

Smith Mountain Striper Club connecting with the local community

The Smith Mountain Striper Club (SMSC) is alive and well! After about a year and a half COVID pause, the club resumed in-person meetings in September 2021. When the calendar turned to 2022, the SMSC began to evolve into a community outreach group with a special focus on providing VA DWR more data for better management of the SML Striped Bass fishery.

The SMSC had meetings in January, February and March that focuses on fishing and lake specific information. The January meeting was a special presentation on boat electronics and how to use the technology to find fish. Captain Weston Hartman was the keynote presenter and offered numerous ideas and tips on how to get the most from your electronics. February and March were both presentations by VA DWR. The February presentation focused on the hatchery in Brookneal and the entire process of collecting fish for spawning, hatching the eggs and growing the hatch into fingerlings that will eventually be stocked into SML in June. Mike Gafford oversees the hatchery operation in Brookneal. The March meeting was the largest turnout of the year. Dan Wilson, Fish Biologist with VA DWR, compiles the data (more information on the what the data is below) from the previous year and presents to the SMSC. This presentation is very informative and gives anglers an opportunity to ask questions about the "state of the fishery". Other presenters throughout the year were club members offering their tips and tricks for successful Striped Bass outings.

The data that VA DWR uses in their assessment of the Striped Bass fishery at SML comes from 2 major sources. The first source is an Angler Journal kept by Striped Bass anglers each time they go out on the water. Anglers are asked to log the date, the number of hours fished, the number of anglers, the number of fish harvested, the lengths of fish harvested, the number of fish released, and the sizes of the fish released. Previously the only way to submit an Angler Journal was by keeping a small book and turning it in at year end. The SMSC created a digital Striped Bass Angler Journal that can be completed on any computer or smartphone. The digital form takes less than a minute to complete. The goal of the SMSC was to give more data to VA DWR and the digital journal is already making an impact.

The second source of data is by examining the otolith bone of the Striped Bass. The length of the fish and age (determined by rings on the otolith) of the fish give biologists clues if the fish are growing at their expected rate. The fish heads are gathered by individual anglers and placed in freezers, also DWR saves the fish heads collected during their gill net surveys in the fall. Overall, the SMSC helped DWR process over 225 fish heads during the 2022 calendar year. The SMSC purchased a freezer and placed it at Indian Pointe Marina for fish head collection. SMSC member Gary Harrison was instrumental in this project.

The SMSC volunteered in the community in 2022. The club had members present at the SML Youth Day at SML State Park in June to cook hamburgers and hot dogs for all those that attended the event. The SMSC assisted VA DWR with Striped Bass fingerling stocking in late

May/Early June and the gill net surveys conducted in October and November. The club also hosted an in-water boat and tackle show in October and the Bridgewater Condo docks. Members and community residents were able to talk fishing and see how others fish.

For the first time the SMSC hosted a month-long fishing contest among its members. The contest was held in April and the goal was to encourage members to get out and fish while also making it a habit to complete Striped Bass Angler Journal entries. The contest was hosted by smlfishfinder.com and the SMSC would like to thank Nathan Carroll for his efforts.

Lastly the SMSC held their own community outreach event. On June 25, 2021, the SMSC hosted Reel Connections for Kids. This event paired children from underserved backgrounds with professional Striped Bass guides here on SML. They were treated to a beautiful morning catching fish with an experienced guide, snacks on the boat, breakfast when they returned from fishing and each child left with their own fishing rod and tackle box equipped with gear. Ken Britske and Kevin Bugg were the main organizers and many SMSC members volunteered their time to ensure this event was a huge success.

If you would like to be involved with Reel Connections for Kids and the Smith Mountain Striper Club please email SMSC@smithmountainstriperclub.com or chad.gilmore72@gmail.com.







