

PATCHOGUE FISHING CLUB OCTOBER CONSERVATION REPORT

WEAKFISH

According to a recent report in the Long Island fishermen's column "Conservation Watch" by Al Ristori, a report on the local weakfish population by the MASMFC claims that our weak fishery is in deep trouble. According to this report the local weakfish stocks are said to be down by almost 16% and there are very few young fish around to replenish the schools. This seems to contradict my observations during the summer. At several docks along the Great South Bay and Moriches Bay I observed a ton of juvenile weakfish chasing the spearing schools. How did I know they were weakfish? On quite a few occasions while fishing for snappers this last summer, I was having a hard time keeping the snappers on the hook. There was a strike and the hook was set, and the fish was on, only to be lost a few seconds later. Finally, after a dozen or so lost fish I was able to get a fish to the dock. They were weakfish (about maybe 8 to 10 inches in length). To me this seems to be a very good sign for the coming years. I have talked to a few anglers and gotten the same sort of information. Also, the club as a whole has done quite well on weakfish this year, so where is this 16% drop in the weakfish population? I would hope that we are not being targeted again. We will have to wait and see what comes out of the next few MASMFC board meetings.

Late Addition:

The Recreational Fishing Alliance is getting into the fray in regards to the weakfish dilemma; they are sending a team to the next MASMFC meeting in Boston. The MASMFC is claiming that the current weakfish plan needs to be changed because of an exceptionally high weakfish mortality rate during the last two years. They want to reduce the recreational quota when everyone including the council agrees that the mortality rate is caused by a natural occurrence. The mortality is directly linked to a depletion of the weakfish's natural forage. The moss bunker population is down drastically and the council just voted to allow the reduction industry to continue to harvest millions of pounds of bunker from the Chesapeake Bay area. The natural mortality of weakfish has been directly linked to the decline of moss bunker. All parties agree to this but the council still feels that the recreational regulations need to be tightened. The RFA is hopping to talk some sense into the weakfish board before we are forced to saddle the burden for the reduction industries ravaging of the bunker schools. The worst part of this whole thing is that changing our regs will not make a bit of difference.

Possible Federal Marine Fishing License

The question of a marine fishing license is back in the news again. A bill is being put before congress that would institute a national federal marine fishing license. The authors of this bill feel that this would be the fairest way to solve the issues which have been plaguing the individual states as they have been trying to implement a marine recreational license. All states would have one all inclusive marine recreational fishing license, which would be good any where within the continual United States. As more information becomes available I will keep you informed.

Ecosystem vs. Single Species Management

There has been a call for a change in how the fishing counsels manage fish populations. Instead of targeting individual species they would set up a plan that encompasses the entire ecosystem. That would mean that not only would the larger predator species be monitored and protected but also all of the inhabitants. This would include all forms of forage fish and even the so called trash species. The trash fish eat just as much as the game fish and can even over shadow the other fish in the hunt for food.

The plan calls for the consideration of the impact of any regulation on all species not just the ones being regulated. I have been told that this was talked about before, but never got off the ground. I feel this is a much better approach to managing our natural resources. Again I will keep the club apprised of any developments in this matter.