

Thanks for checking out the eBook! Hopefully you'll find the following pages helpful. At the least, I hope you this eBook succeeds as a good pre-stripped bass fishing season read.

Without a doubt Cape Cod is a great place to go fishing for striped bass. There are also a ton of other fish species to pursue like bluefish and Bluefin tuna. Unfortunately catching a nice fish off Cape Cod is not always simple and easy-especially for folks not terribly familiar with the area.

This quick and handy guide contains inside information geared towards getting your 2012 season started off on the right foot. I think we have a lot to look forward to this year, especially considering the high amount of plankton, whales and marine life currently feeding off Cape Cod.

If you have any questions please don't hesitate to ask. Hopefully you'll find some value in the following pages, and if not then that is A-OK too.

Have a great 2012 fishing season and maybe I'll see you on the water!

Take care,

Ryan

## Spring Time at the Cape Cod Canal

The spring-time arrival of the striped bass at the Cape Cod Canal is one of the most highly anticipated fishing events of the entire season. Six long months of no striped bass is quickly replaced by top water blitzes, beautiful mornings and fantastic striped bass fishing.

The first striped bass of the year at the Canal generally arrive early in May and are typically on the smaller side.

A lot of guys do pretty well on these small fish which is great. However I usually find myself fishing estuaries and the beachfront during the first week of May. I tend to wait and fish the Canal when the bigger bass begin to filter through.

These much larger striped bass pass through the Canal beginning at some point in mid-May. By the end of the month a steady stream of 15-60 pound striped bass are filtering into and out of the land cut.

Most of these schools of striped bass are using the Canal for feeding and migration purposes. Over the past few springs the

Canal has boasted astounding amounts of mackerel, herring and menhaden during the spring. Couple these forage fish with the lobsters, crabs and other Canal creatures roaming the bottom and the table is set for epic striped bass fishing. In addition to great feeding opportunities the Cape Cod Canal also significantly reduces the overall mileage that these fish need to log in order to reach their summer feeding grounds. To put it simply, the Cape Cod Canal is a food-filled shortcut that large schools of striped bass find very alluring.



*A flat calm evening at the Cape Cod Canal.*

The geography of the Canal also makes feeding easier for striped bass, and fishing easier for the striped bass angler. The Canal is a very contained ecosystem, especially when compared with the

vastness of Cape Cod Bay or the open ocean. Schools of bait fish have less room for escape, because the Canal is only a few hundred yards wide and 50 or so feet deep. This contained area also produces a unique striped bass fishing opportunity for surf casters. All the action is happening in a relatively small, easily cast-able arena.

Over the past handful of years the striped bass fishing at the Canal has been noticeably better during the spring than in the fall. I find stuff like this interesting and I can't help but think of why the fishing during May and June is awesome, while the fishing during September and October is a little lackluster. Fortunately I recently stumbled across a new scientific study that is really helping us understand exactly how striped bass use the Cape Cod Canal.

Acoustic tagging has helped researchers establish how striped bass are moving around, and exactly how they may be using the Cape Cod Canal. Even though the study is in its infancy, I found their findings very intriguing. The following was posted at Eregulations.com.

## Striped Bass

Every summer large striped bass can be found gorging on schools of sand eels, mackerel, and herring in federal waters off of Massachusetts. Federal fisheries regulations prohibit the retention or targeting of striped bass by recreational and commercial fishermen outside of state waters, making all of federal waters a refuge for striped bass.

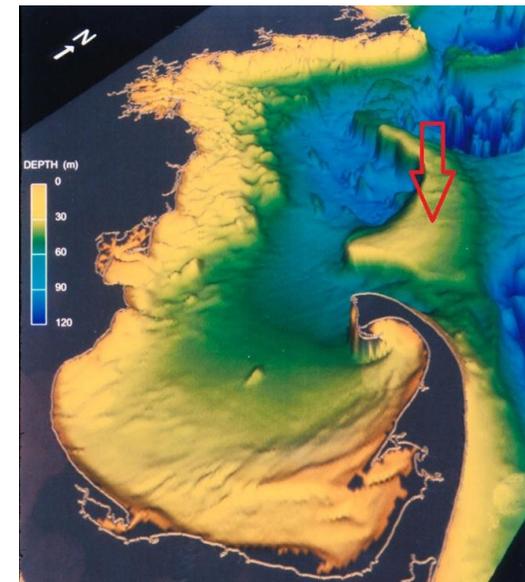
Tagging studies have documented the seasonal latitudinal (north-south) movements of striped bass along the eastern seaboard; however, the inshore-offshore (longitudinal) movements are not as well known. This information gap has an impact on regulations as managers must rely on public perception and anecdotal information to assess the effectiveness of regulations. In an effort to increase information about the longitudinal movements of striped bass off of Massachusetts, MarineFisheries initiated a study designed to monitor the movements of fish tagged on Stellwagen Bank and determine if and when the fish move into state waters.

Beginning in 2008, MarineFisheries deployed an array of 36 receivers that extended from the eastern tip of Cape Ann south to Scituate, plus 8 more receivers in southern locations off of the backside of Cape Cod and in the Cape Cod Canal (See Map). During the spring of 2008 and 2009, we caught 128 striped bass in federal waters on Stellwagen Bank and surgically implanted acoustic tags. The batteries in each tag will last for over three years, so the study is still ongoing, but data are being received and processed. While formal analysis will continue over the next couple of years, researchers are already finding interesting trends in migration.

If anyone has fished in the Cape Cod Canal, also known as “the ditch,” they know that during the spring and fall migration, schools of large bass can be observed riding the tide through the canal, freely eating plugs and bait that land in their path. The acoustic receivers in the canal have confirmed that it is a major conduit for bass migration. During the spring months, 74% of the tagged fish which were detected moving north, use the canal for northward migration. Comparatively, only 35% of the detected

fish use the canal when moving south in the fall. In addition, approximately 58% of the fish tagged on Stellwagen Bank were detected entering state waters, indicating that these fish, at some point of their migration, are available to recreational anglers.

*Special thanks to Paul Morgan (friend and blog reader), for emailing me the link to this study. It's always great to get tips, interesting articles and stories from blog readers. Keep 'em coming!*



*The bass in the study were caught at Stellwagen Bank. Over the past few years many anglers have*

*found large schools of striped bass in areas rather far offshore, including Stellwagen, Regal Sword and the BB Buouy - which are all traditional bluefin tuna hot spots.*

So far their research is directly supporting what Cape Cod Canal anglers have been reporting for years. The exact reasons why there are more fish in the Canal during the spring when compared to fall is a bit of a mystery. However I'd be willing to be that more than likely the reason is that there has just been more food in the Canal during the spring then the fall. The old adage of "find the bait and you'll find the fish" almost always holds true-so why not with regards to Canal fishing?

One thing is for sure though, when the big bass arrive, the Canal fishing can be lights out.

There's been multiple striped bass blitzes during the past few Mays and Junes that lasted from sunrise to sunset. Many of these blitzes contained bass up to 50 pounds. More often than not these bass are feeding aggressively on top, which makes for unreal top water plugging opportunities. I vividly recall one morning two years ago that I enjoyed 14 casts in a row that produced 14 twenty to forty

pound stripers. The even more incredible part of that day was the fact that everyone, and I mean **everyone** was catching just as many huge bass.

Last year when this happened I caught two twenty pound striped bass right off the bat. Both fish got hooked awfully bad with the plug's treble hooks, so I opted to take them home for the grill and just sit back and watch the action. I sat there on the rocks as packs of 15, 20 and 30 pound striped bass chased mackerel right up onto the rocks. These were huge fish in just inches of water!

Please don't think that the fishing is this good all the time-because it just isn't. However if you can time your spring fishing trips to the Canal well, then you can seriously increase your odds of getting in on one of these blitzes of a lifetime.

I think it's important to understand that these enormous schools of striped bass move into and through the Canal in batches during the spring. It's very possible for the Canal to be chock full of bass one day, and devoid of life the very next. Keep in mind that huge schools of striped bass are in migration mode during

May. Biomasses of striped bass travel together up Buzzard's Bay and into the Canal on their way to Cape Cod Bay and beyond.

These biomasses of stripers do not create a steady, consistent stream of fish through the Canal. One biomass of fish will move into the land cut for a few days, and then leave. Often times the fishing dies down for a few days, until the next biomass of striped bass arrives.

Be sure to take a look at the tides before committing to a Canal fishing trip. For your best chance at intercepting surface breaking fish, be sure to get to the Canal whenever a low slack tide occurs around sunrise. At this stage of the tide the Canal has much less water running through it, when compared to other stages of the tide. This makes it possible for an angler to reach fishing busting in the middle with a long, well placed cast. The lower water levels also makes hunting easier for striped bass, as bait fish have less room for escape.

When fish are around and the tide is right I like to make sure I get down to the Canal before sunrise in order to stake out a

prime casting location. I'm no champion surf caster so it's pretty important for me to find an open, steady casting platform that gives me good access to the middle of the Canal other words, I try to find a rocky outcropping that jets way out into the Canal.

The next best casting option is a shallow mussel bed. I'll often wear waders down to the Canal so I can take advantage of mussel beds and sand flats. However wearing waders at the Canal can be potentially life threatening, if an angler was to accidentally slip into the Canal's swift and powerful current. Therefore utmost caution must be used when wearing waders at the Canal, or at any striper fishing hot spot for that matter.

I've always had great success tossing top water mackerel colored plugs during the Spring. This is no surprise considering the amount of mackerel that sometimes invade the Big Ditch. Bouncing jigs along the bottom also works very well during the spring.

We'll get into the specifics of spring time plugging and jigging in future blog posts. I'm really starting to ramble on with this

post so I think it's best I shut myself off here. Plus I'm starving and dinner is just about ready!

## Tips on Developing a Successful Trolling Pattern

When I first began trolling the tube and worm, I did not put much thought into my trolling pattern. I'd typically be excited to have just found some bass, and would troll around in circles, through the general area where I had marked fish.

Just a few years ago I remember returning to the dock after what I believed to have been a successful trip. I had caught a few nice bass and was pretty satisfied, until I heard the news at the dock. A couple sharp striper anglers had severely out fished me, using the same techniques in the same area that I was fishing.

Those guys out fished me not because of luck, some secret technique or special mojo. They out fished me because they had implemented an effective trolling pattern that put their tubes in front of more bass in less time, contrasted to my experience.

Looking back it's no surprise that trolling in circles was not the most efficient use of my time, gas and efforts. Having tubes in the water when there are fish around is always a good thing, but if you want to take your tube and worm success to the next level, then it is important to develop a strategic trolling pattern.

Being smart about how you troll through an area holding fish is often the most overlooked, yet important facet to having a banner day. In this section I will break down my trolling pattern strategy for a variety of situations that I typically encounter while on the water.

Remember that this is just how I like to do things. There's obviously no right or wrong way to catch a fish!

### ***Identifying Bass Behavior***

After locating a fishy area, the next thing I try to do is determine bass behavior. Below are questions I ask myself after finding some fish:

1) Are the bass shoaling or schooling?

This is generally an easy behavior to figure out. If I mark large "piles" of tightly packed

bass, then the fish are in schooling mode. If I am marking individual bass spread out amongst a large area, then the fish are shoaling.

2) Are the bass moving in a certain direction?

This question is more difficult and often requires more time to figure out. To answer this question I'll either use the 15 Minute Rule or a Run and Gun technique- which I'll explain later in this section.

3) Are the bass located throughout a vast stretch of water, or concentrated in one area? Again, I answer this question using the 15 Minute Rule or the Run and Gun technique.

### ***The 15 Minute Rule***

I use the 15 Minute Rule most often when bass are shoaling, or spread out amongst a large expanse of water. Maybe I am marking bass that are suspended in deep water, or maybe they are on the feed along a long stretch of beach. Either way, when fish are spread out throughout a large area, the 15 Minute Rule has proven itself as an efficient tool for developing a successful trolling pattern.

The strategy works like this. Upon marking even one bass I will then put lines in the water. I will begin trolling in a chosen direction, almost always parallel to the beach. This way I troll along the depth at which I marked that initial bass. I am placing a bet that the single bass I have marked, is but one of many bass in the general area.

I will then troll for 15 minutes, keeping a close eye on the sonar the entire time. If after 15 minutes I have not enticed a bite, caught a fish, or marked more bass on the sonar, I resume my search parallel to the beach along the same depth until I begin marking fish again. If I do catch a bass during the first 15 minutes, entice a hit, or mark more bass on the sonar, then my 15 minute clock is reset.

Essentially, I continue trolling in the chosen direction until the area "dries up."

In the past, a typical scenario I've encountered is finding a stretch of water, up to a mile in length, which has held bass along the entire stretch. The areas to the east, west, north and south of this stretch of water often contain no life at all.

The 15 Minute Rule helps me to distinguish the productive stretch of water in the following way.

Let's say I have been catching fish consistently on the troll for the past half hour. During the past half hour I have trolled a relatively straight course eastward through a half mile stretch of water. It's now been 15 minutes since I have caught a bass, enticed a bite, and marked anything on my sonar-indicating that I have come to the end of the productive stretch of water.

The next step would be to reel the lines in, and motor westward, back to where I began marking, and catching fish. I'd keep a close eye on my sonar while motoring, noting any bass marks that may appear.

If I mark bass on my westward trek back to where I initially began marking fish then great, the fish are still holding along the same stretch of water. I would then put lines back in, and troll the same pattern I had initially trolled through the fishy area.

If I do not mark any bass during my trek westward, then I would continue motoring further west. I'd continue motoring west

for up to a mile, keeping a close eye on the sonar the entire time. Often I will begin to mark bass just west of where I had initially found them, indicating that the biomass of fish is moving in a westward direction. If sea conditions permit, I would then put lines in the water, and begin trolling westward. If sea conditions do not allow this, I would then continue motoring west until I stop marking bass, turn around, and troll eastward through this newfound fishy stretch of water.

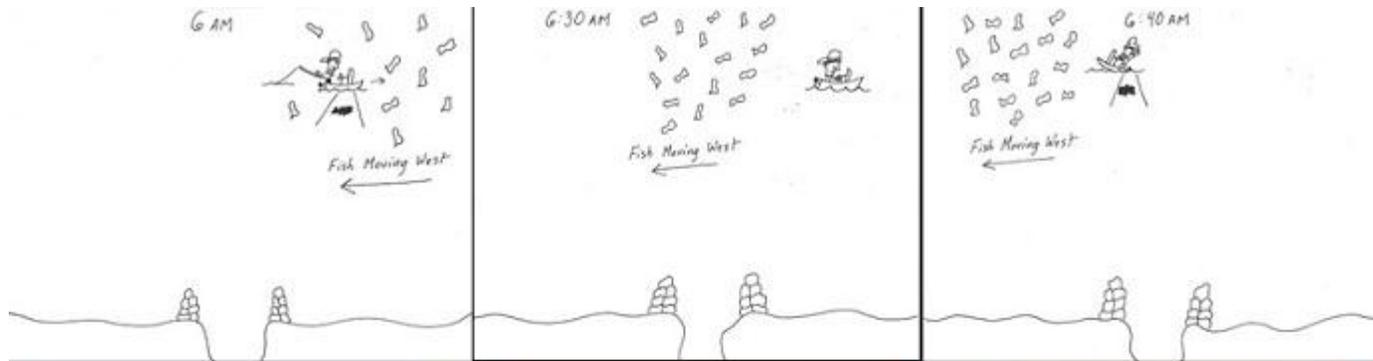
Of course there will be those times when I do not mark bass during the trek westward. And upon motoring up to a mile west of the initial spot where I first began marking fish, I will still fail to mark any life on the sonar. In moments like this I would assume that the biomass of bass has moved either shallower or deeper.

I can assume with relative confidence that the bass have changed depths due to a few important observations. The first is that I stopped marking them at the end of my initial eastward troll. I then also failed to mark any bass during my trek west, back through the once fishy stretch of

water. Finally, after venturing up to a mile west of the initial spot where I first began marking bass, I still failed to mark any life on the sonar.

Thus I would conclude that the bass have moved either shallower or deeper. I would then move into shallower or deeper water, and begin a completely new search pattern.

To get a better idea of what I'm talking about, be sure to check out the diagram on the following page.



*At 6AM our fisherman has marked one of the many bass shoaling in the area. Lines go in the water and he begins trolling east. Unbeknownst to him, the school of bass is on the move-in a westerly direction.*

*Our fisherman has spent 30 min. trolling eastward, catching bass along the way. However, it's been 15 minutes since he last marked a bass, indicating that he may have come to the end of the school of shoaling stripers.*

*Because the biomass of fish is moving west, the stretch of water where our fisherman caught fish is now vacant. He continues westward for a while, marks a bass, and discovers that the fish are moving west. With this knowledge he can now stay on top of the fish and establish a productive trolling pattern.*

## Run and Gun

When bass are schooled up, there will often be large, individual schools of bass spread throughout a large expanse of water. There could be one school of a hundred bass holding in 50 feet of water, and then another equally large school holding in 50 feet of water a quarter mile or more down the beach. Sometimes there will be many schools dotted throughout a mile or longer stretch of water. Either way, the concept to grasp here is that if you have found a large school of tightly packed fish, odds are that there are more schools of bass exhibiting the same behavior in close proximity to the school under your boat.

For me, trolling when bass exhibit this behavioral pattern typically plays out like this.

I'll troll through a large school of bass. If the fish are biting, one or more rods will double over. We'll enjoy a quick flurry of activity until the school moves on. I'll continue trolling in my chosen direction. I'll experience a lull in activity and life on the sonar, solely because of the way the bass are behaving.

What I mean by "solely because of the way the bass are behaving" is that due to the fact that all the fish in the area are balled up in tight schools, there is more water in the general area that is completely vacant of fish.

In other words, when bass are shoaling, many fish are spread out rather evenly across a large expanse of water. When bass are schooling, many fish are located in a very small amount of water. Trolling through an area in which bass are schooling, results in quick flurries of action while you have the school under your boat. If you continue trolling along, it may be a while until you stumble upon the next large school. If you are lucky, you will stumble upon the next large school and enjoy another quick flurry of activity, followed by another lull.

Because of how the bass are behaving, the 15 Minute Rule is not the most effective approach in this scenario. Trolling, in my opinion, is also not the most effective approach to catching bass that are balled up in tight schools.

I instead prefer to get the boat up on plane and cruise at 20-25mph through the

fishy area until I mark a large school of bass. Upon marking a large school of bass, I will then whip the boat around, and pitch live baits or cast artificial baits on top of the school. Time is of the essence in this scenario. By the time lines are set for the troll, the large school of fish will often have already moved out of the area.

I'm not going to dive into running and gunning too much right now because I often do not troll during this scenario.

## Working Structure

One of the most ideal scenarios for trolling the tube and worm occurs when bass are holding tight to a piece of structure. This could be a rip, a ledge, a shoal or really anywhere where bass remain stationary for an extended period of time.

Developing the most efficient trolling pattern in this scenario requires proficient use of sonar, as well as GPS technology. When I find bass stacked up along a drop-off, ledge, shoal or rip, I will mark the spot as a waypoint on my GPS. I'll then develop an angle of attack depending on current, wind, waves and obstructions like buoys and other boats. The goal here is to

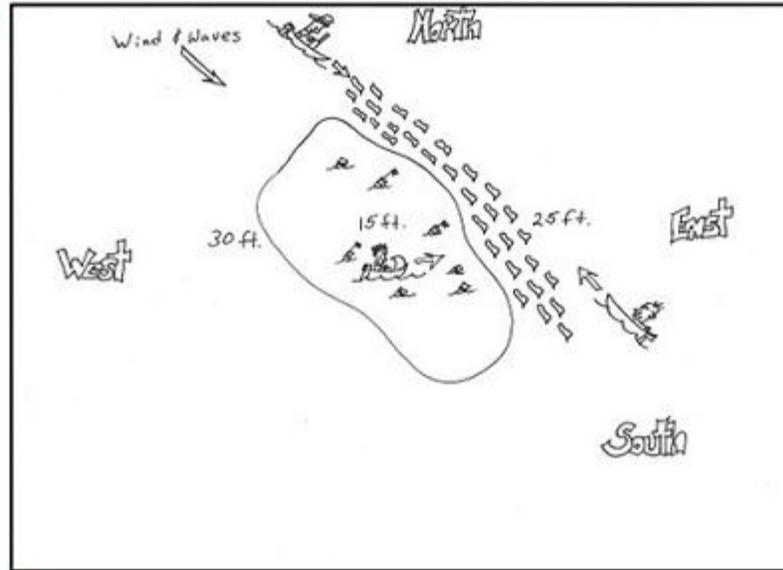
develop a repeatable trolling pattern that will put the tubes in front of as many bass as possible for as long as possible. In the diagram on the following page, the most effective angle of attack would be from the northwest to the southeast. Due to the wind, waves, current, obstructions and location of the bass, the trolling pattern described in the diagram is the most efficient pattern possible.

All other variables held constant, the angler trolling from a NW to SE direction will out fish the other two anglers. Back at the dock, the other two anglers may be puzzled as to why they were out fished. Everyone was using the same technique, in the same exact spot.

The ability to develop a repeatable, productive trolling pattern is what sets proficient tube and worm anglers apart from the crowd.

To get a better sense of working structure and developing a repeatable trolling pattern, be sure to check out the diagram on the next page.

*This angler's pattern will present his tubes to a small portion of the school, for a small amount of time. On top of that, he is currently in 15 ft. of water-the bass are holding in 25 ft. In order to entice a bite, he will have to adjust the depths of his tubes upon reaching the edge of the hump-not an easy task when trolling in the trough of waves, surrounded by lobster buoys.*



*In this scenario, the bass are stacked like cordwood on the eastern side of an underwater hump. The wind is coming from the NW. Lobster pots litter the top of the hump. The most effective trolling pattern is a NW to SE line. This angle of attack will put the tubes in front of as many fish for as long as possible.*

*This angler is trolling in a SE to NW direction. This would be a fine angle of attack, if the wind was blowing from the SE. Unless he is fishing from a massive boat, the wind and waves will make it difficult for him to maintain a constant speed. The pitching of the boat will make for uncomfortable on-deck conditions for his crew. It will also be more challenging, if not impossible, to maintain a course that will bring his tubes directly through the school of fish.*

## Cape Cod's Early Season Striped Bass Fishing Hot Spots

Could the weather have been any better this winter?

I feel as if the winter never really happened here on Cape Cod, or really anywhere in New England for that matter. As I write this I am enjoying a nice "spring-like" breeze that is blowing through many of the open windows in the house. It's 50 plus degrees and sunny at the moment with tomorrow's temperatures expected to be in the mid 60's. Unreal!

The warm winter weather has kept water temperatures well above normal. From what I have heard Cape Cod Bay is about 2-3 degrees warmer than usual for this time of the year. How this will affect the 2012 saltwater fishing season is yet to be determined.

Some folks believe that this year's fishing will be a little off due to the extraordinarily warm winter we have

been having. However all current signs seem to be pointing to the contrary.

According to the National Public Radio service there has been abundant, higher than normal levels of sea life in Cape Cod Bay this winter.

Extraordinary numbers of plankton have attracted pods of whales deep into the Bay. A few months ago right whales were spotted cruising through the Cape Cod Canal. Each day more whales can be spotted feeding heavily on the surface often within just a few hundred yards of the beach.

My father spotted whales off Sandy Neck beach just a few days ago. Keep in mind that it takes a lot of food to feed a whale. It takes even greater amounts of food to attract the rarest whale in the ocean-the right whale-deep into Cape Cod Bay.

Scientists aren't sure if the slightly above average water temperatures are responsible for the higher than normal levels of plankton. One thing is for sure though, there has been a lot of

life this winter in Cape Cod Bay. I believe this can only bode well for this year's fishing.



*By May 15th big bass like this 46 pounder start appearing in Cape Cod's waters.*

Looking forward to the spring small striped bass typically begin arriving in late April. I would imagine there is a good chance that we will see bass a bit earlier than normal this season-maybe around mid April. The majority of these first fish will be on the small side, between 12 and 20 inches.

The best places to target these early season striped bass are around bait filled estuaries inside Buzzard's Bay and on the Cape's southside. I've

always had fantastic luck fishing the Weweantic and Agawam Rivers in Wareham early in the season with super light tackle. Many of the creeks and estuaries from Falmouth to Hyannis also have the potential to produce good fishing in April.

Of course Nantucket and the Vineyard are great places to try for the first striped bass of the season if you don't mind riding the ferry.

Once May rolls around the bigger bass will return to Cape Cod and the Islands. Buzzard's Bay has, over the past few seasons, produced phenomenal top water plugging for the boating crowd. The key is to locate the flocks of birds feeding alongside the bass by using radar.

If you start hearing great fishing reports trickling in from Buzzard's Bay, consider fishing the Cape Cod Canal, especially during breaking tides. Often times the biomasses of Buzzard's Bay bass will move through the Canal a few days after anglers find them feeding in

the Bay. They'll stick around in the Canal for a day or two before moving north into Cape Cod Bay and beyond. Then a new batch of fish will move in from Buzzard's Bay a few days to a week later (at least that is the theory!).



*Having a live-well full of atlantic mackerel is a great first step to boating that first big bass of the season.*

Small bass can be caught in Cape Cod Bay usually during the first week of May. By the second week of May the schoolie fishing is generally pretty steady, with bigger fish filtering in with each passing day. The middle of May is when I start thinking about targeting keeper size bass in the Canal and in Cape Cod Bay.

Fishing with live mackerel can be a lot of fun during May. Macks infiltrate

Cape Cod Bay early in the season and are generally pretty easy to find and catch. Trolling and drifting with live macks is a blast and an awesome way to catch truly big stripers. I can still remember watching a 32 pounder inhale a live mackerel last season right off the stern of the Miss Loretta. That was one sight I will not soon forget!

I am hoping that all this whale activity is a sign that there will be an extraordinary amount of bait present in Cape Cod Bay for mackerel to feed on. Last year's mackerel showing was a bit disappointing compared to past seasons-at least for yours truly. In contrast during 2010 Cape Cod Bay was chock full of mackerel from April right on through August. The bass fishing, in turn, was truly stellar.

The good news is that right whales were spotted with regularity deep inside Cape Cod Bay during the winter of 2009-2010. Low and behold the following summer season produced awesome fishing in Cape Cod Bay. So

far this year we again have the plankton and the whales. I am crossing my fingers that this is a precursor to incredible bass fishing, much like we had during the season of 2010.

Enjoy what you've read? Check out more articles, videos and posts about fishing Cape Cod by visiting [myfishingcapecod.com](http://myfishingcapecod.com).

Thanks and good luck this year!

Take care,

Ryan