

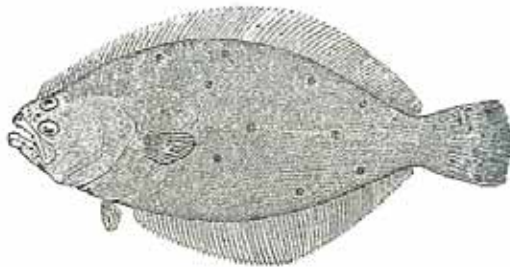
JANUARY 2005
CONSERVATION REPORT

GOOD NEWS FOR FLUKE, SEA BASS, AND PORGY ANGLERS

A LAST MINUTE REPRIEVE FOR FLOUNDER FANS

SALTWATER LICENSE BILL SHOT DOWN, BUT NOT DEAD

Compiled by James Smith

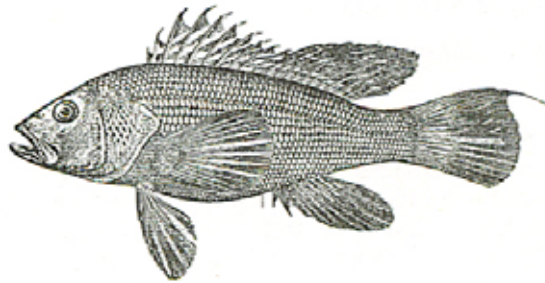


MAMFC MAKES A DECISION ON FLUKE, SEA BASS, AND PORGIES IN OUR FAVOR

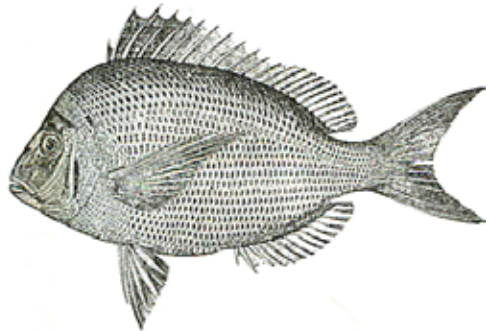
In a recent meeting held by the Mid-Atlantic Marine Fisheries Commission's Advisory Board for Fluke, Flounder, Black Sea Bass, and Porgies, a series of decisions were made which are going to have a positive impact the 2005 fishing season. There has been a lot of talk that Fluke regulations for 2005 would be tightened to an all time high. A 19" minimum size and a one (1) fish per day per angler bag limit was real possibility. The decisions made by the Advisory Board will enable the New York State recreational angler to obtain some very favorable regulations for the coming year.

The board has ruled that the very large over harvest of Fluke last year in our waters was caused by the New York State Department of Environmental

Conservation's delay in coming into compliance with last years MAMFC mandates for Fluke and not the fault of local anglers. They have decided to use the numbers that were posted after the change over had occurred as an average, which had the effect of our Fluke harvest being only a few percentage points over the limit instead of the original astronomical number. This information was coupled with the fact that there has been a redistribution of the east coast recreational catch quotas for this coming year. These changes in policy are going to affect New York and New Jersey's harvest quotas in a positive way, where as it will affect Connecticut's in the negative. The board is going to be calling for a tightening of that states Fluke regulations for the 2005 season. All of this has enabled the Advisory Board to make the following recommendations to the New York State's Department of Environmental Conservation. A minimum size limit is of 17-1/2" and a bag limit of 6 fish per day has been laid out for the possible 2005 Fluke regulations.

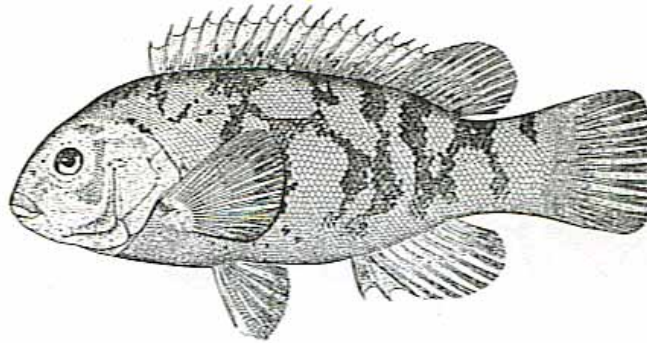


The New York State regulations for Porgies and Black Sea Bass are going to possibly be changed for the better this year. As of January 1st 2005 the Black Sea Bass season is open it will remain open until 12/31/05. The daily bag and minimum size limit will be retained from last year.

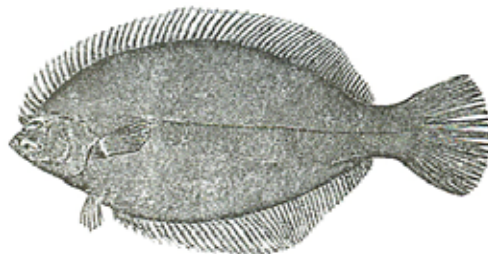


As far as the Porgy regulations go, there is at present two different management plans being reviewed by the Atlantic states Marine Fisheries Commission. The first proposal is for a four state collective regulation, which would include the following states, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New York. Each of these state's quotas will be added together and then divided evenly. This would give us two different regulations for porgies; one would be for party and charter boats, a 60 fish per day per angler and an 11" minimum size limit. Then a private regulation of 25 fish per day and an 11" minimum size limit would be instituted.

The second proposal before the commission is a state-by-state regulation, which would net us a status quo for porgy regulations this year. On a little side note, Massachusetts has been put on notice that their 50 fish across the board regulation is no longer acceptable. If they try to retain the limit the federal government is prepared to close their recreational porgy season with in 60 days of the institution of the illegal limit. Both of the proposals will be voted on at the next commission meeting scheduled for the week of February 7-11. So it seems for now that we are going have things going our way. The future looks a little brighter for next year's fishing season.



On the Black fish front, there is a study being conducted on our local blackfish stocks. This study and the impending debates that are going to follow the release of the information will have to sort out the complicated issue. It has been noted by the ASMFC that there has been an increase of fishing pressure on the blackfish. It seems to have been caused by a decrease in availability of other ground fish. Whether through season closure or depleted stocks recreational fishermen are targeting this species much more regularly. Added to this are the commercial pressure from potting and the live fish market, which all leads to a species being depleted. Nothing is scheduled to change these years as far as the black fish regulations are concerned, but a world to the wise, watch out in 2006.



A LAST MINUTE REPRIEVE FOR 2005 FLOUNDER SEASON

We may have dodged the bullet in regards to the flounder issue this spring. The Mid-Atlantic States Marine Recreational Fisheries Councils Advisory Board for Flounders has voted to allow the opening of the Flounder harvest for this coming spring season. The spring season for flounders will open and close the same as last year. The size and bag limits will also remain the same during this period. As of July 31st the new management plan for winter flounder will go into effect, which allows for only a 60-day open season and an increase in the minimum size limit

to 12". The bag limit will also be reduced to 5 or 6 fish a day. According to Patrick of the MANFC the 2005 fall flounder season will most likely be canceled.

These new regulations would have had me very upset 20 years ago, but now days there are not enough flounder around to warrant that many fishermen targeting them. I think we all love to go Flounder fishing but let us be realistic; the local Flounder population is in serious trouble. A discussion with Mr. yielded some answers; there is a three-pronged problem for the management of flounders. They are being pressure by the commercial fleet, the recreational fishermen, and by natural sources. Even with the severely restricted bag limits and oversized minimum sizes, the Flounder is going to have a very hard time making a come back. Do not get me wrong; I am not advocating a closing of this year's Flounder season. It is just that each year we see less and less flounders being caught in our waters. Are we the recreational fishermen to blame for this mess? I would have to yes and no. Did we have a hand in the decline of winter flounder? Well in years past, yes. I can remember back in the seventies and eighties catching 20 to 30 flounders during a single Saturday morning. I was not the only one taking that many fish; in actuality my harvest was usually on the low side. Now days we are hard pressed to come up 3 or 4 fish for a whole days intensive effort.

On the other hand the commercial fleet is still doing damage to the flounder stocks each and every day. For instance the other day I walked by the seafood counter at a local grocery store and spotted a big giant pile of fresh flounder filet. The amount was staggering. I would have to say it was equal to or greater than the combined flounder catch for our entire club for the last three years. To me it was a sin, were did all of those fish come from? It was defiantly not from our waters! Is the commercial fleet now working on destroying some other fishing grounds?

The third reason for the low flounder stocks is biological. There has been a population explosion of seals in our area; the local group has grown some 200% over the last couple of years. Add to that a healthy striped bass population and a sea gull population that is out of control. Mr. Is talking about a relocation plan for the seals and sea gulls, but that is not going to happen in the near future.

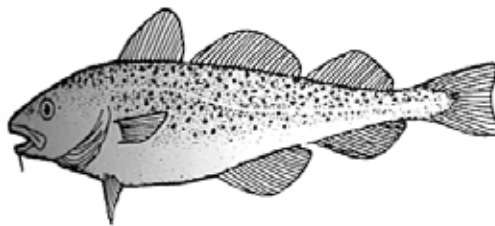
To me the only answer in regards to saving the winter flounder population is to severely curtail the commercial harvest of flounder, the tightening of recreational limits, and a proactive program to elevate the predator threat. All three of these measures combined will promote the re-growth of this fishery. Something needs to be done very soon, before this species disappears from our waters forever.



NEW YORK STATE MARINE RECREATIONAL FISHING LINCENSE TAKES A SET BACK STILL NOT DEAD

The New State Marine Recreational Fishing License Proposal has voted down near the end of last year, but the issue is far from over. There are still several advocates with in the State legislature that support the formation of a recreational marine license program and are at this moment trying to propose some new legislation to push through their beliefs. As the club leadership and I have stated before, we believe that the marine recreational license is an issue that should be dropped from the ballot completely. Besides being just about unenforceable, it would cause serious damage to the local Long Island economy. The revenue generated by the marine recreational fishing scene is extremely wide spread. It starts at the shore with Party and Charter Boat revenues, and carries over to tackle shops, department and discounts stores, dinning and lodging establishments. The institution of a marine recreational license would drastically reduce tourism in our area and cripple and already sagging economy.

It was suggested at he Board of Directors meeting that we should redraft a letter of protest which was supposed to be sent last and have the entire membership of the Patchogue Fishing Club sign their copy of the letter. Then send them to our local State and County representatives. We must take a stand now or in time our sport may go the way of the Dodo bird.



A CALL FOR A MORE ACTIVE ROLL IN THE CONSERVATION OF OUR MARINE RESOURCES

In my humble opinion I feel the Patchogue Fishing Club needs to take a more active role in the conservation of our marine resources. Yes we all love to catch lots of fish but most of us; I think would like to continue to catch those fish for many years to come. We all have griped (me included) about the ever-tightening fishing regulations being imposed on us by the New York State DEC. They are

trying to do (by imposing the detested regulations) just what we say we all want, to continue to catch fish for many years to come. The regulations may not always be very popular but the State is trying in its own way to deal with all of the issues that are involved in the maintenance of our local fish population. With the commercial interests aside for now, we as a club need to find ways to assist in promoting conservation. With in the club membership an extra effort is needed to conserve the current local game fish stocks.

I believe we have all seen the following scenario repeated time and time again at the local piers. A couple guys are fishing and catching one snapper after another. After a little time you start to think how many have they caught already? So you stroll by and in their bucket is some fifty to sixty fish. If the current limit is 10 fish per day and there are three guys, how does that add up? If you say something, the reply is usually "but the #\$%& out" or "that law doesn't pertain to me". What can we do in a situation like that? What are our responsibilities as sportsmen and citizens? These are some questions I feel need to be answered.

As to what we can do if we see an active abuse of the current recreational fishing regulations, we can call the local N.Y. State D.E.C. Stony Brook Office at 444-0435. A conservation officer at the Outdoor Expo explained that we really should not use the 1-800 hot line number because the information reported on it can take up to two (2) days to disseminate down to the local enforcement officers. A word of caution is needed here; the call should be made in such a way as to prevent any ramifications coming back at you. Use prudence in the making of this call; make it out of sight of the offender and out of earshot of any other persons involved. The perpetrators can get down right vindictive towards the person who turns them in. It is not worth an altercation, or an act of vandalism done to your vehicle.

The second issue that I think needs to be addressed is need for a concerted effort on the club member's part to practice catch and release when ever possible. Even in the case of the fish of the month contest, we need to try to return as many fish to the water unharmed as possible. PFC's by-laws allow for this, you can submit a weigh slip if it is signed by yourself and another witness, even if that witness is not in the club. A party or charter boat captain, fishing tackle dealer, or a person who is willing to write down his/her name, address, and phone number on the weigh slip and is willing to be contacted for future verification.

I am also asking for some volunteers to assist me in the matters of conservation, there is a lot of phone calls to make and rumors to run down. I would like to make the Conservation committee into a real committee, not just the single person that it currently is. Conservation is vitally important to our sport, if it is not followed and we do not make our voice heard on issues we could possibly see recreational sport fish disappear. Any one wishing to assist with the conservation committees please contact James Smith at 846-6739 or e-mail at 480vac@optonline.net.