

PRE-SEASON STRIPED BASS CATCH AND RELEASE FISHING



What is Happening Tonight?

- The purpose of this scoping meeting is to obtain public comment on regulatory ideas designed to reduce the impacts of catch and release fishing on pre-spawn striped bass.
- The Department has not yet proposed regulation.
- Your comment is important – especially those concerns we have not yet heard.

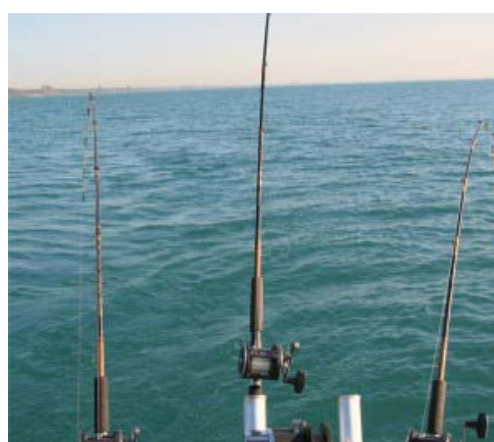
What are we presenting tonight?

- A clear definition of the problem.
- Concerns that we have heard - facts and uncertainty.
- DNR's role and position on the issue.
- Management options for public comment.

Defining the Problem:

- Commissioners and stake-holders have raised concerns about increasing catch and release effort during the ‘pre-trophy season.’
- We are defining ‘pre-trophy season’ as March 1st - the 3rd Friday in April.
- This discussion will focus on catch and release fishing in currently open areas during this ‘pre-season’ time period.

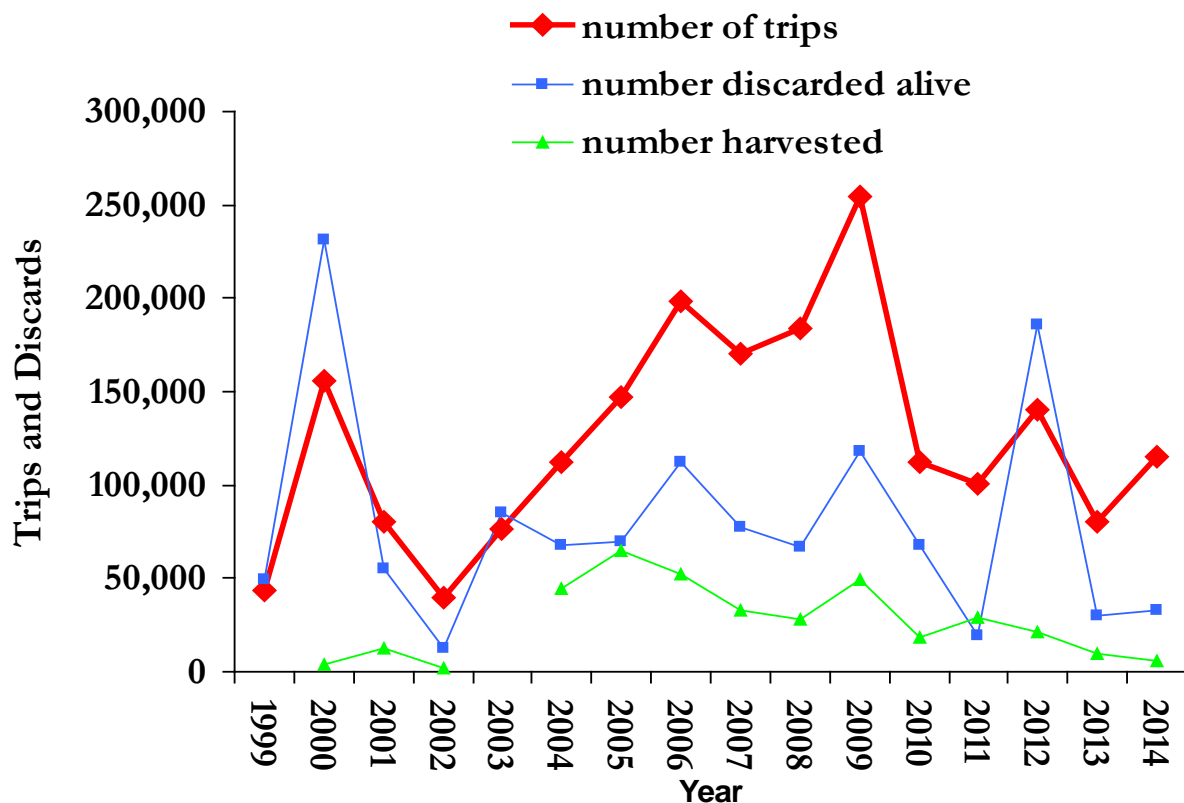
Things we have heard concerns about...



Concern we have heard:

Pre Season Catch and Release Effort is Increasing...

MRFSS estimates of the number of trips taken and number of striped bass discarded by charter boats and private/rental boats in Maryland Chesapeake Bay and Coastal Bays during March and April, 1999-2014. These estimates include 6 weeks of pre-season, and 2 weeks of trophy season.



Concern we have heard:

What about release mortality during pre-season catch and release ?

- Release mortality is influenced by physical injury and physiological stress.

Facts and Uncertainty

- No release mortality studies have been conducted on large, spawn striped bass caught trolling in Chesapeake Bay.
- If effort during pre-season catch and release continues to increase, the number of discard mortalities will also increase.
- Current science does indicate that release mortality rate is low during March and April (0.8%).
- Cool, salty water and cool air minimizes stress.
- Deep hooking is rare in trolling and in use of artificial lures.
- Some gear types (stinger hooks) and/or excessive gear use increases the chance of physical injury, deep hooking, and handling stress.

Concern we have heard:

Even if a female fish doesn't die when released, she may not spawn.

- On average between 2002 and 2014, 84% of fish harvested during the spring trophy season are female.
- On average between 2002 and 2014, approximately half of the females harvested during the spring trophy season have **not** yet spawned or are 'pre-spawn'. The pre-spawn fraction is variable – ranging from 63% in 2005, to 27% in 2014.
- Numbers above are from the DNR trophy season creel survey, and do not include pre-season information. The fraction of pre-spawn fish encountered in pre-season catch and release will be well over 75%.

Concern we have heard (Con't):

Even if a female fish doesn't die when released, she may not spawn.

- **The degree to which spawning behavior of striped bass may be disrupted due to catch and release is unknown.**
- Studies on sub-lethal effects conducted on many species in differing areas around the world show mixed results.

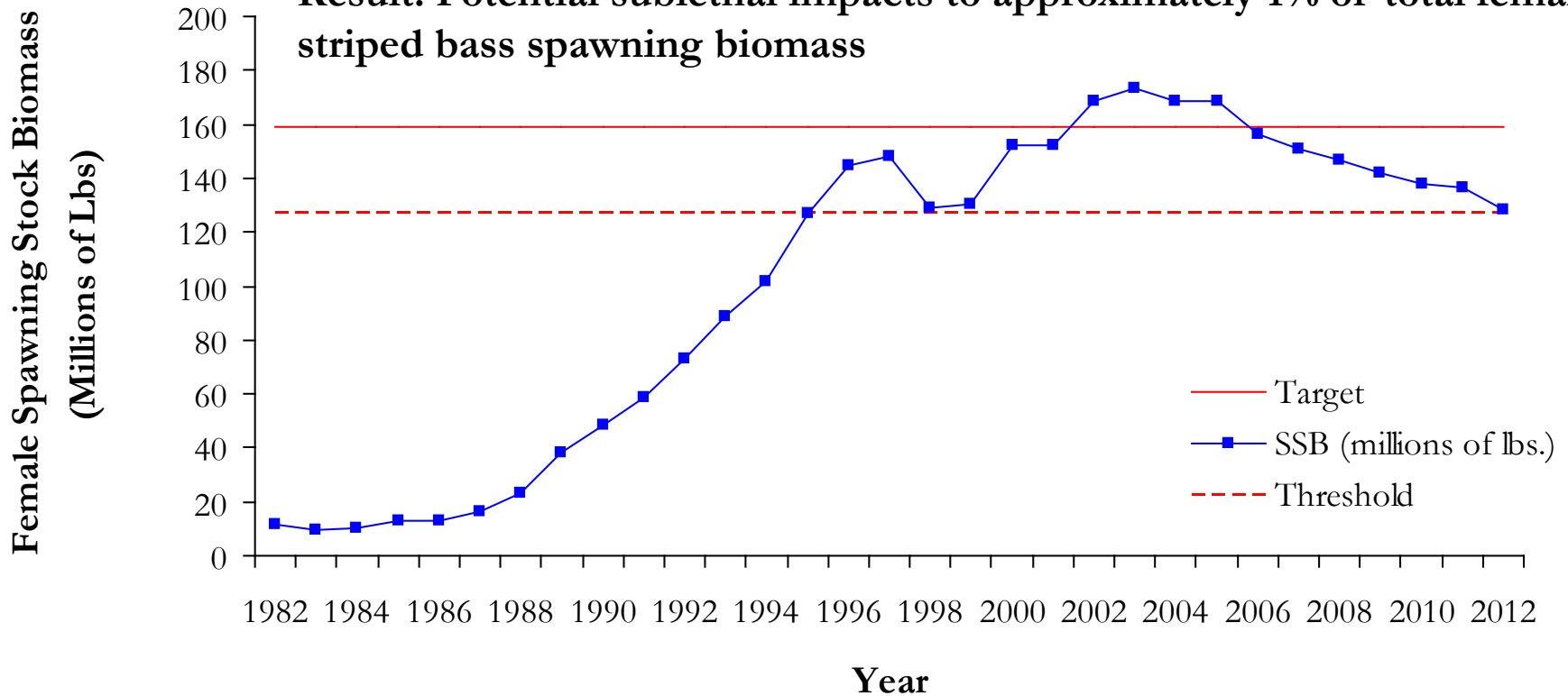
Uncertainty : Stock Level Impacts

Average discards (2005-2008) = 1.4 million lbs.

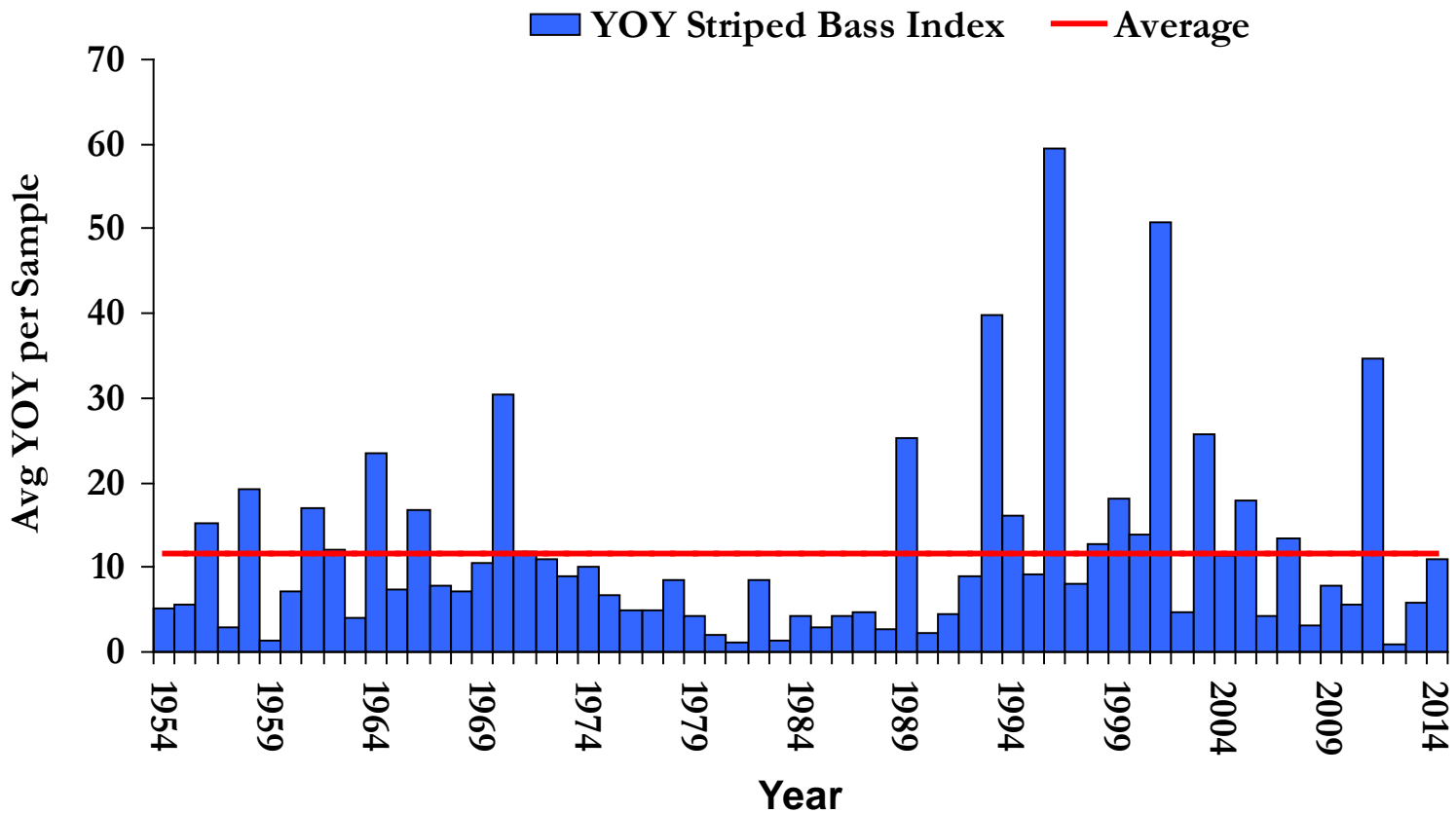
Female discards estimated to be 86% of 1.4 million lbs = 1.2 million lbs.

Total female spawning stock biomass (average 2008-2012) = 138 million lbs.

Result: Potential sublethal impacts to approximately 1% of total female striped bass spawning biomass



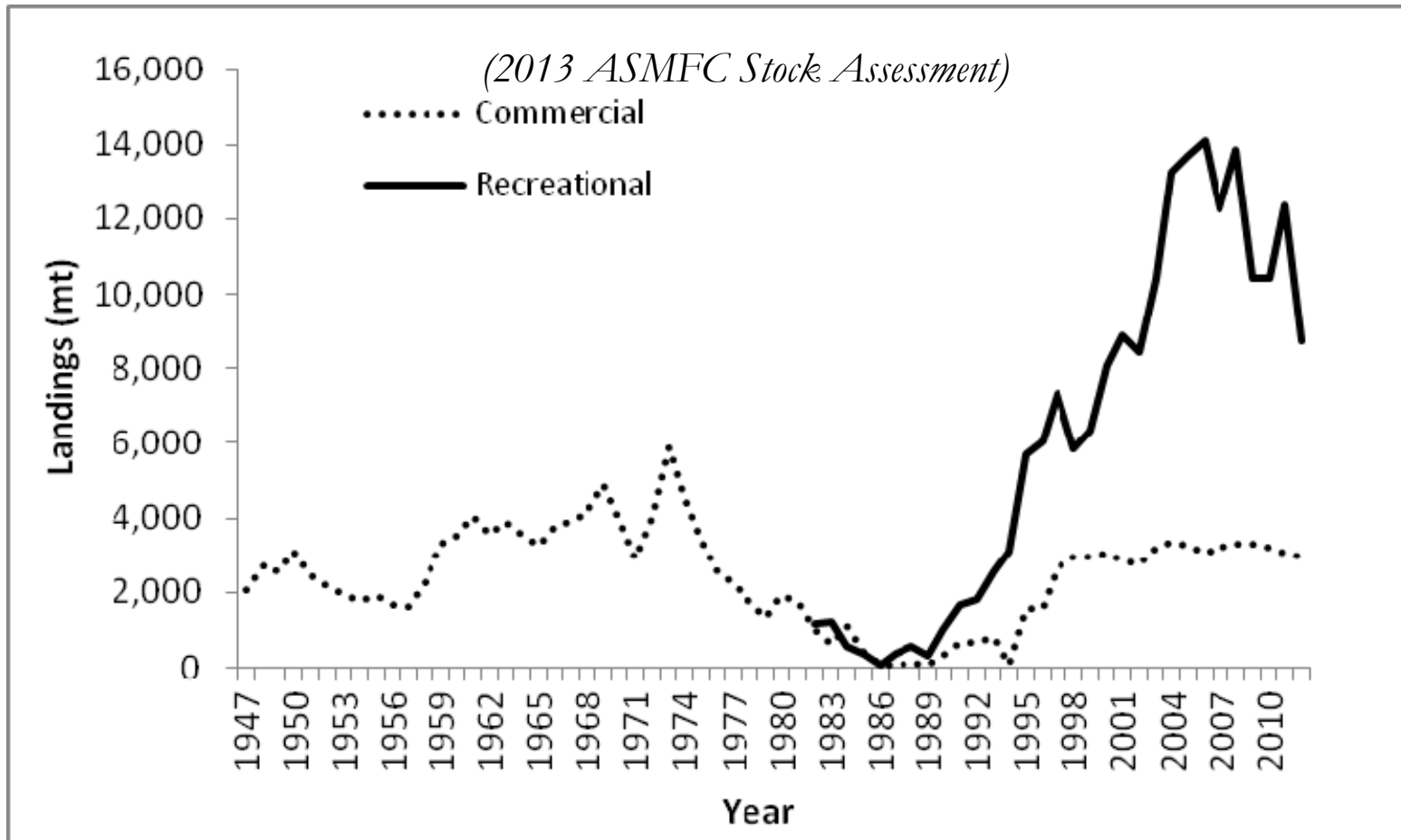
Striped bass juvenile index 1954 - 2014



Outcome of November 2009 ASMFC Striped Bass Management Board Meeting

- Chesapeake Bay is drawing attention.
- Low juvenile indices – Board discussed re-evaluating trigger.
- Spawning biomass is projected to begin declining in 2011.
- Northern and Southern states reporting fewer fish in their waters.
- In 2008, recreational landings declined in many states.
- Overall, recreational landings have increased substantially over the last decade, while commercial landings remain stable.

Striped Bass landings (mt) from Recreational and Commercial Fisheries.



DNR's Role:

Ensure responsible use of the resource

Foster access and opportunity

Exercise caution when impacts to a resource are uncertain, and could be damaging.

DNR's Position

DNR considers that it would be irresponsible to maintain status quo on pre-season catch and release fishing based upon the following:

- Rising effort in pre-season catch and release fishing.
- The uncertain sub-lethal impacts to striped bass spawners.
- Stock assessment results and coastal management issues that are of concern.

DNR's recommendations presented to the joint Tidal and Sport Fisheries Advisory Commissions on October 20, 2009

- Prohibit stinger hooks.
- Prohibit the use of bait unless circle hooks are required.
- Limit number of lines to 6 per boat.
- Require barbless hooks.
- Increase outreach and education on catch and release techniques.

Approved Motion by the Joint Commission:

...prohibit stinger hooks while trolling, prohibit all use of bait while targeting striped bass, require barbless hooks when trolling, increase outreach and education overall, and **include proactive strategy to limit the number of days on trolling to three days(Tuesday and Thursday), one to include one weekend day (Saturday) to allow access...**

As a result of much dialogue with stakeholders, two proposals are being scoped this evening:

Proposal A.	Proposal B.
Prohibit stinger hooks	Prohibit stinger hooks
Require the use non-offset circle hooks or "J" hooks with a gap of less than 1/2 inch when using bait	Require the use non-offset circle hooks or "J" hooks with a gap of less than 1/2 inch when using bait
Limit the number of lines to 6 per boat when trolling	Limit the number of lines to 6 per boat when trolling
Require barbless hooks when trolling	Require barbless hooks when trolling
Prohibit <u>trolling</u> on three days Mon, Wed., and Fri.	Prohibit fishing for (<u>targeting</u>) striped bass three days on Mon, Wed., and Fri.

Next Steps: Timeline for regulation to be effective by March 8, 2010

- **November 16** – A scoping public scoping meeting will be held.
- **November 23** – Close period for public feedback to draft regulation page.
- **November 24** – Submit regulation
- **January 3, 2010** – Proposed Regulation appears in Maryland Register
- **January 4 to February 3, 2010** – public comment accepted on proposed regulation.
- **March 8, 2010** – Regulation is effective.

Address for electronic comment to DNR:

<http://www.dnr.maryland.gov/fisheries/regulations/draftregulations.html>

