

JAY A. JACOBS
Legislative District 36
Caroline, Cecil, Kent, and
Queen Anne's Counties

Environment and Transportation
Committee

Subcommittees

Motor Vehicle and Transportation

Natural Resources, Agriculture,
and Open Space

Local Government and Bicounty Agencies

Joint Committee on Administrative,
Executive, and Legislative Review



The Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street, Room 309
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3449 · 301-858-3449
800-492-7122 Ext. 3449
Fax 410-841-3093 · 301-858-3093
Jay.Jacobs@house.state.md.us

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB889-Fisheries-Striped Bass or Rockfish-Juvenile Survey

Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

Today I am here to present HB889 which expands the scope of the annual young of the year juvenile survey of striped bass by adding more sites in the mid bay region of the Chesapeake Bay.

Currently the Department of Natural Resources conducts samplings in 4 areas of the Chesapeake Bay and tributaries consisting of the Upper Bay Region, the Potomac River, the Nanticoke River and the Choptank River. These areas are located basically in the north and the south regions of the bay. The total number of sites surveyed in these 4 areas is 22. This young of the year sampling has been done in these areas since 1954.

The sampling is done on a monthly basis in July, August, and September in these 4 areas. As you can notice by the chart provided in my testimony, there is no sampling done in any of the mid bay region, or in the Magothy, Severn, Chester, South, West, and Miles rivers, or the Eastern Bay. I know that spawning does take place in many of these areas because I have witnessed it myself.

This legislation seeks to expand sampling sites in the above-mentioned areas from 12 to 20 additional sites. We all want good and accurate science when making proper conservation decisions. For the last several years, an estimated 90% of the biomass including female spawning fish along with the unlimited 14, 16, 18 inch fish which are juveniles 1, 2, and 3 years old have stayed in the mid bay area. We know that because that is where the majority of recreational and charter boats have fished consistently.

Due to climate change, a lack of sav's, the shifting of bottom areas from silting and pollution from harmful nutrients entering from the Conowingo Dam's reservoir, in addition to the massive number of the invasive and predatory blue catfish and snake head, the normal pattern of the juvenile rockfish has undoubtedly been changed.

By adding these additional sites to the historic 4 river locations that have been an area of sampling for 71 years, the Department of Natural Resources will have a more complete understanding of the bay wide juvenile numbers which will be a much more comprehensive understanding of the juvenile indices.

I ask for your favorable vote for HB889

Efforts to rebuild the Atlantic Coast population of striped bass have been ongoing for several years. Although recent population estimates indicate improvement, low levels of reproduction will influence future conservation measures under consideration by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission.

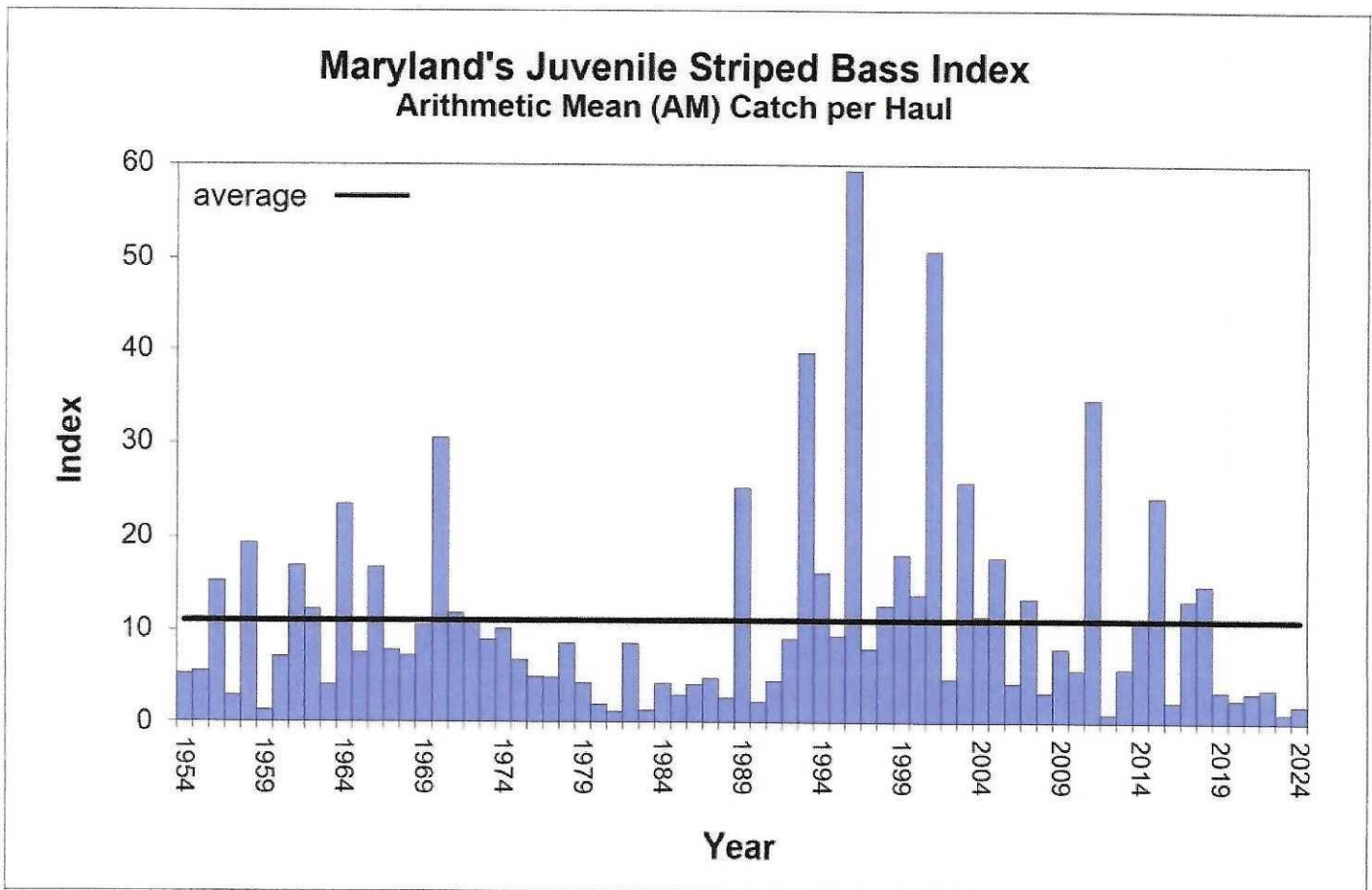
In recent years, Maryland has implemented management actions aimed at rebuilding the spawning stock, including reductions to catch limits, increased protections for spawning fish, tighter slot limits, and season closures. However, warm conditions in winter continue to negatively impact the reproductive success of striped bass, whose larvae are very sensitive to water conditions and food availability in the first several weeks after hatching. Other species with similar spawning behavior such as white perch, yellow perch, and American shad also experienced below-average reproduction this year.



Biologists use a seine net to capture fish for the annual striped bass juvenile index survey in the Nanticoke River. Photo by Joe Zimmermann, Maryland DNR

The below-average year classes will likely become more apparent among the adult population of striped bass in the coming years, as the juveniles reach maturity. While environmental conditions hamper reproductive success, fisheries managers focus conservation efforts on adult striped bass so that the spawning population can produce a strong year class when environmental conditions are favorable.

The Virginia Institute of Marine Science conducts a similar survey in the southern portion of Chesapeake Bay.





A juvenile striped bass caught and released by a survey crew in the Nanticoke River. Photo by Joe Zimmermann, Maryland DNR.

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources announced results of this year's [juvenile striped bass survey](#), which tracks the reproductive success of Maryland's state fish in the Chesapeake Bay. The 2024 young-of-year index is 2.0, well below the long-term average of 11.0, and marks the sixth consecutive year of poor reproduction.

"These results underscore the complexity of managing a coastal migratory species whose life-cycle is influenced by environmental conditions during a brief spawning period," said Maryland DNR Fishing and Boating Services Director Lynn Fegley. "We will continue to explore ways to conserve and enhance the spawning population during this time when we are adding fewer young fish to the population."

During this annual survey, fishery managers examine 22 sites located in four major striped bass spawning areas: the Choptank, Nanticoke, and Potomac rivers, and the upper Chesapeake Bay. Biologists visit each site three times per summer, collecting fish with two sweeps of a 100-foot beach seine net. The index represents the average number of young-of-year striped bass found in each sample. The juvenile striped bass average less than 3 inches long and are not usually encountered by anglers. [Similar fish surveys conducted this summer in the Patapsco, Magothy, Rhode, West, Miles, and Tred Avon rivers](#) found fewer striped bass, also known as rockfish.

Biologists captured more than 56,000 fish of 56 different species while conducting this year's survey. Encouraging results were documented regarding two species lower on the food chain. Menhaden abundance was nearly equal to last year, which was the highest measured since 1990. Spot abundance was the highest measured since 1988. These species are vital to the ecology of the Bay as a food source for many other species of fish and wildlife.

