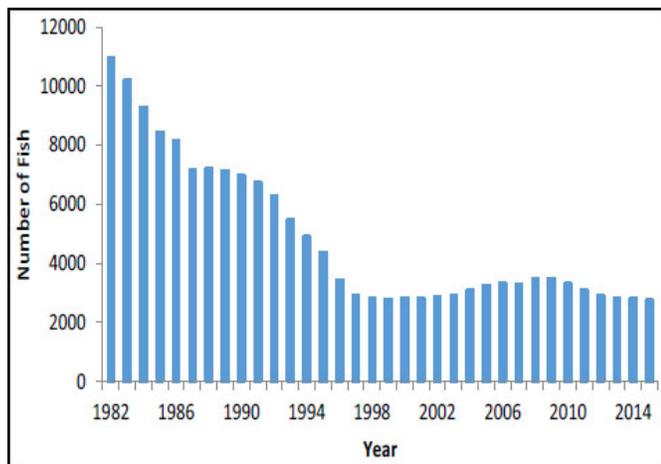


TAUTOG (from page 33)

The good news for Massachusetts fishermen is the stock is healthy and will be consistently managed between neighboring states that share some popular fishing grounds. We anticipate anglers will respond positively to maintaining the conservative rules that have prevented overfishing while making rules consistent.

In many ways the tautog management approach will become “striped bass like” meaning there will be no overarching federal plan or year-to-year tweaking of regulations. Rather, this new approach will create consistent recreational rules with our neighboring state, firm commercial quotas for each state, and create a tagging program to ensure compliance with quota limits.

By Dan McKiernan, Deputy Director



Tautog abundance of the Massachusetts-Rhode Island stock from 1982 to 2015

Tautog 101

Tautog vary in color from dark green to black with regular bars or blotches on the side. They are a stout fish with blunt noses. Their mouths are thick-lipped and have large conical teeth in front and flat crushing teeth in back. The white chin characteristic of large tautog has led many anglers to call this fish the “white chin.”

They live along the Atlantic coast from Nova Scotia to South Carolina, especially inshore waters from southern Cape Cod to Delaware. In the northern part of their range, tautog are typically within several miles of shore in water less than 60 feet deep. More southern populations can be found somewhat farther offshore.

Tautog are found in habitats with structure or cover, hovering around steep, rocky shorelines or hiding near wrecks, piers, jetties, oyster beds, and boulder-strewn bottoms. They generally stay within localized home ranges while feeding and resting. While on their summering grounds, tautog establish a “home site”, a protected spot in which they rest every night. Small tautog do not venture far from their home site during the day, but adults range more widely when feeding.

Tautog do not undertake long seasonal migrations, but tend to move inshore as water temperatures rise in spring. In the winter large groups move offshore to waters 50-150 feet deep in

areas where the bottom is covered with large boulders. Fish less than 10 inches long may remain in shallow estuaries throughout the winter. Some fish remain offshore all year, exhibiting no movement except when searching for food or cover. Tautog tend to remain in small, discrete groups during the spawning season. After reaching sexual maturity, many fish return to the same spawning area each year throughout their lives.

Juvenile and adult tautog are exclusively daytime feeders, with feeding peaks at dawn and dusk. They are usually so inactive at night that divers can easily catch them by hand, as they lie motionless on the bottom. Tautog feed upon shallow water invertebrates such as mussels, clams, crabs, shrimp, and small lobsters. Juveniles and adults living around shoreline ledges feed heavily on blue mussels; their flat grinding teeth are well suited for crushing the hard shells of such animals.

Interesting Facts

Although capable of reaching large sizes, tautog are very slow growing. The largest tautog caught in MA weighed 22 lbs. 9 oz. The largest tautog caught in RI weighed 21 lbs. 4 oz.

The RISAA Hall of Fame largest tautog was 18.90 lbs. caught by Joseph Bleczinski in 2015 by Boat (at right) and 11.20 lbs. caught by Richard Gallipeau in 1009 from Shore.



Males grow faster and live longer than females with a max age of 35 years. Fish at the 16” minimum size are about 8 years of age. Both sexes mature at 3 or 4 years of age at about 12 inches, so the minimum size provides multiple years of spawning before harvest.

By the Numbers

- **90%** Region-wide proportion of harvest taken by recreational anglers (vs. commercial)
- **49,386:** Estimated number of tautog harvested by MA recreational anglers (5-year average)
- **20,200:** Projected number of tautog to be harvested and sold in MA in 2017
- **\$4.35:** Price paid per lb. to fishermen in 2016
- **8:** Average age of a tautog at 16” minimum size
- **2.75:** Average weight (in lbs.) of a 16” tautog
- **3.74:** Average weight (in lbs.) of tautog harvested by recreational anglers (5-year average)
- **2.8 million:** Current estimate of population size in MA-RI region
- **10.9 million:** Historic high population in MA-RI region estimated in 1982