Northern Neck Anglers Club

Monthly Newsletter

Dear Members and Friends of the NNAC:

It was certainly a welcome occurrence to have convened a meeting of the NNAC last Saturday night at the Reedville Fishermen's Museum in Reedville. We had an excellent meeting with 25 in attendance. We signed up 3 new members and 2 renewals bringing the total active members for 2020 to 73. Covid-19 and 90 degree temperatures impacted the total attendance for sure, but those of us deciding to brave the elements and the pandemic had a fun two hours of fishing seminars, a local Boat US presentation, awards, and many questions as the membership seemed to be really plugged into the fishing presentations. Our thanks to Mark Roy, Tom Hedgpeth, Troy Durvin and yours truly for bringing knowledge, techniques, lures, rods, etc. as we discussed Spanish mackerel, blues, and speckled trout. All are active in the waters of the Northern Neck currently and if you can handle the heat, now is a great time to be fishing. And do not forget the cobia bite has picked back up from early June!

Ben Ames and Troy Durvin share techniques for catching trophy speckled trout.

Earl Pierotti accepts plaque for 1st place in Cobia division in the Cobia Classic Tournament.

The Bite Report

As mentioned, there is a lot going on opportunity wise now. For those willing to brave the trip and the temperatures, The Cell has seen nice flounder and spadefish catches throughout the month. Flounder are seemingly moving north, albeit slowly in recent weeks. There have been some decent ones caught in the Little Wicomico jetties on white jigs with a minnow, flounder rigs with a small spinner, various plastic grubs, and bloodworms.

These nice flounder were taken last week near the mouth of the Piankatank River. While no one entered a flounder in the recent NNAC Flounder Bash, there are some around for sure. A member suggested during our recent meeting that we consider moving flounder to our August tournament next year. The fish do seem to move north during the summer.

Cobia action slowed down the latter part of June until almost the third week in July. Mark Roy did catch a couple of really nice ones with family on board in July. He won our cobia portion of the July Flounder Bash tournament. Tom and Steve Hedgpeth also caught nice cobia in July on live eels. There are some great photos of their cobia on the NNAC website and also our Facebook and Instagram pages. As a point of interest, there have been 100 citation cobia (55 lbs or 50 inches) caught so far since June 1, 2020 in Virginia waters.
Fishermen have been loading up on Spanish macs and blues all over our area. One of our members was on a Reedville charter boat last week and they reported a mixed catch of 70. Spanish have actually been around since late May as Jan Jamrog found some then. Most fishermen have been finding a wide-open bite from the mouth of the Rapp up past Smith Point light. It's hot, but it seems less so when trolling at 6kts, versus anchored up trying to entice cobia with the torturous sun beating down.

We have not heard much from the croaker and spot fishermen in the club so far this summer. We would like to show your photos and report if you have caught anything memorable so far this year.

Safety

A fisherman remains in critical condition after an accident in Delaware last week. I included his situation in this month's newsletter as it's totally avoidable and highly dangerous at times to decide to leave a perfectly good boat and find trouble. While bottom fishing with his wife in their 19-foot boat in an inlet near Rehoboth Beach, the fisherman fouled his bottom fishing rig in his boat's propeller. He decided to jump in to untangle. He had trouble trying to climb back into the boat and drifted away in the tide/wind. His spouse was unable to be of assistance. A good samaritan boater witnessed the trouble and summoned assistance by radio. A large rescue effort ensued involving marine police, the US Coast Guard and others. The man was recovered alive but is in critical condition as this is written. It is also very sad to report that one of our members lost two close friends to a Virginia freshwater fishing boating accident on July 24. Both boaters drowned and bodies were recovered. Neither was wearing a life jacket.

Upcoming Tournament

The next NNAC fishing tournament is the ever-popular Spanish Lessons event commencing on Saturday August 1 for three consecutive weekends. Targeted species include Bluefish and Spanish Mackerel. Both species are here in force now and we expect lots of nice entries. 1st place winner will receive a plaque and $100 gift card. 2nd and 3rd place will also receive gift cards $75 and $50 respectfully. Tom Hedgpeth does a great job updating tournament results weekly, so all members are just a few keystrokes away from the current leaderboards! As always, pay attention to Small Craft Advisories as they rule our tournaments! Our website has detailed tournament rules including those pertaining to SCA's. Do not forget prodigious amounts of sunscreen and cold water on board!

Menhaden Catch

Commercial menhaden harvests started very strong in May then slowed dramatically. The Rapp River near the mouth and as far north as the Maryland line held good numbers of fish early. Lately, commercial boats found good fish numbers in New Jersey. Several boats were filling their nets in 3 quick sets before returning. As of recently, roughly 70% of the catch has been outside of the Bay with 30% coming from within the Chesapeake. Local crab fishermen have been able to buy menhaden for bait but even that was a struggle in early June as the fish were tougher to find.

Chesapeake Bay News

The following article is included because aquatic habitat, in this case SAV, or submerged aquatic grasses, are so important to the bay. In many cases, when you find grasses, you will find fish. Currently, trout are in the SAV areas and that is the main factor in finding and catching speckled trout.

UNDERWATER GRASSES HELP TO OFFSET ACIDIFICATION IN THE CHESAPEAKE BAY

Scientists have discovered that the recent comeback of underwater grasses in the Chesapeake Bay not only removes nutrient pollution, improves water clarity, and provides habitat for baby crabs and rockfish, but may also offset the growing problem of acidification as climate change impacts the nation’s largest estuary.

The Susquehanna Flats near Havre de Grace. Photos courtesy of UMCES

Ocean acidification is a phenomenon driven by the increasing levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere because of the burning of fossil fuels and other human-driven activities. When ocean and estuarine waters absorb this additional carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, the waters can become more acidic. Shellfish build their shells out of a compound in the water known as calcium carbonate, and scientists have found there will be less of those building blocks available as ocean carbon dioxide levels rise.

“Many researchers have shown how submerged aquatic vegetation, or SAV, can locally reinforce their own growth by slowing water flow and allowing particles to settle out of the water to allow more light,” said study co-author Jeremy Testa, associate professor at the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science.

“This new research suggests that SAV can provide additional ecosystem benefits—buffering water against acidification—far beyond the habitats where they grow. The SAV-driven pH-buffering mechanism is an unanticipated benefit of restoring SAV through nutrient management efforts.”

Underwater grasses, or SAV, are essential to the Bay ecosystem. They pull harmful nutrients out of the water, cause sediments to settle to the bottom so sunlight can reach plants, protect the shoreline by reducing the impact of waves and currents, and provide habitat and food for a host of important organisms, including baby crabs.

Jeremy Testa examines underwater seagrass.

While there was a Bay-wide decline of SAV from the 1960s through the 1980s, restoring these once-abundant beds has been a primary outcome of efforts to reduce loads of nutrients and sediments to the estuary. SAV cover has increased by 300 percent from 1984 to 2015. One of the largest recovered SAV beds lies in an area of the bay known as the Susquehanna Flats: a broad, tidal freshwater region located near the mouth of the Susquehanna River at the head of the Bay. Today it is one of the biggest and healthiest in the Bay, spanning some 20 square miles.

In a recent study, a team of researchers were drawn to the Susquehanna Flats SAV bed to solve a puzzle of Chesapeake Bay chemistry. The researchers found that SAV beds were sites of production for an acid-reducing compound called calcium carbonate. It was discovered that strong photosynthesis by the plants in Susquehanna flats SAV beds at the head of the Bay and in other shallow, nearshore waters can remove nutrient pollution and generate very high pH, which facilitates the formation of calcium carbonate minerals. When these calcium carbonate particles and other biologically produced

carbonate shells are transported downstream, they enter acidic subsurface waters where they dissolve. The team found the carbonate particles reduced the acidity of the water by four times than it otherwise might have been.

One question critical for this buffer mechanism is whether the calcium carbonate minerals can escape trapping in the estuarine turbidity maximum zone and be transported downstream. A numerical model was used to show that the small crystallites formed on the SAV beds can indeed be transported to the mid-Bay where they dissolve in acidic subsurface waters.

“Just like people take Tums to neutralize the acids that cause heartburn, SAV beds send carbonate minerals to the lower Bay to neutralize acids there,” said Testa, who worked with faculty research assistant Casey Hodgkins and University of Delaware researchers to make the SAV bed measurements.

The implication is that the SAV beds can potentially help to make deeper Bay waters more hospitable to shell-forming organisms.

A globally eminent research and graduate institution focused on advancing scientific knowledge of the environment, the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science provides sound advice to help state and national leaders manage the environment and prepares future scientists to meet the global challenges of the 21st century.

Fish On!!

Ben Ames, President