

#0, "WSB ETIQUETTE REVISITED"

Tue Feb-08-05 12:17 PM by freddie



Many of you have seen this post over the years, but there are many new recreational fishers on this Board now, and I have to assume even more new lurkers. So here it is again:

Well, WSB season is rapidly approaching, and it is time for me to be my usual pain in the ass on the subject of WSB etiquette 😊 We all know (I hope) the DFG Rec Regs: 1 WSB of 28 in. or larger during the main spawning period from March 15 to June 15; catch and release is "legal" prior to "take" (kill) of the 1 WSB limit (but etiquette another matter discussed below); no targeting of WSB after 1 fish limit (no catch and release, but hand off is now legal under the new "boat limit" of one per angler aboard, but once the boat limit is met, NO MORE TARGETING OF WSB); before and after March 15 to June 15, legal limit is 3 per angler (another etiquette question). Experienced WSB fishermen know that the DFG has the season pat: clearly spawned out, thin fish caught generally after June 15, and note that commercial fishermen cannot take WSB during this spawn period, only recs with the 1 fish limit.

Over the years on this Board, the inherent weakness of this wonderful, recovering fish has been discussed to death, with the final word coming from those who know best: the research staff at Hubbs WSB hatchery, who work with and observe these fish daily: WSB DO NOT RELEASE WELL – tears in swim bladder if brought up from below 60 ft (40 ft. is probable), and bladder tears will result if they dive to those depths during the fight, even if hooked near surface. Even touching these fish can cause irreparable damage (hatchery folk say their handprint burn is visible on WSB skin just a day or so after handling, and these fish eventually die, etc., etc). If you grab them by the jaw bone to extract the hook, it breaks easily. Don't be fooled by the size they attain – they are delicate. And the bigger they are, the less likely they are to survive a release. The fish are spent, bloated, and that's what makes them the easiest fish to gaff solo.

I have often heard anglers describe WSB as a fast growing species, and mention them in the company of bluefin tuna, yellowtail, and dorado, the rabbit of the fish world. While it is true that they are RELATIVELY fast growing fish compared to rockfish, halibut or calico bass, their LONGEVITY is much greater than other fast growing fish, and therefore the importance of the big female breeders to the growth, abundance, and survival of the species. Here are some statistical averages FYI and comparison:

BLUEFIN TUNA (AVERAGES)

AGE(YEARS) WEIGHT

1. 10

2. 28

3. 60

4. 109

5. 177

The oldest bluefin tuna known was 9 years old!

YELLOWTAIL

AGE (YEARS) WEIGHT

1. 3.8

2. 7.4

3. 9.9

4. 13.2

5. 15.9

10. 35.0

The oldest known yellowtail was 12 years old! (above stats courtesy of Dr. Larry Allen)

WHITE SEABASS

AGE (YEARS) WEIGHT

1. 0.5

2. 3.3

3. 6.6

4. 10.7

5. 13.1

6. 19.0

7. 20.1

8. 23.5

9. 28.4

10. 24.4

11. 39.9

12. 32.5

13. 28.5

14. 36.3

17. 37.7

27. 49.3

Stats are from DFG Thomas(1966 using scales) & CDFG (2000 using otoliths)

Clearly there is an anomaly in weight from the sample in the 11-13 year class, and we could conjecture on why, but the main point is that WSB are fairly long-lived species with those over 50 lbs. reaching into their 30s. And clearly the big fish are important spawners for at least 20 or more years. Therefore, to risk them in a catch and release foray during a WFO spawning bite for sport and not meat, is a destructive act, albeit unintentional. There is always another day. Take your one legal, rack your rod, or move on, no matter the size. And as someone who has caught a