	4	6	9	5			2		1			38
32	3		8	4	3	6	5								29
36	2	2	9	3	5	5	5								31
40				2	1	2				1					6
<b>5. Rec slot limit</b>															
yes	27	5	53	17	35	29	42	2	1	13	4	2			230
no	7	2	19	13	8	17	15	2	1	6	1				91
<b>6. Minimum/max slot</b>															
18-19 min	5	2	23	3	6	4	5		1	7	3	1			60
20-22 Min	19	2	21	8	16	6	15			2		1			90
23-26 Min	7		19		6	7	17	2			1				59
24-26 Max	12	2	16	1	8	3	6			3					51
27-28 Max	7		9	7	7	5	19	1		5	2	2			64
29 or greater max	6	1	22	5	18	8	10	1	1	1	2				75
<b>7. Slot preference</b>															
20-26	19	5	21	1	11	6	10			8	1				82
22-28	6		9	10	10	6	17		1	3	1	1			64
24-30	2		20	2	13	12	16	2		2	2	1			72
<b>8. % conversation</b>															
0%						1									
25%	5		8	5	7	6	8				1				40
50	5	3	20	5	14	11	14	2	1	6	2	2			85
75	12	1	18	11	8	12	14	2	1	9	1				89
100%	12	1	22	6	13	10	16			5	1				86
<b>9. Bass stamp for buyout</b>															
yes	26	6	60	21	38	36	33	3		17	5	2		1	248
no	8	2	15	11	7	10	26	1	2	4					86
<b>10. Stamp continue</b>															
end	4	2	14	7	12	6	11			5					61
continue	15	4	37	12	25	18	20	3		12	5	2		1	154
<i>Guides Section</i>															
<b>1. Business changed</b>															
worsened considerably		1	1		1		1			1		1			6

worsened a little	3		1		1	1	1								7
not changed	2		1	3											6
imporved somewhat	1		3			1	1	1			1				8
improved a great deal			1												1
<b>2. Keeping bass</b>															
not very important	4	1	5	1	2		1			1					15
somewhat important	2		3				1	2							8
very important				1			1			1		1	1		5
<b>3. Catch lots of bass</b>															
not very important															
somewhat important	5	1	4	2	2	1	2	1							18
very important	1		4			1	1			1	1	1			10
<b>4. A large bass</b>															
not very important	1														1
somewhat important	1		6	1		2	1					1			12
very important	4	1	2	2	2		2	1		1					15
<b>5. Many or big most important</b>															
big fish	2	1	2	2		1	1			1	1				11
many fish	2		5		1	1	1	1		1		1			13
<b>6. New investments</b>															
yes	1		5			1	2	1			1	1			12
no	5	1	2	2	2	1	1			1					15

### **Personal angler comments**

1. Seen fishery recover, plateau, head down, and has seen a drop in the industry associated with these changes.
2. Better to take a few small bass than concentrate on large ones.
3. Bait fishing should be circle hooks only
4. Go back to 36" min. population is heading back to collapse
5. Regulations in all states should be the same.
6. Field agencies should have no vote on ASMFC
7. Being forced out of the guiding business in NH because of deteriorating quality of fishing for large fish in shore.
8. More bait free areas, one eel can hurt or kill several stripers.
9. End commercial killing at all costs including party boats that target stripers. Get rid of treble hooks and kill tournament
10. End all harvest until fishery is 100% recovered.
11. End commercial bass fishing, keep the minimum sizes up, and there would be plenty of stripers of all sizes available
12. Along with outlawing commercial striper fishing outlaw all of the medieval methods of killing them like umbrella rigs etc
13. Release all fish over 34 inches. **Many similar comments for fish of different sizes ie 36, 40 etc.**
14. Lots of problems unforeseen in opening the EEZ, don't.
15. Fishing was so bad for this guide that he couldn't tell customers to come in good conscience.
16. The commercial fishery for striped bass has none of the historical qualities often attributed to commercial fishing. Commercial striped bass fishing is largely a corruption of recreational fishing comprised of those fishing for beer money.
17. We need better enforcement of regulations especially commercial.
19. Would gladly give up my personal catch to improve the fishery.
20. No special bag limits for 6 packs.
21. Limited number of tags required for killing of big fish.
22. Black market under the table sale is totally out of control.
23. Decrease in average size started two years ago, crash is around the corner. We shouldn't kill only large fish.
24. Poaching is out of hand, we need better enforcement.
25. Management process stinks, should not allow trebles on artificials and J hooks for bait.
26. Need to cull out more small fish and kill less big ones. **Many more comments similar.**
27. Fattest bass in years.
28. Striped bass are genuine gamefish and should be treated as such.
29. In CT released over 200 stripers none over 28 inches.
30. Wild stripers are not a safe item to eat and should not be sold.
31. Guiding business for stripers is down, albies up, quality of fishing is the difference.
32. Opposed to fees because states rob them for the general fund.
33. Maine anglers release breeders only so they can be killed commercially in MA, it is wrong. Regs. should be the same coastwide.
34. Only circle hooks for bait fishing.
35. Fishtraps suck.
36. Maine guiding business hurt by lack of larger stripers.
37. More money should go for enforcement.
38. Stop commercial fishing, but don't turn it into recreational catch.
39. Large fish are hard to find. Would support a slot if science agrees.
40. Make it a gamefish.
41. Do whatever it takes to preserve the fish, especially the larger ones. We should eat the smaller ones. Several like
42. I have seen the small towns in NJ where I grew up benefit from the striper fishing, especially after labor day. Commercial fishing wrecks whatever fishery it touches and we need to keep it out of striper fishing in NJ and get rid of it
43. Many comments about would pay to get rid of commercial bass fishing, but don't trust govt. so voted no, or would vote if 100% guaranty funds would go nowhere but to bass conservation.
44. Several folks said that no one should eat striped bass because of diseases.
45. Charters should have the same rules as recs.
46. I like our NJ rules.
47. Stripers are overfished.
48. Do away with spring trophy striper season in Bay.
49. Outlaw bridge gaffs.
50. MD resident writes -as have others - that DNR is lying about striped bass population to keep up commercial quotas.
51. Put some of the buyout money into striped bass aquaculture.
52. Poaching needs to be more accurately reflected in bycatch.
53. Guide from Virginia writes more fish, but skinny and diseased. Must stop commercial fishing or he will be out of bus