

Striped Bass Recreational Length Limit Change

NOTICE

Effective 0001 hours, Friday, May 26, 2023, the length limit for striped bass in all Connecticut waters will be a 28-31 inch harvest slot limit, meaning recreational anglers may only retain a striped bass if it is greater than or equal to 28 inches and less than 31 inches in length. The striped bass recreational possession limit (one fish) and open season (year-round) will remain status quo.

On May 2, 2023, the Striped Bass Management Board of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) took emergency action to implement a coastwide 31-inch maximum size limit on recreational striped bass harvest. The emergency action was taken because coastwide recreational harvest of striped bass in 2022 increased substantially from 2021 (2021 estimated harvest = 1.87 million fish or 15.84 million pounds; 2022 estimated harvest = 3.48 million fish or 35.88 million pounds). The steep increase in striped bass harvest in 2022 jeopardizes the success of the ongoing ASMFC striped bass stock rebuilding plan which mandates that ASMFC must rebuild striped bass Spawning Stock Biomass (SSB) to target levels by 2029.

The 2022 ASMFC Striped Bass Stock Assessment Update completed in November 2022 estimated that striped bass SSB was 143 million pounds in 2021; the target SSB for 2029 is 235 million pounds (64% greater than estimated 2021 SSB). The 2022 stock assessment concluded that if the striped bass fishing mortality rate remained constant at the estimated 2021 rate for the remainder of the rebuilding period, the probability of SSB reaching the target by 2029 was approximately 78%. However, the 2022 assessment only considered data available through 2021, and therefore did not consider the substantially elevated striped bass harvest observed in 2022.

In March 2023, at the request of the Striped Bass Management Board due to concerns about the impact of elevated 2022 harvest upon stock rebuilding, the ASMFC Striped Bass Technical Committee completed updated stock assessment projections that incorporated estimated 2022 striped bass harvest. The updated projections indicated striped bass fishing mortality rose substantially in 2022, and therefore the probability of successful stock rebuilding by 2029 had declined to approximately 15%. The substantial increase in striped bass harvest in 2022 was driven by the new availability of the very abundant 2015 striped bass year class (age-7 fish) in the prevailing coastwide harvest slot of 28-35". Approximately half of the 2015 year class was 28-inches or greater in length in 2022; in 2023, almost all striped bass in the 2015 year class will be 28-inches or greater, meaning that availability of striped bass in the 28-35" harvest slot, and therefore striped harvest, would likely continue to increase substantially in 2023 without changes in prevailing regulations. The emergency action taken by the Striped Bass Management Board, which will narrow the coastwide harvest slot limit to 28-31", was intended as a precautionary action to reduce potential striped bass harvest in 2023, mitigate further declines in rebuilding probability, and hopefully avoid the need for even more restrictive regulations in 2024-2025.

To come into compliance with the ASMFC emergency action, CT DEEP will implement a new 28-31” harvest slot limit for striped bass effective May 26, 2023. The new 28-31” harvest slot limit that will become effective on May 26th means that any striped bass that is less than 28 inches or greater than or equal to 31 inches must be released immediately without avoidable injury. This regulation will apply to all waters of the state (marine and inland district).

Unfortunately, CT DEEP produced printed 2023 Fishing Guides and distributed them to various outlets statewide prior to the ASMFC emergency action. These printed Fishing Guides therefore display a striped bass length limit (28-35” harvest slot limit) that will no longer be in effect as of May 26th. CT DEEP is working to correct the printed fishing guides that have not yet been distributed to the public and apologizes for any inconvenience to individuals who have already obtained a printed guide. A corrected version of the printed guide is available for download at: <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Fishing/General-Information/Fishing-Guide>

Questions on the new striped bass harvest slot regulation can be sent via e-mail to deep.marine.fisheries@ct.gov , or call 860-434-6043 and leave a voicemail and someone from DEEP Marine Fisheries will return your call as soon as possible.

For more information about the ASMFC emergency action, please read the ASMFC news release available at <http://www.asmfc.org/uploads/file/64529753pr10AtlSripedBassEmergencyAction.pdf> as well as the informative FAQ page compiled by the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries available at <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/striped-bass-emergency-action-frequently-asked-questions-faq>. The 2022 ASMFC Striped Bass Stock Assessment Update can be found at https://asmfc.org/uploads/file/63cb200fAtlStripedBassAssessmentUpdate_Nov2022.pdf

ASMFC is required to hold four public hearings within 30 days of any emergency action to provide information on the action and obtain public comment. CT DEEP Marine Fisheries previously provided notice of these hearings in an e-mail notice sent on May 11th but is including this information again in this notice for convenience.

ASMFC will hold four virtual hearings and has released a hearing schedule:

Wednesday, May 17 5:00 – 7:00 p.m. (completed)
Monday, May 22 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.
Tuesday, May 23 5:00 – 7:00 p.m.
Wednesday, May 31 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

To register for a virtual hearing, please go to this link:

<https://register.gotowebinar.com/#rt/454738649028335194>

and use the dropdown menu to select the hearing date you plan to attend. Hearings will be held via GoToWebinar, and you can join the webinar from your computer, tablet or smartphone. If you are new to GoToWebinar, you can download the software by (<https://support.goto.com/webinar/help/how-do-i-download-goto-webinar>) or via the App store under GoToWebinar. We recommend you register for the hearing well in advance of the hearing since GoToWebinar will provide you with a link to test your device’s compatibility with the webinar. If you find your device is not compatible in advance of the

hearing, please contact ASMFC at info@asmfc.org (subject line: GoToWebinar help) and we will try to get you connected. We also strongly encourage participants to use the computer voice over internet protocol (VoIP) so you can ask questions and provide input at the hearing.

Members of the public may also submit written comments by sending an e-mail to comments@asmfc.org or by mail to:

Emilie Franke
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission
1050 N. Highland Street, Suite 200 A-N
Arlington, VA 22201

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