



Gordon's Quill

Vol. XXVi, No. 29

Fall 2015

IN THIS ISSUE

Lead Story



Horse Brook Restoration

President's
Message
Page 2



2015 Founders
Fund



Reception Honorees
Page 3

Good Fight
Culvert



Operations
Page 4

Home
Waters



Page 7

Unique
Caddis



Behavior
Page 9

Ted
Page 12



The State of
the Striper



Page 15

Horse Brook Restoration

We are happy to announce the completion of the Horse Brook restoration project and to announce that Horse Brook now flows into the Beaverkill without obstruction, giving spawning trout many miles of stream to spawn.

Horse Brook is a tributary that enters the Beaverkill about two miles downstream from Junction Pool in Roscoe. For decades, the productivity of this stream for spawning trout has been virtually eliminated by a culvert about a quarter of a mile up from the Beaverkill where Horse Brook Road crosses the brook. The culvert formed a bottleneck in the stream that collected debris during high water, leading to frequent flooding, while in low water, the brook was filtered beneath the culvert, which absolutely blocked fish from passing. More important, the outflow of the culvert itself was several feet above the stream, creating an impassable "waterfall" preventing trout from traveling upstream to spawn.

In 2008, TGF proposed replacing this culvert with a "bottomless" overpass that would allow the stream to flow unimpeded. In 2010, the project looked like a go. Funding was in place, approval was given by state and local authorities, and geologic and hydrologic studies were complete. Unfortunately, the political winds changed, and approval for the project was withdrawn.



(continued on page 5)



THEODORE GORDON FLYFISHERS, INC.

OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS 2015-2016

President

Bert Darrow

Treasurer

William Blumer

Vice President, Conservation

Chuck Neuner

Vice President, Membership

Pat Key

Vice President, Secretary

Charles Flickinger

Vice President, Events

Coordinator

David Berman

Vice President, Education

Karen Kaplan

Directors

Terms expiring in 2015

David Berman

Bert Darrow

John Happersett

Bud Bynack

William Blumer

Terms expiring in 2016

Shannon Brightman

Joel Filner

Charles Flickinger

Richard R. Machin

Warren Stern

Terms expiring in 2017

Karen Kaplan

Pat Key

David Kramer

Steve Lieb

Chuck Neuner

GORDON'S QUILL

Staff

Publisher

Editor-in-Chief

Bud Bynack

Art Director

Richard R. Machin

All correspondence regarding *Gordon's Quill* should be sent by e-mail to editor@tgf.org or by post to: Editor, TGF PO Box 2345, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163-2345 Copyright 2015. All rights reserved.

President's Message Fall 2015



With the fishing season now over for most rivers and cooler weather beginning, the trout that we angle for will have a chance to rest and replenish their numbers over the winter. After attending a meeting this past week, I was able to take a short diversion on my way home and observe the Willowemoc Creek. There were at least half a dozen trout rising regularly. That is always exciting and fun to see at any time, but seeing rising fish at this time of year is not that common. While fishing in the Yellowstone area in July for almost three weeks, I realized that the fly hatches there were very sparse and in some cases already

done. They were about two weeks early this year because of less snowpack, resulting in lower and warmer water. In both cases, distance and time showed the same thing, that temperatures are warmer than normal.

At our Founders Fund reception held at the Union League Club, we were able to introduce our scholarship recipient, Charles Robinson, and honor Joe Martens, former New York State DEC commissioner, for the work that he has done. These two people represent the future—Charles, who is just starting his career, and Joe, who has worked for many years in conservation and will continue to do so at the Open Space Institute, OSI. Joe will be working to combat climate change through intelligent and effective land conservation, and Charles is planning to work in the management of wetland ecology. We wish both Charles and Joe good luck in their work for conservation in the future.

Our Founders Fund event was a great success again this year, and I would like to thank Karen Kaplan for all the work that she did working with the committee to select this year's scholar and arranging for the reception at the Union League Club.

Lastly, I would like to say that TGF is working with OSI, NYSDEC, NRDC, Friends of the Beaverkill, and Catskill Mountainkeeper, as well as with private individuals, to refurbish, rebuild, and improve the Beaverkill Covered Bridge Campsite and bridge on the upper Beaverkill. This is something that really needed to be done. The work on the bridge has already started, and there are many other things planned for this site that will make it better for many different types of recreation and education. I would like to thank John and Patricia Adams for hosting the meetings at their home. The Beaverkill Covered Bridge stretch is one of the most beautiful places to fish on the upper Beaverkill, with about two miles of river. The area was once fished by Theodore Gordon himself while staying at a local boarding house

Bert Darrow, President
Theodore Gordon Flyfishers

2015 Founders Fund Reception Honorees

On November 3, 2015, supporters of the Theodore Gordon Flyfishers Founders Fund gathered at the Union League Club in Manhattan to carry on the work of those who, in founding TGF, fostered a tradition of educating and enlightening the public about environmentally responsible philosophies.

The TGF Founders Fund offers scholarships to students showing excellence and outstanding dedication in an environmental field. In addition, each year, the Founders Fund Society names an exemplary conservationist who will serve as a model for young Founders Fund Scholars who are beginning their careers.

This year, we paid tribute to Joe Martens, former commissioner of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, for his exceptional environmental advocacy. In addition to the numerous initiatives that Commissioner Martens has launched to protect drinking water, improve air quality, and reduce greenhouse gasses, he issued a Findings Statement concluding that high-volume hydraulic fracturing should not be allowed to move forward in New York, and in December 2014, Governor Andrew Cuomo's administration announced that it would ban hydraulic fracturing in the state of New York because of concerns over health risks.

From its beginning, the Founders Fund has partnered with the Environmental Consortium of Hudson Valley Colleges and Universities to help tap the best and the brightest students in the region. Founded in 2004, the consortium is composed of over seventy colleges and universities in the Hudson Valley region. Its mission is to help shape the future of the regional and global environment through cooperation, education, and research.

With the support of the Founders Fund Society, the Founders Fund Committee selected Charles Robinson as the 2015 Founders Fund Scholar. Mr. Robinson is in the M.S. program in Conservation Biology at the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse. A member of the Beta Beta Beta Biology Honor Society, he has served as a DEC seasonal field technician and is considered one of the top field people ever for his work. His graduate research will measure the dispersion of Bd, *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*, the amphibian chytrid fungus, across the Hudson River watershed, a pathogen whose levels are currently unknown in the region. Findings will be published for the first time in peer-reviewed journals and presented nationally. Upon completion of his degree, Mr. Robinson intends to pursue a career in wetland ecology and management in New York and aid in the restoration and protection of compromised wetland habitats.

Since the inception of the awards in 2006, recipients of TGF Founders Fund scholarships have gone on to careers in environmental law, environmental education, environmental advocacy, environmental research, and environmental engineering throughout the Northeast.



The Good Fight

News from the TGF Conservation Committee

Culvert Operations

Chuck Neuner

With the completion of the Horse Brook culvert project and with a new Culvert Remediation Initiative in the planning stages – sequential remediation of culverts along the Beaverkill and Willowemoc – there has been a lot of talk about culverts.

Culverts can often prevent trout and other species of fish from reaching suitable spawning areas. The following is a brief review of why culverts can be problematic for trout and the environment and a discussion of some of the measures that can be taken to mitigate their impact on trout spawning habitat.

We tend to think of culverts as pipes, but they are by definition channels, and specifically channels to carry a stream under a road or railroad bed. Culvert “pipes” (what we generally think of as “the” culverts) are used to construct culverts, and there are over twenty-five standard culvert pipe designs. Each pipe design is available in many shapes and sizes, and each size is available in many variations. The reason for all the different variations stems from the need for a given culvert cross section that best matches the flow characteristics of the stream that it is channeling and that does so throughout the year and under all conditions.

In specifying a culvert pipe, an engineer studies the history of the flow to be channeled through the culvert and selects a conduit cross section that best addresses the variations of the flow throughout the year. Historically, this had been done based simply on the demands of the surrounding infrastructure and with little or no consideration of its impact on the surrounding environment. As a result, these culverts generally have performed their function as intended from a civil-engineering perspective, and trout could either pass through them or not, depending on the flow conditions that resulted.

Some culverts are simply too high above the streambed, regardless of the pipe profile, to allow trout to pass upstream. They may have been installed this way, but more likely, the stream below the culvert has washed away over the years, and the opening of the culvert is now too high above the stream below it to allow the trout to leap up during spawning-season flows. For brook trout and brown trout, which spawn in the fall, these are often the lowest flows of the season. Rainbow trout generally spawn in the spring (depending on

(continued on page 6)

Horse Brook Restoration (continued from page 1)

Fast-forward to 2014, and in a different political climate, Trout Unlimited was able to present the proposal originally worked out by TGF. TGF president Bert Darrow worked closely with TU representatives, including Tracy Brown, Trout Unlimited's northeastern restoration coordinator, to get the project restarted. TGF contributed \$15,000 to the project and partnered with TU to raise additional funds. With the recent installation of guardrails on the roadway above the brook, the replacement of the culvert pipes channeling Horse Brook with a box culvert that allows the brook and the trout in it to move freely is complete.



Membership Renewal

It's time to renew your TGF membership for 2016. Your support is critical to the ability of the Theodore Gordon Flyfishers to fulfill its mission to protect and preserve riparian habitat through conservation, environmental oversight, and education.

TGF's membership year runs from January 1 to December 31. If your TGF membership expires on December 31, 2015 and you have not already renewed, please renew your membership today. Additionally, if you know someone who is interested in TGF's conservation, environmental, and educational goals, consider giving them a gift membership for the 2016 year. It's easy to renew online at www.tgf.org. Your membership card will be mailed in late January.

If you would like to volunteer or become more active in TGF, let us know by e-mail via "Contact Us" at tgf.org. Also, please help us stay in touch during the year by notifying us of any changes to your contact information, particularly your e-mail and mailing addresses. We depend upon both to keep you up to date on TGF meetings, volunteer opportunities, and other activities, as well as with publications such as this newsletter.

TGF appreciates and needs your support to continue its work in this, its fifty-third year, and beyond. Please take the time to renew your membership today. If you have already renewed, please accept our thanks. If you have any questions regarding your membership or renewal, please e-mail me at membership@tgf.org.

Patricia Key, Membership Chair
Theodore Gordon Flyfishers

TGF @ SOMERSET

TGF will again have a booth at The Fly Fishing Show in Somerset, New Jersey, January 29, 30, and 31, 2016. We need volunteers to help staff the table, promote TGF, welcome new members, and greet old friends. Save the date, and if you can help bring the TGF message to show-goers, get in touch via "Contact Us" at tgf.org.



the origin of their specific genetic strain), and although the flow is greater in the spring, the high culverts then often have a torrent flowing out that is too great for the fish to overcome.

The best culverts balance the engineering requirements of the structure they support with the seasonal flow characteristics of the stream, and ideally, for our purposes, they take into consideration the flow of the stream during spawning season. Such culverts are generally longer at the bottom than at the top and ideally equally as wide across at the bottom as at the top. An excellent example of this last design is the recent installation at Horse Brook, which is referred to in engineering idiom as a "box culvert."

The reason that more box culverts are not in use is mainly the result of cost and convenience. It is relatively fast and inexpensive to lay a pipe in a stream and cover it with soil, as opposed to designing and constructing a bridge, and a box culvert is essentially a bridge with its roadway set level to the ground.

There are streams where pipe culverts are appropriate in terms of both human and environmental requirements, and we will be addressing a number of such culverts with TGF's Culvert Remediation Initiative. We will also be addressing conditions that will require replacement with box culverts similar to the one now in place on Horse Brook, and these will require greater planning and resource considerations.

The positive impact of culvert remediation on the environment of the Beaverkill and the Willowemoc and on trout fishing in the entire Beaverkill watershed cannot be overstressed. Once these spawning tributaries are open to trout, the resultant fingerlings will far outnumber the trout currently stocked in the system, and barring any unforeseen factors, it may be very possible to establish a wild trout population surpassing the current augmented fishery. Such trout would also be genetically predisposed to survival under the unique conditions of the river and the local environment in which they are reared.

TGF is working closely with Tracy Brown, northeastern restoration coordinator for Trout Unlimited, on the remediation of the culverts along the Beaverkill and Willowemoc spawning tributaries. Tracy has championed the work on Horse Brook, and she is currently evaluating data that have been collected along many spawning tributaries of both the Beaverkill and the Willowemoc. Once she has collated the data, she will provide TGF with a list of the best candidates for remediation in terms of spawning habitat. She will list them in order of relevance and cost, and we will create a plan to facilitate the work required.

The TGF Conservation Committee will provide an overview of the Culvert Remediation Initiative once the data from Tracy Brown are made available, but in the meantime, please feel free to e-mail me via the "Contact Us" tab on tgf.org with any questions.



Home Water

Bud Bynack

The riffle runs across and down, while the river runs true. Across and down, it flows, cobbles and shallows alive with macroinvertebrates, teeming, hidden—flows into a creek like “the crick” that flowed through my hometown. But here, it’s just another current in the wide river, the river driven into the volcanic rock of an old caldera—a part of the river that looks like a creek, running along the riprap that shores up the gravel road beside it.

Here, in the dry sagebrush, chukars and rattlesnakes thrive, while in the cold water, life feeds life. Back then, back there, there was no life in that creek, the creek where I waded in summer, fell through the ice in winter, seeking a private place to hide myself, to find myself, in a valley carved by glaciers, a valley full of money.

Here, in this canyon worn by water in a land made by fire, stoneflies thrive, lay eggs that grow to nymphs that grow until they crawl, as we once did, out into the air, so dry, so hostile, so much what must be home.

I used to wade ankle-deep in the riffle, casting imitations of big, black stonefly nymphs, flies the size of sparkplugs, to the predators that waited for the bugs—trout fat, healthy, innocent of the mimesis in what appeared to them: caught, touched, let go, happy to be returned to their lives.

In the winter of 1996, a weather system from the South Pacific, the Pineapple Express, brought rain to a melting snowpack, brought flows to the river that blew away all that we knew, all that we could know, about it.

Up in Whitehorse Rapids, a Class IV challenge to every drift boat and cumbersome rubber raft, the Can Opener, a rock so called because of what it did to aluminum boats, suddenly had a mate: Oh Shit Rock, where, if the person rowing did what was necessary to miss the Can Opener, the boat then headed straight at—yes.

Farther downstream, the riffle disappeared, blown out, washed away, destroyed, gone.



I parked at the pullout above where it had been. This had been my special place; I was not alone in that. Before the flood, if you stood at the head of the riffle, where you’d stand to make a cast above it, and checked the space behind you, you’d see what marked the spot: a burning bush, but a mute one, the voice of God long gone, only the whisper of the high-desert wind speaking there now—a dead sapling illuminated by the sun shining through the cloud of monofilament that wrapped its branches, the fruit of years of snagged casts.

I said, “This was my home water.” But the river, always itself, said: “Not yours, not anyone’s, not anymore, not ever.”



I fished the river less after that, moved away, found other waters to sustain the life that a river feeds. It was a long drive to the river, and other flows called, then others still, always moving on, not homeless, but never again at home.

It was sixteen years before I went back, way too late in the year for the stoneflies, too late for most bugs to be hatching, for the big trout to be on them, nothing happening.

Nothing but what had happened, what the river, always itself, had become: itself yet again. The riffle was back, and so was the little creek within the big river, a flow where fish could await the stonefly migrations still to come.

That was not to be while I was there, of course. It was to come. But as I stood above to take a picture, a truck passed, carrying steelhead anglers from runs upstream—it was steelhead time, but I, ever anachronistic, wanted to fish for trout. They were still there, after all.

Back at my rented cabin, reviewing the day in pictures, I found that what I had caught when I took that photo was the river yet again—not the river itself, not now, not then, but the river as I always knew it. In the picture, diagonally from above, beams of light shine down, shine just the way that emanations of divine regard are shown in Baroque paintings. This was not light, though. Light itself cannot be seen; light is just the condition of seeing. This was the representation of light, its transmutation.

The truck had raised a cloud of dust—that's the obvious explanation. But what's in the photo is not just dust, except the way we all are, in the end.

The riffle runs across and down; the river runs true. Light floods the creek, the riffle, the river, the far bank, illuminated now not by sunlight, but by the presence of what is not light, illuminated by a mimesis of light—the river brought from what it is, itself, home to consciousness—brought home to consciousness by dust.



Unique Caddis Behavior

Larry Solomon

Only relatively recently in the long history of fly fishing has the caddisfly obtained the importance it deserves in the eyes of the angler, although it always has been on the trout's menu. Maybe because the mayfly is a bit prettier and is more easily captured, floating calmly down the currents, it was the aquatic insect that early angling authors began to imitate and love.

However, in 1977, with a second revised edition in 1990, Eric Leiser and I published the first book to appreciate the caddis (order Trichoptera, meaning "hair wing") as it should be appreciated. Since then, Gary LaFontaine, as well as Dick Pobst and Carl Richards, also published books on the caddis. Yes, the caddis flits around like a ping-pong ball and has down wings, rather than the pretty upright wings of the mayfly, but if you want to have the full menu for the trout, you need to have some knowledge of caddis behavior.

Over the past one hundred years and more that the mayfly has been written about, most of the imitations have been given popular names such as Hendrickson, Green Drake, Blue-Winged Olive, or Sulfur, quite often being named after an individual or for the way the insect looks. The caddis has not had that attention, although, there are a few, such as the Shad Fly or Grannom, which is of the *Brachycentrus* genus in the East, and the large October Caddis (*Dicosmoecus*) that hatches around October in the West. However, since caddisflies have gained popularity, several others have been given common names, such as the East's *Psilotreta*, which has been dubbed the Silly Caddis. It does sometimes make communication about what's hatching a bit easier.

The emergence of caddisflies can vary with the species, weather, and water level. Just before hatching, the caddisfly larva pupates in a case on the stream bottom for about a week, then the pupa crawls out and swims up to the surface. This emergence is sometimes quite rapid, and often the trout does not get to the emerger until it reaches the surface, especially if the water is not too deep. The result will often be a splashy rise form. As I noted in "Reading Rise Forms" in the Summer 2015 *Gordon's Quill*, when you see that, you want to get your fly right on the rise immediately when it occurs, so the trout thinks, "Hey, there's another!" and takes your imitation. You especially should do that if you see the caddis fly away, because the fish missed it and will briefly look for it. If your fly is there, the fish will take it.

But it's not always that way. Many species rise to the surface more slowly, similar to many emerging mayflies. The fish usually rise to them with a more classic take. However, the fish is not seeing a nymph, as with the mayfly, but an emerging caddis pupa, a partially developed adult, with short wings along its sides and long legs for swimming, and that's what you should be imitating, either as it is coming up to the

(continued on page 10)

surface or in the surface as a “floating emerger.” Quite often, too, they will be taking the adult, if it is staying on the surface for some time. Then the rise can be slow and deliberate.



A pattern that I developed years ago, the Delta Wing Caddis (see photo) has often outfished other patterns under a variety of conditions. It was initially tied to resemble an insect that has just emerged, but is stuck in the surface film, which I had observed and which happens quite often. Since it appears helpless, it is easy prey for the fish. It is best fished dead drift and almost always is taken with a gentle rise. It also resembles a caddis that has been ovipositing and is dead in the film, like the spinner of the mayfly. And it can resemble several terrestrial insects. So you can see the versatility of the fly. I have found it very effective to fish a Delta Wing Caddis the morning after a caddis hatch has occurred into the night, because several

of them may be drifting dead downstream. Even if you don't see fish rising, just fish it dead drift down the prime holding lanes. You'll often get a surprise.

It's very difficult to find the Delta Wing Caddis fly for sale, because it is a bit difficult to tie the wings correctly, and it takes commercial tiers more time than they want to spend. So if you tie yourself, you can play with it. Once it's tied, I clip the hackle off the bottom so that the fly floats flat in the surface. I use hen hackle points for the wings, but you might also find that using CDC for the wing can also work.

There is a lot of variation in caddis emergences, but the behavior that truly surprised me involves the ovipositing or egg-laying stage of the caddis life cycle. Many caddis species lay their eggs similarly to the way mayflies do—they simply dip their abdomens into the water's surface and release their eggsacs. Many of them die after that and are available to the trout as a spent adult, just like the spinner of the mayfly. But some fly away to mate again.

However . . . prior to publishing *The Caddis and the Angler* in 1977, I encountered several situations where, although there were caddis emerging and trout readily rising, I was unable to get any significant response from the fish after having presented several different dry-fly patterns and even a pupa imitation. This happened during two major caddis hatches over several years. It's frustrating when you *think* you have an idea of what's going on. While writing the book and spending some time at the Smithsonian Institution's Department of Entomology, I inquired about the ovipositing behavior for each caddisfly family. That's where I learned that the Hydropsychidae family, which is one of the most abundant, and several other families, as well, swim to the bottom to drop their eggs, then return to the surface. Hmmm. . . . I was given an article published by the Entomological Society of Canada that described the results of placing float nets in the St. Lawrence River and collecting insects every four hours. Many of the insects were caddisflies that had just hatched, but at the same time, there were caddis females of the same species that had hatched a day or so earlier, had deposited their eggs underwater, and had recently returned from ovipositing. This return often occurred at about the same time of day as the hatch.

Well, what does that mean to the angler? The hatching caddis rises to the surface as an emerging pupa, with no obvious wings. The female returning from ovipositing, however, returns to the surface with long wings, as on a wet fly . . . a

very different image, as the trout see it. If the trout key on the image of long wings, they will often continue to feed on that stage of the insect as long as it's available. (The chart with wing silhouette lists the caddis families.

The ones with the dot on the left swim or crawl back up, as mentioned). The chart shows their wing shape and average size. It has been a help. However, for the vast majority of anglers, unless we don scuba gear and go under the surface with a magnifier, we don't really know what's going on at the level of wing size and shape, and that includes whether or not fish are taking emergers or female caddisflies that have oviposited by swimming to the bottom and are returning to the surface. We have to experiment. So if you are not getting results using the conventional methods of fishing the pupa, emerger, and/or adult caddis imitations during a hatch, try imitating the returning female with a wet-fly pattern.

Once I had knowledge of this information, I anxiously awaited the following season to confront the hatch that had caused me problems, which, thank you very much, came when it should, in early June. But it happened to be that there really were two caddisfly species hatching—the more obvious being the Silly Caddis, about size 14, and also a *Rhyacophila*, size 16, with similar dark wings, but a lighter body. It is the *Rhyacophila* that swim to the bottom to lay their eggs, and they were now coming to the surface. They were even crawling up my waders underwater with wings fully extended, which I had remembered seeing in previous years. I initially had fished a dry to the rises, with no takers. But I had forgotten to tie some wet flies to imitate the returning females, so I took two of my Delta Wing Caddis patterns, forced back their wings, and fished them, one at the tip and one as a dropper, so I could give two different looks to the trout. I would cast up and across, mend the line to allow the flies to sink a bit, then let them come up as they swung below me. I was delighted, but not really surprised, when five decent-sized trout eagerly took the flies as they came up toward the surface.

This was something that unless I had some knowledge of the possibility, I would never have known. I subsequently tied several wet flies to match the appropriate insects and have had success with them in situations where female caddisflies are returning to the surface after ovipositing underwater.

So again, as I always say, observe and experiment. The more information that an angler has of the various possibilities that may occur, the more often he or she can hook more trout.



family	average length (mm)	silhouette
Brachycentridae	10-14	
Limnephilidae	14-19	
Lepidostomatidae	8-9	
Phryganidae	18-25	
Leptoceridae	8-10	
Odontoceridae	14-16	
Goeridae	5-7	
Helicopsychidae	5-7	
Hydropsychidae	10-12	
Rhyacophilidae	8-13	
Philopotamidae	6-8	
Polycentropodae	7-9	

Ted

Turhan Tirana

He helped make that summer for me the best of my adult years. But I know just about nothing about him.

What I know, most importantly for me, is that he is a studious, patient, and effective angler. I know that he is a high school lacrosse coach and graduated from Greenwich High School in the same class as Peter and Claudia, my son and daughter-in-law, although neither he nor they knew each other. I know that duct tape keeps his car together and that sometimes he buys gasoline one gallon at a time, because that's all he can pay for. I know that when the season is right, he scrapes and paints boat bottoms and sometimes serves as first mate on a boat moored at a Greenwich yacht club.

But I don't know where he lives. I don't know whether at one time he was married. I don't know what he does with the rest of his life. I've figured out not to ask and to be grateful for our relationship—no matter what I know or don't know. He's not at all uncomfortable with long silences.

We met in early spring at low tide one dawn at Cove Island. I was on the Darien side of the inlet, having stumbled my way over the partly submerged top of the one-hundred-yard, probably two-hundred-year-old rock dam. I was catching twenty-inch striped bass, one after the other. He saw the splashing from the Stamford side and came over to the water's edge. I yelled for him to cast from his side toward me, where I'd found the fish. He placed a few graceful casts with his fifteen-foot-long rod, but nothing snatched his feathered imitation of something that swims and tastes good to bass. The bait fish had fled, who knows where, with the bass presumably in pursuit.

Oddly, neither of us was wearing waders, as do just about all fly fishers all the time, and neither of us was carrying the paraphernalia most fly fishers do, such as nets and, in salt water, baskets to store loose line and all manner of other stuff. We were both in shorts, with just sandals on our feet. And whereas the rods that most fly fishers use in such a circumstance are nine feet long, mine at fourteen feet was virtually the same as his. I felt in him a strangely kindred spirit.

The bait and fish gone, each of us went his own way. Back at my car on the Stamford side, I found this note under the windshield wiper: "Call me, Ted," with a phone number.

I called. He said, "I'll show you the cinder worm hatch. I'll show you the Farmington River. We'll fish the Trico hatch. We'll fish the Mill River." I knew the Farmington, a fine trout river in the northwest corner of the state close to Massachusetts, but crowded, and because of a proliferation of fly hatches together with lots of expert anglers, hard to fish. I'd just recently heard of the Mill. And for several years, I'd known of the cinder worm hatch, but hadn't figured out how to put together what I knew into a workable plan to fish it.

What I knew about the cinder worm hatch was that these worms, about one inch long, come out of the Long Island Sound mud at the full moon, and one fishes for the bass with a fur-and-feather imitation. I'd bought several and tried them at dawn on the days of the full moon, occasionally catching small bass. What I didn't know is that dawn is too late. One must usually go out a bit after midnight, after the high tide starts to flow out into the sound. I also didn't know that the hatches occur on the new moon, as well, two weeks later. At both the full moon and the new moon, the tide reaches its highest points, which happens then to be at midnight. But more important, I really had no idea what to look for and what to do. I was at a loss, perplexed, even saddened. A strange and probably powerful experience was passing me by.

Ted called again. "Last night," he told me, "the cinder worms were in Cos

Cob harbor. If they're back tonight, I'll call you around midnight." I stayed awake way beyond my normal bedtime. At midnight, the phone rang. "Meet me in the Innes Arden parking lot," Ted said. I did. We drove in his car to Cos Cob to a marina where spotlights shine on the boats to discourage their theft and incidentally shine into the water. "There they are," Ted said. I looked. "Where?" I asked. "All over," he answered. "Don't you see them?" I adjusted my eyes to the detail of the water's surface and then below. There they were, hundreds of them, thousands, swimming about in all depths with no apparent rhyme or reason. Two other anglers were there as well, fly rods in hand, waiting for the tide to begin to sweep the worms out into the sound and for the bass to come in from the deep to meet their moving meal. At that point, I fully woke up, excited, but puzzled still. What next?

Ted and I jumped back into his car and sped back to Old Greenwich to his secret spot, an inlet that I recognized as one where many years earlier I had once caught bluefish, although in the middle of the day at low tide, and where I used to go also at low tide to pick up oysters left briefly uncovered by the tide.

This being the new moon, hence dark, and there being no floodlights or any electric lights, we listened. The water's surface was alive with slurps, some louder than others, as the bass sucked in the worms. Then, as our eyes adjusted to the dark, we could make out swirls, some larger than others, where the bass had just been. It was eerily primeval—just us in the dark with the moving tide, and in it, the worms and the bass. My adrenaline kicked in, bringing mind, instinct, and will to their highest alert.

Ted paddled a canoe he had hidden in the grass, while I cast. Quickly, I felt a dead weight at the end of my line in the water somewhere in the dark. The dead weight came alive and started pulling. I couldn't hold it back, so I let it take line from the reel, more and more as the line headed for a twenty-foot wood piling around which it could easily become wrapped. The line stopped. "I lost it," I muttered. "Damn." "No, I didn't." The fish had turned around, passed under the canoe, and then out the other side. Eventually I brought it close to the canoe's side. It was too large for me to grasp with one hand in the water. Using two, I heaved it into the canoe, extracted the hook, admired its fat silver sides, and tucked it back in the water where it belonged. My fantasy had become reality.

The hatch slowed, then stopped. It was 2:30 A.M. Might as well go home. The next adventure, in fact, two, happened at the Farmington. Scouting the river from the banks ahead and then behind me, Ted served as surrogate eyes. He spotted, as I could not have, occasional trout, noting where they lay in wait, and occasional hatches. The first was the *Tricorythodes*, the Tricos, the reason we were there then. This is an aquatic insect so tiny, the fur, silk, and feather imitation in one's hand is hard to see, while the real thing in the surface currents of the river is even more difficult to see—by us, not the fish. It hatches in August, when most of the other hatches have long ceased.

Ted found the Tricos, then directed my casting. I caught moderate-sized trout, but the size did not matter; what was important is that I had caught them on Tricos. The hatch dwindled, fewer and fewer flies on the surface, and stopped. Next, we fished imitation ants, beetles, and inchworms, allowing them to float down a lane of current into a large pod of trout waiting in clear water just a few inches deep. These are conditions intolerant of mistakes. Yet because one can see the trout reacting—or not—they can be especially fun. With Ted spotting the fish, choosing the flies, and instructing me as to how I should approach them and then where to place the flies, I caught several, including one large fish. Ted was passing on to me gifts he had learned himself or that someone else, perhaps in the same way, had passed on to him.

I had fished only one other time with Tricos, in Montana, with no success, and had no confidence in fishing with terrestrials. These were new successes, as well as pleasures, as well as reasons to look forward in successive years to fishing mid and late summers when most fly fishers have longed packed up their gear, awaiting April and May, the traditional fishing time.

Ted taught me other lessons, as well—to fish the pipe outlets on the outgoing tide at Eagle Pond at Greenwich Point and to investigate even the slightest unusual movement of water. He taught me that one need not eat before and certainly while fishing. He taught me to add three turns to the Clinch Knots I'd been tying—he's seen my flies come untied with just eight turns. He taught me to fish heavier tippets in salt water and lighter ones in fresh. (I own 7X, but had been afraid to use it.) He taught me to allow my back cast to extend farther, thereby effectively completing what is known as a double haul, the perfection of which has eluded me for decades. And he taught me to be kind to anglers I find where I intended to fish alone.

I pay Ted sometimes, but more as a token, and considerably less than a commercial guide charges. Also, in exchange for his teaching me, I have offered to switch roles—to guide him to two places that, oddly, but fortunately for me, he does not know. Both can be dangerous. One is Pennfield Reef, off Fairfield, which stretches an entire mile into Long Island Sound. At the dropping and low tides, one can walk out on it the entire way in only a few inches of water, fishing off both sides into deeper, moving water.

The other is the mouth of the Housatonic River, where the river empties into Long Island Sound, near Milford. Here, too, at dropping and low tides, one can walk way out on a mostly shell bottom into a maritime landscape so open and empty as to seem lunar and fish into the rushing water of the river. Because both places are so flat, the incoming tide comes in fast. One does not want to be trapped by it and floated off somewhere.

Ted and I didn't manage to fish the Mill River together. I did so on my own. What a treasure! It's a tiny stream one mile off exit 47 on the Merritt Parkway. Most rivers are stocked with fish raised in concrete fish hatcheries, but not the upper portion of the Mill. It contains native brook and brown trout—they were born there. I hadn't imagined there were any native trout anywhere in Connecticut. At the Mill, one is not allowed to keep fish. For that reason and because the stream is so small, with overhanging bushes and branches constantly alert to grabbing one's fly, and because the fish usually are small, one can fish it without seeing another human. The fish, being native, are instinctively wary, more difficult to catch, more beautiful and stronger than hatchery trout. The forest one walks through to get to the river is a pleasant mix of deciduous and evergreen, dappled with sunlight when the sun shines. It is a virtual paradise.

Yet I don't fish it as well as I think I might. I'd like to see how Ted fishes it.

I asked by e-mail whether he were free to fish the stream on mornings, before his high school routine begins. He responded: "When I fish, I feel guilty, when u fish, u feel free. Fishing is a personal endeavor, that is why it is special when we share a great day together. We will make it happen soon. It is just too taxing for me. I have acquired much side work, painting and carpentry at night, weekends, etc. I have many irons in the fire."

I replied that I hadn't understood the extent of his outside work, that I was harking back to early summer when he invited me fishing. Then this answer: "T, I love fishing w u. We will do it. I can't wait to hit the Mill n get some brookies. There is also great dry fly action on the Mill all winter. We will make it happen!" So far nothing has happened. Years have passed.



The State of the Striper

Warren R. Stern

This summer, like the summers of the past 30 years, found me, fly rod in hand, on the beaches, flats, and inshore waters of Nantucket, fishing for bonito, bluefish, false albacore, and most importantly, striped bass. But this summer, something unusual captured my attention. On a beautiful September afternoon, I was fishing the beach at Great Point when a friend rushed over and excitedly announced that standing on that spot with his fly rod, he had taken fourteen albies over a few hours on the previous day. I, of course, was getting skunked, which evidenced two unfortunate truths—one, “You shoulda been here yesterday,” the other that at the age of sixty-three and somewhat physically challenged, I could not hope to match the fishing prowess of my friend, a much younger fellow, built like an NFL running back, who could cast an entire 9-weight line for hours on end.

But the discussion led me to reflect on another subject, one of more general interest: the state of the striped bass fishery and how catching albies had become such a commonplace experience. I asked my friend—one of the most dedicated and proficient fly rodders on the island—how he was faring on stripers. Not so well, he said; a few stripers in the spring, but nothing since. I could say the same for myself—I was finding albies easily enough, particularly from my boat, but stripers were another story.

These experiences seemed typical of the fishing in recent years. To test this, I obtained whatever data I could find on the results of the Inshore Classic, a popular annual fishing tournament sponsored by the Nantucket Anglers’ Club from mid-September to mid-October to raise money for scholarships for high school students residing on the island. This past year marked the event’s tenth anniversary, and I thought it might be interesting to check the results to see if they confirmed that albie catches were growing more common and striper catches less so. The data are incomplete, but is instructive nevertheless. This table summarizes the data I have been able to locate.

Year	Number of Entrants	Total Fish Reported	Striped Bass	Bluefish	Bonito	False Albacore
2006	138	80	21	44	4	11
2007	175	120	29	39	12	40
2011	232	171	21	61	17	72
2012	242	187	24	80	4	79
2013	267	154	26	60	24	44
2015	259	233	26	55	41	111

Put differently, in 2015, twice as many anglers caught ten times as many albies as in 2006, but only 25 percent more stripers.

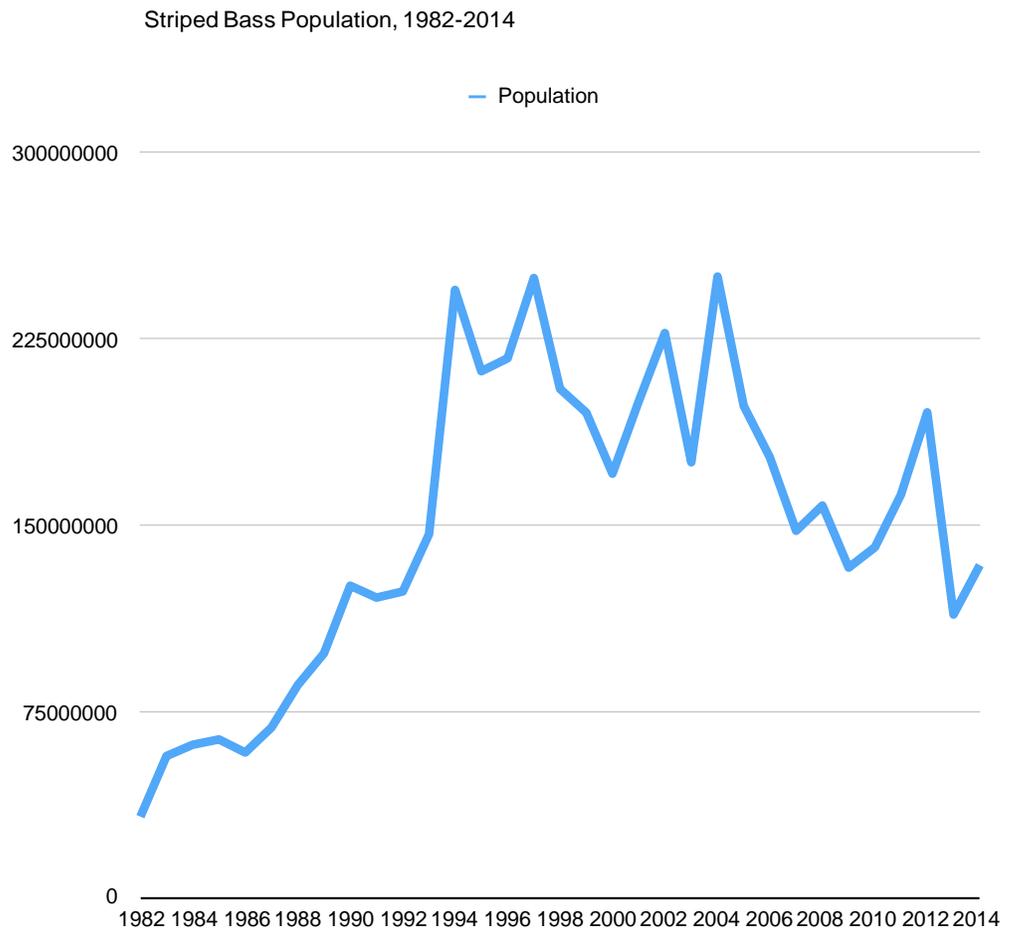
The Nantucket Inshore Classic occurs at about the same time as the more famous and much bigger Martha’s Vineyard Striped Bass and Bluefish Derby. I do not have historical data from this event, but its Web site reports that in 2015, participants weighed in 467 albies as against only 259 stripers (and 891 bluefish and 340 bonito). Although each island’s denizens love to emphasize supposed differences

between the islands, the distribution of stripers relative to albies does not appear to be one of them.

One can only speculate about whether the growth in the albie catch marks a trend. (It coincides with an explosion of the seal population in the Cape and the Islands, which, among other evils, is harming shore fishing of all types.) The coastal migratory striped bass stock between Maine and North Carolina is managed through the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC). False albacore are not among the managed species, and I can only guess at why they seem to have become so numerous. Perhaps less competition for food from stripers (and bluefish, which seem to be in the lower part of their breeding cycle), perhaps warmer water temperatures. Perhaps simply random variation.

Stripers, on the other hand, are managed, and the ASMFC data are voluminous, going back to 1982. The story they tell should be of interest to all saltwater anglers in our area, particularly those who prefer the fly rod, for the striped bass is an ideal fly-rod quarry, one that according to Ed Mitchell in *Fly Rodding the Coast* has long "stirred the imagination of fly fishermen," going back to Frank Forester in the 1840s and, yes, to our own Theodore Gordon.

The following chart illustrates the changes in the estimated striped bass population since 1982. (Except where stated otherwise, I derived the charts included in this essay from data presented in the October 8, 2015, Atlantic Striped Bass Stock Assessment Update prepared by the Atlantic Striped Bass Technical Committee of the ASMFC.) In summary, striped bass almost disappeared in the 1980s, then thrived into the early years of this century, and now populations seem to be trending downward.



The story behind these numbers is well known to devoted saltwater anglers. Prior to the 1980s, striped bass were essentially unprotected. Fish were slaughtered without restraint. Veteran fly rodder Lou Tabory vividly described the scene in "Striper Report 2013," published in *Fly Fishing in Saltwaters*. (See the sidebar).

The moratorium was mandated by the federal Atlantic Striped Bass Conservation Act of 1984 to enforce the ACFMC plan for striped bass management. It continued from 1985 to 1989. The population grew sixfold by 1995—the year that the striper stock was declared rebuilt—and with some variation, it maintained itself through about 2005. Commentators considered this to be a triumph of fisheries management. As Lefty Kreh put it in the 1997 edition of *Fly Fishing in Salt Water*, the experience showed that “if the environment is okay, proper controls on fish harvest can make a terrific difference.”

This decade coincided with explosive growth in the fly-fishing industry and ushered in the golden age of saltwater fly fishing in the Northeast. Kreh commented in his 1997 book that the “fastest-growing area of fly fishing is in saltwater” and “the greatest number of new participants . . . are those who are fishing for striped bass along the East Coast of the United States.” Two years later, as the boom extended, Lou Tabory commented in *Stripers on the Fly*, “The resurgence of striped bass is the reason the Atlantic coast has become a fly fishing Mecca,” stripers “are the mainstay of the New England and mid-Atlantic sport fishery,” and stripers are “the most important fly-tackle game fish from Maine to the Carolinas.” Publishers rushed to bring out books on fly rodding for stripers, including works by J. Kenney Abrames and Ray Bondorew that emphasized traditional fly patterns and techniques.

Looking back on this period in an article in *Fly Rod and Reel* describing the fly-fishing scene on the fabled Monomoy flats, Tom Rosenbauer of Orvis fame remarked, “Monomoy became a circus worthy of Islamorada during tarpon season,” offering the angler shots at “thousands of fish a day, some of them reaching 30 pounds.” And Lou Tabory commented in “Striper Report 2013,” “Ten to 15 years ago, Cape Cod hosted large numbers of surf anglers, especially in the fall. Beach buggies were everywhere. Most were spin fisherman, but at the Vineyard fly-anglers often dominated the water. And it really didn’t matter because the fishing community was out enjoying its mutual passion—fishing for striped bass.”

But, alas, the golden age was short-lived. As Tabory put it, “something happened.” The striper population dropped precipitously after 2006 and has generally trended down ever since. Paralleling this drop in population has been a drop in the recreational catch, as the first table on page 18 shows.

From this, one can see that the relative decline in the striper take in the Nantucket Inshore Classic is not an anomaly. The recreational take has plunged since 2006 and is approaching levels as low as those experienced before the fishery had fully recovered from the crisis of the 1980s and before Northeast saltwater fly fishing achieved the height of its popularity.

The data do not suggest that this decline was due to overfishing. As the chart shows, there has been no significant growth in the recreational harvest or the numbers of dead releases. The great majority of stripers caught by recreational anglers are released alive. Nor can one necessarily blame the commercial fishery. The second table on page 18 shows that the commercial harvest plus discards has not grown since 2000.

In the 1940s and '50s striper numbers fluctuated, but by the early '60s the numbers increased. . . . From the early '70s, striper numbers continued to grow, with 1973 recording the largest commercial landing in modern times. Fishing for bass was at an all-time high with large numbers of big fish taken from the beach. . . .

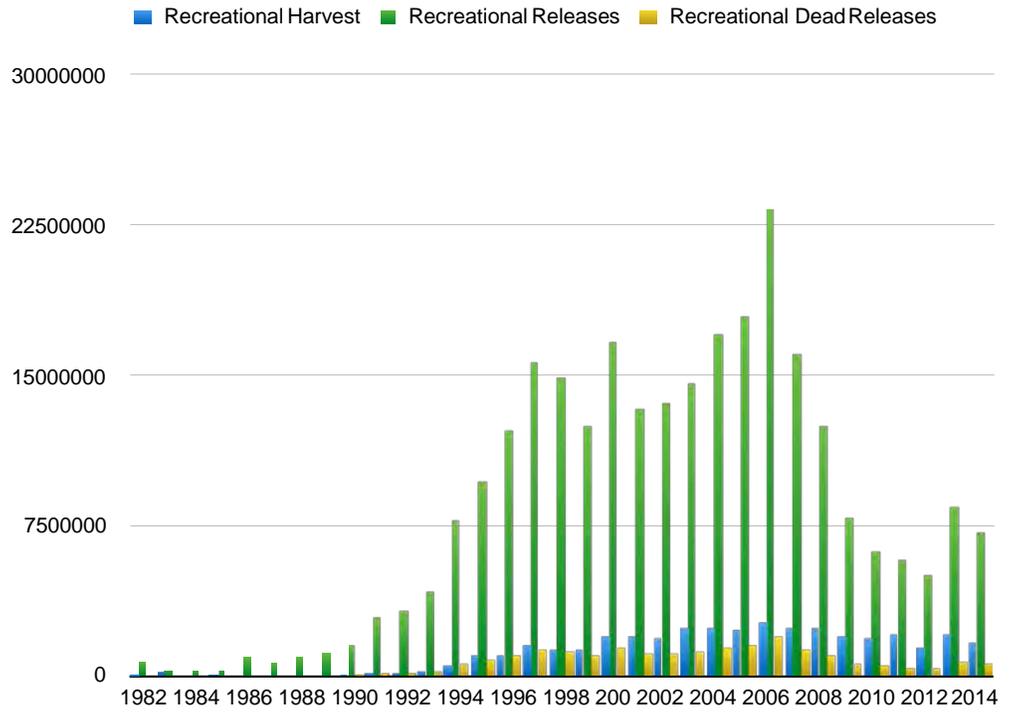
[C]ommercial beach-angling became very popular. . . with catches of more than a thousand pounds of stripers on a hot night. Nobody ever thought it would end. . . . The market price of stripers was high and anglers were making big money. . . .

In the early '80s everything changed. The numbers of stripers decreased rapidly, and . . . young-of-the-year numbers drastically dropped. With no regulations . . . anglers continued killing . . . the brood stock.

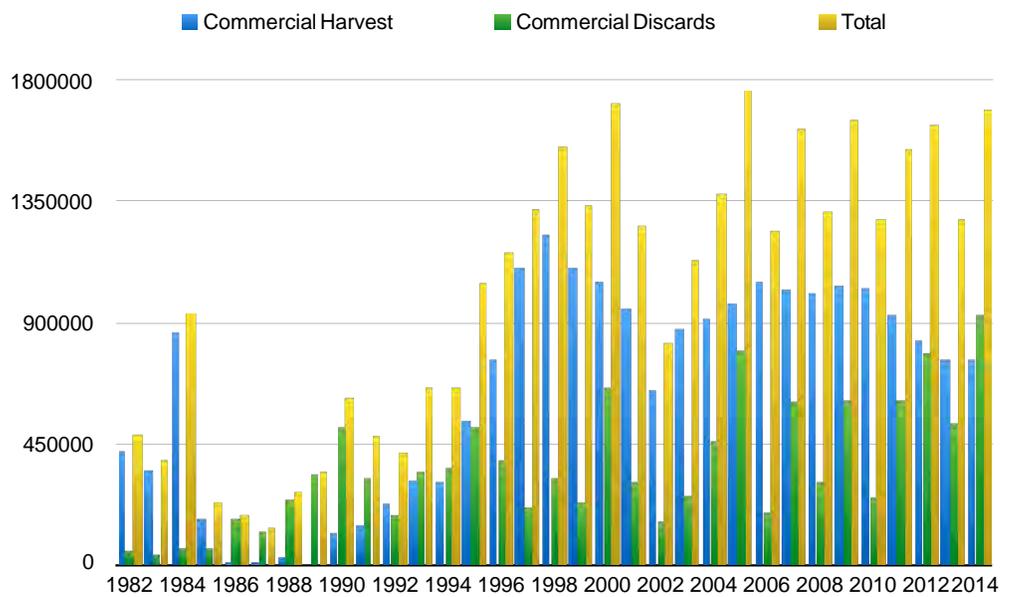
. . . [T]he fishery collapsed so fast that drastic measures were needed quickly. It was the first time in the history of the striper fishery that sport anglers and commercial anglers agreed on an issue—stop killing fish. It took a little time, but eventually a moratorium was established protecting stripers.

*—Lou Tabory,
“Striper Report, 2013”*

Recreational Fishing, 1982-2014

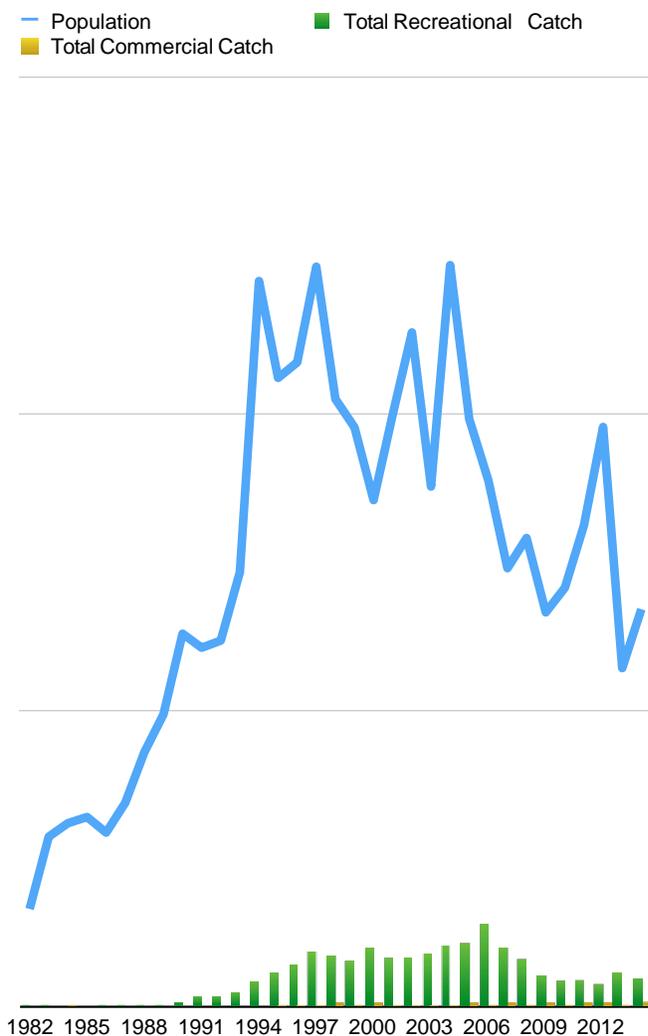


Commercial Harvest and Discards, 1982-2014



In fact, if you combine commercial and recreational removals and compare the result with the changes in population, you will see that overfishing does not seem to be the problem.

Population vs. Recreational and Commercial Removals, 1982-2014



The hypothesis of overfishing has been rejected by the ACFMC, based on the parameters it employs for fisheries management. The ASFMC released its report on the 2014 catch in October 2015 and concluded that striped bass are not overfished, meaning that the stock was not “exploited to a level of abundance considered too low to ensure safe reproduction.” ASFMC analysis emphasizes a “threshold” and “target” for two biological reference points: the female spawning stock biomass (SSB) and fully recruited fishing mortality, that is, the “instantaneous rate at which fish in a stock die because of fishing” (F). A “threshold” is a “critical” level “not to be crossed.” If the level is crossed, “the sustainability of the stock is threatened.” In the case of F, the threshold is set at maximum sustainable yield, that is, the “largest average catch to be taken from a stock without negatively impacting the ability of the stock to replace itself.” A “target” is a benchmark “that should not be exceeded on average” in order to achieve “a sustainable stock” or some other management objective. The F target “provides a buffer to account for the uncertainty” in the F threshold; the SSB target corresponds to 125 percent of

the SSB threshold. The ASFMC estimated the 2014 SSB at 63,918 metric tons, which exceeded the threshold of 57,626 metric tons, but was below the target of 72,032 metric tons, and estimated the 2014 F at 0.205, which was below the threshold of 0.219, but above the target of 0.180.

The ASCFM report noted that total abundance in 2014 was estimated at 134 million fish, a significant drop from the 195 million fish estimated in 2011, following an abundant year class in the Chesapeake Bay. The report then warned that the ASCFM projections showed that the probability of SSB falling below the threshold was 0.49 by 2015 and would decline slightly thereafter, but that there was less than a 12 percent probability that F would exceed the threshold. In other words, the ASFMC report indicated that the odds were about fifty-fifty that as measured by SSB, the “sustainability of the stock would be threatened” in 2015.

Even before issuing the October 2015 report, the ASFMC had taken action to maintain SSB above the threshold. In October 2014, the commission approved Addendum IV to Amendment 6 to the Atlantic Striped Bass Interstate Fishery Management Plan. The addendum reduced F reference points and required coastal states to implement harvest reductions with the objective of enhancing “the long-term sustainability of the striped bass resource and the fisheries it supports.” The ASFMC explained that total harvests had been decreasing since 2008, and even though F had always been maintained below the target, SSB was approaching its threshold and would probably fall below the threshold in the next several years.

The net effect of the Addendum is to reduce coastal catches by about 24 percent and the harvest in the Chesapeake Bay by 20 percent. Although recreational interests in the Northern states (which have been most adversely affected by the decline) wanted greater restrictions, the outcome seems to have been regarded as the best that could be achieved, given the opposition of commercial interests in Chesapeake Bay.

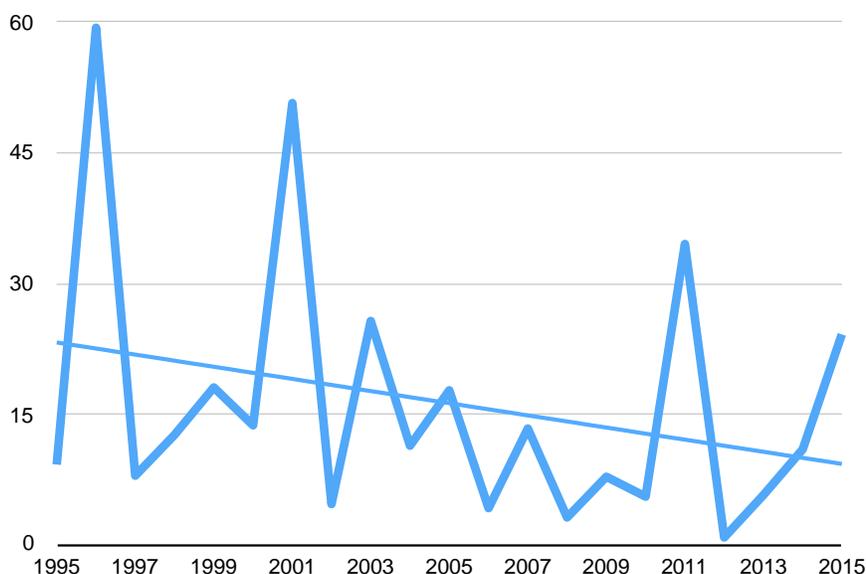
The impact of the Addendum IV measures will not be known until the ASFMC issues its 2015 stock assessment and perhaps not for a year or two after that. But Brad Burns, president of Stripers Forever, reported in September 2015 that his survey of the organization’s board members showed that “the striper fishery can be summed up as inconsistent at best and continuing to trend downward.” This is hardly scientific—Stripers Forever is an organization devoted to making the striper a game fish, so one would be surprised to hear an upbeat report. But the negative tone is consistent with what I have heard from anglers generally and with the data from the Nantucket and Martha’s Vineyard tournaments.

Reasonable people can disagree about whether the ASFMC measures will reverse the decline in the striper population. Burns is pessimistic. Citing declining young-of-the-year data, Burns argues that the fishery won’t turn around unless steps are taken to increase future spawning rates. He points out that the average young-of-the-year catch per haul in Chesapeake Bay from 1995 to 2005 (the peak boom years) was 21.06, significantly higher than the 9.73 average from 2005-2014 and much higher than the 3.52 average for the previous three years. Burns sees bad times ahead: “If we are looking at a declining fishery now, imagine how it will look when the last of the fish born during the boom are gone.”

A few weeks after the Burns report, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources issued its 2015 study of the striped bass juvenile index, which measures the number of fish less than one year of age, trumpeting that at 24.2, the index doubled the long-term average and was the “eighth highest on record.” Charles Witek, another fisheries conservation advocate, characterized this as “reasonably good news,” but pointed out that the long-term average included the 4.26 average in the ten years ending in 1985 and that the ten years ending in 2005—the boom years—averaged 22.38, twice the average of current decade. Witek reported that commercial interests were seizing upon the 2015 index to ask the ASFMC to reverse stockbuilding measures taken as a result of Addendum 4, but the ASFMC has tabled the issue until February.

In my opinion, it would be a mistake to place too much weight on the Maryland 2015 index, and I doubt that the ASMFC will do so. In the first place, Virginia, which also monitors striped bass reproduction in the Chesapeake, reported on the same day that its survey showed only an average number of young-of-the-year striped bass, an average well below the results in almost all of the years since 1987. Moreover, while there have been some improvements in the Maryland young-of-the-year index since 2013, when it approached zero (and this may indicate a larger quantity of small fish over the next several years), the trend since 1995 has been negative.

Maryland YOY Index, 1995-2015



A blog post by Witek on the Maryland results attracted a comment by Aaron Adams, a leading saltwater fisheries scientist (and a great angler). Adams argued that the standard for measuring young-of-the-year data should be the years of healthy striped bass production, a standard that the 2015 data fail to meet. More importantly, Adams asked whether “habitat loss has capped the total possible abundance of striped bass . . . even without fishing pressure.” He pointed out that “this aspect is not included in striped bass management (and is not included in most fisheries management.)”

Adams is right to raise the question of habitat and the related questions of warming oceans, disease, and disruptions of the food chain. This points to broader environmental problems that, unfortunately, may mean that the striper reproduction cycle may never again attain the levels achieved at the end of the twentieth century. But of course, this also raises the question of what the ASMFC can do in the near term to protect the spawning stock. As long ago as 1995, in *Fly Fishing the Inshore Waters*, at a time when the stock was declared rebuilt, Lefty Kreh warned that “further declines in our Atlantic Coast striper population are possible, so the crisis is far from over.” He said, “Scientists still don’t really know why there are good and bad years of striper reproduction,” and “until they do, we should be careful about allowing heavy harvesting by either sport or commercial fishermen.” Most importantly, he admonished us to “take the steps necessary” to protect “our seed stock.” Such steps could include a slot limit. In “Striper Report 2013,” Tabory proposed a one-fish-a day, 22-to-26-inch slot limit, which would permit fish that exceed the limit to have about eight or ten years to breed. This is a sensible measure that has a greater chance of implementation than

the more ambitious proposal of getting the striped bass declared a game fish. And of course, even absent compulsion, all anglers should release larger fish and do their part to rebuild the stock.

So, what about albies? Aren't they good enough? From where I stand, the diminishing stock of striped bass is not offset by the apparent growth in the albie fishery. Striped bass, like bonefish and tarpon, are a saltwater species that seems particularly suited to the fly rod. False albacore? Not so much. The fly is certainly an effective bait for albies, and pound for pound, the albie outfights the striper every time. And they are a beautiful (albeit inedible) species. But albies do not show until late summer, and when they do, the chase-the-birds, run-and-gun, cast-and-strip technique can lose its appeal. After a few fish are brought to the boat, my mind wanders to the beautiful spring days, the quiet flats, the fertile estuaries, the beautiful shorelines, and the subtle fly patterns that I associate with striper fishing. I suspect that if he were alive today, Theodore Gordon, who wrote of taking large striped bass "at the Falls of the Potomac" on "Bumble-puppy flies," would agree.

