



Stripers Forever 2005 Annual Fishing Survey Analysis

Total Surveys

In 2005 we compiled 459 surveys, the largest number since we started the survey in 2003. We had double digit returns from most states from NC to ME, and approximately 100 each from MA and NJ. We feel that this year's survey has produced a good representative sample of angler sentiments from fishers all along the Atlantic Coast.

The complete Excel spreadsheet of survey responses is posted to our website. Find "2005 Fishing Survey" under News and Announcements on the right side of the home page www.stripersforever.org.

Here is a summary of the answers by question #.

2, 3. About 70% fish predominately from boats, and about 30% fish mostly from shore. About 75% of those who responded have more than 10 years of experience fishing for striped bass.

4, 5, 6. The quality of fishing question, #4, is quite subjective. For example, some members selected "Improved Somewhat" and went on to answer the size and frequency of catch questions much the same as respondents who said their fishing was "Much Worse". Still, in the 2003 survey, 43 percent of the anglers indicated that fishing for stripers was improved, versus about 30 percent who felt it was worse – note that not all anglers perceive a change either positive or negative, so positive and negative sentiment will not equal 100%. In 2004, those numbers reversed - about 43 percent felt that fishing was worse while only 33 percent saw an improvement. In 2005, 43% again regarded fishing as worse, and 35% felt that it improved.

The 44% of respondents in 2003 who felt the average size of the stripers they caught was declining grew to 50% in 2004 and 55% in the 2005 survey.

In 2004, 51 percent of respondents said they caught fewer or many fewer fish. This number was up from 39% in 2003. For 2005 this number came in at 44%. While this was a slight improvement over 2004, it is largely attributable to the number of very small stripers from the huge 2003 year- class that was available in 2005.

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7. The interest in guided trips has – thankfully – remained constant in all three years that we have done the survey, ranging from 58 to 60% of respondents being the same or more likely to book a guided trip.

8, 9, 10. The percentage of anglers who felt that a small fish should be allowed for food was at a three year high of 75%. The responses to this question can be a little confusing. Many respondents who said no to allowing a small fish said yes to a small fish slot limit; this would seem to indicate that they liked the idea of small rather than a large fish being taken for food, but did not want a blanket reduction in size. We feel from both the answers to the survey, and the comments on tab 2 of the spreadsheet, that there is strong and increasing sentiment that we should be putting a lot less pressure on the large fish. A 66% majority of respondents – the same as 2003 and 2004 - think that this smaller fish should be allowed instead of, as opposed to in addition to, a large fish, although there are regional differences in that opinion. All states south of New York felt that small fish should be allowed in addition to a large one. Twenty-eight inches remained the most popular minimum size for anglers who do not want any harvest of smaller stripers.

11, 12. Support for a slot limit to take the pressure off large breeders remained very high at 75%. Votes were quite evenly split, though, on what the slot should be, with 20-26 being the most popular, but by just 5 votes over 24-30.

13. The mission of Strippers Forever – to achieve game fish status for the striped bass -- is frequently challenged by those who claim that all we want is to take for ourselves all the fish presently caught by the commercial fishery. The results from all three of our annual member surveys show just how wrong-headed that interpretation is. About 85% of those surveyed want at least half of the commercial catch reserved for conservation, and not to be assigned to increased recreational bag limits.

14, 15. The popularity of using a stamp to buy out the commercial fishery increased slightly to 77% of the respondents, and about 72% of those who favor the stamp thought it should continue after the buyout to pay for management and enhancement of the fishery.

Guides Section

In 2005 we received surveys from 59 guides, the largest number since we started the survey in 2003. The number of guides who felt that their business had improved was almost exactly equal to the number that felt it had slipped. As in 2004, 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 second tab of the spreadsheet that is posted to our website at www.stripersforever.org. Comments that were seen repeatedly included: 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.