



Stripers Forever 2008 Annual Fishing Survey Results

In 2008 we compiled 636 surveys, the greatest number since we began in 2003. We had double digit returns from most states from NC to ME, with more than 100 each from MA, NJ and for the first time ME. We believe that this year's survey has again produced a good representative sample of sentiments from fishers all along the striper's migratory range. We will be sending this information to the press and to fishery policy makers everywhere. We hope that you will use it personally, and that you share it with your local club or fishing organization, to advocate for the goal of coast-wide striped bass game fish.

The complete Excel spreadsheet of *Survey Totals* is also attached to this same web page. Another document entitled *Key Comparisons* can be found there also along with the actual survey that was sent out.

Here is a summary of the answers by question #.

2, 3. About 69% of respondents fish predominately from boats, and about 30% mostly from shore. 79% have more than 10 years of experience fishing for striped bass.

4. In 2008 59% of the anglers indicated that the quality of fishing for stripers was worse or much worse – down from 43% in 2007. Only 21% felt that it was improved, compared to 34% in 2007. It should be noted that the meaning of “quality” is quite subjective. Some anglers said that the “quality of stripers fishing had improved greatly” but then said that they were catching fewer and/or smaller fish. Clearly, “quality of fishing” means a lot more to some fishers than either the quantity or size of the fish being caught.

5. As to the size of the stripers being caught, the majority (58%) reported the average size of the stripers they caught was declining, compared to a statistically similar 57% in 2007.

6. In 2007 we reported this “The greatest statistical change in 2007 concerned the number of fish caught per hour. 48% of respondents said they caught fewer or many fewer fish per hour in 2007. This is the third straight year that this number has increased.” In 2008 the percentage of anglers reporting poorer catches jumped to a new low of 66%, and the trend was the same all up and down the East Coast.

7. The number of our members who said that they were as or more inclined to take guided trips dropped a little to 51% from the historic range of 58-60%. This should be another reason for fishery managers to take this situation very seriously.

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8, 9, 10. 77% of responding anglers felt that a small fish should be allowed for food. Of those, 67% felt that it should be offered instead of a larger fish. These were new highs for both percentages. Along with the many comments we received about curtailing the killing of large fish – tab #2 on the spread sheet – we take this as a clear message that with every passing season more and more of our members understand that far too many large breeding size female bass are being taken. The question is when will the fishery managers see the light! Many respondents commented that they felt no bass of any size should be taken until the population had recovered to better levels.

11, 12. Support for a slot limit to take the pressure off large breeders crept up two percentage points to 76%, a new high. Members in every state widely favored a slot limit in our survey. Many respondents cited the success of Texas and Florida, which employ both slot limits and game fish status to manage red drum and snook.

13. The mission of Stripers Forever – to achieve game fish status for striped bass -- is frequently challenged by those who claim that our real goal is to take for recreational anglers all the fish presently caught by the commercial fishery, the “quota grab” accusation. The results from every one of our five annual member surveys show just how erroneous that interpretation is. 87% of those surveyed want at least 50% of the commercial catch reserved for conservation – same as in 2007 - and not assigned to increased recreational bag limits.

14, 15. Using a stamp to buy out the commercial fishery was favored by 74% of respondents, the same as in 2007.

Guides Section

In 2007 we received surveys from a record 62 guides. Unfortunately an increasing number of them are reporting that their businesses are being adversely affected by the smaller number of striped bass generally available. Fishery managers are you listening? These are good, sustainable jobs that with catch and release fishing can be maintained through the ups and downs of the population cycle. That is if we don't throw the fishery away on a few years of over fishing as seems to happen so often with our commercial fisheries.

Other Comments

We received a variety of comments that can be read on the second tab of the Survey Totals Excel spreadsheet. 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.

Question # and answer	ME	NH	MA	RI	CT	NY	NJ	PA	DE	MD	VA	NC	SC	totals	% of respor
Personal use angler's section															
State of the Fishery 2008															
1. What state	105	10	126	23	41	89	168	2	6	34	17	14	1	636	
2. I fish from a boat what percentage of the time.															
<25%	26	3	44	5	5	40	48		3	4				178	28
25 - 49	3		2	1	1	3	6				4			20	3
50-74	7	1	14	1	3	5	22	1	2	2	1	2		61	10
>75%	66	6	64	16	31	41	92	1	1	27	12	12	1	370	59
3. I have fished regularly for stripers for this many years.															
<5 years	8		9	4	1	3	8			3			1	37	6
5-9 years	15	2	15	4	4	14	29	1		1	3	2		90	15
>10	76	7	99	15	35	68	127	1	6	28	14	12		488	79
4. In my opinion striper fishing in the past five years has changed as follows:															
much worse	67	3	26	2	4	13	20		1	2	2	3		143	23
worse	30	4	58	9	15	33	66	2	2	19	5	3	1	247	36
same	4	1	18	9	11	18	30		1	8	5	5		110	
improved somewhat	3	2	19	2	8	18	35		2	2	5	3		99	16
improved greatly			3	1	3	6	16			2				31	5
5. The average size of the stripers that I catch now has changed as follows:															
much smaller	39	2	26	3	8	20	35		1	4	1	3	1	143	23
somewhat smaller	31	4	43	9	14	35	57	2	1	14	6	6		222	35
no change	18	2	23	8	9	18	32		3	7	6	2		128	
somewhat larger	15	2	25	3	8	14	37		1	7	4	3		119	19
much larger			5		2	2	6							15	2
6. The number of stripers I catch per hour of fishing time on the water is:															
many fewer	80	4	40	6	6	21	37		3	9	1	2		209	33
fewer	20	6	46	10	16	27	55	1		15	7	4	1	208	33
about the same	4		26	6	14	24	41	1	3	8	6	5		138	
more	1		14	1	5	14	31			1	2	3		72	11
many more			1			2	2				1			6	1
7. Because of the changes in the striped bass fishery my inclination to take a professionally guided striped bass trip has changed as follows:															
less likely	65	6	49	8	15	40	78		4	11	6	9	1	292	49
about the same	26	4	47	14	23	41	64	2	2	15	9	5		252	43
more likely	6		15	1	2	5	13			4				46	8
<i>Bag and size limit</i>															

8. Forgetting for a moment current striped bass regulations, and starting with a clean sheet, I think that recreational anglers should be able to keep at least one school striper (possibly different from state to state, but probably between 18 and 28 inches in length) per day for personal consumption.

yes	84	7	92	14	28	55	136	1	5	29	17	13	1	482	77
no	17	3	32	9	13	33	31	1	1	5		1		146	23

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	70	5	68	13	20	38	71	1	3	20	7	6		322	67
in addition to	13	2	23	2	8	18	62		2	8	10	7	1	156	33

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

28	7	1	12	4	6	14	19			1				64	
32	2	1	6	3	2	9	3	1	1	1				29	
36	2		6	2	1	7	1			1				20	
40			3				3							6	

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

yes	90	10	91	11	27	62	124	1	5	25	12	10	1	469	76
no	10		28	10	14	24	41	1	1	9	5	4		147	24

12. Slot preference

20-26	61	5	40	6	6	17	38	1	3	6	3	2	1	189	40
22-28	17	2	28	3	12	16	54			11	6	5		154	33
24-30	10	3	26	5	8	29	35		2	8	2	3		131	27

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	0
25%	10		14	3	5	9	25		1	5	2	2	1	77	14
50	27	5	27	8	12	35	62	1	2	12	11	5		207	37
75	26	2	24	5	5	22	29	1	1	6	3	1		99	18
100%	39	4	49	2	14	16	40		1	8	2	4		179	32

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	78	9	102	19	32	67	104	2	4	28	14	9		468	76
no	24	1	22	4	7	19	54		2	6	2	5	1	147	24

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	20	2	21	5	6	17	25	1	1	10	2	3		113	24
continue	59	7	79	14	27	51	79	1	3	18	12	6		356	76

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	6	3	1	3	2		1	1	1	18
worsened a little	4	4	1	1	4		2	1		18
not changed	1	6		2	4					15
imporved somewhat	1	4			3		1			10
improved a great deal							1			1
18. How important is keeping a striped bass to your clients?										
not very important	7	8	1	2	6	1	1	2	1	29
somewhat important	5	5		2	1	8		1		22
very important		4				4		1	2	11
19. How important to your clients is catching a lot of stripers per trip?										
not very important	1				2	1				4
somewhat important	6	12	1	3	5	6	1	1	1	36
very important	5	5		1		6		1	1	20
20. How important is catching a really large striper to your clients?										
not very important		3				4				7
somewhat important	5	9	1	2	3	4	1	3	2	30
very important	6	4		2	3	4		1		21
21. Which is more important to my clients, catching big fish or catching a lot of fish?										
big fish	6	6		1	3	6				22
many fish	5	9	1	3	2	7	1	4	2	35
22. I am more likely than I was 5 years ago to make new investments in equipment for my striped bass guiding business?										
yes	2	9		1	3	5	1	1		22
no	10	7	1	3	4	6		3	2	37
23. My comments as to how the management of striped bass is affecting my guiding business:									See Sheet 2.	

Personal angler comments

ME guide lost some better clients in 08 who were not content to fish for a few small fish.

We need better data to understand why fishing has dropped off.

Stop killing big breeder bass.

Guide says bad management is killing his business

I caught no striped bass at all this season

Take no stripes at all until population recovers

NY guide on Peconic flats says he has gone from seeing 200- 400 fish a day to seeing few to none

NC angler thinks recs should be able to keep one or two fish daily from EEZ

The commercial striper fishery should never have been reopened. Fishign was far better in 1990 than now.

ME guide says population crash is epic and frightening. Hard to believe that I have lived through the cycle and am back at the bottom.

I've been watching the gradual landslide of this fishery for 10 years, and this year it dropped like a stone.

Catching a striper by fly now requires a miracle

Maine guide sold his boat and will not be guiding in 2009

More calls for a tag system with licenses allowing a season not daily bag limit.

Number and size of fish caught wading on Martha's Vineyard has dropped steadily for the last 10 years says guide.

Quit guiding two years ago. Shore fishing is getting slower by the minute says MA guide.

Count the EEZ dragger catch in MA against the commercial rod and line quota until it is a game fish.

How about a bill says MA whereby all fishery managers associated with striped bass lose their jobs when this fishery collapses. It won't be long.

Long established ME guide says trips down 60%

Something has to be done.

Worst fall ever seen off Jones Inlet NY

Angler fishes the Hudson during the spring run, several trips to Cape Cod and others to LI Sound. All trips in 2008 was disappointing.

Spent three days without fish on Cape Cod and packed up and went up to the Adirondacks trout fishing

A slot fish, one large fish a year, circle hooks for bait, and things would be better....

Charter boat out of Cape May says worst spring in many years with fall only a little bit better

High line fisherman says from Cape Cod to Hatteras biomass is less than 30% of what it was in 1998

Retired in NY fishes 3 times week March until Dec in West Sound, 2006 771, 2007 405, 2008 320

Summer fishing in MD should be shut down says MD guide.

A number of MD fishers want to end the spring trophy fishery.

I fish every weekend in NJ but haven't caught a keeper in two years.

MD guide says there are very few small bass in the Bay and that he predicts they will simply run out of resident fish in the next couple of years.

ME guide says less fish each year for last 6 years despite more bait available.

Well known writer says MA commercial fishery is a grotesque charade

A number of anglers from all up and down the coast said that no striped bass should be harvested until stocks are stronger.