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## LEGISLATIVE (from page 3)

While there is not likely to be any immediate impact on Rhode Island, if the courts find in favor of New York and force the coastwide management councils to adjust allocations, it will almost certainly have a negative impact on our own state's quota unless future stock assessments improve.

### Winter Flounder

Last month I reported that a recent seminar on the state of winter flounder in state waters was not exactly encouraging regarding the future of this once popular fish, so I was quite



surprised to read in the annual RI DEM report "2018 Finfish Sector Management Plan" that, after admitting

"The stock did not meet its rebuilding target in 2014, in part due to low recruitment. In 2014, NOAA Fisheries partially implemented Framework Adjustment 50 to revise the rebuilding end date to 2023. Heavy fishing pressure, habitat degradation, and low genetic variability hinder winter flounder recovery" went on to conclude "Recommend considering changes in management to allow more liberal commercial possession limit in state waters."

It would seem to me that simple logic would lead one to just the opposite conclusion and perhaps a review of what changes in management might be more effective for conservation of this species.



## WITEK: TIME BOMB (from page 31)

The drop is largely attributable to anglers making far fewer fishing trips during the 2018 season. Thus, managers are faced with a chicken-and-egg situation. Were fewer fish caught because anglers fished less, or did anglers fish less because there weren't enough fluke to justify leaving the dock?

If the answer is the latter, the economic impact of not rebuilding the stock will probably be far more severe than the impacts of strict regulations.

Simultaneous cutbacks in both the striped bass and summer flounder harvests would probably have a significant short-term impact on the recreational fishing industry. But those aren't the only key species with problems.

### BLUEFISH TOO

For many years, bluefish have been the "Plan B," the backup species that anglers—and captains—fall back on when they can't find their primary targets. But over the last year or two, finding bluefish has often been hard.

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council will update the bluefish stock assessment this summer. If the update brings some bad news, as it very possibly will, we might find that new regulations are needed for bluefish as well.

It will take time to put any new rules into effect. However, it is very possible that we might see new, more restrictive regulations for striped bass, bluefish and summer flounder in 2020.

If that happens, the bomb that's currently ticking might well go off, and change the face of New York's recreational fishery.

However, if such regulations are needed, and *aren't* put in place, the bomb will still explode as fish populations decline to lows that haven't been seen in decades.

If that should occur, the damage will probably be far worse, and last far longer, than anything caused by new rules.

Remember the winter flounder.

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