

Rockfish season opens with 32-inch limit Regulations announced for today's opener

By **Peter Baker**
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Regulations announced yesterday for this year's recreational and commercial rockfish seasons include a limited spring fishery in the lower tidal Potomac River and the possibility of an increased total catch.

The spring rockfish season for recreational and charter-boat fishermen in Maryland waters of the Chesapeake Bay will open today, with a 32-inch minimum size limit and creel limits of one per day and five overall through May 31.

The area open to fishing today through May 31 -- exclusive of the spring season on the lower Potomac -- is the main stem of the Chesapeake Bay from Brewerton Channel off the mouth of the Patapsco River south to the Maryland-Virginia line, including Tangier and Pocomoke sounds.

The season in the lower Potomac, regulated by the Potomac River Fisheries Commission, will be open from May 4 to May 19. The river and its tributaries downstream of the Route 301 bridge will be open to fishing with a daily catch limit of one fish 32 inches or larger.

Regulations were approved yesterday by the Administrative, Executive and Legislative Review Committee, which is empowered to enact emergency regulations.

"I am looking forward to great striped bass seasons this year," said Department of Natural Resources Secretary John R. Griffin. "Fish hatched in 1993 will be legal size this year, and the 1993 hatch was the highest in history."

DNR biologists believe that number of legal sized rockfish (striped bass) available through the end of the fall season this year will be 65 percent more than were available last season.

For the spring season, however, the 1993 class should not be a factor. Those fish will be surpassing only the 18-inch minimum for the fall season this year.

The fall season will run Aug. 30 to Nov. 17, with a daily limit of two fish per person.

one fish per day, with all Maryland waters open

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Recreational fishermen catching rockfish from today through July 4 must report their catch by calling (800) 999-2800. Catches made in the Potomac River spring season should be reported by calling (800) 266-3904.

"Conservative management and good individual sportsmanship go hand in hand in order to maintain the current high levels of striped bass," said Griffin.

"We are cautious to assure that overfishing does not occur and that recreational, charter and commercial watermen benefit but also do their individual parts to conserve striped bass."

The proposed 2 million pound commercial quota was reduced to 1.8 million pounds, with the difference to be allocated to 10 additional days of fishing for recreational and charter-boat anglers. The 10 days are not included in any of the season dates announced yesterday.

Anglers fishing for striped bass must have Chesapeake Bay Sport Fishing licenses and a \$2 striped bass stamp.

The recreational season in the Atlantic Ocean and coastal bays is year-around, with a 28-inch minimum and a limit of two per day. No license or stamps are required to fish for rockfish in the coastal bays or the Atlantic.

Striped bass seasons

(Fishing hours in all seasons, 5 a.m. to 9 p.m.)

Recreational and charter-boats

April 26-May 31: Maryland trophy season. Minimum length 32 inches, creel limit 1 per day and 5 per season. Fishing limited to the main stem of the Chesapeake Bay from Brewerton Channel to the Maryland-Virginia line, including Pocomoke and Tangier sounds. Use of live eels as bait is prohibited. Use of gaffs is prohibited, and fish may not be culled.

May 4-May 19: Potomac River spring season. Minimum length 32 inches, daily creel limit 1. Fishing limited to river and tributaries downstream from the Route 301 bridge.

June 1-June 16: Second session, Maryland season. Minimum length 28 inches, creel one per day. Fishing open in Maryland bay waters and tributaries.

June 17-July 4: Third session Maryland season. Minimum size 26 inches, creel limit 1 per day. Fishing open in Maryland bay waters and tributaries.

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Commercial seasons

Pound nets: July 8-Nov. 8

Haul seines: Aug. 26-Nov. 8

Hook and line: Nov. 12-Nov. 27

Gill net: Nov. 25-Feb. 28

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