



MARINE FISHERIES PROGRAM QUARTERLY REPORT

September 2017



➤ FISHERIES MANAGEMENT, MONITORING & RESEARCH:

◆ ASMFC / MAFMC Management.

The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASFMC) met jointly in August to review previously implemented 2018 specifications for summer flounder, scup, black sea bass and bluefish and to consider setting specifications for scup in 2019. **The recreational harvest limit (RHL) for all species except black sea bass will be increasing for 2018.** Though sea bass abundance remains high, the very large 2011 year class that has driven the fishery in recent years has been fished down. **On the positive side, the 2015 year class appears to be large and will assure a robust fishery in coming years.**

Species	Year	Recreational Harvest Limit (millions of pounds)
Summer Flounder	2017	3.77
	2018	4.42
Scup	2017	5.50
	2018	7.37
	2019	7.37
Black Sea Bass	2017	4.29
	2018	3.66
Bluefish	2017	9.65
	2018	11.58

◆ At the spring Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASFMC) Summer Flounder, Scup and **Black Sea Bass** board meeting, the **board had responded to very high November and December (wave 6) 2016 black sea bass harvest estimates by voting to impose a 5-fish possession limit for black sea bass in wave 6 for the states of Rhode Island through New Jersey.** In Connecticut, this would have affected party/charter boat anglers who were allowed 8 fish. At the **ASFMC Summer meeting, the board the Board rescinded that previous action and, as a result, states will maintain their 2016 wave 6 measures for 2017.**

At the August Joint meeting of Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and ASFMC, the Council and Commission also discussed the potential opening of a recreational Wave 1 (January-February) black sea bass fishery in 2018. This proposal had a very lengthy discussion, but ultimately, the Council and Commission decided not to open the Wave 1 fishery in 2018 due to concerns about the amount of harvest that would have to be reallocated from



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the rest of the 2018 recreational season and the potential disproportionate impacts to states that may not participate in the Wave 1 fishery.

◆ At the spring ASFMC meeting, the **Summer Flounder**, Scup and Black Sea Bass Board accepted New Jersey's request to *consider* a proposal for conservation-equivalent management measures for the 2017 summer flounder recreational fishery. Addendum XXVIII to the fishery management plan (FMP), which was approved February 2, 2017, **required CT, NY and NJ to implement identical measures that would result in a collective 33% reduction in harvest from 2016 levels**. Because fish in NJ waters are somewhat smaller than fish further to the north, **NJ contended that the state would suffer a disproportionate impact from a 3 fish, 19 inch, and 128-day season and strongly opposed those measures**. In developing an alternative proposal, NJ took a part conventional and part unconventional approach in making its case that their proposed measures were "conservation equivalent". **Part of NJ's justification depended on a conventional approach of shortening the season to 104 days, but opted to keep the minimum size at 18 inches instead of 19 inches. This netted them about a 21% reduction in harvest – short of the required 33%**. To span that gap, NJ took an unconventional approach of including in their calculations the expected difference in dead discards between Addendum XXVIII measures and their proposal. Their approach also included an unquantifiable assumption that the reduction in the discard mortality rate would be reduced from 10% to 8% by a proposed educational outreach campaign that focused on proper handling and releasing of fish. On a May 22 conference call, **the board did not accept the proposal, and on June 1, ASFMC's Interstate Fishery Management Policy Board voted to find NJ out of compliance with the FMP**. Under the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act (ACFCMA), if the Secretary of Commerce concurs that (1) the state failed to carry out its responsibility under the commission's FMP and (2) the measures the state failed to implement and enforce are necessary for the conservation of the fishery, then the Secretary could declare a moratorium for the fishery in that state. In his finding, **the Secretary of Commerce ultimately concluded that the measures NJ implemented were likely to be equivalent and therefore that the second noncompliance criteria was not met, and a moratorium was not necessary**. As ACFCMA is the principal tool to assure state compliance with FMPs, the Commission's policy board expressed dismay over this decision and grave concern about the impact to the Commission process. The Commission's leadership has requested a face-to-face meeting with the Secretary with the goal of "protecting the process." The Commission hopes to clarify the process by which the Secretary makes a decision regarding a Commission noncompliance finding through a Memorandum of Agreement that includes the opportunity for the Commission have a meeting with the Secretary prior to a final compliance decision.

◆ On June 26, the department held a public hearing Amendment 1 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for **Tautog**. The **2015 Benchmark Stock Assessment and Peer Review Report indicated that for the Long Island Sound region, the stock is overfished and overfishing is occurring**. The NY Bight assessment (NY/NJ) reached the same



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conclusion for tautog in that area, while tautog assessments to the north and south suggest sustainable fishing rates and acceptable biomass levels. The amendment will require CT and NY to implement measures for LIS that constitute at least a 50% probability of achieving the regional target fishing mortality rate. For the **LIS region, this will mean measures that will reduce commercial and recreational harvest by 47.2%**. Not surprisingly, this news was met with consternation from both the recreational and commercial fisheries stakeholders. At the summer ASFMC meeting, the board did not take final action on the amendment but did vote to: **revise the goals of the FMP, allow reference points to be modified by board action, adopt four-region regional management, options related to maintenance of fishing mortality and spawning stock biomass, and commercial quotas and harvest tagging**. Action was deferred to the Annual Meeting (October) on state-specific measures. The delay allows states within the regions to consider additional management programs other than were suggested at the public hearings. **Connecticut and New York region needed additional time to explore other management strategies that would moderate the severe social and economic impacts, very disjointed management measures between neighboring regions, and provide flexibility in achieving such a large reduction in fishing mortality**. The two states are exploring a more modest harvest reduction in the neighborhood of 20-30%. Connecticut and New York will work with the Technical Committee/Stock Assessment Subcommittee to determine what impacts such a lessened reduction would have on the probability achieving the fishing mortality target in a reasonable amount of time and present a proposal to the board in October.

◆ At the Summer Meeting, the ASFMC **American Lobster** board considered Lobster Conservation and Management Team (LCMT; industry advisors) proposals to **achieve a 5% increase in egg production** and to consider final action and Addendum XXV of the American Lobster Fishery Management Plan. The **objective of the addendum was to address the continued recruitment failure of lobster in the southern New England stock**. The Area 6 (LIS) LCMT settled on management measure options that included a reduction in the maximum gauge and adjustments to the closed season. After considering the proposals put forth by the various LCMTs and Technical Committee input, the Board was divided in its support of the Draft Addendum. Some members felt the proposed measures did not go far enough to protect the stock and would not achieve the required 5% increase in egg production. Others believed significant reductions have already occurred in the fishery and no further action was needed. Ultimately, the **Board decided to not to move forward with the addendum and decided instead to establish a workgroup to develop recommendations on the best approaches to manage SNE lobster in the context of climate change and other issues facing the fishery**.

◆ At the ASMFC Summer Meeting, the Shad and **River Herring** Management Board reviewed the results of the **2017 River Herring Assessment Update, which indicated that river herring remain depleted and at near historic lows on a coastwide basis**. The “depleted” determination was used instead of “overfished” and “overfishing” because many factors, not



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just directed and incidental fishing, are contributing to the low abundance of river herring. Alewife and blueback herring (collectively referred to as river herring) are anadromous species, spending the majority of their life at sea and returning to their natal streams to spawn. While at sea, mixing is believed to occur among multiple river-specific stocks and the incidental catch of river herring in non-targeted ocean fisheries is known to include both immature and mature fish.

The stock assessment update applied the same approaches used in the previous benchmark stock assessment with the incorporation of additional years of data (2011-2015). Of the 54 coastwide river herring stocks for which data were available, 16 experienced increasing abundance trends, 2 experienced decreasing abundance trends, 8 experienced stable abundance, 10 experienced no discernible trends in abundance due to high variability, and 18 did not have enough data to assess recent abundance trends. The trends for Connecticut rivers appear in the table below.

Abundance and trends of select Connecticut alewife and blueback herring stocks from the 2012 benchmark assessment and the 2017 assessment update. A = Alewife only; B= Blueback herring only; A,B = Alewife and blueback herring by species.

Rivers in CT	Benchmark Trends (2001-2010)	Updated Recent Trends (2006-2015)
Bride Brook	Unknown ^A	Increasing ^A
Connecticut	Decreasing ^B	Stable ^B
Farmington	Unknown ^{A,B}	Unknown ^{A,B}
Mianus	Unknown ^{A,B}	No Trend ^A , Increasing ^B
Mill Brook	Unknown ^A	No Trend ^A
Naugatuck	Unknown ^{A,B}	Unknown ^{A,B}
Shetucket	Unknown ^{A,B}	No Trend ^A , Stable ^B

While abundance in these river systems are still at low levels, dam removals and improvements to fish passage have had a positive impact on run returns. Since the completion of the 2012 assessment, NOAA Fisheries in partnership with the Commission have worked to provide state and local agencies with restoration project funding, leading to dam removals and fish passage improvement projects. River herring are managed through Amendment 2 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Shad and River Herring, with the goal of conserving and protecting river herring along the coast. The Amendment prohibited state waters commercial and recreational fisheries beginning January 1, 2012, unless a state or jurisdiction had a Sustainable Fishery Management Plan (SFMP) approved by the Board.

◆ The Marine Fisheries Program also hosted an ASFMC public hearing on September 11th to get public input on Amendment 3 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for **Atlantic Menhaden**. **This amendment includes provisions to incorporate the ecological role of menhaden into menhaden management and to revisit commercial allocation methods.**



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Menhaden occupy an important link in the coastal marine food chain as they transfer planktonic material into animal biomass. Menhaden support a variety of predator species including important commercial and recreational species such as striped bass and weakfish, iconic birds such as osprey and bald eagles, and marine mammals such as the humpback whale. **Reduced menhaden populations may impact the abundance and diversity of predator populations, particularly if other prey options are limited or not available.** Over 30 people attended the hearing and were universally supportive of developing and incorporating management “reference points” that conservatively maintain menhaden biomass at levels to assure their ecological role.

◆ Summary of Spring 2017 Long Island Sound Trawl Survey (LISTS):

Due to vessel repairs to the *R/V John Dempsey* detailed in the previous quarterly report, there was no April sampling and only about half of the standard May sampling. All of the standard June sampling was conducted. This resulted in 64 tows in the spring LISTS (May = 8 days & 24 tows; June = 13 days & 40 tows) whereas the typical spring LISTS consists of 120 tows.

This past spring, 6 species were at record high abundance for the LISTS time series; **black sea bass, smooth dogfish, spotted hake, scup, striped sea robin and weakfish**. Two additional species were at notably higher than average abundance (but not record high abundance); **butterfish and northern searobin**. **Summer flounder catches were about average.**

The record high black sea bass index was approximately 9x higher than the time series average and was driven by a half dozen tows in the eastern half of the Sound that had a lot of black sea bass. The largest catch of black sea bass was a tow toward the end of May that had 136 black sea bass weighing more than 124 kg (approximately 274 lbs).

More than 46,500 scup (porgy) weighing more than 7,400 kg (16,400 lbs) were caught in the abbreviated Spring 2017 LISTS. As noted above, this is a record high for the LISTS time series. In fact, this relative index of abundance is approximately 14x the average and 3x the previous record high from 2016. Large catches (1,000-5,000 scup per tow) occurred on 6 May tows and 8 June tows in the Eastern and Central portions of the Sound.

Species that were at notably low relative abundance in the spring 2017 LISTS included winter flounder, lobster, little skate, striped bass and tautog. The index for winter flounder was at an all-time low but this is at least partly due to no sampling in April or the first part of May when LISTS historically caught the majority of the winter flounder for the spring survey.

All of the species mentioned as being above average catches in Spring 2017 LISTS are considered warm temperate species and most of the species mentioned as being below average catches are considered cold temperate species. Only two of the species mentioned deviate from this pattern; both striped bass and tautog are considered warm temperate species but catches this past spring were below average.



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The invasive red algae was particularly troublesome at one site in May in the Niantic Bay vicinity where just under 270 kg (almost 595 lbs) were scrubbed from the net. For the rest of the spring sampling, seven other sites had more than 10 kg (22 lbs) of the red algae in the net – all in the eastern portion of the Sound, mainly off Old Saybrook, Niantic and New London.

◆ Update on Fall 2017 LISTS:

Due to weather and mechanical delays, only two days of fall survey have been completed thus far. Currently, Dempsey is undergoing repairs to the PTO which failed while sampling on Monday, 9/11/2017.

◆ Marine Fisheries GIS:

Using the online mapping application presented at the previous FAC meeting, five (5) anglers have provided input to the *Popular Places to Fish* map layer. Angler participation was crucial to ironing out some bugs early on and subsequent feedback on the ease of use of the app has been mostly positive. Three (3) anglers provided their feedback directly through the mapping application using their home computers. Two (2) of the anglers viewed the app then provided feedback to Fisheries staff who entered the information. Most of the angler knowledge pertained to the western portion of LIS which is very helpful since the layer previously didn't have much information for that area. **Hopefully, more anglers will be willing to provide their knowledge for inclusion in the *Popular Places to Fish* map layer.** Updates to this layer will be added to future versions of the interactive *Saltwater Fishing Resource Map* on the CT DEEP website. (www.ct.gov/deep/saltwaterfishingresourcemap). If you are an avid saltwater angler and would like to contribute your fishing knowledge to the map, please call **860-434-6043** or email <mailto:deep.marine.fisheries@ct.gov> to find out how you can get involved.





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➤ MARINE RECREATIONAL FISHING:

MARINE RECREATIONAL INFORMATION PROGRAM (MRIP)

◆ 2016 & 2017, MRIP Wave 3 (May-June) **Total Catch** estimates for Connecticut (numbers of fish).

2016		42,063	2017		38,288
	BLUEFISH			BLUEFISH	
	DOGFISH SHARKS	73,181		DOGFISH SHARKS	12,203
	SKATES/RAYS	70,430		SKATES/RAYS	9,476
	WEAKFISH	1,654		EELS	8,591
	SUMMER FLOUNDER	498,004		SUMMER FLOUNDER	103,823
	WINTER FLOUNDER	504		WINTER FLOUNDER	367
	HERRINGS	122,264		HERRINGS	61,814
	SCUP	254,210		SCUP	311,196
	BLACK SEA BASS	334,083		BLACK SEA BASS	49,654
	SEAROBINS	335,259		SEAROBINS	257,395
	STRIPED BASS	186,050		STRIPED BASS	350,320
	WHITE PERCH	3,514		WHITE PERCH	500
	CUNNER	8,105		CUNNER	0
	TAUTOG	6,371		TAUTOG	41,657
	*** GRAND TOTAL	1,945,833		*** GRAND TOTAL	1,246,492

◆ 2016 & 2017, MRIP Wave 3 (May-June) **Harvest** estimates for Connecticut (numbers of fish).

2016		15,471	2017		9,521
	BLUEFISH			BLUEFISH	
	DOGFISH SHARKS	47		DOGFISH SHARKS	22
	SKATES/RAYS	0		SKATES/RAYS	0
	KINGFISHES	12		EELS	0
	WEAKFISH	39		KINGFISHES	0
	SUMMER FLOUNDER	88,813		SUMMER FLOUNDER	14,602
	WINTER FLOUNDER	0		WINTER FLOUNDER	367
	HERRINGS	100,176		HERRINGS	55,143
	SCUP	92,933		SCUP	150,453
	BLACK SEA BASS	128,600		BLACK SEA BASS	17,972
	SEAROBINS	4,664		SEAROBINS	9,173
	STRIPED BASS	17,834		STRIPED BASS	16,086
	WHITE PERCH	3,514		WHITE PERCH	500
	CUNNER	0		CUNNER	0
	TAUTOG	0		TAUTOG	0
	*** GRAND TOTAL ***	452,111		*** GRAND TOTAL ***	273,838



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Marine Boat Catch Card Angler Survey

◆ Marine Fisheries staff have received 179 catch cards from marine recreational anglers who fish from boats. The catch card is designed to collect fishing trip effort, catch by species and disposition, along with length measurement data on kept and released fish. The boat launches are Barn Island, Bayberry Lane, Niantic River, Baldwin Bridge, Birdseye (Stratford), Norwalk (Veterans Park) and Saugatuck River State Boat launch.

Eastern Boat Launches have been visited 21 times, Western launches visited 20 times

Species	# Kept	% Kept East	# Released East	% Released East	# Total East
Skates	0	0%	0	0%	0
Tautog	0	0%	1	100%	1
Atlantic Menhaden	0	0%	0	0%	0
Dogfish	0	0%	1	100%	1
Winter Flounder	6	75%	2	25%	8
Sea Robins	0	0%	11	100%	11
Black Sea Bass	15	75%	5	25%	20
Scup	18	69%	8	31%	26
Bluefish	28	100%	0	0%	28
Summer Flounder	30	53%	27	47%	57
Striped Bass	8	35%	15	65%	23
TOTALS	105	60%	70	40%	175

Number of catch cards: 140 East, 39 West

Species	# Kept West	% Kept West	# Released West	% Released West	# Total West
Skates	0	0%	0	0%	0
Tautog	0	0%	0	0%	0
Atlantic Menhaden	1	100%	0	0%	1
Dogfish	0	0%	0	0%	0
Winter Flounder	0	0%	0	0%	0
Sea Robins	6	75%	2	25%	8
Black Sea Bass	3	21%	11	79%	14
Scup	5	36%	9	64%	14
Bluefish	0	0%	2	100%	2
Summer Flounder	3	75%	1	25%	4
Striped Bass	1	50%	1	50%	2
TOTALS	19	42%	26	58%	45



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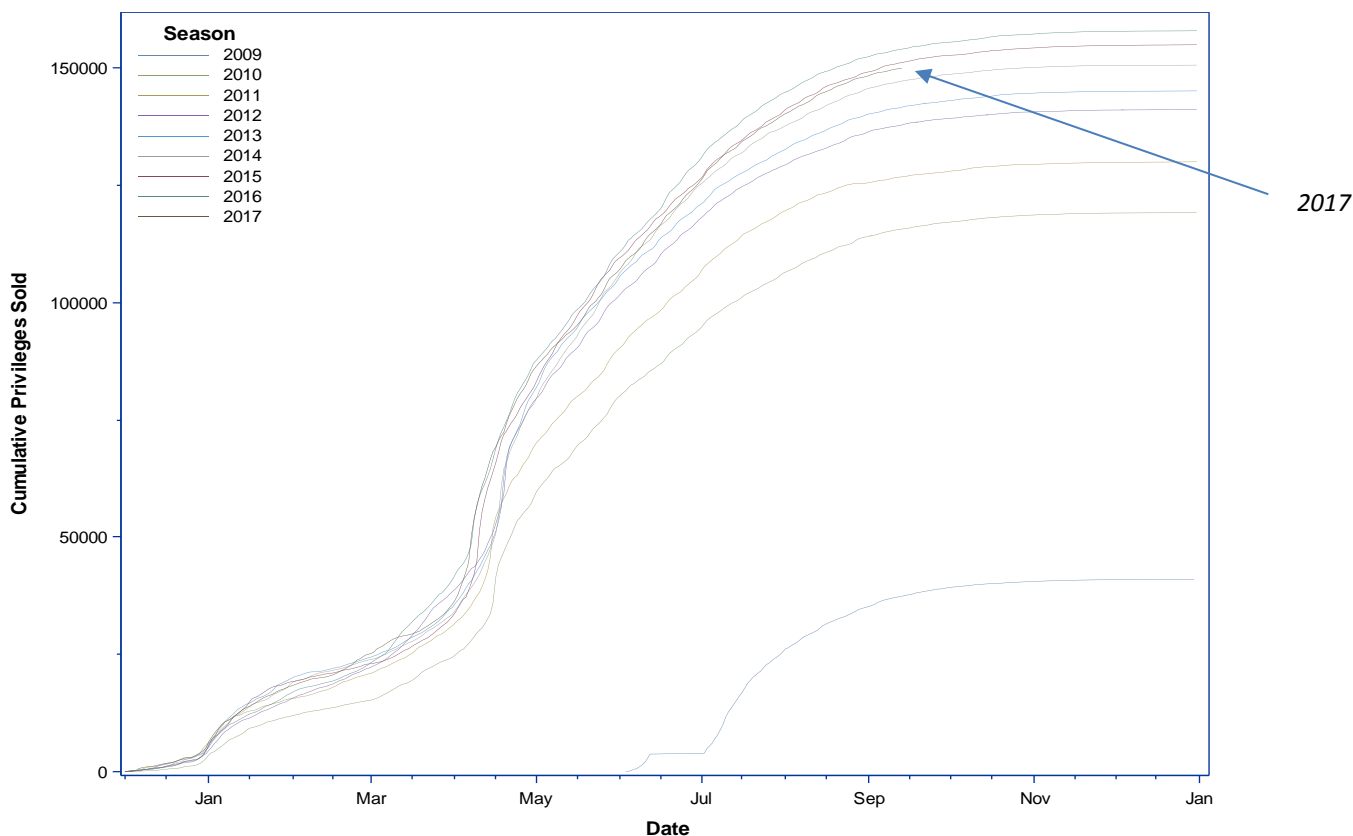
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➤ MARINE RECREATIONAL FISHING LICENSES:

- ◆ Growth in marine fishing license sales in 2010 - 2017.

2017 Marine Licenses issued through SEPTEMBER 13, 2017.





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Marine Waters Fishing Licenses, 2015 – 2017. Licenses by Type

Privilege Type	Season		
	2015	2016	2017
10195 - Marine Waters Fishing Lic, Free Annual - Code 9 (Intellect Disabled)	427	445	401
10196 - Marine Waters Fishing Lic, Free Annual - Code 5 (Blind)	83	82	80
10197 - Marine Waters Fishing Lic, Free Annual - Type 17 (Handicapped)	511	505	456
1296 - Marine Waters Fishing Lic	18,301	18,752	17,557
1297 - Marine Waters Fishing Lic (Non-Res)	2,870	2,996	2,736
1337 - Marine Waters Fishing Lic, Free Annual - Age 65 Plus	31,250	33,014	32,392
1345 - Marine Waters Fishing Lic, 1-day	802	733	590
1346 - All Waters Fishing Lic	65,988	67,254	64,371
1347 - Marine Waters Fishing Lic / Firearms Hunting Lic	448	440	456
1348 - All Waters Fishing Lic / Firearms Hunting Lic	17,185	16,043	17,625
1349 - All Waters Fishing Lic / Arch Deer / Small Game Lic	1,813	1,948	3,696
1350 - AW Fish Lic / Fa SS (Fa Hunt; S/R PL Deer; PL Sp Trky)	1,114	1,243	.
1351 - AW Fish Lic / Archery SS (Arch Deer / Sm Gm; PL Sp Trky)	1,001	1,050	.
1352 - Marine Waters Fishing Lic, 3-day (Non-Res)	1,377	1,491	1,174
1353 - All Waters Fishing Lic (Non-Res)	1,519	1,702	1,764
1354 - All Waters Fishing Lic / Firearms Hunting Lic (Non-Res)	138	142	125
1355 - Marine Waters Fishing Lic / Firearms Hunting Lic (Non-Res)	25	21	14
1475 - AW Fish Lic / Fa SS Lic (Fa Hunt; S/R/Mz PL Deer; PL Sp Trky)	2,059	1,938	.
1476 - AW Fish Lic / Fs SS (Fa Hunt; Mig Duck Stmp; Hip Pmt)	1,288	1,095	.
1922 - Connecticut Bonus Striped Bass Voucher	1,927	2,214	2,229
1953 - All Waters Fishing Lic / Firearms Hunting Lic	376	334	353
1954 - AW Fish Lic / Fa SS (Fa Hunt; S/R PL Deer; PL Sp Trky, 16-17)	49	53	.
1955 - AW Fish Lic / Fa SS (Fa Hunt; Mig Duck Stmp; Hip Pmt, 16-17)	61	43	.
1957 - Marine Waters Fishing Lic (16-17)	368	355	347
1958 - All Waters Fishing Lic (16-17)	2,778	2,783	2,554
1959 - Marine Waters Fishing Lic, 1-day (16-17)	20	24	18
1960 - Marine Waters Fishing Lic / Firearms Hunting Lic (16-17)	9	6	10
1962 - All Waters Fishing Lic / Arch Deer / Small Game Lic (16-17)	52	9	85
1964 - AW Fish Lic / Archery SS (Arch Deer / Sm Gm; PL Sp Trky, 16-17)	28	48	.
1965 - AW Fish Lic / Fa SS Lic (Fa Hunt; S/R/Mz PL Deer; PL Sp Trky, 16-17))	46	39	.
2023 - Free One-Day Sport Fishing License - 1st	500	578	451
2024 - Free One-Day Sport Fishing License - 2nd	533	544	380
Total	154,946	157,924	149,864



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➤ NOTICES TO FISHERMEN:

- 9/11/2017 **2017 Commercial Fishery Possession Limits**
Effective 0001 hours Sunday, September 10, 2017, the scup commercial fishery possession limit will be 100 pounds for holders of Scup License Endorsements. (N17-17)
- 8/18/2017 **2017 Commercial Fishery Possession Limits**
Effective August 20, 2017 the commercial fishery possession limits for scup and summer flounder have changed. (N17-16)
- 8/15/2017 **Notice to Lobster Fishermen**
This notice serves as a reminder of the upcoming fall season closure required under Addendum XVII to the ASMFC American Lobster Fishery Management Plan which was approved in November 2011. (N17-15)
- 7/7/2017 **2017 Commercial Fishery Possession Limits**
Effective 0001 hours Sunday, July 9, 2017, the scup commercial fishery possession limit will be reduced from 600 pounds to 200 pounds. Restricted Commercial Fishing License holders who do not hold a Scup License Endorsement are reduced from 60 fish to 20 fish. (N17-14)
- 7/6/2017 **Notice to Recreational Fishermen**
Black sea bass: For paying passengers on party or charter fishing vessels there are new measures. (N17_13)
- 6/27/2017 **2017 Commercial Fishery Possession Limits**
Effective 0001 hours, Saturday, July 1, 2017, the scup commercial fishery possession limit will be reduced from 1,200 pounds to 600 pounds. (N17-12)

➤ PUBLIC OUTREACH:

◆ 2017 Connecticut Marine Trophy Fish Award Summary

- 101 Total Trophy Fish Awards
- 27 Male & 4 Female Participants
- 9 Youth Participants (Age 16 & under)
- 17 Different Marine Species
- 2 NEW State Records

◆ 2017 New State Record Marine Fish

Species	Length	Weight
American Eel	39.5"	5 lb. 3 oz.
Smooth Dogfish	42"	9 lb. 2 oz.

◆ 2017 New Trophy Fish Records

Species	Length	Weight
Tiger Shark	108"	550 lb.
Striped Bass	49"	46 lb. 8 oz.
Weakfish	31"	9 lb. 8 oz.
Striped Searobin	19.5"	3 lb. 4 oz.



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◆ 2017 New Trophy Fish Records Continued

Species	Length	Weight
Clearnose Skate	39.75"	5 lb. 2 oz.

◆ 2017 Marine Trophy Fish Award Species Rank

1. Black Sea Bass	16
2. Bluefish	12
3. Blue Crab	11
4. Striped Bass	10
5. Summer Flounder	8
6. Scup	7
7. Weakfish	7
8. American Eel	5
8. Striped Searobin	5
9. Northern Kingfish	4
10. Clearnose Skate	3
10. Tautog	3
10. Smooth Dogfish	3



Steve Danis with his 81 inch – 278 pound Thresher Shark caught at the CIA Grounds