

Could You Be Intercepted While Fishing?

By **Maryellen Gordon**, Senior Fisheries Biologist | **Amber Johnson**, Assistant Fisheries Biologist

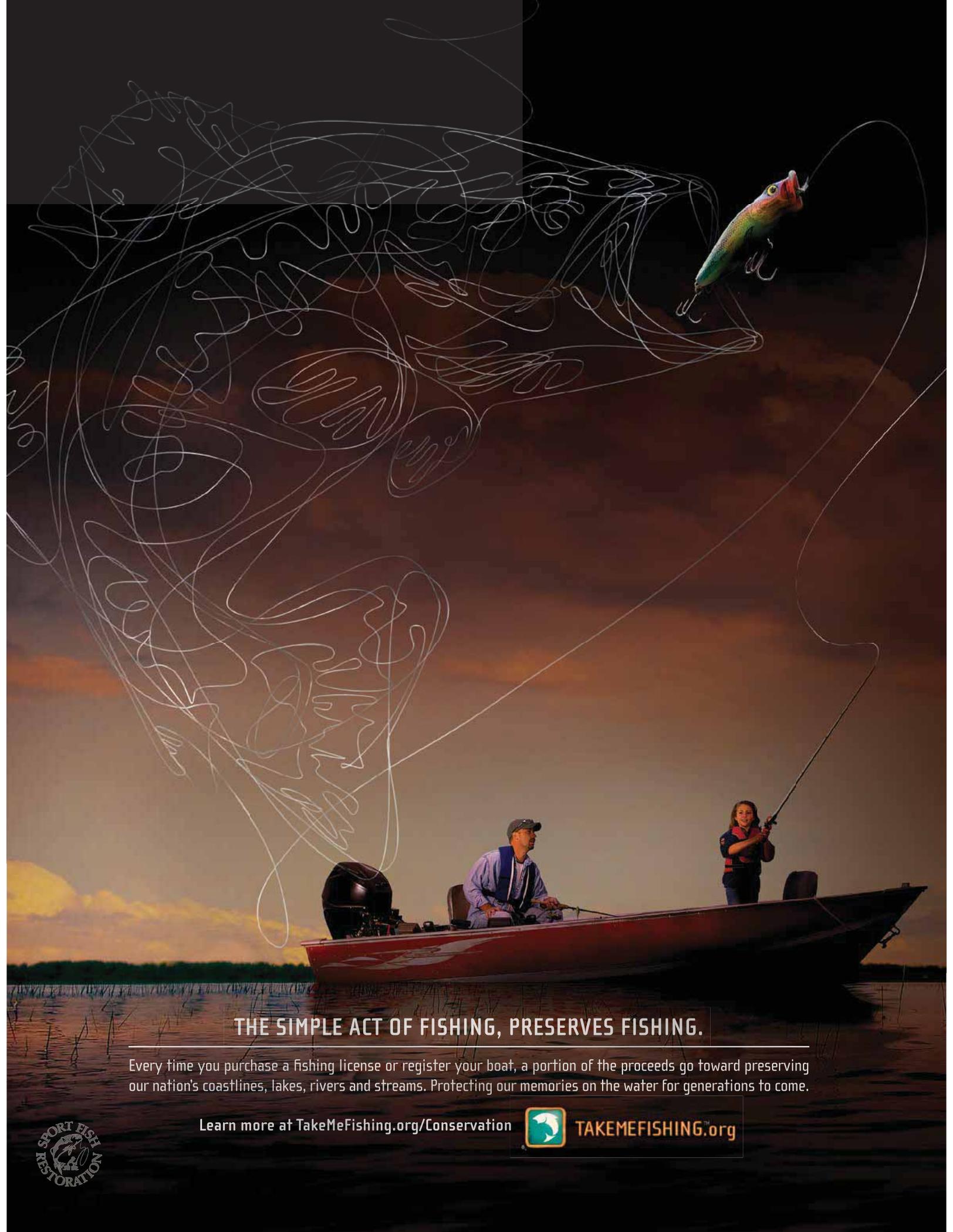
The Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (APAIS) is under way. You may see our interviewers at many marine public access fishing sites throughout New Jersey.

This recreational angler survey is now conducted “in house” by each of the 13 Atlantic states from Maine to Georgia. New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife is conducting this survey on behalf of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), National Marine Fisheries Service.

The survey targets marine recreational anglers to obtain information about their fishing effort, catch and participation in marine recreational fishing and about the demographic, social and economic characteristics of those who participate in saltwater recreational fishing in United States waters.

(continued on page 8)





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Hunter Jackson fishes the surf at Island Beach State Park.

Jonathan Campbell/NJ Div. Fish and Wildlife

with APAIS—are collecting valuable fishing catch-and-effort data. *Your willing participation is vital* to assemble a large database which will be utilized to help manage the health and future stocks of recreationally fished species.

The Access Point Angler Intercept Survey is one of the pieces that complete the Marine Recreational Information Program puzzle. Through this program, NOAA Fisheries counts and reports marine recreational catch and effort. Driven by data provided by anglers and captains, the Marine Recreational Information Program produces better information through better science and—equally important—increased transparency, accountability and engagement. These data for marine recreational fisheries had been collected through the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey from 1979 until 2008 before being replaced by the Marine Recreational Information Program. This program was created in order to continue improving the collection, analysis and use of fishing data.

How are the Data Used?

Accurate, up-to-date angler catch, effort and participation statistics are fundamental for assessing the influence of fishing on any stock of fish. The fish quantities taken, fishing effort plus the seasonal and geographical distribution of the catch and effort are required for the development of rational management policies and plans. Continuous monitoring of

Interviewers are assigned to public fishing sites using a random selection process proportional to the level of fishing activity.

For each predetermined public fishing access site (jetty, beach, marina, pier, boat ramp, causeway, etc.) a random computer selection assigns the date and time during which the APAIS interviewer must stay—whether or not there is fishing activity—to survey all anglers, including those with “no catch,” even in bad weather. The interviewer’s job is to politely engage with anglers, asking questions that will provide data on the health of our recreational fisheries.

These questions include, among others: how long was the angler actively fishing? What was the target fish? What species were actually being caught and how many? Do you have fish that we could sample

(measure, weigh and identify)? The interviews provide valuable information that will allow estimates of overall catch. The more data collected, the more successful the survey becomes.

No Fish Today

It is noteworthy that reporting a zero catch for the day is equally important to the survey results as when you’ve reached the possession limit. A “no catch” response is also calculated into the estimate of catch-per-unit-effort amongst all the anglers fishing in that area, providing realistic data.

Please know that the interviewers have no enforcement responsibility and are not looking for violations or to hassle anglers in any way. Interviewers—whose shirts will be emblazoned

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catch, effort and participation is needed to assess trends, to evaluate the impacts of management regulations and to project what effects various management scenarios could have on a fishery.

Recreational fisheries data are crucial for the National Marine Fisheries Service, the regional fishery management councils, the interstate fisheries commissions, state conservation agencies, recreational fishing industries and others involved in the management and productivity of marine fisheries.

The Marine Recreational Information Program consists of several independent, yet complementary surveys:

- **Access Point Angler Intercept Survey**—designed to assess catch per unit effort in all fishing modes, featured in this article;
- **Coastal Household Telephone Survey**—collects information about recreational fishing effort via telephone based data collection. The effort data is used to estimate the total number of fishing trips taken by marine recreational anglers. Effort data collection is transitioning to new U. S. Postal Service-based methods over the years 2015–2018;
- **For-Hire Survey**—designed to assess for-hire charter and headboat fishing effort;
- **Large Pelagic Survey**—which collects information on pelagic species of fish; and
- **Highly Migratory Species Catch Card Census Program**— collects information about migratory fish species.

Each state’s saltwater recreational registry acts as the contact list for the Coastal Household Telephone Survey and the future mail survey. Complete participation in the New Jersey Saltwater Recreational Registry Program is essential to achieve accurate recreational fishing estimates, helping to ensure healthy fisheries for the future.

New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife’s Marine Fisheries Administration conducts a plethora of other surveys to add to these data. (See *The Fishing Experience: It’s Not Just About Fish*, page 24.) Scientists, stakeholders, public officials and many others all have a hand in developing recreational fishing regulations that benefit the marine resource and those who enjoy them. If you’re an angler, the process ultimately revolves around you.

What we learn from anglers is critical to understanding the health of our fisheries. If you are not “intercepted” for an interview or contacted through the New Jersey Saltwater Recreational Registry Program, you can still participate. Become part of the fishery management process: submit a fishing report after each saltwater trip to the New Jersey Volunteer Angler Survey. Your fishing reports—whether you caught zero or 50 fish—will help improve saltwater fishing opportunities in this state. Your reports will have a real impact on how our oceans are managed. Submit online reports at www.NJFishandWildlife.com/marinesurvey.htm.

Additional Resources:

New Jersey Saltwater Recreational Registry Program— and to register: www.saltwaterregistry.nj.gov

Marine Recreational Information Program— www.countmyfish.NOAA.gov

Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (featured in article)—www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/recreational-fisheries/Surveys/survey-details

New Jersey Volunteer Angler Survey— To submit your fishing effort: www.NJFishandWildlife.com/marinesurvey.htm.

NOAA’s Site Register—To learn about New Jersey’s fishing access sites, peruse at www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/siteregister 

Cool Catch Info About Your Favorite Fishing Sites

Anglers, use the survey tool to access a wealth of information about a particular fishing site. To check it out, visit: <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/siteregister>.

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Governor's Surf Fishing Tournament

GET OUTSIDE & ENJOY A DAY OF FISHING WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS

By Karen Byrne, Senior Biologist

Hundreds of anglers from New Jersey and neighboring states will descend upon the beaches at Island Beach State Park on May 15, 2016 to celebrate the 25th year of the Governor's Surf Fishing Tournament! Participants can expect a great day of fishing, fun, prizes and quality time with friends and family as they try to catch the longest fish of the day and win the coveted Governor's Cup.

This family-friendly tournament aims to encourage youth and adults to learn more about surf fishing while taking advantage of a great activity. Since its inception in 1991 the tournament has generated more than \$135,000 for various marine education

and restoration efforts, including construction of access ramps for disabled saltwater anglers, surf fishing instruction programs and equipment at Island Beach State Park, and a mobile automatic heart defibrillator for use at Island Beach State Park. Most recently fifteen specialized surf wheelchairs that provide beach access for the disabled and elderly were purchased by the Tournament Committee and from donations from Jersey Shore Surfcaster, Greater Point Pleasant Charter Boat Association, John Mangiante Foundation, Manasquan River Marlin and Tuna Club and Jersey Coast Shark Anglers. These chairs are available for use the day of the tournament.

The 24th annual tournament saw an increase in registered participants over the previous year, and everyone enjoyed beautiful weather all day. Expectations were high as there had been a bluefish blitz the week before the tournament, but fishing on tournament day ended up being slow. Despite that, participants had a great time, and two striped bass and 11 bluefish were entered.

Lieutenant Governor Kim Guadagno and DEP Commissioner Bob Martin took part in the awards ceremony and presented tournament winners with their prizes in a variety of categories. Rich Bergman of Atco, NJ took the grand prize and the New Jersey Governor's Cup by catching a 32-inch striped bass. Bergman received one rod and reel combination—which he generously donated to the Island Beach State Park surf fishing education program—a Coastline Surf System, a pair of Costa Del Mar sunglasses, a plaque and had his name engraved

Thank you!

New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife, along with our co-sponsors—the NJ State Park Service, NJ State Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs, Jersey Coast Anglers Association and NJ Beach Buggy Association—would like to thank the following organizations for contributing to the success of the 24th Annual Governor's Surf Fishing Tournament in 2015:

- Costa Del Mar Inc.
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- NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife's Hooked on Fishing - Not on Drugs Program
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- On the Water Magazine
- Silver Horde
- Sportsmen's Center
- Stanley Jigs



Jon Cartucci/NJ D.F.W.

Tournament winner Rich Bergman of Atco took the grand prize by catching a 32-inch striped bass. L-R: JCAA President John Toth, NJDEP Commissioner Bob Martin, Lt. Governor Kim Guadagno, 2015 Governor's Surf Fishing Tournament Winner Rich Bergman, NJBBA President Tim Burden, and NJFSC President Pola Galie.

on the Governor's Cup, which is permanently on display at Island Beach State Park.

In addition to the grand prize, five anglers received rod and reel combinations for their prize-winning fish in the striped bass and bluefish categories. There were categories for children, teen and adult anglers, including sub-categories for male and female anglers. Early tournament registrants were also entered into an early entry raffle for a Coastline Surf System. 

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Bluefishing from Shore

By Bryan Carter, Seasonal Technician

Bluefish (*Pomatomus saltatrix*) are one of the most common and popular sportfish in New Jersey. Because of their wide range in sizes and abundance, bluefish are a great angling option for kids and first-timers all the way up to experienced anglers.

Bluefish are globally distributed. The largest bluefish has been recorded at 31 pounds 12 ounces, while the oldest is recorded at 12 years old. Bluefish become sexually mature at two years old, and spawn several times during the year. They come in a variety of sizes on the New Jersey coast and are easily identified by their silvery sea green color, large mouths with a single row of large sharp teeth and streamlined muscular build. They can occur in New Jersey waters generally from April to December during their migrations along the coast.

Known to be very aggressive predators, bluefish can go into blitz mode where they force baitfish to the surface and tear into anything in their path. Anglers can take advantage of situations like this, as well as the general aggressive nature of the fish to increase catch rates. While bluefish are known to take a wide range of bait and lures, matching the baitfish present at the time of fishing will improve angling success.

There's a seasonal nature to bluefish behavior linked to their migration and feeding patterns. Focusing on shore-based angling, what follows will highlight techniques for catching bluefish in New Jersey.

Spring

Springtime in New Jersey provides the best opportunity at catching large bluefish from shore. Often referred to as "gators", these large 8–20 pound bluefish are migrating north, feeding on schools of bunker. Bunker are large, oily baitfish and the primary food source for larger bluefish. Bays, inlets, jetties, and sand beaches are all productive during the springtime. A couple of techniques are applicable for targeting these larger fish in the spring.

Angling with fresh bait (for useful tips, see www.NJFishandWildlife.com/artbaitfish15.htm) is the most common method for targeting larger bluefish. Using chunks of bunker for bait to match the food source, bait fishing can be very successful on the beaches and in back bays. Heavy tackle is required, as bluefish are considered to be among the hardest fighting fish in New Jersey.

Large, sharp hooks and a wire or thick monofilament leader fished on a fish finder rig will produce the best hook-to-land ratios. Bait fishing is generally the more successful method when the water is murkier and the bluefish are not blitzing. The scent of the bait allows the bluefish to rely on senses other than sight to find your offering.

◀ This bluefish was caught in the Long Beach Island surf by Andrew Beck of Manahawkin.

Photo by Paul Presto

Bluefishing — The Best Defense...

Remember to always be prepared with a pair of needle nose pliers when targeting bluefish. A bite from even a small bluefish can cause damage. It is a good idea to have extra rigs or lures ready as bluefish will bite through leaders and damage non-metal lures. While soft plastic lures are widely successful when targeting other species, avoid using them when bluefish are around. If planning to keep bluefish, the New Jersey regulations are a bag limit of 15 fish per angler per day, with no minimum size and no closed season.



(Top) Frank Strouse with a handsome bluefish.
(Bottom) A nice bluefish was hooked by Jeff Stives.

bunker and Atlantic herring can sometimes draw large bluefish in tight to the surf. Most bluefish caught from late October to early December are bycatch from anglers targeting striped bass. For those interested in targeting bluefish during these months, using methods similar to spring bluefishing is the best option. If sand eels are present, use a long narrow profile lure such as a diamond jig with surgical tubing.

References

Chesapeake Bay Program — Field Guide:
www.chesapeakebay.net/fieldguide/critter/bluefish

Loving Long Island — Catch and Cook:
www.loving-long-island.com/snapper-fishing-on-long-island.html 

Lures can be productive when targeting large bluefish in the spring and are more applicable during blitzes. Popping plugs and metal spoons or jigs are the best lures to use during this time. Popping plugs are splashed along the surface, replicating a jumping bunker, a common escape method used when bunker are attacked. This method works well in calmer water along any beach or bay structure. Amazing visual strikes occur when bluefish launch out of the water to strike a popping plug.

Metal lures such as large spoons and diamond jigs also work well for larger fish. Best fished in deeper moving water such as inlets, a fast constant retrieve will cause the metal lure to wobble and flash like an injured bunker reflecting sunlight. The flashes cause bluefish to aggressively attack the lures. If a bluefish hits a metal lure but does not take the hook, continue the same retrieve and they will often continue chasing the lure and strike again. Replacing treble hooks with single hooks on lures will make unhooking these big fish a much safer process.

Summer

Large bluefish generally depart the New Jersey coast in June, but soon after, the arrival of juvenile fish occurs. Locally called “snappers,” small 3- to 8-inch bluefish invade the New Jersey bays and beaches every July and August. Snappers are a great way for kids and beginners to get introduced to saltwater fishing. Aggressive and very abundant, snappers can be caught very easily to provide instant action for anyone learning to fish. Snappers fight hard for their size and are sporty on light tackle, but do not require the same size gear as the larger gators that occur in the spring.

Common around bayside docks and bulkheads, snappers can be caught using a variety of methods. Look for splashes of small baitfish jumping to escape snappers. The simplest method for targeting snappers is to use a bobber with a small hook and piece of spearing for bait. Spearing occur in New Jersey bays and inlets in giant schools each summer and are the primary food source for juvenile bluefish. Other baits such as squid, bloodworms, live minnows, or mackerel are also effective for catching snappers.

Snappers can be caught on artificial lures as well as bait. Metal spoons—similar to those used for large bluefish in the spring but smaller in size—work well for catching snappers. Using a 1/8 or 1/4 oz. metal spoon retrieved quickly, lots of snappers can be caught. The flashing created by the spoon imitates an injured silverside.

An even more popular method is the use of a snapper popper. Snapper poppers consist of a barrel shaped float with a small hook 18 to 24 inches behind, coated in flashy hair material or surgical tubing. The float is slowly retrieved and popped

along the surface making a loud splashing sound. The sound of the float attracts the snappers to the area. The flash of the hook provokes the snappers into biting. Because of their easy use and high success rates, snapper poppers are good rigs to use for anglers learning to fish with artificial lures.

Fall

During September, most of the summer species depart New Jersey waters and fall species begin to make their way down the coast. Every year, New Jersey anglers anticipate the mullet run when hundreds of thousands of striped mullet flood out from the back bays to migrate south along the beaches. The abundance of mullet provides a new and substantial food source for bluefish. The small snappers leave the back bays and larger “cocktail” bluefish, ranging from 9 to 20 inches, feast on the striped mullet saturating the surf and jetty pockets. The mullet run traditionally lasts throughout September and October.

Taking advantage of the amount of bait present, early fall can be a prime time for New Jersey anglers to catch bluefish. As before, matching the bait present will provide the best results for anglers targeting bluefish. Most tackle shops will supply fresh mullet for bait during this time of year and that is the best option when bait fishing.

The most effective way of fishing mullet is using a mullet rig, which consists of a float to keep the mullet off the bottom, a stout wire approximately the length of a mullet, and a detachable hook. Bluefish bite their prey from the tail end, so to increase hookup ratios, the wire is inserted through the mullet’s body and the hook is attached to the wire near the tail. Small chunks of mullet can also be used on traditional high-low rigs, however more bluefish likely will be landed on a mullet rig.

Once again, lures work well when targeting bluefish in the fall. Swimming plugs are the best lures with which to mimic mullet. These plugs are about 6 inches long and very thin in profile. A lip on the front causes the swimming plug to wobble back and forth like an injured mullet trying to swim. Fast, straight or erratic retrieves will get the attention of bluefish.

Many New Jersey anglers prefer to use white and powder blue colored swimming plugs to even better replicate a mullet. Generally, mullet rigs work better on flat open beaches where a longer cast is required. Swimming plugs may be the better option in inlets, jetties, and steep surf banks where there is more structure to hold the bluefish, and more water deep enough to work the swimming plug.

In some years, the large “gator” bluefish return along the New Jersey coastline later in the fall. Often times these larger bluefish remain offshore on their southerly migration. However, pods of