



NOAA Fisheries

Constituent Data Review Workshop



report by Richard Hittinger

RISAA Members Frank Blount, Michael Bucko, Ed Cook and Richard Hittinger attended 2-day workshop sponsored by NOAA to review 2008 fisheries data

I am now on my way back from two days of reviewing data in Silver Spring, Maryland with a great group of people from all up and down the east coast and Gulf coast. I am taking this opportunity to write while I am still fired up about the meeting, and I have not gotten back into my normal busy routine.

Well, the bottom line is that there are many people working for NOAA who are doing the best that they can to “estimate saltwater anglers’ overall catch and effort.” The problem that may occur is when fisheries managers use this data as the basis of management decisions we may not fully appreciate the limitations of the data. More on that later; for now let me summarize the information presented at the workshop.

2008 Constituent Data Review Workshop, May 13-14

First, since the workshop dealt with existing data, the basic principal of the current MRFSS (Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistical Survey) was described. Very simply, there are two major components of the estimate: *Effort* estimates and *Catch* estimates. Effort estimates are a measure of how many recreational fishing trips are taken every year and these estimates are collected by telephone interviews for shore and private boaters and from the for-hire survey of party and charter boats. Catch estimates are made from personal intercepts of fishers as they are leaving fishing areas or leaving boats with their catch.

OK, so the concept sounds very simple and you already knew all of this. Well, there is much more to it and I will try to explain some of the more important details. *Stick with me as long as you want or skip to the next to the last paragraph (the one with the list) for the end of the story.*

The MRFSS program has been collecting data on recreational fishing catch and effort since 1980 and there is a reasonably good level of confidence in the annual summary data, especially for coast-wide information. When reviewing the data one issue that we found was that when broken down to a state level, even

though most states showed an overall reduction in effort (number of fishing trips) during 2008 (as would be expected by the economic slow-down), **both CT and RI showed an increase in effort in 2008.** The increase for RI was about 20% more fishing trips in 2008 than in 2007. In fact, MRFSS predicted that the number of fishing trips in 2008 was the **highest annual number of trips since the survey data that we reviewed started in 1989.**

This is VERY SIGNIFICANT because the number of trips is used directly to estimate the total annual catch and harvest for each species. Therefore if this number is off, our catch and harvest numbers for fluke, for example, are off by the same proportion.

Because of this we looked into how this number was derived. The biggest component of this effort is from the private/ rental mode. This data is derived from telephone surveys of “coastal households” (416,500 for RI in 2008) to derive a “prevalence number” that indicates the fraction of households that fished at least one day during the two month reporting “wave”. A wave is a two month period (March/ April, May/ June, July/ August, September/ October, or November/ December).

During the telephone surveys the number of trips per fishing household is recorded. The prevalence number is highest in July/ August (about .04 or 4%) and much lower in November/ December (about .01 or 1%). This makes sense since more people are fishing in July and August.

Once the prevalence is determined it is multiplied by the number of coastal households times the average number of trips reported per positive household to determine the total number of trips for that wave. This is then multiplied by an “out-of-state correction factor” to arrive at a total estimated number of trips.

It is this out-of-state correction factor at 2.01 for the July/ August wave during 2008 was the largest recorded over the last five years for any wave.

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