

THE WATCH (from page 3)

RHODE ISLAND

The RIDEM Marine Fisheries Division held a "Pre-Hearing Workshop" on February 13, 2019 in Narragansett. The agenda for this meeting was split between commercial and recreational management issues at the state level for the 2019 fishing season.

As this process goes forward, these are the dates to remember:

- March 1: Public Notice will go out.
- March 11: Public Hearing will be held.
- March 18: End of public comment period
- April 1: RI Marine Fisheries Council will review hearing results

Menhaden

Due to its interest to recreational fishing, I will start with the Menhaden Fishery findings.

It was noted that both a single species and eco-based benchmark assessments are currently underway, and the results will be peer reviewed in 2019. After years of effort, the importance of menhaden as an important forage fish to many fish and wildlife species as well as its ecological niche as an important filter feeder is finally going to be considered as an alternative to the traditional management method based upon a single species.

As to the current status, the population of menhaden is that it is not overfished, and overfishing is not occurring.

The commercial landing for 2018 in Rhode Island were only 1/3 of the established quota. No specific harvest limits for commercial fishing were given for 2019, but there was a statement made by DEM representatives that an increase in quota was likely and that we may see some out of state boats engaging in this fishery in the Bay. This seems to be a reference to Maine vessels harvesting for their lobster fishery now that herring catches are very low, and an alternate bait source is needed.

Summer Flounder

The current assessment is that summer flounder is not overfished, but that *overfishing was occurring*.

Since the 2008 and 2009 recruitment estimates, the recruitment for year classes (2010-2015) have dropped significantly. The previous expectations that there might be an increase in quota could be modified by the impending stock assessment which was delayed. At the time of this meeting the only option for recreational catch was a repeat of last year's regulations.

There is also an inclusion of a **Special Shore Proposal** discussed in the last meeting of the Legislative Committee and endorsed and recommended to DEM by the RISAA Board of Directors. This would use the same shore points as allowed for the current Special Shoreline Scup fishery with a 2 fish bag and a 16" minimum. This is in recognition that current size limitations for summer flounder make it very difficult for shore anglers to catch and keep any summer flounder. This proposal is similar to one already in place in Connecticut.

Approval for this change will have to be approved by the ASMFC after an assessment of its probable impact on recreational catch.

Black Sea Bass

According to current stocks status, there are no current issues. The only option presented was for status quo on this year's regulations. There were considerable comments on the late opening (6/24) of this fishery and its impact on shore and bay and shore fisherman.

Scup

The stock status is good with an increase in quota expected. One option presented was to keep it the same as last year, and two additional options presented for changes in both the recreational general category and Party and Charter (P/C) boat category.

The first of these is a proposal to keep the current season opening of May 1, with an increase in a two month "bounty catch" of 50 fish for P/C vessels in either Sept/Oct., May/June or Sept/Oct.

The second proposal is to keep the current harvest limits but opening the season year-round from January 1/Dec. 31 for both general, special and P/C categories.

Bluefish

No changes in current regulations for 2019.

Recreational Cod

Increasing the minimum size from 22" to 23" with the current possession limit of 10 fish. This matches Federal specifications for the Georges Bank recreational cod fishery.

*If you wish to comment on or make suggestions in writing regarding any of the above or other recreational proposals for recreational season, minimum size or bag limit take notice of the March 18 deadline. Written comments can be directed to the RIDEM, Division of Marine Fisheries, 3 Fort Wetherill Rd., Jamestown, RI 02835

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