

FISH THE RIPS (from page 9)

In simplest terms, the flowing water speeds up as it hits the obstructing reef, causing the turbulence, and baitfish get trapped, knocked about and disoriented in that turbulence.

Predators, primarily striped bass, but also bluefish, that are far stronger than the baitfish and able to handle the strong current, will patrol the reef looking to pick off easy prey. Most often, these predators will cruise the water at or near the start of the visible ripline.

At peak feeding activity, there will often be fish busting on bait on the surface, making for some exciting fishing with surface lures and flies. More often, the action will be below the surface, right down at the base of the structure, and so heavy jigs and sinking fly lines will be required to reach the strike zone.

I fish the rips in the manner that I learned from Ben DeMario, by turning my boat with the stern to the ripline and stemming the tide with just enough power from the motor to keep the boat in position about 40 to 50 feet ahead of the ripline.

If fish are busting on the surface, I cast to them. If nothing is showing on the surface, then I cast parallel or quartering to the ripline, giving my lure or fly time to sink with the current flow before starting my retrieve.

When a fish is hooked, I generally shift the motor to neutral and let the boat drift back into the rip so that I don't have to fight both the fish and the current. That can be tricky - even scary - if the rip is big and nasty and the drifting boat is getting whacked by waves coming from several directions.

Almost exclusively, I use light spin tackle or fly tackle, and this equipment is not designed to fight a strong fish from a boat that's holding position in a ripping current.

After the fish is landed or released, I motor back upcurrent to resume position ahead of the ripline.

If there is little or no action, I move the boat, first to another section of the rip, and then to a different reef. This fishing is generally dependent on sufficient current flow to create the kind of rip that traps and confounds bait. If the current diminishes toward slack at the reef I'm fishing, I will likely move to another reef where the current has not yet faded.

There are folks who fish the rips differently. Some troll lures along the ripline, and a rare few anchor up and cast or drift their offerings back from a stationary boat. I don't like that method, and I'm not the only one who frowns on anyone who anchors up and hogs a section of the rip.

While predators often cruise along the rip looking for prey, it is true that certain parts of certain rips fish better (that is, are more productive) than other parts at certain stages of the tide.

Local knowledge gained over time can focus you on when and where to cast - another good reason to hire a local guide if you are new to the area or to this kind of fishing.

In general, our local reefs produce well from late May until mid-October. As the fall migration heats up, the action shifts from the reefs to the beaches as bass and blues come close to shore to feast on the mullet and peanut bunker (juvenile menhaden) that tend to hug the coastline as they, too migrate south.

WITEK: CATCH/RELEASE (from page 23)

It was an eloquent statement that did nothing to change Fote's mind; educating children, and older folks, about conservation seemed, to him, a frivolous effort compared with the serious business of killing striped bass. Thus, just a few minutes later, he tried a different tack, attempting to don the mantle of advocate for the tackle shops, saying,

"one of the things that concerns me, where we didn't put this in the Amendment [sic], a lot of people supported the circle hook thinking it wasn't going to eliminate incidental catch. I think of tackle store owners that basically cater to the surf fishermen, basically went ahead and started stocking circle hooks.

"But they also continued buying the mullet rigs. Unless you're a surf fisherman, you don't know what I'm talking about. A mullet rig is basically what you fish mullet [as bait] with. It's a split hook, you know it's a two-prong hook that you put the mullet through, and you put this two-hook on. You catch bluefish, you catch kingfish, you catch whatever is in the surf, but it does catch striped bass.

"You basically want to keep a fish, and it might be bluefish, striped bass. It does away with the mullet rigs. This is a big expense for tackle stores, because they basically stock up mullets for probably a year, so they have it in the spring, because they catch it in the fall. Now they have the hooks all set, means thousands of them in each tackle store, and they are basically going to stop selling those rigs."

It was a stretch, even for Fote, who apparently couldn't conceive of someone fishing mullet—on a mullet rig—for bluefish and kingfish, and maybe for summer flounder and weakfish as well, and just releasing any striped bass that they caught. But he managed to deliver his lines with a straight face, although they weren't particularly convincing; only New Jersey voted to oppose the mandatory release of striped bass caught on J-hooks, although the North Carolina delegation couldn't reach a decision and cast a null vote.

That doesn't mean that other Management Board members don't remain very concerned about release mortality, and the unfortunate truth is that some striped bass anglers are handing them ammunition to support their efforts to restrict the catch-and-release fishery.

Sadly, many such anglers don't realize that they are doing harm.

More than three decades ago, a new catchphrase entered the angling lexicon. It was "CPR," which stands for "**catch, photograph, release.**"

As explained in a 1989 article in Virginia's *Morning Call*, "It's called CPR. Not the life-saving cardiopulmonary resuscitation but a different form of life-saving—giving a fish a chance to swim free while, at the same time, taking it home on film.

"This form of CPR—catch, photograph and release—will hopefully catch on across the country."

CPR didn't originate in the striped bass fishery, but it quickly took root there. A 2014 post on the blog *Delaware Surf Fishing* noted that, "CPR...Catch Photo, and Release [is a] grass roots [movement] to inspire anglers to only take what you need or release what you can to promote the rebuilding of the stocks.

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