

**FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE
STRIPED MULLET
AUGUST 2021**

STATUS OF THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN

Fishery Management Plan History

Original FMP Adoption:	April 2006
Amendments:	Amendment 1 – November 2015
Revisions:	None
Supplements:	None
Information Updates:	None
Schedule Changes:	None
Comprehensive Review:	July 2020

The North Carolina Striped Mullet Fishery Management Plan (FMP) was adopted in April 2006. The management plan established minimum and maximum commercial landings triggers of 1.3 and 3.1 million pounds (NCDMF 2006). If annual landings fall below the minimum trigger, the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries (NCDMF) would determine whether the decrease in landings is attributed to stock decline, decreased fishing effort, or both. If annual landings exceed the maximum trigger, NCDMF would determine whether harvest is sustainable and what factors are driving the increase in harvest. The striped mullet FMP established a daily possession limit of 200 mullets (white and striped in aggregate) per person per day in the recreational fishery.

Amendment 1 to the FMP was adopted in November 2015, and the subsequent rules were implemented in April 2016. Amendment 1 resolved issues with Newport River gill net attendance, mitigated known user group conflicts, updated the management framework, and updated minimum and maximum commercial landings triggers to 1.13 and 2.76 million pounds (NCDMF 2015). Amendment 1 maintains the 200 mullet possession limit per person in the recreational fishery.

Commercial landings in 2016 were 965,198 pounds, which is below the minimum landings trigger of 1.13 million pounds (Figure 1). As required by the FMP, the NCDMF initiated data analysis in July 2017 to determine whether the decrease was attributed to a stock decline, decreased fishing effort, or both. The NCDMF presented preliminary findings and recommendations to the North Carolina Marine Fisheries Commission (NCMFC) during its November 2017 business meeting. It was determined by the NCDMF that no management

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actions were necessary at that time, but a more comprehensive analysis with data through 2017 was needed.

The NCDMF presented results of their comprehensive analysis at the February 2018 NCMFC business meeting and concluded the stock had likely declined since completion of the 2013 stock assessment, which had a terminal year of 2011. The NCDMF recommended updating the 2013 stock assessment model to include data through 2017 prior to taking management action. As an assessment update, there were no changes to model parameters and peer review was not required, as the configuration of the model that previously passed peer review was maintained. Results of the stock assessment indicated overfishing was not occurring through 2017 but could not determine if the stock was overfished.

Subsequent management options were developed by the NCDMF and presented to the Finfish, Southern, and Northern advisory committees in July 2018 to receive input prior to finalizing the NCDMF recommendation. Recommendations were then presented to the NCMFC at its August 2018 business meeting. The NCDMF and the advisory committees recommended no management action be taken since the stock assessment update indicated overfishing was not occurring. The NCDMF would, however, continue to monitor trends in the commercial fishery and fishery-independent indices. The recommendation was approved by the NCMFC.

Review of the 2020 commercial landings indicated neither the maximum or minimum triggers had been exceeded. The 2020 FMP review schedule indicates the striped mullet FMP review is underway.

Management Unit

Coastal and joint waters of North Carolina.

Goal and Objectives

The goal of Amendment 1 to the North Carolina Striped Mullet FMP is to manage the striped mullet fishery to preserve the long-term viability of the resource, maintain sustainable harvest, maximize social and economic value, and consider the needs of all user groups. The following objectives will be used to achieve this goal:

1. Use a management strategy that provides for conservation of the striped mullet resource and promotes sustainable harvest while considering the needs of all user groups.
2. Promote the protection, enhancement, and restoration of habitats and water quality necessary for the striped mullet population.
3. Minimize conflict among user groups, including non-fishing user groups and activities.
4. Promote research to improve the understanding of striped mullet population dynamics and ecology to improve management of the striped mullet resource.
5. Initiate, enhance, and/or continue studies to collect and analyze the socio-economic data needed to properly monitor and manage the striped mullet fishery.
6. Promote public awareness regarding the status and management of the North Carolina striped mullet stock.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STOCK

Biological Profile

Striped mullet are found in a wide range of depths and habitats but primarily inhabit freshwater to estuarine environments until migrating to the ocean to spawn in the fall (Able and Fahay 1998; Pattillo et al. 1999; Cardona 2000; Whitfield et al. 2012). Striped mullet serve as an ecological link between some of the smallest aquatic organisms and the highest-level predators in the marine food chain. Striped mullet feed on microorganisms such as bacteria and single-celled algae found on aquatic plants, in mud, silt, sand and decaying plant material (Odum 1968; Moore 1974; Collins 1985a; Larson and Shanks 1996; Torras et al. 2000). In turn, striped mullet are prey to top predators such as birds, fish, sharks, and porpoises (Breuer 1957; Thomson 1963; Collins 1985a; Barros and Odell 1995; Fertl and Wilson 1997). Striped mullet are highly fecund (upwards of 4 million eggs for a large female; Bichy 2000) and spawn in large aggregations near inlets to offshore areas (Collins and Stender 1989). Length at 50 percent maturity occurs at 11.1 inches fork length for males (Bichy 2000) and 12.6 inches fork length for females (NCDMF 2021). Spawning individuals have been reported from September to March; however, peak spawning activity occurs from October to early December (Bichy 2000).

Stock Status

The most recent assessment of the North Carolina striped mullet stock was completed in 2017, utilizing data from 1994-2017 (NCDMF 2018). The 2017 stock assessment is an update to the 2013 stock assessment (NCDMF 2013). Results of the stock assessment indicate spawning stock biomass increased from 2003 through 2007 but declined through 2017. Recruitment also declined in the latter portion of the time series, though a slight increase was observed in 2017. Fishing mortality (F) had little variation for most of the time series, with a slight increase in 2017. Despite this increase, F in the terminal year ($F_{2017} = 0.13$) was below both the fishing mortality target ($F_{35\%} = 0.40$) and threshold ($F_{25\%} = 0.57$). Based on the assessment results, the stock was not undergoing overfishing in 2017. A poor stock-recruit relationship, resulting in unreliable biomass based reference points prevented determining if the stock was overfished.

Stock Assessment

Stock Synthesis text version 3.24f (Methot 2000, 2012; Methot and Wetzel 2013) was used to model the striped mullet stock in the 2017 stock assessment update and, also to calculate reference points (NCDMF 2018). The Stock Synthesis model incorporates information from multiple fisheries and surveys and both length and age composition data. The structure of the model allows for a wide range of model complexity depending upon available data. The strength of the model is that it explicitly models both the dynamics of the population and the processes by which one observes the population and its fisheries. That is, the comparison between the model and the data is kept close to the natural basis of the observations, instead of manipulating the observations into the format of a simpler model. Another important advantage is the model allows for (and estimates) selectivity patterns for each fishing fleet and survey.

DESCRIPTION OF THE FISHERY

Current Regulations

There are no size restrictions, but as of July 1, 2006, there is a 200 mullet (white and striped aggregate) daily possession limit per person in the recreational fishery and the mutilated finfish rule was modified to exempt mullet used as bait.

Commercial Fishery

Historically, beach seines and gill nets are the two primary gear types used in the striped mullet commercial fishery, with most commercial landings prior to 1978 coming from the beach seine fishery. Gill nets (runaround, set, and drift) replaced seines as the dominant commercial gear type in 1979. Because the commercial fishery primarily targets striped mullet for roe, the fishery is seasonal with the highest demand and landings occurring in the fall when large schools form during their spawning migration to the ocean and females are ripe with eggs. Striped mullet are primarily targeted commercially using runaround gill nets in the estuarine and ocean waters of North Carolina. The striped mullet beach seine fishery primarily occurs in conjunction with the Bogue Banks stop net fishery. The stop net fishery has operated under fixed seasons and net and area restrictions since 1993. Stop nets are limited in number (four), length (400 yards), and mesh sizes (minimum eight inches outside panels, six inches middle section). Stop nets are only permitted along Bogue Banks (Carteret County) in the Atlantic Ocean from October 1 to November 30. However, the stop net season was extended to include December 3 to December 17 in 2015 due to minimal landings of striped mullet (Proclamation M-28-2015). In 2020, the stop net fishery was open from October 15 through December 31 (Proclamation M-17-2020). Due to the schooling nature of striped mullet, the beach seine fishery has the potential to be, and historically has been, a high-volume fishery with thousands of pounds landed during a single trip. In addition, the use of cast nets in the striped mullet commercial fishery has been increasing since around 2003.

Since 1972, commercial landings have ranged from a low of 965,198 pounds in 2016 to a high of 3,063,853 pounds in 1993 (Table 1; Figure 1). From 2003 to 2009, landings were stable between 1,598,617 and 1,728,607 pounds before increasing to 2,082,832 pounds in 2010. Landings fluctuated annually between 1.5 and 2.0 million pounds from 2010 to 2014 before declining in 2015 and again in 2016, dropping below the minimum commercial landings trigger established by Amendment 1. Commercial landings in 2020 were 1,299,464 pounds, which is 169,464 pounds above the minimum commercial landings trigger.

Recreational Fishery

The federal Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) is primarily designed to sample anglers who use rod and reel as the mode of capture. Since most striped mullet are caught with cast nets for bait, striped mullet recreational harvest data are imprecise. In addition, angler misidentification between striped mullet and white mullet is common, and bait mullet are usually released by anglers before visual verification by creel clerks is possible. As such, mullets are not identified to the species level in the MRIP data (Catch Type B). Because of imprecise estimates,

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MRIP data are not considered a reliable source for estimates of recreational striped mullet harvest and catch.

In October 2011, NCDMF began a mail survey to develop catch and effort estimates for recreational cast net and seine use. The mail survey was established as a direct response to a lack of precision in MRIP estimates for difficult to sample or overlooked recreational fisheries and activities. The survey does not distinguish between striped and white mullet, and all data should be interpreted with caution because the ratio of striped mullet to white mullet in the recreational catch will differ between seasons and areas of the state. Recreational cast net effort directed toward mullet is usually highest from July through October and increased between 2019 and 2020 (Table 2). Mullet harvest and total catch is also highest from July through October and decreased between 2019 and 2020. Number of releases decreased between 2019 and 2020. Estimates of catch in 2019 are lower compared to most other years.

Striped mullet harvest data from the Recreational Commercial Gear License (RCGL) were collected from 2002 to 2008. The program was discontinued in 2009 due to a lack of funding and the minimal contributions from RCGL to overall harvest. From 2002 through 2008, an average of 41,512 pounds of striped mullet were harvested per year using a RCGL (Table 3).

MONITORING PROGRAM DATA

During 2020, sampling was impacted during March through June due to the COVID pandemic. Executive Order (EO) 116, issued on March 10, 2020, declared North Carolina under a State of Emergency and was soon followed by EO 120 which implemented a statewide Stay at Home Order for all non-essential State employees. During this time, limited sampling occurred.

Fishery-Dependent Monitoring

The number of striped mullet measured per year in fishery-dependent programs between 1994 and 2020 ranged from 123 to 13,212, with the lowest number measured in 1996 (Table 4). In 2020, 4,150 striped mullet were measured from commercial catches; a more than 60% increase from the previous year. Variation in mean length was low, usually falling between 12.0 and 14.5 inches fork length (FL), with the lowest mean length occurring in 1997 (12.8 inches FL). Minimum and maximum lengths fell within a small range with maximum length ranging from 20.0 to 28.0 inches fork length, though in 1994 and 1996, maximum length was below 20.0 inches (Table 4).

From 1994 through 2020 the size range of striped mullet captured in the commercial fishery as determined from commercial fish house samples ranged from 5.0 to 28.0 inches FL (Figure 2). Modal length generally falls between 12.0 and 14.0 inches. In all years there are few striped mullet over 18.0 inches present in the catch.

Fishery-Independent Monitoring

Modal age was two in all years except 1996, 1999, 2001, and 2003 when the modal age was one, and 2017 when modal age was 1-2 (Table 5). Minimum age was zero in every year except 2010

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when the minimum age was one. Maximum age ranged from six in 1996, 2012, 2014, and 2015 to 15 in 2017. There is substantial overlap in length at age for striped mullet (Figure 3). Striped mullet grow quickly from age 0 to age 2 with growth slowing after age 3.

The striped mullet electrofishing survey, also known as Program 146 (P146), was initiated in 2003 to produce a fishery-independent index of relative abundance for striped mullet. Twelve sampling stations were established among four sites (three stations per site) in the Neuse River and its tributaries. Each station is sampled once per month from January through April and from October through December. To provide the most relevant index from the striped mullet electrofishing survey, data were limited to those collected from January through April when striped mullet are most abundant in the Neuse River. Since the survey primarily catches adults, juveniles were excluded from analysis. A sample represents all the fish collected over a 500 m transect. Striped mullet relative abundance was stable at approximately 100.0 fish per sample from 2005 through 2009 before peaking in 2011 at 168.8 (Figure 4). Standard errors in 2010 and 2011 are large because of samples from March 2010 and January 2011 that caught 4,253 and 4,497 striped mullet, respectively. For reference, besides these two catches the next largest sample was 1,345 striped mullet caught in March 2018. Relative abundance declined in 2012, potentially due to hurricanes, before increasing to near the 2004 to 2018 time-series average of 80.5 in 2013 and 2014. Relative abundance declined in 2015 to 45.1 fish per sample, declined again in 2016 to 20.0 fish per sample, and remained low in 2017 at 26.2 fish per sample. Relative abundance increased in 2020 to 94.7 fish per sample.

From 2004 to 2020, the size of striped mullet captured during the January to April portion of P146 sampling ranged from 4.0 to 21.0 inches FL (juveniles excluded; Figure 5). In most years, modal length was between 10.0 to 12.0 inches FL but was below 10.0 inches from 2009 to 2011. In 2020 modal length began decreasing and overall size distribution remained truncated.

During 2020, no index of abundance is available for striped mullet from the fishery-independent assessment (Program 915) or the striped bass independent gill net survey (Program 135). Sampling in 2020 was impacted by the COVID pandemic. Executive Order (EO) 116, issued on March 10, 2020, declared North Carolina under a State of Emergency and was soon followed by EO 120 which implemented a statewide Stay at Home Order for all non-essential State employees. During this time, fishery-independent projects were not able to take place, delaying future gill net sampling.

The fishery-independent gill net survey, also known as Program 915 (P915), has sampled in Hyde and Dare Counties since 2001 and the Neuse, Pamlico, and Pungo rivers since 2003. Sampling in the Cape Fear and New rivers began in 2008, and sampling in Carteret County began in 2018. To provide the most relevant striped mullet index from the survey, data were limited to samples from shallow river areas (Pamlico, Pungo and Neuse rivers) from October to November where and when most striped mullet occur. The survey primarily catches adults, so juveniles were excluded from analysis. From 2004 to 2014, relative abundance fluctuated between 7.0 and 16.0 striped mullet per sample (Figure 6). Relative abundance dropped in 2015 to 3.7 and then again in 2016 to a time-series low of 3.1 striped mullet per sample. CPUE decreased in 2019 to 4.4 fish per sample.

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From 2004 through 2018, the size of striped mullet captured during the October to November portion of P915 sampling in the Pamlico and Neuse rivers ranged from 8.0 to 25.0 inches FL (juveniles excluded; Figure 7). Modal length ranged from 12.0 to 14.0 inches but began to decline in 2011 and declined further in 2019. Few striped mullet less than 10.0 inches or greater than 15.0 inches are captured in this survey.

In October 1990, the NCDMF initiated the striped bass independent gill net survey, also known as Program 135 (P135). The survey was designed to monitor the striped bass population in the Albemarle Sound and Roanoke River but also encounters striped mullet. To provide the most relevant striped mullet index from P135, data were limited to those collected from 2.5-inch to 5.5-inch mesh sizes from November through February (fall-winter) where and when the majority of striped mullet occur. Since the survey primarily catches adults, juveniles were excluded from analysis. Data were also limited to those collected in less than 10 feet of water because these samples covered most of the water column. Relative abundance averaged 2.2 fish per set from 1990-2008 (Figure 8). Standard errors in 2013, 2014, and 2015 are large because most fish came from a few samples. Relative abundance increased to 10.5 in 2010 and spiked at 15.2 and 12.9 fish per set in 2014 and 2015. Relative abundance declined in 2016, and no striped mullet were caught during the survey in 2017 or 2019.

From 1990 through 2018, modal length of striped mullet captured in P135 sampling ranged from 10.0 to 15.0 inches FL (juveniles excluded; Figure 9). Modal length has fluctuated annually, increasing in 2015 and 2016 while length distribution has truncated.

RESEARCH NEEDS

The following research needs were compiled from those listed in Amendment 1.

- Initiate a fishery-independent adult striped mullet survey in the Core and Bogue sound areas where approximately 20 percent of the striped mullet harvest occurs – HIGH (independent gill net survey began in 2018)
- Develop a reliable fishery-independent index of juvenile abundance – HIGH (Needed)
- Initiate a tagging study to provide estimates of stock size, fishing mortality, and natural mortality that are not dependent on assumptions about steepness – HIGH (Needed)
- Increase the number of age samples from both fishery-dependent and fishery independent sources – MEDIUM (Ongoing)
- Investigate how catchability of striped mullet by NCDMF Program 146 is affected by variations in salinity and conductivity and expand the survey to other coastal rivers and tributaries – MEDIUM (Ongoing)
- Initiate a study to estimate fecundity and update the current maturity schedule microscopically – MEDIUM (see NCDMF 2021)
- Initiate a survey to estimate RCGL landings of striped mullet to estimate recreational landings, as well as social and economic elements of the striped mullet fishery – MEDIUM (Ongoing through NCDMF)
- Increase sampling of the commercial bait mullet cast net fishery to improve estimates of striped mullet and white mullet harvest – LOW (Needed)
- Restart fishery-independent cast net sampling to improve estimates of the proportion of striped mullet and white mullet in this fishery – LOW (Needed)

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- Analyze the data from the CRFL recreational cast net and seine survey to better characterize the recreational striped mullet fishery, including the social and economic elements – LOW (Needed)
- Improve recreational fisheries statistics provided by the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) or some other program to reliably characterize the magnitude and length and age structure of recreational fisheries losses – LOW (Ongoing)
- Initiate a plankton survey covering all inlets to determine inlet use by striped mullet – LOW (Needed)
- Explore the NOAA Bridge Net Survey as a possible larval/juvenile abundance index for striped mullet – LOW (Ongoing)
- Investigate the disappearance of males from the population after age three – LOW (Needed)
- Initiate an acoustic tagging study to determine spatial and temporal variations in habitat use throughout the state to help provide better indices for stock assessments – LOW (Needed)
- Implement public outreach on waste reduction of striped mullet in the commercial and recreational fisheries – LOW (Needed)
- Consider sex-specific selectivity curves in future modeling work – LOW (Needed)

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The management strategy for the striped mullet fisheries in North Carolina is to: 1) optimize resource utilization over the long-term; 2) reduce user group conflicts; 3) promote public education. The first strategy will be accomplished by protecting critical habitats and monitoring stock status. To address user group conflicts, a rule change was made to limit how much of a waterway may be blocked by runaround, drift, or other non-stationary gill nets. Specific user group conflicts will continue to be dealt with on a case-by-case basis and management actions will be implemented to address specific fishery-related problems. Issues addressed in formulating Amendment 1 of the management plan for North Carolina's striped mullet fishery included: 1) resolution of the Newport River gill net attendance; 2) user group conflicts; 3) updating the management framework for the N.C. striped mullet stock. See Table 6 for a summary of management strategies and outcomes.

Minimum and maximum landings triggers of 1.13 and 2.76 million pounds have been established to monitor the striped mullet fishery. If landings fall below the minimum landings trigger or exceed the maximum landings trigger, the NCDMF will determine if a new stock assessment and/or interim management action is needed.

FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN SCHEDULE RECOMMENDATIONS

Striped mullet commercial landings in 2020 were 1,299,464 pounds, which is above the minimum and below the maximum commercial landings triggers established in Amendment 1. In addition, the 2018 striped mullet stock assessment update indicated overfishing was not occurring through 2017 (NCDMF 2018). Review of the Striped Mullet FMP began in July 2020, as scheduled.

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TABLES

Table 1. Commercial landings of striped mullet (in lbs) in North Carolina, 1972-2020.

Year	Pounds	Year	Pounds
1972	1,176,918	1997	2,442,657
1973	1,092,620	1998	2,218,108
1974	2,137,502	1999	1,460,850
1975	1,952,748	2000	2,829,086
1976	2,071,741	2001	2,317,655
1977	1,834,935	2002	2,596,304
1978	1,752,233	2003	1,629,314
1979	1,767,955	2004	1,598,617
1980	2,215,532	2005	1,620,394
1981	1,293,902	2006	1,728,607
1982	1,492,179	2007	1,668,804
1983	1,068,014	2008	1,675,859
1984	1,688,522	2009	1,685,615
1985	1,486,583	2010	2,082,832
1986	1,932,190	2011	1,627,894
1987	2,590,360	2012	1,859,587
1988	3,060,829	2013	1,549,157
1989	2,062,147	2014	1,828,351
1990	2,994,604	2015	1,247,044
1991	1,467,448	2016	965,337
1992	1,820,494	2017	1,366,338
1993	3,063,853	2018	1,312,121
1994	1,726,242	2019	1,360,537
1995	2,298,446	2020	1,299,464
1996	1,756,863		

Table 2. Number of trips (effort), number of mullet harvested, number of mullet released, and total number of mullet caught in the recreational cast net fishery estimated from the NCDMF mail survey with associated percent standard error (PSE) by wave, 2012-2020. Estimates with a PSE value greater than 50 are shaded in gray.

Year	Wave	Effort	PSE	Harvest	PSE	Releases	PSE	Total Catch	PSE
2020	Jan/Feb	11,690	23.9	8,878	37.9	1,077	53.3	9,955	36.8
	Mar/Apr	11,799	17.5	25,426	29.9	4,549	47.5	29,975	29.7
	May/June	24,586	16.9	51,327	21.1	19,058	31.5	70,385	20.6
	Jul/Aug	64,789	14.8	152,144	21.3	78,864	25.8	231,008	19.8
	Sep/Oct	34,501	13.0	254,362	18.0	56,512	18.5	310,874	16.8
	Nov/Dec	26,203	14.9	136,348	19.6	46,406	22.1	182,754	18.7
	Total	173,568	7.63	628,485	10.5	206,466	12.95	834,951	9.88

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Table 2. Continued

Year	Wave	Effort	PSE	Harvest	PSE	Releases	PSE	Total Catch	PSE
2019	Jan/Feb	12,139	18.4	27,088	35.1	7,351	33.7	34,439	32.7
	Mar/Apr	9,674	21.4	11,023	37.4	3,517	47.8	14,540	34.7
	May/June	44,262	14.5	143,824	21.9	35,856	25.0	179,680	20.9
	Jul/Aug	39,904	14.5	210,967	20.3	122,890	33.6	333,857	20.8
	Sep/Oct	40,143	13.3	219,358	14.8	124,146	22.7	343,504	15.3
	Nov/Dec	16,819	20.1	76,555	30.7	27,125	33.3	103,680	30.0
	Total	162,941	7.1	688,815	10.0	320,885	16.5	1,009,700	10.2
2018	Jan/Feb	4,121	30.4	3,935	65.2	450	70.5	4,385	62.1
	Mar/Apr	8,950	20.8	16,051	41.4	4,560	43.2	20,611	39.5
	May/June	32,021	14.3	58,694	25.2	12,577	29.5	71,271	24.8
	Jul/Aug	11,125	20.3	43,317	24.2	13,418	33.4	56,735	24.5
	Sep/Oct	11,832	71.1	139,578	72.5	56,912	85.8	196,490	76.1
	Nov/Dec	20,890	16.3	85,612	18.4	20,987	23.6	106,599	18.4
	Total	88,939	12.1	347,187	30.1	108,904	45.4	456,091	33.5
2017	Jan/Feb	6,178	25.3	7,047	55.9	994	70.9	8,042	56.7
	Mar/Apr	16,513	15.9	36,630	25.7	13,572	30.5	50,202	26.3
	May/June	37,371	13.2	175,562	20.3	56,093	21.8	231,656	19.4
	Jul/Aug	54,353	13.8	218,395	15.6	89,636	19.3	308,031	15.0
	Sep/Oct	41,186	13.8	195,901	15.9	54,855	24.7	250,756	16.1
	Nov/Dec	27,259	14.4	89,393	18.6	24,847	28.1	114,240	18.9
	Total	182,861	6.7	722,929	8.8	239,998	11.3	962,927	8.7
2016	Jan/Feb	11,910	27.1	6,927	51.1	3,283	73.2	10,210	55.4
	Mar/Apr	13,803	20.5	17,333	44.5	1,238	63.5	18,571	42.0
	May/June	39,127	13.7	141,203	25.2	47,699	29.9	188,903	23.6
	Jul/Aug	51,085	11.8	306,614	18.3	109,938	22.3	416,552	17.7
	Sep/Oct	41,325	12.1	173,517	18.6	26,096	21.3	199,613	17.2
	Nov/Dec	34,673	16.3	102,800	26.5	31,637	33.1	134,437	27.0
	Total	191,922	6.4	748,394	10.9	219,892	14.3	968,286	10.7
2015	Jan/Feb	6,730	25.4	19,540	38.2	3,060	52.0	22,600	37.0
	Mar/Apr	13,981	18.5	25,446	28.2	5,880	33.6	31,326	27.9
	May/June	50,315	12.1	147,726	17.8	50,052	25.7	197,778	16.9
	Jul/Aug	71,656	10.7	400,123	13.9	156,696	19.1	556,819	14.1
	Sep/Oct	40,078	10.6	232,037	15.4	43,801	19.1	275,837	15.1
	Nov/Dec	24,116	17.8	117,650	21.6	36,550	26.2	154,200	21.9
	Total	206,876	6.0	942,521	8.4	296,039	12.2	1,238,561	8.5

STATE-MANAGED SPECIES – STRIPED MULLET

Table 2. Continued

Year	Wave	Effort	PSE	Harvest	PSE	Releases	PSE	Total Catch	PSE
2014	Jan/Feb	5,206	25.0	12,023	46.3	1076	57.9	13,099	44.3
	Mar/Apr	16,131	19.0	13,949	45.0	1,859	60.3	15,807	43.0
	May/June	35,945	13.5	110,839	20.8	28,262	22.4	139,101	19.5
	Jul/Aug	52,883	13.7	208,730	18.1	63,626	19.8	272,356	16.8
	Sep/Oct	63,224	12.7	362,912	14.6	136,337	16.4	499,250	13.5
	Nov/Dec	23,867	14.5	74,605	19.7	20,344	26.7	94,949	19.2
	Total	197,257	6.8	783,058	9.4	251,504	11.1	1,034,561	8.9
2013	Jan/Feb	13,053	18.3	57,047	30.0	7,862	36.4	64,909	29.7
	Mar/Apr	9,079	23.4	20,839	41.4	4,021	49.4	24,860	41.4
	May/June	24,541	11.8	65,072	24.4	21,957	30.5	87,030	24.8
	Jul/Aug	41,197	11.3	324,616	16.2	121,012	21.7	445,628	15.9
	Sep/Oct	25,872	16.3	159,790	20.9	39,065	26.1	198,855	19.8
	Nov/Dec	25,544	15.3	83,943	21.1	35,592	31.0	119,534	21.5
	Total	139,286	6.3	711,307	10.1	229,509	13.9	940,816	9.9
2012	Jan/Feb	10,484	22.1	23,346	32.8	9,050	42.3	32,395	32.4
	Mar/Apr	9,734	19.8	17,055	32.0	3,931	57.2	20,986	31.8
	May/June	20,903	12.5	84,180	25.7	26,845	32.9	111,025	23.9
	Jul/Aug	32,810	13.3	181,667	19.6	76,701	26.0	258,368	18.3
	Sep/Oct	30,377	11.2	292,859	13.0	72,004	16.1	364,862	12.6
	Nov/Dec	21,315	15.8	94,155	21.1	31,676	26.7	125,831	20.7
	Total	125,623	6.2	693,262	8.9	220,205	12.2	913,467	8.6

Table 3. North Carolina Recreational Commercial Gear License (RCGL) survey estimates of the number of striped mullet harvested, pounds harvested, number released, and total number caught. The RCGL survey was conducted from 2002 to 2008, funding was discontinued in 2009.

Year	Number Harvested	Pounds Harvested	Number Released	Total Number
2002	66,305	64,213	6,549	72,854
2003	28,757	24,774	3,514	32,270
2004	34,736	35,947	2,875	37,611
2005	35,888	36,314	3,492	39,380
2006	38,175	37,385	5,352	43,527
2007	35,472	40,168	7,449	42,921
2008	51,465	51,785	9,207	60,672

STATE-MANAGED SPECIES – STRIPED MULLET

Table 4. Mean length, minimum length, maximum length (fork length, in), and total number of striped mullet measured from North Carolina commercial fish house samples, 1994-2020.

Year	Mean Length	Minimum Length	Maximum Length	Number Measured
1994	13.0	6.1	19.1	302
1995	14.5	9.3	21.6	255
1996	13.5	10.0	18.5	123
1997	12.8	9.2	22.8	2,048
1998	13.1	8.6	25.4	1,600
1999	13.4	8.7	23.9	1,759
2000	13.4	8.3	23.5	7,522
2001	14.1	8.1	20.9	5,726
2002	13.2	5.9	21.3	10,989
2003	13.2	6.3	24.5	7,170
2004	13.1	7.6	24.4	12,778
2005	13.5	7.8	22.6	10,270
2006	13.7	7.8	22.2	12,108
2007	13.5	7.1	27.5	12,141
2008	14.1	8.4	24.1	13,212
2009	14.1	8.0	22.4	8,241
2010	13.9	8.1	22.7	10,991
2011	13.9	6.5	22.1	7,750
2012	14.0	7.9	22.2	12,833
2013	14.2	8.3	24.3	8,535
2014	13.8	7.7	24.0	6,517
2015	14.2	8.1	24.9	5,923
2016	14.3	8.9	24.1	5,661
2017	14.2	7.8	28.6	4,480
2018	14.5	8.3	22.5	4,111
2019	14.6	8.7	22.8	2,538
2020	13.8	8.3	21.9	4,150

STATE-MANAGED SPECIES – STRIPED MULLET

Table 5. Modal age, minimum age, maximum age and total number of striped mullet aged from fishery-independent and fishery-dependent sampling, 1996-2020. Age data from 2020 are preliminary.

Year	Modal Age	Minimum Age	Maximum Age	Number Aged
1996	1	0	6	163
1997	2	0	7	344
1998	2	0	7	717
1999	1	0	8	753
2000	2	0	10	1,122
2001	1	0	11	705
2002	2	0	7	625
2003	1	0	13	765
2004	2	0	9	1,142
2005	2	0	10	654
2006	2	0	10	685
2007	2	0	10	699
2008	2	0	10	771
2009	2	0	13	349
2010	2	1	8	748
2011	2	0	14	633
2012	2	0	6	873
2013	2	0	7	850
2014	2	0	6	855
2015	2	0	6	769
2016	2	0	8	956
2017	1-2	0	15	695
2018	2	0	10	770
2019	2	0	13	827
2020	2	0	7	264

STATE-MANAGED SPECIES – STRIPED MULLET

Table 6. Summary of management strategies.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY	Implementation Status
Establish minimum and maximum commercial landings triggers of 1.13 and 2.76 million pounds.	Amendment 1, 2015.
Establish minimum and maximum commercial landings triggers of 1.3 and 3.1 million pounds.	Striped Mullet Fishery Management Plan, 2006.
Implement a recreational harvest limit of 200 mullet per person, per day – currently there are no bag restrictions for mullet.	Striped Mullet Fishery Management Plan, 2006. MFC Rule April 2006 adoption 15ANCAC 03M.0502 (a), (b)
Modify mutilated finfish rule to exempt mullet when used as bait.	Striped Mullet Fishery Management Plan, 2006. 15ANCAC 03M.0101

FIGURES

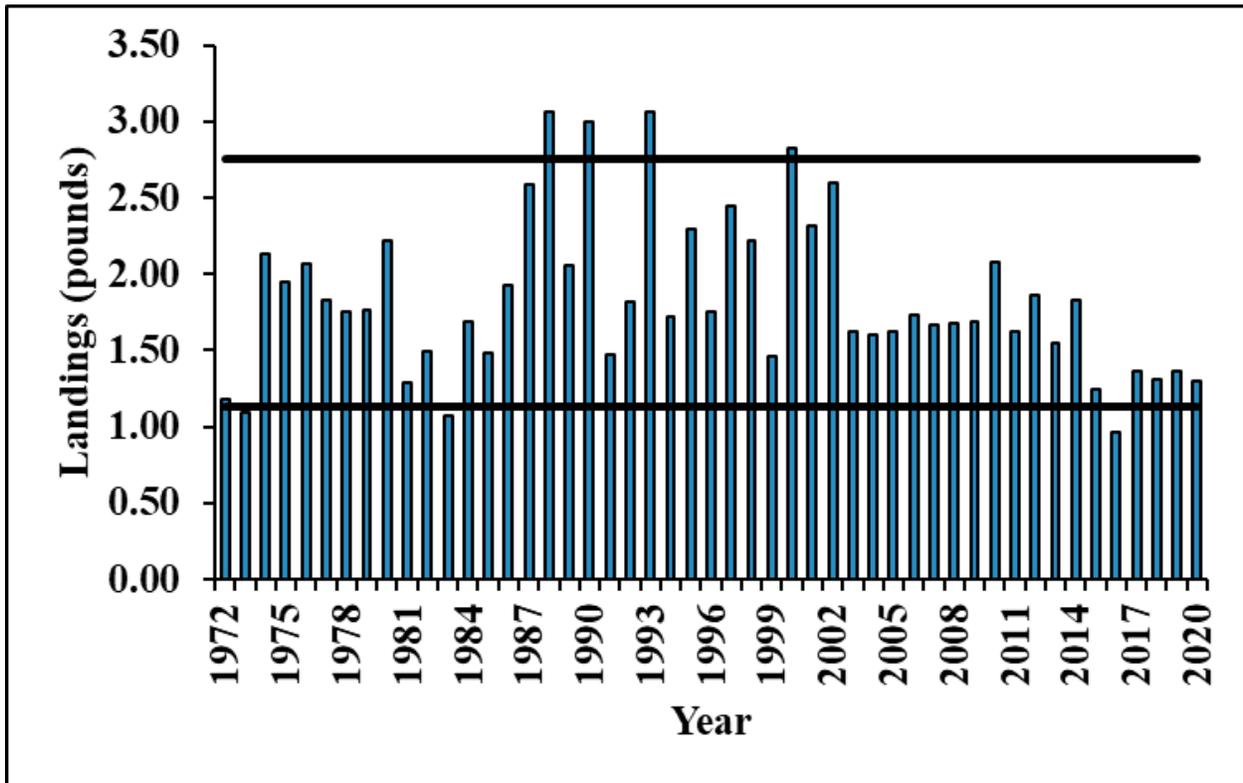


Figure 1. Commercial landings of striped mullet (lbs), 1972-2020. Solid horizontal lines represent upper (2.76 million lb.) and lower (1.13 million lb.) landings limits that would trigger a closer examination of data. Landings limits were changed in 2015 by Amendment 1 from previous upper and lower limits of 3.1 million and 1.3 million lbs (NCDMF 2014).

STATE-MANAGED SPECIES – STRIPED MULLET

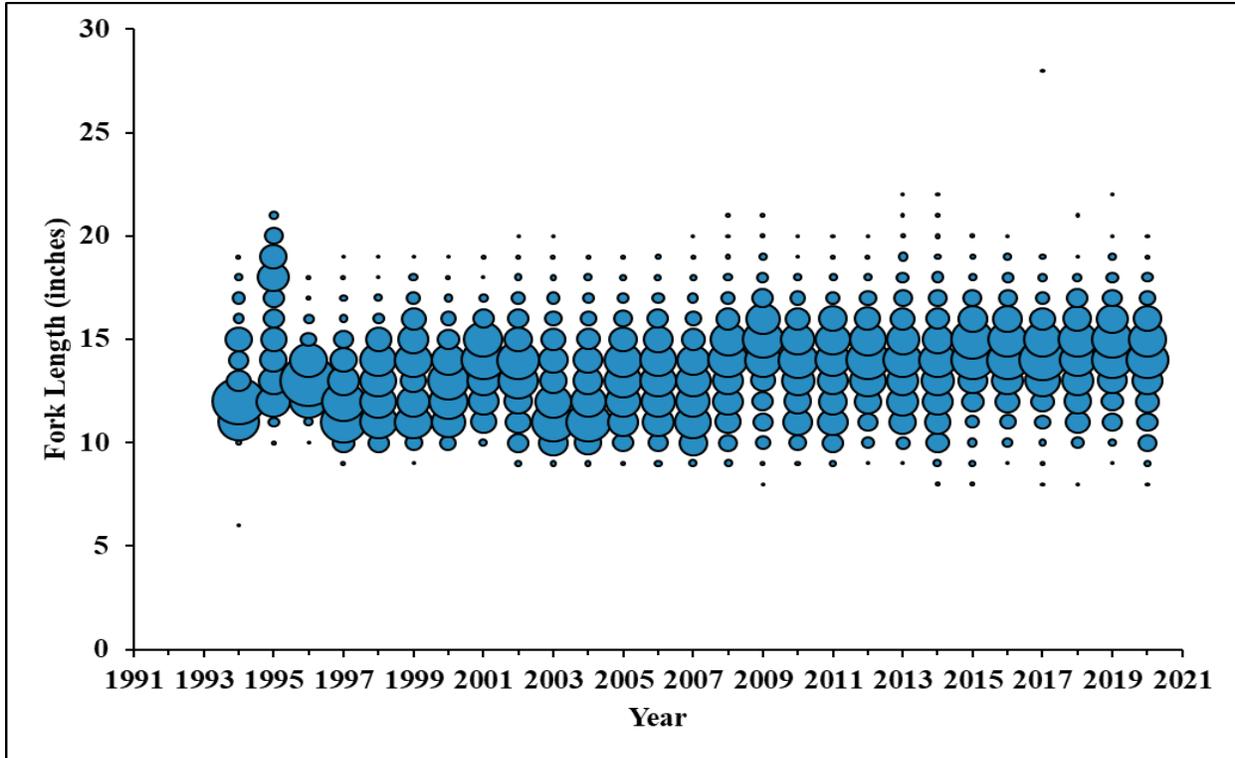


Figure 2. Commercial length-frequency (fork length, in) of striped mullet harvested in the commercial fishery based on NCDMF fish house sampling (n=28,795,554), 1994-2020. Bubble represents the proportion of fish at length.

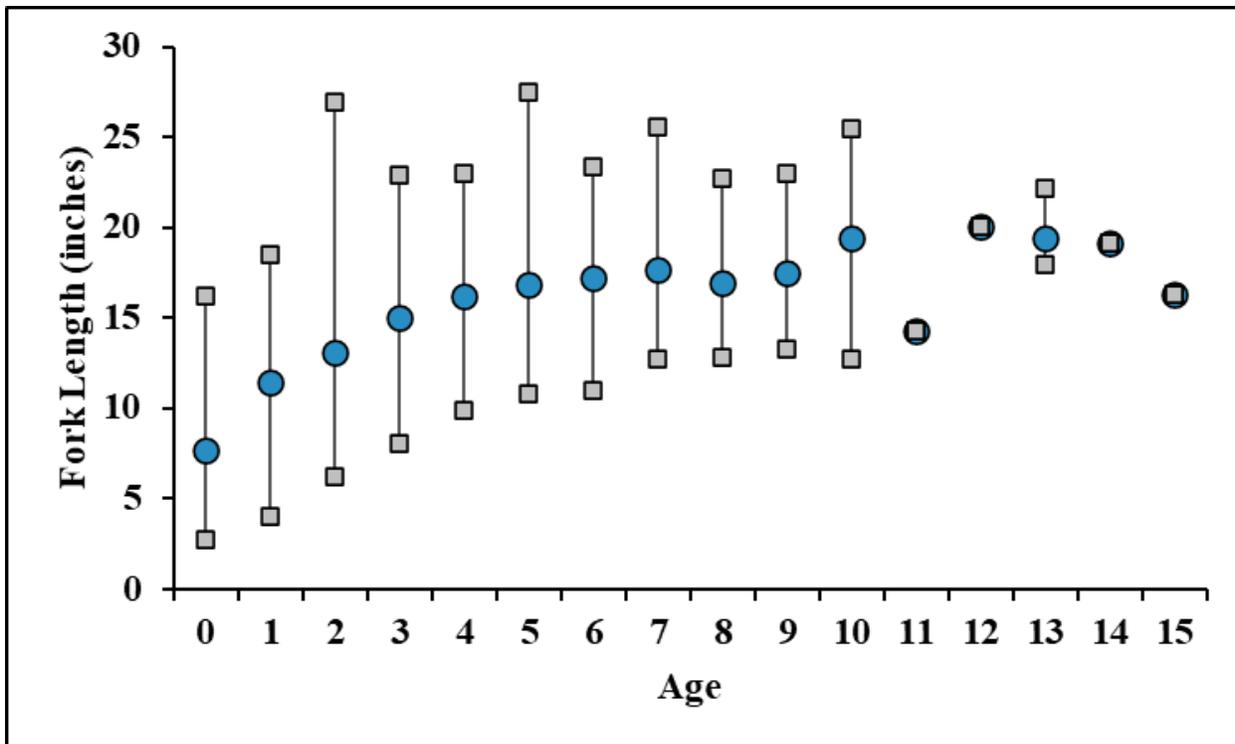


Figure 3. Striped mullet length at age based on all age samples collected from 1996 to 2020 (n=17,734). Blue circles represent mean size at a given age and the grey squares represent the minimum and maximum observed size for each age. Age data from 2020 are preliminary.

STATE-MANAGED SPECIES – STRIPED MULLET

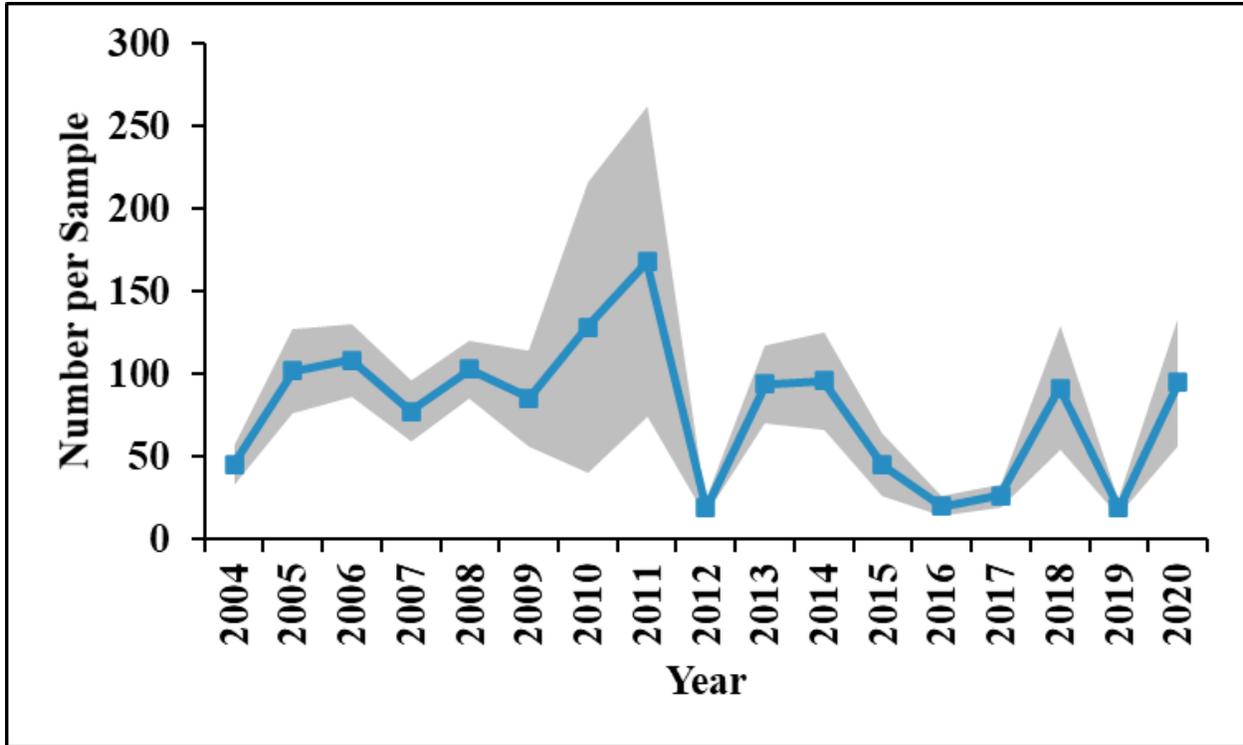


Figure 4. Number of adult striped mullet per sample (500 m sampling session) from the striped mullet electrofishing survey (P146), 2004-2020. To provide the most relevant index, data were limited to those collected from January through April. The shaded area represents standard error.

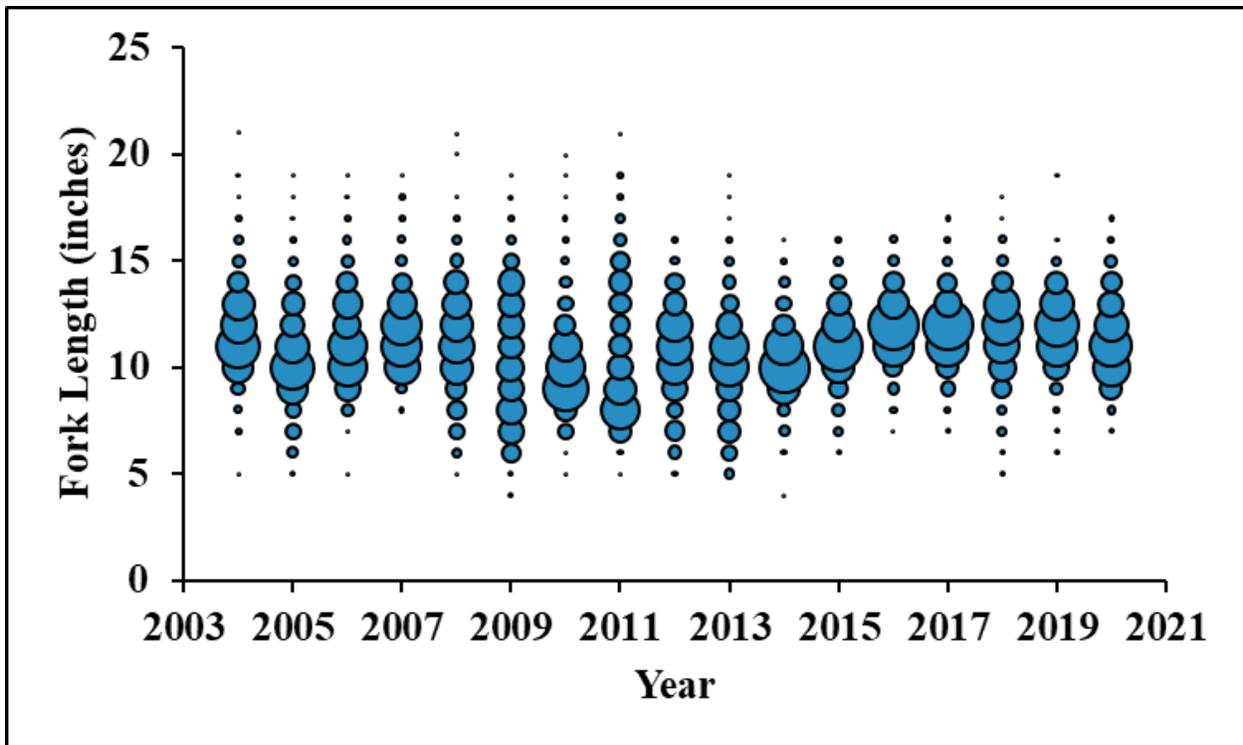


Figure 5. Length frequency (fork length, in) of adult striped mullet from the striped mullet electrofishing survey (P146), 2004-2020. Lengths include striped mullet collected from January through April. Bubble size represents the proportion of fish at length.

STATE-MANAGED SPECIES – STRIPED MULLET

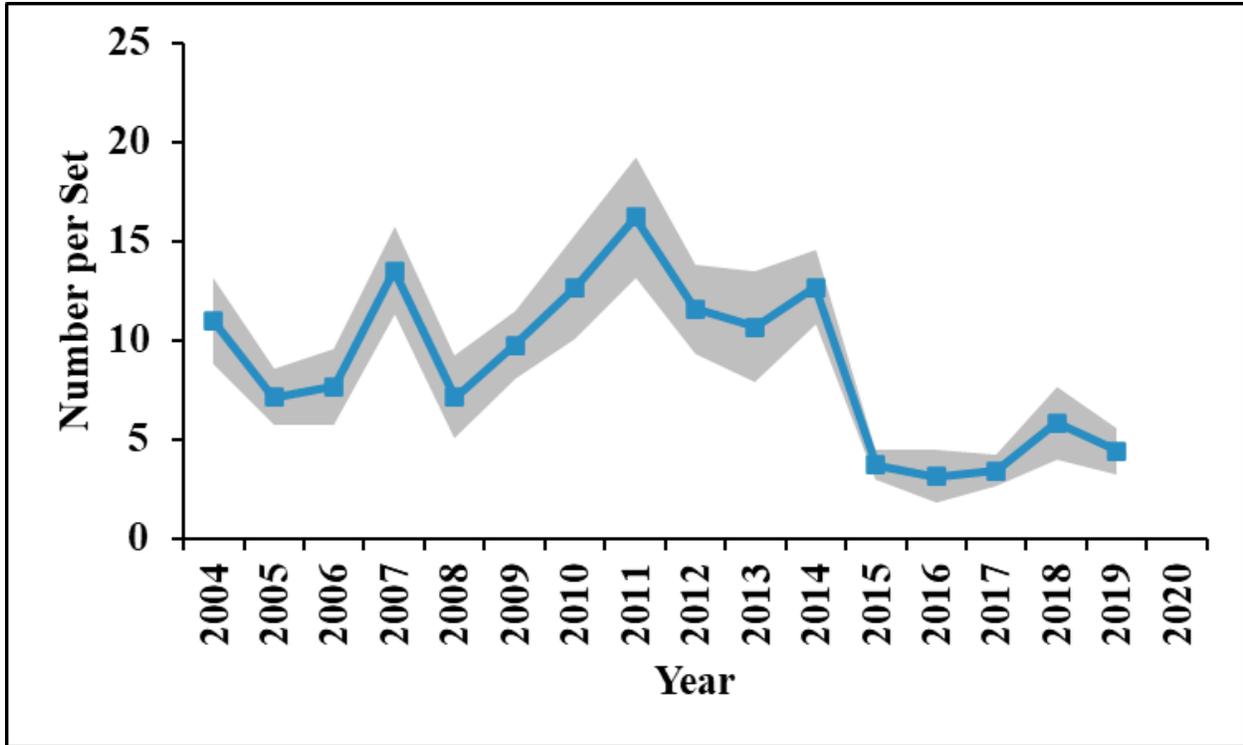


Figure 6. Number of adult striped mullet per gill net set from the independent gill net survey (P915), 2004-2020. To provide the most relevant index, only shallow river (Neuse, Pamlico, Pungo) samples collected from October to November were included. The shaded area represents standard error. Sampling did not occur in 2020.

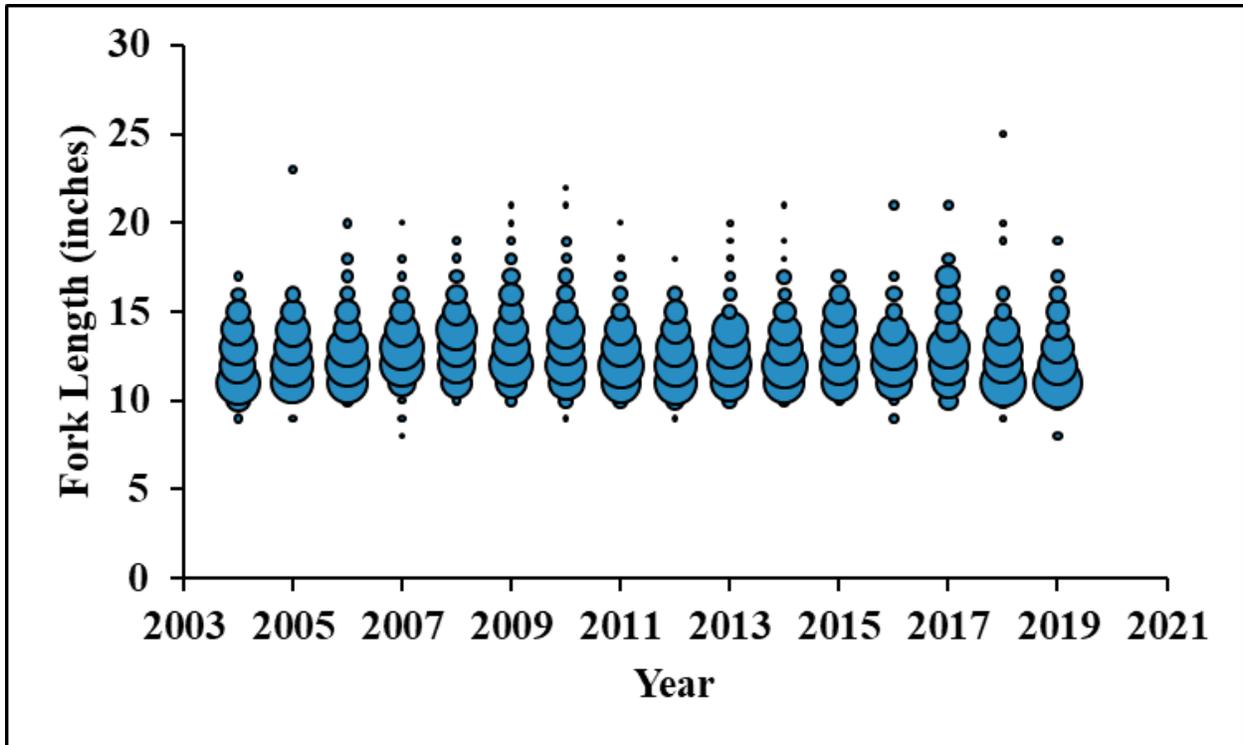


Figure 7. Length-frequency (fork length, in) of adult striped mullet from the independent gill net survey (P915), 2004-2020. Lengths include striped mullet from shallow river (Neuse, Pamlico, Pungo) samples collected from October to November. Bubble size represents the proportion of fish at length. Sampling did not occur in 2020.

STATE-MANAGED SPECIES – STRIPED MULLET

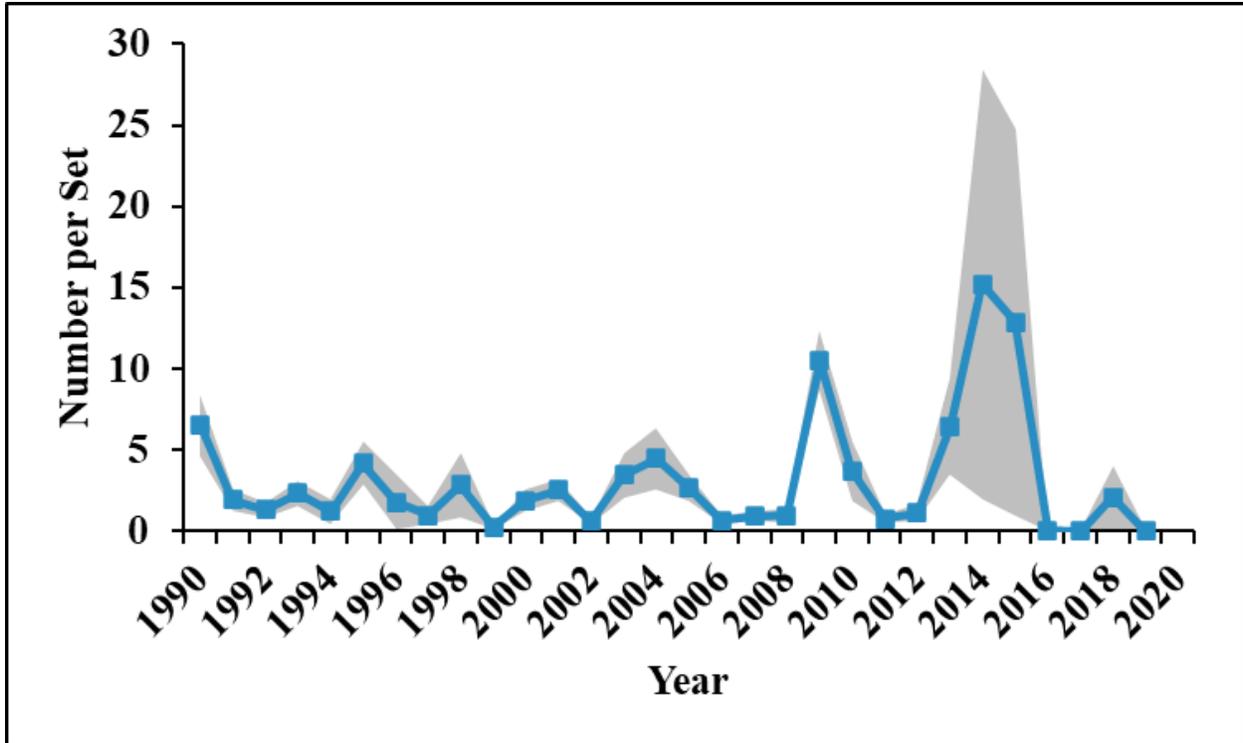


Figure 8. Number of adult striped mullet per gill net set from the striped bass independent gill net survey (P135), 1990-2020. To provide the most relevant striped mullet index data were limited to those collected from 2.5-in to 5.5-in mesh sizes from November through February (fall-winter) in less than 10 ft of water. Bubble size represents the proportion of fish at length. Sampling did not occur in 2020.

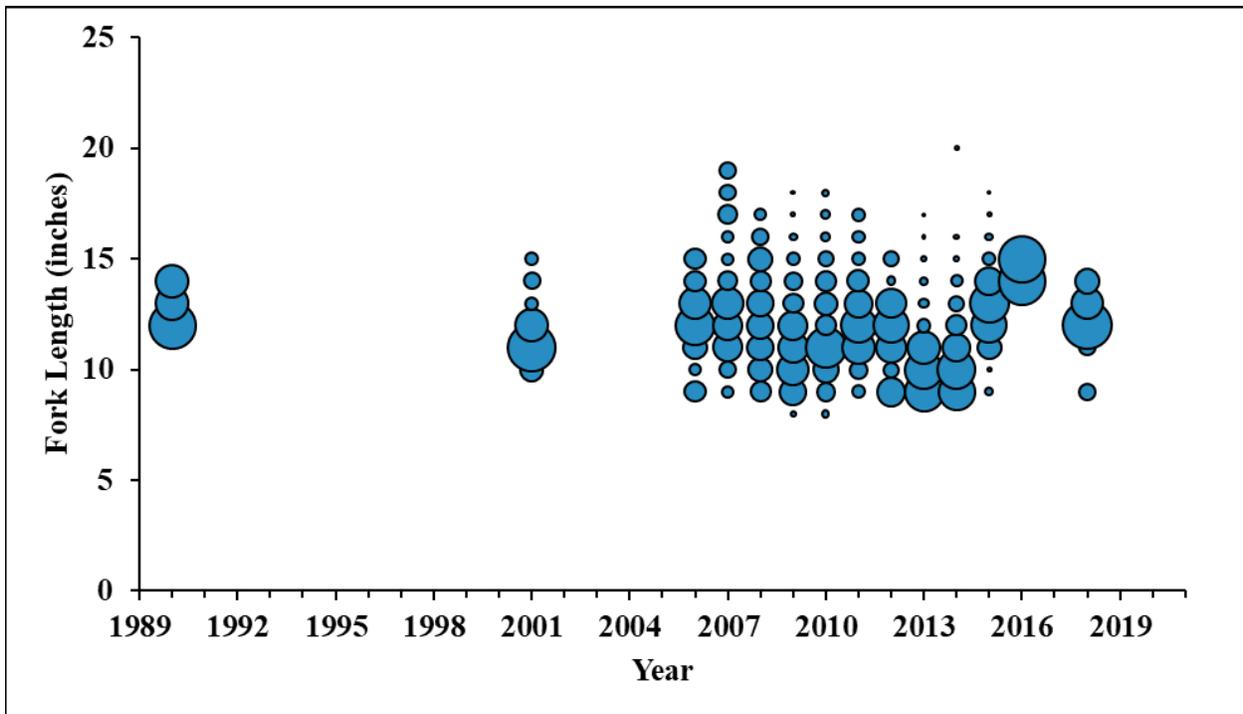


Figure 9. Length-frequency (fork length, in) of adult striped mullet from the fall-winter portion of the striped bass independent gill net survey (P135), 1990-2020. In some years no striped mullet were captured or no lengths were recorded. Sampling did not occur in 2020.