

Time to Change



Menhaden Management

Healthy menhaden populations are crucial for a healthy Chesapeake Bay.

- Menhaden are small, but they are an important species for the health of the Chesapeake Bay.
- They provide high-protein forage for a growing population of economically important food and game fish.
- Historically, menhaden have supplied up to 80% of total forage for striped bass along the Atlantic Coast. Nowhere is this predator-prey relationship more critical than in the Chesapeake Bay.
- The Bay furnishes both nursery grounds and spawning grounds for up to 70% of the coastal migratory striped bass population.
- The Bay is the nursery grounds for nearly 50% of all menhaden spawned along the Atlantic Coast.

Chesapeake Bay water quality is dependent on filter feeders.

- As Chesapeake Bay oyster stocks continue to decline, menhaden perform an increasingly critical function as filter feeders.
- An adult menhaden could potentially filter up to 1 million gallons of water every 180 days. A healthy menhaden population can significantly reduce the amount of nitrogen in the Bay each year.
- The Chesapeake Bay 2000 Agreement calls for a multi-species approach for managing menhaden in order to ensure there are enough menhaden to fulfill their important roles as filter feeder and forage fish.

Virginia's waters account for the majority of the menhaden commercial catch.

- In 2003, the Atlantic Coast harvest of menhaden was 366 million pounds.
- About 75% (274.5 million pounds) came from the Virginia waters of the Chesapeake Bay.
- At least 91% (333 million pounds) of that menhaden catch was juvenile or age class 0-2, the most critical age for developing a healthy population.
- While the commercial industry in Virginia is directed to avoid these juvenile fish as much as possible, government data indicate an increase in the take of this age group. Scientists advising the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Virginia is a member) are studying menhaden depletion and assessing whether restrictions should be tightened.

The legislature is not the appropriate authority to manage menhaden.

- Menhaden is the ONLY species in state marine waters for which the Virginia Legislature sets the operative regulations.
- The Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC) regulates every other marine fish species.
- VMRC is staffed by scientists and fishery management professionals trained to evaluate and manage fish stocks for the benefit of all Virginians.



*Coastal Conservation Association Virginia asks you
to allow the VMRC to oversee menhaden!*

*For more information visit the CCA website,
www.ccavirginia.org*