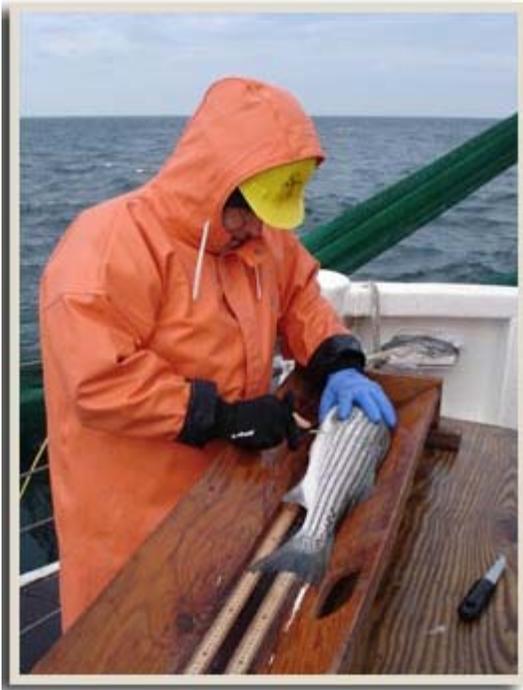


Cooperative Winter Tagging Cruise



Luke Whitman of the Fisheries Services' Striped Bass Project participated in this years Cooperative Winter Tagging Cruise on the Atlantic Ocean. the following is a summary of the cruise and Lukes experiences while at sea. If you would like further information about this exciting work please write Luke at customerservice@dnr.state.md.us.

The Cooperative Winter Tagging Cruise began in 1988 to tag striped bass on their wintering grounds off the coast of Virginia and North Carolina. This cruise is part of the coast-wide tagging program used by the Atlantic states to assess the annual fishing mortality of the migrant striped bass population. The Maryland DNR has always been a part of this effort, contributing personnel to serve on the cruise and managing the data collected. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) research vessels are used for this cruise, most often the Oregon II from Pascagoula, Mississippi. The cruise leaves out of Morehead City, North Carolina during the last two weeks of January. Fishing begins around Cape Lookout, moving north until good numbers of striped bass are encountered. In past years, the best fishing has been between Kitty Hawk and Corolla, North Carolina. The

fishing gear consists of two 65 foot bottom trawls, which are fished for 15 to 20 minutes per haul.

The 2007 cruise took place from January 17 through January 25. Bad weather forced us to leave later than planned and to return early. A total of 369 striped bass were tagged and released, which is much lower than the 19-year average of 2,217 fish. Most of the striped bass were caught in Virginia waters north of Cape Charles. The best catches were close to shore, near Hog Island, Virginia. This is the first time that the cruise has fished this far north and we were unable to find the large schools that have been encountered in previous years. We did catch some rare species including Atlantic sturgeon, thresher sharks, and a large basking shark. As in previous years, we caught large numbers of dogfish, skates, croaker, and weakfish. Sturgeon were also tagged and samples were collected from various species for studies conducted by cooperating scientists. Data is recorded on all species.



Although we didn't tag as many striped bass as hoped, this year taught us a lot about striped bass movements during a warm winter. Recapture information provided by fishermen will tell us about the migrations, growth, and survival of striped bass. Tag returns are also used to estimate fishing mortality along the Atlantic coast, which is important to many aspects of striped bass management. The Maryland DNR has a vested interest in striped bass management and plans continue its involvement in the Cooperative Winter Tagging Cruise for years to come.