

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

ATLANTIC STRIPED BASS TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

August 8, 2008

Meeting Report

Participants

Mike Brown (ME DNR)	Mike Kaufmann (PA FBC)	Wilson Laney (USFWS)
Cheri Patterson (NH DFG)	Des Kahn (DE DFW)	Roy Miller (DE DFW)
Vic Crecco (CT DEP)	Rob O'Reilly (VMRC)	Craig Shirey (DE DFW)
Carol Hoffman (NY DEC)	Charlton Godwin (NC DMF)	Nichola Meserve (ASMFC)
Russ Allen (NJ DEP)	Gary Shepherd (NMFS)	

Meeting Overview

The Technical Committee (TC) met via conference call to: 1) review a Stock Assessment Subcommittee (SAS) recommendation on updated biological reference points (BRPs); 2) review proposals from Delaware and Pennsylvania for alternative management in the Delaware Estuary; and 3) hear an update on North Carolina's assessment efforts for the Albemarle/Roanoke stock.

Elect a Chair and Vice-Chair

This agenda item was not completed during the call. In subsequent emails, Des Kahn was elected chair. A vice-chair should be elected at the next opportunity.

Review the SAS's Recommendation for Updated Biological Reference Points

Gary Shepherd provided a review of the SAS's report, as well as the expected age structure of the population at the recommended Fmsy. The TC approved the report for Management Board review. In lieu of a chair, Alexei Sharov will present the report to the Board on August 19.

Concerning the recommendation for more explicit management objectives, the TC suggested that it could provide the Board with relevant technical information, such as the estimated age structure necessary to ensure certain levels of fecundity.

Review Delaware Estuary Proposal for Alternative Management

Des Kahn and Mike Kaufmann introduced this two-state proposal for alternative recreational management in the Delaware Estuary. For its portion of the Delaware River, Bay and tributaries, Delaware proposes a slot limit (20-24" or 20-26") with a creel limit (1 or 2 fish) for a two-month period between July and September. For its portion of the Delaware River, Pennsylvania proposes the same slot and creel limits for the two-month period of April and May. Both fisheries intend to target the mature male portion of the population.

Delaware Proposed Regulations: The TC recommends that the Board consider approval of the proposed regulations for Delaware's portion of the Delaware River, Bay and tributaries. The TC does not recommend any one option above the others.

The proposal provides evidence that such a fishery would target and capture mainly mature male striped bass, which currently experience a low exploitation rate. The proposed slot limits would allow the targeted male fish to have spawned multiple times. Catch and effort during the period would be quantified through the federal recreational survey, which covers Delaware's portion of the Bay and the River up to the PA-DE state line. The fishery's effect on exploitation and fishing mortality rates would be monitored via the spring tagging program, which tags about 400-700 fish on the DE and PA spawning grounds annually. Monitoring of the sex ratio of caught fish would be performed and increase data on striped bass distribution by sex. The Delaware Estuary stock has been declared restored since the last time similar options were considered, and the stock continues to demonstrate expansion of the age structure.

Pennsylvania Proposed Regulations: The TC recommends that the Board consider approval of the proposed regulations for Pennsylvania's portion of the Delaware River **IF** a circle hook requirement is implemented. Additionally, the TC would prefer that there be a means to monitor the fishery's catch and effort before implementation of the regulations. The TC does not recommend any one option above the others.

1) Circle Hook. Unlike Delaware's proposed summer fishery, Pennsylvania's proposed spring fishery would open the spawning grounds during the spawning season. Regulatory discards of fish larger than the slot limit will be mostly females. Russ Allen expressed New Jersey's opposition to allowing harvest on spawning grounds during the spawning season due to the potential increase in hook and release mortality of mature females in a new directed fishery. The addition of a circle hook provision should provide some insurance for limiting hook and release mortality, although New Jersey would be more comfortable with Pennsylvania implementing a season similar to Delaware. New Jersey and Delaware have circle hook requirements for the spawning season to reduce mortality on striped bass caught and released.

The TC therefore recommends that Pennsylvania also implement a circle hook requirement comparable to the other states' requirement to reduce mortality from this source. Because mortality to females resulting from catch and release is included in overall fishing mortality estimates produced from tag-recapture data, there is a means to monitor what increase in fishing mortality would result from implementation of the proposed regulations.

2) Monitoring. Given new access to this resource, angler effort and harvest would likely increase in Pennsylvania's portion of the Delaware River. While tagging data will be used to monitor exploitation and fishing mortality, there is no means to estimate angler catch and effort (although it is believed to be quite limited). The federal recreational survey does not cover these waters nor does Pennsylvania have a creel survey for the area. The only estimate of harvest is from a creel survey in 2002 that estimated a striped bass harvest of 582 fish between Wilmington, DE and Downsville, NY.

The TC would prefer there to be a means to monitor the fishery prior to implementation of the proposed regulations, at least initially and periodically, if not annually. The TC notes, however, that other states are not required to and do not estimate catch and effort in inland fisheries not covered by MRFSS (e.g., Hudson River, which also has a recreational fishery opening in the spring). Estimates of effort, catch, harvest, and releases would be the primary focus for monitoring, while associated biological data would be secondary (lengths of harvested fish would be within the slot). Given that Pennsylvania would not be able to implement any

regulations until spring 2010, there should be time to establish an appropriate monitoring system. The following options for monitoring were discussed:

- A. Volunteer Angler Logbook Program: could collect effort, catch, harvest, release, length-frequency of harvested and released fish. Previous attempts with such a program in Pennsylvania were met with limited participation.
- B. State or Federal Creel/Intercept Survey: could collect effort, catch, harvest, releases, length-frequency of harvested fish, otoliths or scales from harvested fish if state-run. Pennsylvania has five public boat ramps, associated shore fishing areas, and two additional 0.25-0.5 mile public shoreline fishing areas in 55 miles of riverfront. A multi-state creel survey was successfully completed in 2002 by the Delaware River Fisheries Coop. The original goal was to complete the survey every five years. The MRFSS intercept survey does not cover this portion of the Delaware River, and the revised MRIP intercept survey is expected to initially cover the same areas as MRFSS (Gordon Colvin, NOAA Fisheries, personal communication, 26 August 2008).
- C. State or federal angler registry: a standard registry could collect effort data as the number of participants fishing for all species; with a supplemental target species question, a registry could collect effort data as the number of participants fishing for striped bass. Pennsylvania fully implemented a new electronic license application in 2008; although it has not been done yet, additional questions (e.g., on target species) can be added to the license application. The federal angler registry associated with MRIP is expected to cover the full 55 miles of Delaware River in Pennsylvania that includes the tidal striped bass spawning grounds, and can also incorporate questions for supplemental information.

Other Concerns

- It was noted that the proposals seem in contrast to the states' striped bass health advisories for the Delaware River and Bay. The resulting discussion was not of a technical nature, but a management/public health nature, thus TC advice was not developed on this issue.
- It was noted that the proposed regulations would not be consistent with New York's Delaware River regulations and New Jersey's Delaware Bay and River regulations, which could be an enforcement concern. This issue was not addressed as a technical concern, thus TC advice was not developed on this issue.

Status Update on North Carolina's Albemarle/Roanoke Stock Assessment

North Carolina is in the process of conducting its next A/R stock assessment. A data workshop has been held and a model is now being configured (the ASAP2 forward projecting statistical catch-at-age model). Preliminary runs are showing conflicting results, indicating that data may be incomplete or the stock may violate the models assumptions. The model is going to an outside review to determine if its use should be continued and how. In the meantime, tagging data, landings, and independent surveys suggest that fishing mortality is not likely above the target of 0.27. North Carolina hopes to have a peer-reviewed assessment by early 2009 (necessary for continuing with the revision to its Estuarine FMP for Striped Bass). The Technical Committee provided several suggestions on the tagging and age-based models. Charlton Godwin was asked to provide exploitation rates from the tag data (assuming various reporting rates since one is not known yet, although funding for a high reward tagging study is being pursued).

Other Business

Des Kahn noted that there will be a new paper in Ecological Applications on mycobacteriosis in striped bass. He will send the paper around when available.

