

## **Proposal for December season extension of Maryland's recreational striped bass fishery**

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Striped bass fishing is a keystone component of Maryland's recreational fishing industry, generating much enthusiasm and interest in the sport of fishing. The licensed charter boat fleet is a very important component of that recreational fishery; providing a cost effective way for many Maryland citizens to enjoy the Chesapeake Bay and fishing opportunities. As a result, the charter boat fishing industry produces much economic revenue in terms of the recreational portion of Maryland's fishing industry.

However, over the 2008 spring and summer seasons, the charter boat captains reported a marked decline in striped bass fishing to Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MD DNR). For example, the number of charter boat trips taken in 2008 (based on mandatory charter boat daily fishing reports) declined by 45% during wave 4 from the number of trips taken in 2007. Therefore, to address the needs of the charter boat component of Maryland's fishing industry and provide quality opportunities for all recreational anglers, we propose to extend the recreational fishing season for an additional 15 days through to December 31. Currently the regulations have a recreational season closure of December 15, and the harvest is restricted to 2 fish between 18 and 28 inches, or 1 fish between 18 and 28 inches and one fish greater than 28 inches.

### **Justification**

To estimate the potential increase in striped bass harvest due to the expansion of the recreational fishing season by two weeks, we expanded estimates of harvest reported for wave 6 (November – mid December) proportionally, assuming that harvest rates in last two weeks of December will be equal to the harvest rates observed in November – mid December in the past. For example, MRFSS wave 6 estimate of private boat and shore anglers' harvest (A+B1) was expanded by 1/3 (catch reported for 6 weeks \* 8/6). Based on the data over the past five years, the potential increase in the private recreational harvest may vary between 6,645 and 23,010 fish, with an average increase of 13,624 fish (Table. 1).

Calculations for charter boat sector were conducted differently. Because charter boat operators provide MD DNR with daily fishing reports, we estimated potential increase in the charter fishery component by expanding (doubling) the harvest reported from December 1-15 from 2003 to 2007 (Table 2). After this harvest expansion, we anticipate an additional harvest of 82 to 1519 fish.

Based on reported harvest in recent years and assuming a constant fishing rate throughout a two month period, we expect the total increase in the number of harvested striped bass as a result of fishing season extension through the December 31 to be within the range of 7,000 to 25,000 fish. This increase in the harvest constitutes only 1 - 4 % of the total annual recreational harvest in Maryland (Table 3). We believe factors such as weather and angler avidity, compounded by fish availability during the last two weeks of December will determine at what point in the range this season extension and increase in size limit will fall.

Table 1. Total number of striped bass harvested by recreational anglers (shore and private boats) in wave 6 in Chesapeake Bay (MRFSS data) and estimated additional harvest due to increase of fishing period from 6 to 8 weeks.

Year	Reported harvest for wave 6 (number of fish)	Expected harvest increase (number of fish)
2003	48,939	16,313
2004	19,971	6,657
2005	19,936	6,645
2006	41,084	13,695
2007	69,031	23,010

Table 2. The number of striped bass harvested, the number of trips taken, mean harvest per angler as reported by Maryland's charter boat captains during December 1-15 2003-2007, and expected harvest increase following the extension of fishing season through December 31.

Year	Harvest	Number of trips	Mean harvest per angler	Expected harvest increase
2003	89	20	0.78	30
2004	395	85	0.87	132
2005	82	17	0.95	27
2006	312	50	1.04	104
2007	1519	230	1.07	506

Table 3. Estimated additional harvest of striped bass by recreational anglers during last two weeks of December and total annual recreational harvest in numbers of fish.

Year	Additional harvest in December	Total annual recreational harvest	Additional harvest as a percent of total annual recreational harvest
2003	16,402	524,213	0.03
2004	7,052	378,265	0.02
2005	6,727	487,366	0.01
2006	14,006	645,967	0.02
2007	24,529	679,024	0.04