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Fishing enthusiasts excited about striped bass

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GASPÉ: - Gaspesians and tourists are enjoying the return of a popular sport which hasn't been possible in Quebec for decades. Those interested may now fish striped bass on the south coast of the Gaspé, and from July 26 to August 24, they can keep one bass per day.

Julie Gagné, from the Saguenay, a fishing buff, heard about the presence of striped bass and the fact that Barachois is considered as "The Spot" for bass fishing. So she grabbed her fishing rod and tried her luck. "It's a big fish [up to one meter long] and pretty combative. I've been told that it provides you with a big thrill."

Gilbert Scantland from Gaspé has experienced that "big thrill," several times over the last few weeks. He's a salmon angler and says that "salmon fishing trains your patience, but bass trains your arms! The other day, I caught about 15 bass in two hours. It can take 10 to 15 minutes to fish each one, so I've been "connected" to a bass almost all the time." Mr. Scantland released all his catches.

In 2013, striped bass fishing began in the coastal areas on the south side of the peninsula (from the Campbellton Bridge to Cap Gaspé) between June 15 and September 30. Anglers had to release their bass all summer long. What is new this year is that from July 26 to August 24, anglers may keep one bass per day if it measures less than 65 centimeters.

Striped bass fishing is good for outfitters. The customers of Grey Ghost Destinations, in Barachois, are mostly salmon anglers. But in 2014, owner Donald Bourgouin estimates that "15% to 20% of my customers are coming to fish striped bass." These customers are Quebec residents, who sometimes used to travel to Massachusetts or Maine to fish



Photo: Simon Blanchette

Simon Blanchette, a client of Grey Ghost Destination in Barachois, caught and released this striped bass.

striped bass.

"The Gaspé Coast can promote an unique combination: its famous salmon rivers and striped bass fishing. This year, the number of large salmon in the river is low, so striped bass "helps," said Mr. Bourgouin. "If salmon aren't biting, we take our customers to the barachois to fish striped bass."

Up until 2009 striped bass were rare on the Gaspé. Some fish which spawn in the Miramichi River, in New Brunswick, started to appear on the Gaspé Coast and the mouths of rivers, where they came to feed.

The striped bass observed on the Gaspé is part of the Southern Gulf of St. Lawrence population. It's not part of the same population as the striped bass of the St. Lawrence River, which became extinct in the 1960's and which has been reintroduced

since 2002. It's still prohibited to fish the river population, which is still fragile.

The more and more common visits of striped bass on the Gaspé raise a question: will the bass feed on the young salmon which swim down the rivers in May? In 2013 and 2014, bass and young salmon were equipped with emitters for scientists to monitor their trek.

According to the first results, striped bass wouldn't endanger the Gaspé's young salmon population. "Downstream migration [of young salmon] was almost completed when the striped bass showed up in the estuaries," said Valérie Bujold, a biologist at the Quebec Forest, Wildlife and Parks Ministry.

The contents of bass stomachs will also be analyzed. "At first sight, it seems like there's not a large proportion of young

salmon [in the bass stomachs], said Mrs. Bujold. Most of their prey are fish which travel in schools, such as sticklebacks and sand eels."

Biologists are asking anglers to treat the bass with caution if they want to enjoy its fishing for a long time. "When one releases a bass, it's important to leave it in water as long as possible, in order to limit the air exposure," recommended Mrs. Bujold. "And we ask fishermen to inquire about the regulations before going fishing. It only takes five minutes!"

Anglers must use a single hook, and a maximum of five hooks on their line.

Special conditions apply to striped bass fishing in the Malbay Barachois (upstream from the CN bridge). It is prohibited after September 1 and the catches in the barachois must be released at all times.

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