


5 Important Facts about Menhaden



1. Chesapeake Menhaden Populations Are Crucial for a Healthy Bay.

Menhaden are small and have no value as sport fish or table fare, but they are the Bay's most important species. They provide high-protein forage for a growing population of economically important striped bass and other predators. Historically, menhaden have supplied up to 80 percent of total forage for striped bass along the Atlantic coast. Nowhere is this predator-prey relationship more critical than in the Chesapeake Bay, which furnishes both spawning grounds for up to 70 percent of the coastal migratory striped bass population and nursery grounds accounting for nearly half of all coastal menhaden recruitment. Striped bass are the most economically important recreational and commercial fish on the East Coast, with a \$180 million economic impact to Virginia's recreational industry alone.

2. Chesapeake Bay Water Quality is Dependent on Filter Feeders.

As important as menhaden are as a forage fish, they serve an increasingly critical role as a filter feeder as oyster stocks continue to decline in the troubled Chesapeake. An adult menhaden could potentially filter up to 1 million gallons of water in 180 days. A healthy menhaden population could potentially filter out 25 percent of the Bay's nitrogen per year.

3. The Chesapeake Bay Menhaden Harvest is Greater than the Harvest of the Rest of the Atlantic Coast Combined.

In 2003, more than 275,000,000 pounds of menhaden were harvested from Virginia waters. Total Atlantic coastal landings were more than 366,000,000 pounds, meaning the Virginia portion of the Chesapeake Bay and its nearby coastal waters alone accounted for 75 percent of the landings. Given that, statistics indicating healthier menhaden populations up or down the Atlantic coast would not seem to have any bearing on the problems associated with the shortage of menhaden in the Bay.

4. The Virginia Legislature is Not the Appropriate Venue to Manage Menhaden.

In state marine waters, which include the Chesapeake Bay, menhaden are unique among fish species. They are the ONLY species for which the Virginia Legislature sets the operative regulations. Every other marine fish species under management is governed by the Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC), which is staffed by scientists and fishery management professionals trained to evaluate and manage fish stocks for the benefit of all Virginians. What happens to one species affects other species. The VMRC cannot effectively manage predator species without managing the forage species as well.

5. CCA VA is NOT Trying to Close Businesses or the Fishery.

CCA Virginia simply wants responsible scientific management that conserves, protects, and restores Virginia's resources for everyone, including the commercial industry.



CCA VA has approximately 2,000 members representing saltwater anglers in Virginia. To get involved in the fight for the conservation of marine resources in our state, contact CCA VA at 757-481-1226, or visit our website, www.ccavirginia.org.