

# New Jersey

## *Fish & Wildlife Digest*

A Summary of Rules and Management Information

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*FREE*

## 2002 Marine Issue

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NEW JERSEY DIVISION OF  
**Fish and Wildlife**



New Jersey Department of  
Environmental Protection

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# New Jersey Fish & Wildlife Digest

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Department of Environmental Protection  
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## The Director's Message

By Bob McDowell

### Value of the Marine Resource— Cost of Management: Who Pays the Bill?

New Jersey is fortunate to have a rich coastal heritage. The state has 120 miles of ocean coastline, over 390,000 acres of estuarine area and inlets spread all along the coast allowing easy access between bays and the ocean. Fishery resources are both abundant and diverse with northern species in the winter, southern species in the summer and others available year round. Large recreational fisheries are supported by these diverse resources. Every year about one million recreational anglers spend over five million days fishing New Jersey's marine waters. New Jersey's recreational saltwater anglers spend about \$750 million annually on fishing related products, with a resultant sales tax income to the state of about \$45 million. Sixteen thousand full time equivalent jobs are supported by saltwater sportsmen and women in New Jersey.

Overall, the total ripple effect on the state economy resulting from recreational saltwater fishing has been estimated at \$1.5 billion annually. These numbers do not even include the value that our marine environment and fishing opportunities have on New Jersey's tourist industries. With approximately one-third of all marine angling participants being non-residents, the impact on tourism is substantial. Of the 14 Atlantic coastal states, New Jersey is third in recreational importance and fifth in total recreational and commercial importance when ranked by the value of its fisheries. When ranked by the amount of state funding provided to support marine fisheries programs, however, New Jersey comes in a distant twelfth. Only the states of Rhode Island and New Hampshire, with their very short coastlines, rank behind New Jersey in state funding. The reality of the situation is that financial support for protection and management of New Jersey's valuable marine resources is woefully inadequate and has been getting worse. In 1990, the state appropriation for marine fisheries management and research was \$1.5 million, but by 2000 the appropriation had dropped to \$1.3 million. The current annual state appropriation of \$1.3 million falls far short of recognizing the value of these marine resources and the individuals and industries dependent upon those resources.

As some of our fish stocks continue to decline, recreational anglers become burdened by strict regulations caused by the need to rebuild these stocks. These regulations are based upon available information gathered through fisheries research. If this information is outdated, inaccurate or is not available, existing regulations may be inappropriate. Inappropriate regulations will not sustain abundant fisheries resources, and may have serious economic and social consequences upon both anglers and New Jersey's coastal communities.

For New Jersey's citizens to receive the maximum benefits from the state's marine resources, it is imperative that marine fisheries research programs supply accurate and timely information upon which to base management decisions. However, marine fisheries research is expensive. As fisheries research becomes more essential and increasingly complex, the cost will go up. Whether revenues are generated

(continued on page 4)

**OUR MISSION:** To protect and manage the state's fish and wildlife to maximize their long-term biological, recreational and economic value for all New Jerseyans.

**OUR GOALS:** To maintain New Jersey's rich variety of fish and wildlife species at stable, healthy levels and to protect and enhance the many habitats on which they depend.

To educate New Jerseyans on the values and needs of our fish and wildlife and to foster a positive human/wildlife co-existence.

To maximize the recreational and commercial use of New Jersey's fish and wildlife for both present and future generations.

#### WHERE TO WRITE US

New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife • P.O. Box 400 • Trenton, NJ 08625-0400  
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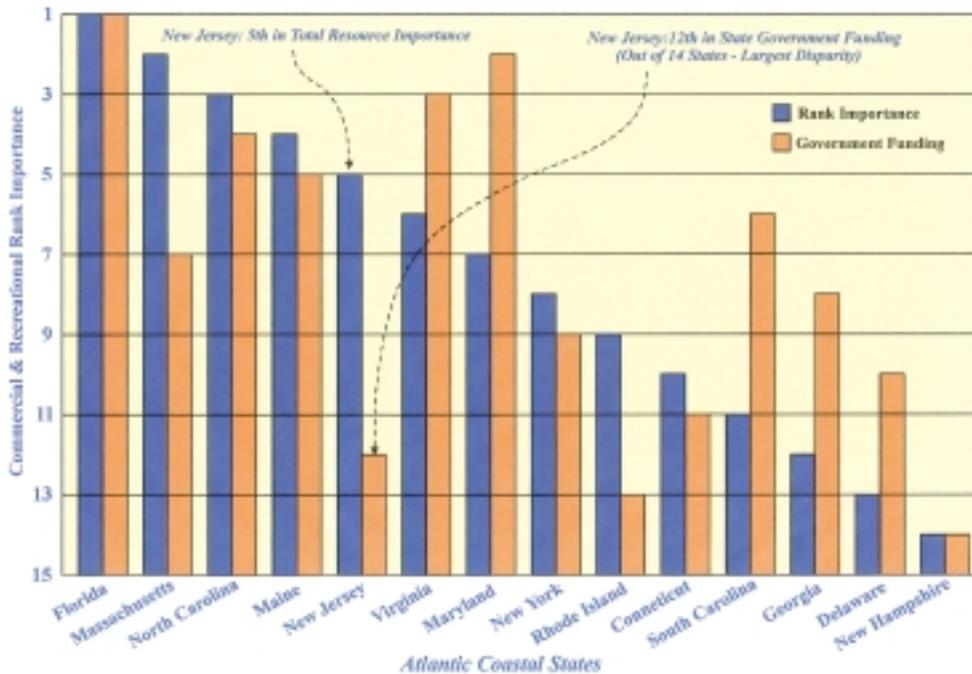
*This marine Digest has been designed with regulations grouped in the center to create a pull-out section.*

*Portions of this Digest are available in enlarged format for the visually impaired.*

**Write to:**  
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## The Director's Message *(continued from page 2)*

### Marine Fisheries Resource Importance Vs. State Government Funding



by fishing license fees or through tax dollars, saltwater sport anglers must be willing to pick up a major portion of the tab to pay for marine fisheries research and management.

Yet if recreational anglers are expected to pay for marine fisheries research, they should know

how this research will result in better fishing. Saltwater anglers want to know what impact the mysterious activities of research biologists will have on what they may catch or take home for the table. While it is not always possible to make a direct and positive connection, there are cases

where research information results in direct and positive decisions for sport fisheries. Although size limits, bag limits and seasons control many fisheries, research results have had positive effects on stock sizes, and resulting angler success for many species, including striped bass, summer flounder, winter flounder and weakfish. Most would agree that fishing for these species is at least as good and in most areas much better than it was 10 years ago. This is due in large part to management programs which were instituted based on fisheries research.

In spite of these successes, much needs to be done to improve fisheries research and fishing in New Jersey's marine waters. Important programs which are desperately needed to support future successes in fisheries management include collection of recreational harvest data, implementation of a marine fisheries stock assessment program, increased law enforcement, increased collection of biological data such as length and age comparisons, increased sampling of nearshore ocean fishes to track abundance, identification of important fish habitat areas, biological monitoring of artificial reefs, enhancing artificial reef development, and providing better information and education to New Jersey's saltwater anglers.

This is just a partial list. And the price tag? Annually, \$3.8 million. So who pays the bill?

*Robert McDowell*

## Don't Miss The Eleventh Annual Governor's Surf Fishing Tournament!

This year's **Governor's Surf Fishing Tournament** will be held **Sunday, October 6, 2002** at Island Beach State Park. Last year, more than 1,300 adults and children registered for the event. The tournament generated more than \$10,000 in registration fees which will be used for marine education and restoration efforts, construction of access ramps for disabled saltwater anglers, mobile fishing education carts and specialized wheelchairs which provide beach access for the disabled and elderly. The goal of the tournament is to encourage both youngsters and adults to learn more about the sport of surf fishing and take advantage of a great family activity. The winner of the 2001 Governor's Cup was **David Hilgar** of Fallsington, Pennsylvania with a 35 1/8" striped bass.

The Division would like to thank the following organizations for their contribution to the Tenth Annual Governor's Surf Fishing Tournament: **Auto Parts & Sporting Goods of Woodbridge, Baker Manufacturing Co. Inc., Bimini Bay Outfitters Ltd., Brielle Bait & Tackle, Buck Knives Inc., Burris Savvy Optics, Bushnell Performance Optics,**

**Cape May County Chamber of Commerce, Classic Fishing Products, Creative Publishing International, Delorme Mapping, D.O.A. Fishing Lures, Inc., Frank's Boat Rentals, Gargoyles, Inc., Hoppe's Division, Images Group, Inc. on behalf of Woolrich, Inc., Jenkinson's Aquarium, K-Mart #3071 (Toms River), Korkers Products Inc., Lamiglas, Inc., Legal Limits, Manns Bait Co., Morrison's Seafood Inc., Ocean Fresh, Penn Fishing Tackle Mfg. Co., Scott's Bait & Tackle, Shakespeare, Shoreway, Sportsman's Outpost, Springfield Marine & Aluminum, The Delaware River & Bay Authority, Tribophysics Division/Mil-Comm Products Co. Inc., The Outdoor Recreation Group, WalMart #1742 (Turnersville), WalMart #1844 (Toms River), Water Gremlin Co., Wetlands Institute, Wright & McGill Co., WTP Inc., and YBC.**

For more information and registration forms contact: NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife, PO Box 400, Trenton, NJ 08625-0400 or call 609-984-0521, or visit our website at [www.njfishandwildlife.com](http://www.njfishandwildlife.com).

**We Apologize!**—Last year, we inadvertently omitted the **Sportsman's Outpost of Williamstown** as a contributor to the tournament. The Sportsman's Outpost's annual contribution and their support are greatly appreciated.

### Publications Available

The following publications are available by writing:

#### *Nacote Creek*

#### **Research Station Publications** PO Box 418 • Port Republic, NJ 08241

- Shellfish Growing Waters Classification Charts. This publication is available free at any shellfish license agent and online at [www.state.nj.us/dep/watershedmgt/bmw/index.htm](http://www.state.nj.us/dep/watershedmgt/bmw/index.htm).
- *NJ Reef News*\* leaflet is available free. Send self-addressed stamped #10 envelope (3 oz. postage) to address above.
- *Party and Charter Boat Directory*\*: Send self-addressed stamped #10 envelope (3 oz. postage) to address above.
- *A Guide to Fishing and Diving New Jersey Reefs*\*: See this Digest, page 25, for details.
- *New Jersey Pumpout Station Directory-2000-2001 Boating Season Guide*\*: Send self-addressed stamped #10 envelope (2 oz. postage) to address above.

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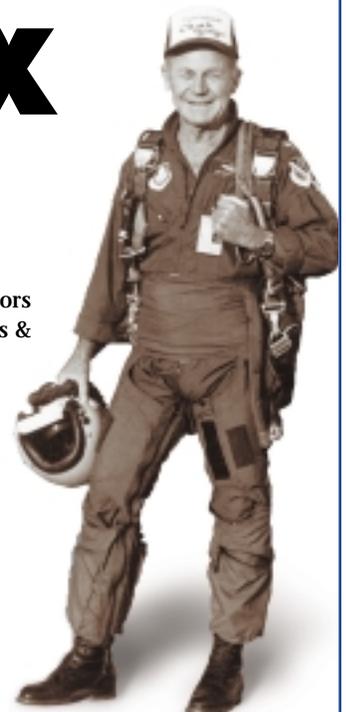
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# Atlantic Croaker: A Profile

By John McClain, Principal Fisheries Biologist

The croaker is a member of the Sciaenidae, or drum family, which includes the black drum and weakfish. Their name comes from the sound they can make by vibrating their swim bladders.

## Names:

The accepted scientific and common names are *Micropogonias undulatus* and Atlantic croaker. Other common names are croaker, golden croaker and hardhead.

## Size:

The largest Atlantic croaker reported was 26 inches in length and weighed 8 pounds, cleaned. The New Jersey State record is a 5.5-pound fish caught in Delaware Bay in 1981. The average croaker kept by fishermen in New Jersey in recent years ranges from 11 to 14 inches.

## Food:

The Atlantic croaker is an "opportunistic bottom feeding carnivore" which means it will eat any small shellfish, worm, crab, shrimp, etc, it can catch.

In turn, croaker are eaten by the larger predators such as bluefish, striped bass, summer flounder, weakfish and sharks.

## Range And Migration:

The Atlantic croaker occurs in Atlantic coastal waters from Cape Cod, Massachusetts to Florida and through the Gulf of Mexico. While uncommon north of New Jersey, they are one of the most abundant inshore bottom dwelling fish from the Chesapeake south through the Gulf of Mexico. Their appearance in our waters is dependent on favorable environmental conditions and/or high population numbers. When conditions have been favorable, adult croaker move into Delaware Bay and our coastal waters in early summer. They begin moving south and somewhat offshore in mid-fall.

## Spawning:

Atlantic croaker spawn offshore from September through December between Cape May and North Carolina. Further south, the spawning season extends into March. Most croaker are mature by age three. Females can release from 100,000 to 1.5 million eggs depending on fish size. The young



move into the larger bays and upriver after spawning where they appear to overwinter. Young croaker ranging from less than 1 inch to 2 inches have been taken in the Delaware River in November and December. This tendency may account in part for the variability in croaker abundance. Studies indicate that winter water temperatures in the mid-Atlantic estuaries greatly affect the number of croaker in the mid-Atlantic region. The survival rate for young of the year Atlantic croaker is less than two percent at

temperatures below 38°F. Severe winters can result in the loss of most of a year class of overwintering fish.

## Commercial And Recreational Importance:

Commercial landings in New Jersey have varied widely over time, from 100 pounds in 1971 to 2.1 million pounds in 2000. Most of the harvest is taken August through October by the otter trawl fishery in the southern portion of the state. However, gill net landings have increased in the last few years, going from less than one percent of the landings in 1997 to 30% in 2000.

The Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey reported no New Jersey landings from 1982 through 1990 and for 1992. A few fish were taken in 1991 and reported landings since then have increased drastically from 2500 fish in 1993 to 990,000 fish in 2000. The fishery occurs primarily in our southern coastal waters and Delaware Bay.

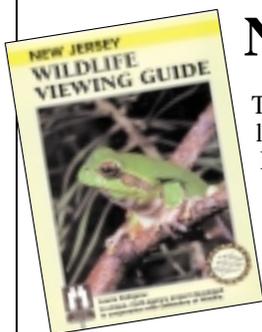
## Sportfishing Techniques:

Atlantic croaker are caught from July through October by private, party and to a lesser extent charter boats. Most are taken in the ocean, although bay catches have been increasing. Croaker are caught using top and bottom rigs, single hook rigs, bucktails and jigs. Baits used are shrimp, worms, shedder crab, fish, squid and soft plastic lures. Since croakers are bottom feeders, enough weight must be used to keep the bait close to the bottom.

## References:

Lankford, T. E. Jr. and T.E. Targett, 2001  
Unpublished manuscript

Personal communication from the National Marine Fisheries Services, Fisheries Statistics and Economics Division, Silver Spring, Maryland



## NEW JERSEY WILDLIFE VIEWING GUIDE

The NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife is proud to announce the publication of the New Jersey Wildlife Viewing Guide. The publication of the Guide is the culmination of a two year project coordinated by the Division's Endangered and Nongame Species Program to establish a network of viewing sites throughout the state.

The Guide beautifully illustrates the rich natural treasures that few people realize exist in the state. Experience the amazing diversity of New Jersey's wildlife and habitats at 87 of the state's best Wildlife Viewing Areas. The 165 page Guide is full of color photos and illustrations and provides directions to each site and information on site facilities, best viewing seasons and which animals and habitats can be seen.

Unique to the New Jersey Guide is the addition of Wildlife Diversity Tours. In four regions, expanded information is provided on five sites in each region that when experienced through a 2-3 day trip provide a deeper understanding and appreciation of the ecosystems and wildlife found in the region.

**Order yours today by using the order form.**

The creation of the Wildlife Viewing Guide and the development of a Watchable Wildlife Program for New Jersey was made possible in part through grants from the EPA, US Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service and Department of Defense. Major funding has been provided through proceeds from the sale of 'Conserve Wildlife' license plates.

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