

The State of Striped Bass

A Guide to the Science



Striped bass are a cornerstone species of the Atlantic Coast, prized by anglers and serving as a vital indicator of the health of our waterways. The Chesapeake Bay acts as the primary nursery for these fish, but in recent years, we have seen a concerning drop in the number of young striped bass surviving to adulthood.

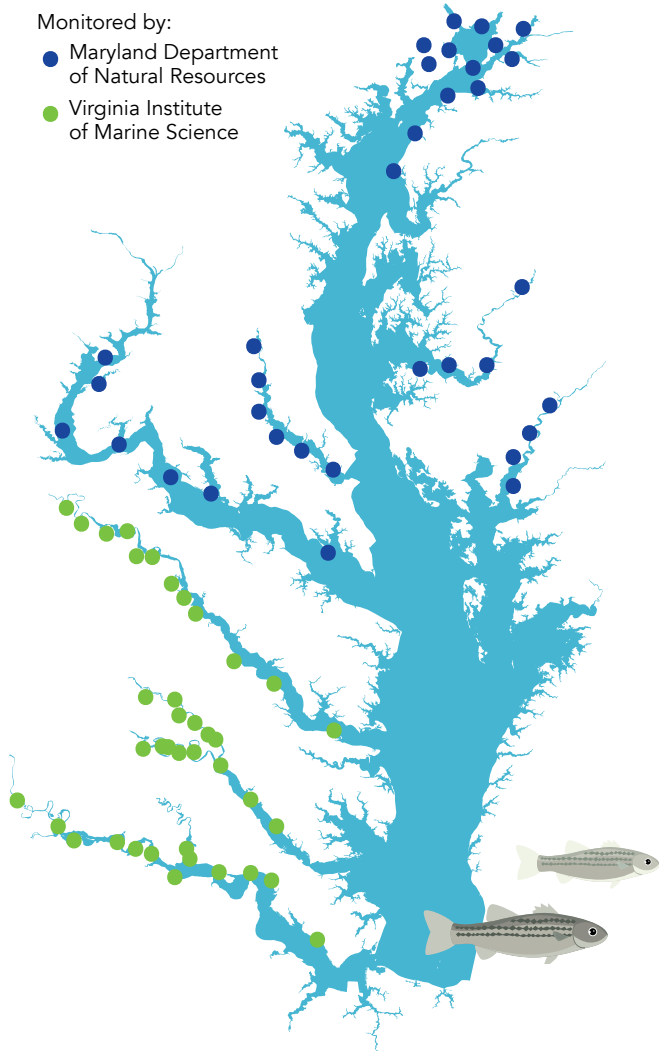
To understand why this is happening and how we can better manage the species, researchers and managers gathered in 2025 to review the current science and identify the best path forward.



Where We Monitor

Monitored by:






- Maryland Department of Natural Resources
- Virginia Institute of Marine Science

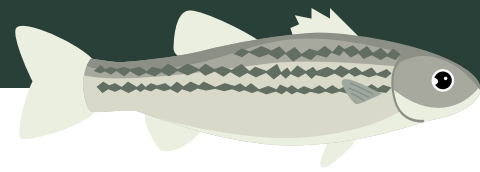


What We Know

Our current monitoring programs are robust and effective. By tracking striped bass every year in the same places, at the same times, using the same methods, we have built a reliable gauge that allows us to see long-term trends clearly.

Population decline is rarely caused by a single issue; it is likely a complex mix of:

-  Environmental stresses, like warming water or reduced water quality
-  Loss of habitat for spawning and growth
-  Shifts in the food of young fish
-  Predation by other species, such as invasive blue catfish
-  Disease outbreaks



Key Research Needs

1. **Monitor Prey:** Sample zooplankton (the food source for baby striped bass) during the critical window when fish are hatching and beginning to feed, Bay-wide.
2. **Track Movement & Survival:** Expand fish tagging, including monitoring how predators like blue catfish impact juvenile survival, to get a clearer picture of where fish are ending up.
3. **Study Early Life:** Investigate the health of eggs, the condition of baby fish, and the effects of stressors like microplastics on young, vulnerable fish.
4. **Connect Environment to Catch:** Compare survey data against environmental factors like water temperature, salinity, and water clarity to see how these conditions influence survival.
5. **Update Goals:** Re-evaluate the targets we use to measure success; they need to reflect today's environment rather than the mid-1990s.

Recommended Next Steps: Protect and Expand

Protect What's Working

The backbone of our management is our long-term, standardized survey system. We must ensure it stays consistent and able to track long-term trends.

Expand the Scope

We need to look for fish in "non-traditional" places. Our current surveys need to be supplemented to catch changes like fish moving to cooler tributaries or shifting their spawning grounds.

Plan Proactively

Instead of being reactionary, we should use existing data to build better models that predict how different environmental factors will impact fish populations in the future.

Look at the Bigger Picture

We should compare striped bass trends with other species like white perch or alewife. If other fish are also declining, it helps us understand if the problem is specific to striped bass or if the entire ecosystem is shifting.



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