

Stripers Forever 2003/2004 Survey Analysis

Total Surveys

In 2003 we compiled 341 surveys compared to 275 in 2004. Last year we sent out the survey twice, a move that produced many additional completed questionnaires. We did not make a second mailing this year because Stripers Forever is currently involved in many additional projects and because the initial mailing produced a good representative sample of responses from members all along the Atlantic Coast.

The Answers

1. We received completed questionnaires from every state -- Maine to North Carolina -- with the greatest number coming from the Northeast. Massachusetts was first with 66 responses, followed by New Jersey with 56. The geographic spread of responses was very similar to last year.
2. The answers to this question mirrored the 2003 response – two-thirds of the membership fishes from boats at least 75 percent of the time, while one-third are predominately shore fishermen.
3. The response from this year and from 2003 shows that 60-plus percent of our responding members have more than 10 years of experience fishing for striped bass.
4. The answers to this quality of fishing question are as subjective as the question itself. For example, some members who think their fishing has “Improved Somewhat” also say they caught larger but fewer stripers. Still, in the 2003 survey, 43 percent felt that fishing for stripers was improved somewhat or greatly, and only about 30 percent felt that it was worse. In 2004, those numbers reversed -- about 43 percent felt that fishing was worse while only 33 percent saw an improvement.
5. About 50 percent of the 2004 respondents felt that their average catch was smaller, while only 44 percent felt that way in 2003.
6. This question relating to the number of stripers caught per hour of fishing produced a very disturbing response, but given all the warning signs, that was certainly not unexpected. In 2004, 51 percent of respondents said they caught fewer or many fewer fish while only 18 percent caught more. In 2003, those numbers were 39 percent for fewer and 24 percent for more! That would seem to indicate a steep decline in catch rates from one year to the next.
7. The interest in guided trips has – thankfully -- not changed much in the last year. About 60% of respondents in both years said that their inclination to take a guided trip was the same or greater.
8. The number of anglers who felt that a small fish should be allowed for food dropped slightly in 2004, but could be well within a margin for error. This question, like number four, is subjective. Many respondents who said no to

allowing a small fish said yes to a small fish slot limit. We take this to mean that they do not want a blanket lower size, but think it is good policy to shift some harvest from large fish to smaller ones.

9. A two to one majority of respondents to this question chose “Instead Of” in both the 2004 and 2003 surveys. Not surprisingly, the question generates very regionalized results. Anglers in states like Maine that already allow either a small fish or a trophy fish are very much in favor of that practice. Maryland and other states with similar regulations are very much in favor of allowing a small fish, and by a two to one margin think it should be in addition to a large one.
10. Twenty-eight inches is the most popular minimum size for anglers who do not want any harvest of smaller stripers.
- 11, 12. Those in favor of a slot limit increased from 70 to 80 percent this year. We think this increase reflects concern among anglers about the over-harvesting of larger fish, a practice which reflects the current Atlantic States Marine Fishery Commission (ASMFC) management thinking. What anglers feel is the proper slot size, though, is a matter of conjecture and that is why Stripers Forever does not choose sides on this particular issue. We do know that virtually all of our members are more concerned with doing what is best for the species. We think the ASMFC should be managing stripers from that perspective and not with the obvious goal of keeping commercial harvesters and pin hookers happy with their plunder.

The single most popular slot size is 24-30 inches, but by only a small margin over 22-26 inches.

13. The mission of Stripers Forever – to achieve game fish status for the striped bass -- is frequently misconstrued (usually deliberately) by naysayers who are convinced that all we want is to take for our own all the fish caught by the commercial fishery. The results of the 2004 survey show just how wrong-headed that interpretation is. About 50 percent of the survey respondents want between 75 and 100 percent of the commercial catch reserved for conservation; most of the rest of the respondents want the conservation number to be about 50 percent. Of the 275 survey respondents, only one wanted the entire commercial quota given to recreational anglers, and we’ll bet that he simply didn’t understand the question.

14, 15. The concept of using a stamp to buy out the commercial fishery stayed consistent with around 74 percent of respondents supporting the idea. The percentage of those who feel anglers should continue to purchase a stamp in order to fund management and conservation of stripers increased slightly from about 71% to 80%.

Guides Section

About 40 percent of the guides who completed both the 2004 and 2003 questionnaires feel that their businesses have slipped some in recent years. Fortunately, the guiding industry is more or less holding up, though many guides agree that it has become increasingly difficult to find large stripers for their clients.

Other Comments

We received a variety of comments that can be read on the tabs of the spreadsheets posted to our website at www.stripersforever.org. Several comments stand out: put an end to the commercial fishery; use more “fish-friendly” tackle like circle hooks; and adopt management measures to take the pressure off larger striped bass.

somewhat important	5	1	3	1		3			1	14
very important	1		2	3	1	2	2		1	12
20. A large bass										
not very important	2		2			1				5
somewhat important	3		3	1	1	2	1			11
very important	1	1		3		1	1		1	9
21. Many or big most important										
big fish	2	1		2		2				7
many fish	2		5	1	1	2	2		1	14
22. New investments										
yes	2		3	2		2	1			10
no	3	1		3	1	2	1		1	13

Personal angler comments

better management of forage species

stiffer penalties for illegal sale

outlaw unsporting methods like wire line and umbrella rigs

circle hooks for bait, barbless for artificial

John Cole for sainthood.

release fish between 32 and 44 inches in size

"The romanticism of the commercial fishery as a pastoral occupation that is founded in our cultural history bears no current realities of our fisheries, our fishermen, or our economies."

slot for the bottom license w/tags for larger fish to limit their catch

better enforcement

the high minimum size forces me to kill a fish larger than I want if I want to eat one

a number of calls for weekly or seasonal limits per angler

schoolies taste better

a number of MA anglers called for the removal of Diodati, only state where we are hearing that about one person

no saltwater license, but likes the striper stamp idea

a single fish of any size as a bag limit

continues to mistrust the stock assessment models

like the slot but sizes should be reviewed annually and set by biologists...several like this

guides and mates should not keep fish,

bag limit of 1 fish per day

Guides comments

#s of smaller fish are dropping off, % of larger fish is up, fly rodders having a hard time catching fish since there a had more big fish when size limit was 36 inch min.

Striped bass is a very important gamefish and they should not be caught commercially.

MA commercial season cleans out large striper fishing in certain areas

lay off the big fish

one guide on Nantucket said that cash sales to restaurants are rampant and that real commercials don't bother w current management of striped bass has ruined the inshore fly fishing guiding business

CT guides says that 5 years ago we averaged 30 a day, now lucky to get 10

MD guide says that all commercial fishing for everything should be banned in chesapeake bay.

Go to mandatory circle hooks