

THE WATCH (from page 3)

This fish stock has a Spawning Stock Biomass (SSB) of 129 million pounds, which is just hovering above the threshold of 127 million pounds, and well below the target of 150 million pounds.

Just how much larger fish are disappearing was underscored by the state-sponsored Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament that occurs every year. *The Roanoke Times* reported on February 20, 2018 that in 2012, fishermen registered 1,331 citation-size strippers, fish that weighed a minimum of 40 pounds or measured 44 or more inches. Last year, the citation count had crashed to 198, according to Lewis Gillingham, tournament chairman.

Third, this amendment sets a bad precedent. By attaching this amendment to federal financial legislation simply to accommodate a small local fishing interest, this end around the fishery management system negates informed widespread public input on a fish stock that belongs to the people of the United States of America. Local interests circumventing national fishing law is a recipe for disaster as was the case with summer flounder off the coast of New Jersey and red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico. And, who in New England can forget the political pressure that was placed upon managers to fish cod to almost extinction.

In 2017 Rep. Zeldin sponsored H.R. 1195 - Local Fishing Access Act which did not pass. This bill would have authorized NOAA to permit and regulate Atlantic striped bass fishing in the Block Island Sound Transit Zone. The transit zone is the area of federal waters within Block Island Sound, located between areas south of Montauk Point, New York, and Point Judith, Rhode Island. The appropriations bill Rep. Zeldin tagged with his amendment refers to this same transit zone.

It's a federal fishing law for a reason

Fishing for striped bass is prohibited in the EEZ since the Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act which was approved in 1984. The Act made striped bass fall into a unique federal-state interjurisdictional management category, now managed by states through the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, but also with management backed by the Federal government.

No doubt the Federal Government is in charge of striped bass. The Act states, "The Secretary shall promulgate

regulations governing fishing for Atlantic striped bass in the exclusive economic zone that the Secretary determines – (1) are consistent with the national standards... (2) are compatible with the Plan and each Federal moratorium in effect... (3) ensure the effectiveness of State regulations...; and (4) are sufficient to assure the long-term conservation of Atlantic striped bass populations."

Rhode Island and Massachusetts played a big role in striped bass fisheries management. In 1981 Senator John Chafee (R-RI) became an advocate for striped bass obtaining millions in funding to conduct important research on the dwindling species which led (in 1984) to Representative Gerry Studds' (R-MA) sponsoring the Striped Bass Conservation Act in the House.

Let's take action

My personal point of view: Rep. Zeldin's amended bill is a special interest bill that promotes the self-interests of New York charter and party boats. They will do harm to large premium breeders which in turn could damage the fishery for all. The bill also sets a bad precedent for fishery managers, reinforcing that states and regions should look out for themselves rather than adhere to strong federal fishing laws that safeguard the fish in the interest of all Americans.

So I say, let's make some noise on this one and write our U.S. Senators and Representatives as this is just the tip of the iceberg on weakening the law so that special interests can overfish.

A lot more than fishing gear at the Fishing Show

The New England Saltwater Fishing Show was a big success. The three day show had a vibe that I have not felt in recent years. Show attendance and vendor sales were great as usual, but this year there was an unusually high level of excitement about the upcoming fishing season.

Steve Medeiros, president of the RI Saltwater Anglers Association (and show director), said, "Every day we had long lines at opening that stretched around the entire corridor outside the exhibition hall. We won't know exact attendance numbers until we get a final report from the Convention Center but vendors were very happy." (to page 26)

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