



Stripers Forever 2006 Annual Fishing Survey Results

Total Surveys

In 2006 we compiled 445 surveys, comparable to those responding in 2005. 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 again produced a good representative sample of sentiments from fishers all along the stripers migratory range. We will be sending this information to the press and to fishery policy makers everywhere. We hope that you personally will use it, and offer it to your local club or fishing organization to help us advocate for the goal of coast wide striped bass game fish.

The complete Excel spreadsheet of survey responses is posted to our website at this address <http://www.stripersforever.org/Home/I008F3494>. This year we have added another shorter and more graphic sheet entitled Comparative Summaries and Graphs. It can be found on the same web page as the spread sheet of survey responses.

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. The "quality" of fishing question, #4, remains quite subjective. In 2006 43% of the anglers indicated that the quality of fishing for stripers was worse or much worse, while only 36% felt that it was improved - note that not all anglers perceive a change either positive or negative, so positive and negative sentiment will not equal 100%. This was the same percentage as in 2005. It is a reversal from 2003, the year of our first survey when the numbers were reversed and 44% felt the fishery was still improving. 2006 is also the third straight year of negative sentiment.

5. 58% of respondents in 2006 felt the average size of the stripers they caught was declining compared to only 21% who felt it was increasing. This is by far the most negative comment we have had on size of fish. We had several of the best known Massachusetts guides send in very negative comments about the effect that the commercial striped bass fishing season has on their local fishing areas, and on the trend in quantities of large bass in general.

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6. In 2006 47% of respondents said they caught fewer or many fewer fish while only 22% reported catching more fish. This is a margin of more than 2 to 1 and is even more startling when you consider the giant 2003 year class that has provided a lot of small fish.

7. Last year we wrote that “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”. This was again the case in 2006.

8, 9, 10. The percentage of anglers who felt that a small fish should be allowed for food was 73%, roughly comparable to 2005. When put together with our question on slot limits it is clear that many of our members understand that the brunt of the harvest on long-lived stripers should not be born by older, breeding-age fish. While we do not have an exact calculation, we know that many of the 27% who opposed the taking of a small bass are so concerned about the deterioration of the striped bass resource that they want to sharply curtail the harvest of stripers of all sizes until the numbers recover.

11, 12. Support for a slot limit to take the pressure off large breeders was at 74%, in line with last year’s 75%. Votes were quite evenly split, though, on what the slot should be, with 20-26 being the most popular at 123 votes, though the two other slots each received 99. A slot limit to take the pressure off large breeders was supported by 76 to 31 in MA , 71 to 16 in NJ, and was favored in every state in our survey. Survey after survey from anglers and guides cried out to remove the pressure from large stripers.

13. The mission of Stripers 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 four of our annual member surveys show just how erroneous that interpretation is. For the fourth year in a row 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. In 2006 33%, up sharply from 28% in 2005, want 100% - all – of the commercial quota to be set aside for conservation and none added to the recreational catch.

14, 15. The popularity of using a stamp to buy out the commercial fishery increased again to include 80% of the respondents. We had several comments like “a slot limit and stamp sale to buyout the commercial fishery, it’s about time”. We just have to get the benefits of this idea across to the fishery managers and the politicians who make these policy decisions.

Guides Section

In 2006 we received surveys from 47 guides. The number of guides who felt that their business had slipped somewhat was double the number that said it had improved. A number of guides felt that they had lost some of their more serious regular customers because they were unable to find large fish as consistently as in the past. This is a terrible injustice. We are convinced that if there were no commercial fishery for striped bass, that the quality of fishing would be better now than at any time in the past, and that there wouldn’t be enough guides to fill the demand.

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.

18 and 28 inches in length) per day for personal consumption.

yes	47	9	77	33	24	24	68	10	4	16	8	3	323
no	7	3	31	12	15	17	22	3	4	2	4	1	121

9. If you answered yes to #8, should this smaller fish be allowed instead of, or in addition to, a bass of some larger size?

instead of	40	7	51	19	19	17	29	4	2	10	2	3	203
in addition to	6	2	23	14	5	7	31	6	1	6	6		107

10. If you answered no to #8 what should the minimum size be?

28	3		15	5	5	2	11	2	4	2	1		50
32	2		9	4	6	8	2	1		1			33
36		3	5	1	2	3	4				1		19
40	1		1	2									4

10. Do you think we should have a slot limit for recreationally caught stripers?

yes	50	8	76	30	21	23	71	11	4	16	11	3	324
no	3	4	31	16	17	17	16	2	4	2	1	1	114

12. Slot preference

20-26	37	4	34	6	8	2	15	1	2	6	7	1	123
22-28	8	1	21	10	5	8	29	4	2	8	2	1	99
24-30	5	3	18	14	8	13	27	6		2	2	1	99

13. When commercial fishing is ended, what percentage of the current commercial quota should be saved from harvest as a conservation buffer? The rest would be used to liberalize the recreational harvest. 25%, 50%, 75%, 100%

0%	1												1
25%	8	4	13	12	2	5	10	2		4	2		62
50	11	3	24	13	14	8	31	5	3	6	3		121
75	18	1	22	5	6	10	16	5	4	5	2	3	97
100%	17	3	41	14	13	16	23	2	1	2	4	1	137

14. Would you favor legislation that creates a striped bass stamp costing between \$10.00 and \$25.00 per year with the funds earmarked to buyout the current commercial fishery?

yes	41	7	87	34	33	36	63	7	5	16	11	4	344
no	12	5	18	9	6	4	24	5	3	2	1		89

15. If you answered yes to #14, should this stamp program end after a fixed number of years, or should the fee continue to fund enforcement and striped bass enhancement programs?

end	11	1	19	8	7	9	17	1	2	3	2	2	82
continue	27	6	67	26	26	27	44	6	3	13	9	2	256

16. My personal comments on striped bass management that you have not covered are? See sheet #2.

Guides Section

17. How has your guiding business for striped bass changed because of the fishery in the last five years?

worsened considerably	1		1				2		1		1	1	7
worsened a little	3		7	2	1		1						14
not changed	3		5	1	1	1	2			1	1		15

improved somewhat	1	3			3					7		
improved a great deal		2			2					4		
18. How important is keeping a striped bass to your clients?												
not very important	6	7	1		1		1		1	18		
somewhat important	1	8	1	1	5		1		1	18		
very important		3	1	1	5				1	11		
19. How important to your clients is catching a lot of stripers per trip?												
not very important		1			1					2		
somewhat important	4	7		2	5					18		
very important	4	10	2		6		1	1	2	1	27	
20. How important is catching a really large striper to your clients?												
not very important		1			2					3		
somewhat important	5	9	1		5			1	1	22		
very important	3	8	2	2	1	4		1	1	1	23	
21. Which is more important to my clients, catching big fish or catching a lot of fish?												
big fish	3	7	1	1	1	3		1		1	18	
many fish	3	8	1	1		8			1	1	1	24
22. I am more likely than I was 5 years ago to make new investments in equipment for my striped bass guiding business?												
yes	4	9		1	3						17	
no	4	4	3	1	1	7		1	1	2	24	
23. My comments as to how the management of striped bass is affecting my guiding business:											See Sheet 2.	

Personal angler comments

no stripers between 28 and 40 inches should be killed

constantly see immigrants poaching small stripers

fishes all over ma ri, bait shop owners say number of big fish is down

the commercial fishery kills too many large bass

would pay for a separate stamp to allow keeping a bas over 40 inches

need a slot to protect larger fish

need for better enforcement

Guide says I have lost some of my clients who want to catch one big striper not 50 small ones

Circle hooks are needed. Too many fish die from j hooks and bait.

Focus mgmt on more large fish

Should have to buy a license that would come with a limited number of tags, like deer tags.

Commercial striped bass fishing in MA has killed the number of large stripers in ME Kennebec

Guide says MA commercials are just paying their fishing expenses and can't be justified

Commercial guys are wrecking the fishing near the harbors etc.

We don't have commercial seasons for deer or geese.

Guide says that commercial fishing need MV is ruining chartering during the commercial season.

Guides says he and his clients endorse a slot limit in MA and the end of comml fishing. Killing big fish is short sig

RI says we need a slot limit and let all fish 28 to 40 inches live.

Another guide says his clients would rather catch less fish but larger ones, says too many big bass are being kille

Serious fisherman from Canada says last 3 years on Cape have been steady decline. He is disappointed.

Maine guide says clients are dropping trips because of no big fish

Most people prefer to eat a small fish and not kill a big one says Barnstable guide.

ban multiple hooks per lure and require circle hooks - many like this

a federal license should be issued that would allow anglers to fish in every state

license should have a tag for large fish, one per season

encourage fish farms to replace wild striped bass, end commercial fishing for stripers

Thinks myco is being covered up. Catches lots of infected fish, but none of them over 30", thinks they die first.

MA retired, new to surf casting has caught hundreds 20-25 inches but only one legal fish. Thinks this is unfair.

Stop killing large fish and put a limit on number of bass that can be released per day.

Very notable contributor says there should be a max not minimum size - one fish max 24 per day coastwide

Charter boat anglers should get one fish the same as shore fishermen

2006 was the worst fishing off Nauset Beach in many years

Many fishermen use the analogy of redfish in FL as success of slot limits and to leave big fish alone

C/R only until the quantities of bass come back says RI with 20 years experience.

Inshore areas have been hurt the most as the population shrinks.

Loss of slot limit in NJ is hard on charter business here says NJ guide.

MD charter captain says commercial fishing and possession on charter boats must stop. Big fish are dwindling.

We need a stamp as an enforcement tool. No stamp - heavy fine.

Many comments complaining about current management focusing on killing larger bass.

Slot limits should be the same for neighboring states

Allowing treble hooks in an essentially c/r fishery is insane.