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HUNTING AND FISHING

By HOWARD BRANT

Striped bass protector sees species on wane

"Action should be taken immediately to add the striped bass to the threatened species roster of the Endangered Species Act," proclaimed Bob Pond, executive director of Stripers Unlimited, at the recent Sportfishing Expo in Ocean City, Md.

"I say this," Pond contends, "because our extensive striped bass research indicates that this gamester is being drastically affected by such long-term, persistent, chlorinated hydrocarbons as PCB's and DDT, especially in Chesapeake Bay, one of its major breeding grounds. And the purpose for adding bass to the endangered species roster would be the initial step towards establishment of a federal management program for this dwindling species."

Back in 1965, Pond claims, researchers with Stripers Unlimited began noticing a drastic behavioral pattern change in striped bass, particularly in the Chesapeake Bay area. "Bass are primarily surface feeders," said Pond, "but back in the mid-60s it became evident that bass were changing their habits and were beginning to feed more and more on the bottom.

"At that time Stripers Unlimited began an extensive research program and since then we have found that striped bass eggs, especially those hatched in Chesapeake Bay, contained large amounts of PCB's and DDT. And we believe this occurance is crating abnormalities in our bass populations," Pond added.

Pond also said that in recent years there has been a continual decline of pan-sized striped bass. "Small stripers represent our future brood stock. But the numbers of small fish have been on the wane since 1970, the last good bass hatch year. Thus, it is my belief that unless steps are taken before the 1970 hatch — already damaged and depleted — returns to Chesapeake Bay this spring to spawn, we will witness the end of striped bass abundance.

"All facts indicate there has been little recruitment of bass into the fishery since 1970 because of extensive PCB and DDT contamination. And without stringent control, the already depleted and damaged bass stocks could be virtually destroyed this year from overexploitation by both sport and commercial fishermen," said Pond.

Pond also urges that the Interior Department consider the development of a striped bass hatchery in Maryland. He contends that by removing female bass from spawning rivers and by feeding them a healthy diet (unaffected by DDT and PCB's) at such an installation, they would then produce healthy eggs. And when this healthy spawn is hatched the fry could then be returned to the sea to begin replacment of the damaged spawning bass in the existing fishery.

"Many bass fishermen have been spoiled by recent bass abundance," Pond continued. "This is due to their cyclic nature. But we ask anglers to reconsider their catches. In Chesapeake Bay, for example, more big fish continue to show up, but missing are the smaller bass, especially the pan-sized fish which in other years could always be counted on in spring and fall. Aren't the catch records, the size of fish involved and the downward trend sufficient to get us thinking seriously about the future of our bass populations?"

Pond contends there should be uniform striped bass regulations throughout the East Coast and, possibly a stringent possession limit. He also advocates the release of all female bass weighing between six and 15 pounds because it is this size female which is the essential breeding fish to sustain our bass populations.

Further information concerning Pond's theories and contentions, as well as additional information about Stripers Unlimited, may be obtained by writing Stripers Unlimited, P.O. Box 45, South Attleboro, Mass. 02703.

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