

Fishing will be a mixed bag in 2019

by
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THE 2018 SEASON

If you worked hard, you caught fish in 2018. Maybe not what you wanted to catch, but there were fish to catch.

The school striped bass fishing was awesome with a number of large fish taken at the Cape Cod Canal, at the Southwest Ledge Block Island, and with shore anglers catching keepers in the 30" range mixed in with all those smaller bass. However, the bass bite compared to recent years was way off the mark for most shore, Bay and ocean anglers.

The tautog season was great with anglers catching their limit and a number of larger fish, many over 15 pounds, being caught throughout the fall season. And, once again this year we filled out our fishing with large scup, a great black sea bass bite (particularly in spring at Buzzards Bay, off Newport and Block Island) and sea robins (which more and more anglers are keeping, cleaning and eating).

Other species such as summer flounder (fluke) fishing, large striped bass fishing in general, the false albacore run in the fall were not as robust as we would have liked to see. Offshore we fell short on the bluefin and yellowfin tuna bite but had an abundance of sharks offshore.

WHAT'S IN STORE FOR 2019?

Striped bass

Even though a new striped bass stock assessment is done, data from it will not be used for management decisions until 2020. So for 2019 striped bass regulations are expected to be the same as this year... one fish 28" or larger/person/day.

The striped bass fishing for keeper sized bass will hopefully improve in 2019 with some of the small school-size fish we have been catching in abundance maturing to keeper sized fish.

However, the stock assessment, is not good. With the biological reference points we now have, specifically the Spawning Stock Biomass (SSB), the amount of spawning fish needed in the water to insure sustainable stock levels, is



This 24.5 inch black sea bass was caught off Newport by Capt. Dave Monti using a pink bucktail on a 3-way swivel. Black sea bass are expected to be plentiful and large in 2019

showing that striped bass are overfished and overfishing is occurring.

However some fish mangers, being pressured to keep people fishing for striped bass, are thinking about lowering the amount of spawning stock biomass needed in the water to insure a sustainable fishing. This is troubling and equated by many to lowering the basketball rim to eight feet because at ten feet it is too hard to get a basket.

Data presented to anglers at a December 19, 2018 Rhode Island DEM public workshop on striped bass clearly shows fewer and fewer keeper striped bass have been caught in Rhode Island and Massachusetts over the past four years. Lowering our SSB goal to take more fish is being frowned upon by most conservation minded anglers.

Additionally, the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP), the way fish mangers measure recreational fishing harvest, has recalibrated its data due to enhanced data collection strategies. The new recalibrated data shows that over the years, anglers have been catching more fish than originally thought. In the case of striped bass, the data is showing anglers have been catching more than twice the amount of striped bass than originally thought.

So next year we will be status quo on striped bass, and the prediction is that the striped bass fishing for smaller fish will be good, but the bite for the 30, 40 and 50 pound fish will continue to decline in 2019.

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Ed Doherty of Mattapoissett with a 27 lb. striper that he caught on the Cape Cod Canal.