

Happy New Year 2010!

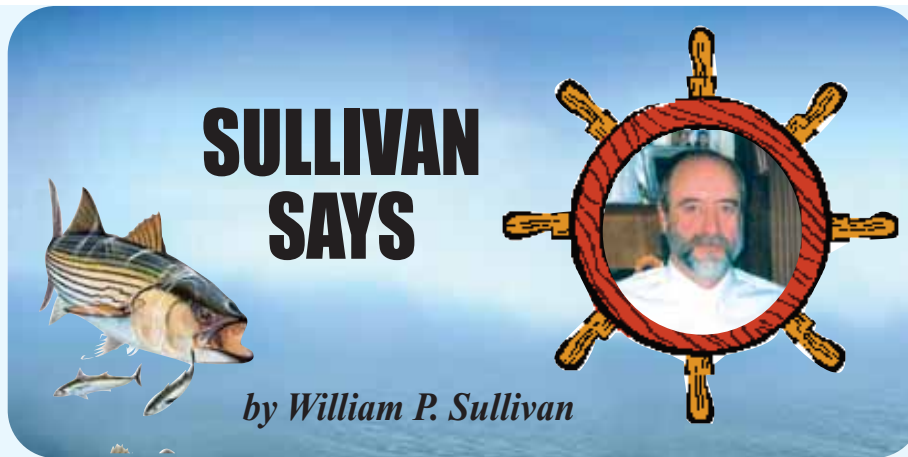
Well, this year we will really feel the repercussions of 2009 legislation. Let's start with the changes as I know them now. For the codfishermen who expect the wholesale slaughter of last season, you can keep only 10 codfish until, I believe, April 30. Flounder, as if there were any flounder season to speak of - you can only keep two. If you plan on flounder fishing in a boat under 21

feet, you need to wear an approved PFD. Winter offshore wreck fishing is closed for sea bass until April unless you have an RSA. If you were born after, I recall, 1992, you now have to pass an approved boater safety course to operate any motorized vessel in New York state. Lastly, you need to have your New York State saltwater fishing license unless you are on a party or charter boat that bought the \$400.00 blanket license. If you charter a boat, ask if they have the license. There is nothing in the law that states they must have one to operate.

Upcoming potential changes... fluke may get less restrictive, sea bass, porgies and weakfish look like they will take a hit. The environmental folks are looking for MPA's, protected no-fishing areas and the license may morph into "catch shares". Catch shares mean you pay for your tags to keep fish and a set allotment will be made available. So it comes down to pay-to-play, with the deepest pockets getting to play. Enforcement kicks into high gear with DEC, Park Police, Bay Constables and, outside of the 3-mile limit, the USCG checking for compliance. All in all, this will be an even tougher year for the tackle shops, bait stations and for-hire fleet. If you weren't politically involved, it's never too late.

During the late fall 2009 wrap-up, there were some very good days but still not what it should have been. Striped bass tended to stay from Moriches on east for a long stretch. When they did make the westerly charge at Jones Inlet, they fooled everyone but the sharpies and chased a school of big sandeels into the back bay. While guys gagged out front at the inlet, bridges and bars, there was a big school of sizable fish crashing bait, poppers and plugs inside. Blackfish weren't as good as past falls in the bay and outside was picky. Yeah, plenty of boats kept limits, but put that in perspective. Four fish a man is nothing to hang your hat on. Since Fed water sea bass were closed, partyboats were forced to fish deep for ling and blackfish and then come back inshore for sea bass. That cramped their style and didn't let them work optimally. Blackfish just aren't in the deep in numbers until the water chills and ling isn't everyone's cup of tea, so there were some unhappy faces. Some codfish were taken at Coxes Ledge and the eastern wrecks. Again, picky, but you could put a fair catch together. The East End to Moriches had the best of stripers and the North Fork and Sound had the best of blackfish. The West End and South Shore did fair to well, but I wouldn't rate it very high for a fall fishing season.

Good legal news... well, for some... Town of Islip lost the \$2.1m lawsuit with Frank Sloup. Frank is a bayman who trapped eels, among other things, in the creeks around Islip for his entire life, starting at three years of age with his father and grandfather. The waterfront homeowners with the deep political pockets got the town to say Frank's eel pots in the creeks were a hazard to navigation.



Codfish will be the big ticket item this winter at Montauk and the "Rosie" has moved there for the season. Courtesy Capt. Jim Russo, the partyboat "Rosie", Uihlein's Dock, Montauk.

They forced him out of business, his fish store went bankrupt and he moved to Maryland to start over. Well, he won; he's back, and since I live in Islip, I guess I'll wind up paying the freight. I'll gladly pay my share of that money to comp anyone that got a foul-smelling screw from the old regime political pay-to-players in town hall. Hopefully, Phil Nolan and the new administration will read this and remember that Islip has a working waterfront to keep in mind.

One ray of light comes from Senator Charles Schumer, who took a stand in favor of the fishermen against the faulty regulations. The Town of Brookhaven's Supervisor Mark Lesko has to make good and straighten out Jane Bonner on beach access for anglers. Again, the deep-pocket homeowners and special interests banned fishing because of "garbage left on the beach, etc.", when it was the parties and teenagers. Also, the divide between surfers and anglers along the South Shore and the East End, particularly Gilgo, Tobay and Montauk, is coming to a head. There are divided areas, but the surfers are encroaching and something needs to be done. Everyone is entitled to use the public beaches. Just respect someone who is there first and obey the regulations. Finally, the whole issue of 4x4 access is getting out of hand with the soccer moms and twenty-somethings in the Hummers and Land Cruisers using fishing permits to have beach parties. Night fishing and 4x4 access permits, 4x4 rules on equipment and airing down need to be enforced.

We all have a stake in these issues whether we surf fish or not. Encroachment is the foot in the door to limit other access to, say, boat ramps,

town marinas, legislating gas docks, fishing stations and private marinas out of business and so on. It happened to Frank Sloup and it can happen to anyone.

Off the soap box and back to the subject at hand - fishing in January.

Bay fishing is going to be herring, with some luck. The past few years have been slow. Why? Maybe it's those midwater trawlers up north, or seals or

a combination of both. If you aren't aware of these issues and their effect on herring populations, get in the loop. Try jigging herring with Sabiki rigs near the inlets, at the bridges or piers like Captree, Magnolia Pier and Point Lookout west. If you want a tutorial on herring, go to Magnolia and watch the recent immigrants from the old USSR. These people have it down to a science with flashers and rigs and knock the herring a good shot. And get a good pickled herring recipe. If you like Vita in a jar, herring filets at the deli or roll-mops, you can make them yourself.

Inshore and island-wide, blackfish, ling, and codfish are on the menu at some port on any given day. Codfish made a great showing mid-January 2008 on the Atlantic Beach Reef and inshore West End wrecks, and they repeated in 2009. Seventeen Fathoms, the Farms and the Mudhole had them, too. From Fire Island to Shinnecock 70- to 100-foot wrecks held some and Montauk had them at Block and Coxes. Ling were all over the island last year and the fall saw very good catches. Winter mackerel were disappointing again last year. The Sheepshead Bay boats had to run well south for them, and it wasn't all that consistent.

Look for deep water wreck specials to the west for codfish, pollock, hake and the like, but remember no sea bass unless the boat is fishing under an RSA permit. Be sure to ask. Montauk should have some extra-deep or extra-long-range trips where you may see the tilefish, wreckfish and barrelfish on top of the cod, pollock and hake.



Cod over 20 pounds like this one are "steakers". Courtesy Capt. Jim Russo, the partyboat "Rosie", Uihlein's Dock, Montauk.

Ten codfish may not justify the ride to New England when you can do the same at Montauk and Shinnecock. Some of the West End boats, and

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it looks like the *Rosie* from Moriches, will relocate to Montauk for the codfish. That's a nice touch; you get to fish Montauk and do it with a crew that you know from your summer fishing.

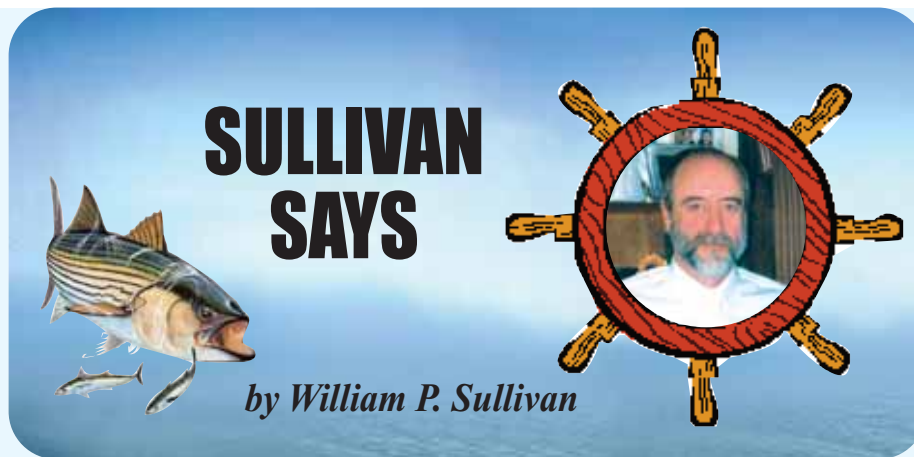
Just keep in mind that winter fishing is often captain's choice. Depending on what port you sail from, you need to be prepared to fish multi-species. That means rod combos need to include something to jig mackerel, another to fish ling and codfish shallow, and lastly a deep water stick with braid. Don't sail without an assortment of hooks, sinkers and, if you can, bring your own bait.

Little things can make a big difference in coming home with a pound or 100 pounds of fish. And don't forget to dress for the season. Insulated sea boots and rain gear are a must, and those pocket hand-warmers are a blessing if you are like me and hate fishing with gloves on. Hooks for codfish - I would carry 4/0's on 40-lb 12-and-18 inch snells, 5/0's on 50-lb and 6/0's on 60-lb. For ling you can use the 4/0 codfish hooks. And carry a pack of 1/0 porgy hooks

just in case they get finicky. Mackerel are the standard treble hook, jigs and tubes. Baits will be clams for codfish and ling, conch when the bergals are fierce and bergal strips for the ling. On open bottom and gravel, dead-sticking can out-fish holding the rod at times, so if you aren't getting hit, try throwing some slack in the line and laying the rod on the rail. Be prepared to drift, as well. Sinkers used at the West End need to be 8's to 14's and Out East keep a 16- or 20-ounce handy. On deep water wreck trips, call ahead and ask the captain what to bring. It will be a load. Also toss in a couple of codfish jigs from 12 to 16 ounces. Makes for a heavy tackle box, but that will help you get off the boat with a heavy cooler, as well. If you have it, you may not use it, but if you don't have it, you are out of luck.

Now it's time to refresh my yearly tackle care piece. First, set up a work area with WD40, a tube of grease and some toothbrushes and pipe cleaners and get started. Task #1 is to check the rods and reels for needed repairs. You will be on a waiting list to get broken guides re-wrapped and reels repaired. Pulling cotton through the guides will tell you if you have grooved, nicked or cracked rings. Check the reel seats for cracks or the need for epoxy. If your reels chattered, bound up, or drags didn't work, get them to the shops now and you can play with terminal tackle and line later.

If your line is two seasons old, get rid of it. Remember, when spooling with braid, you first put a mono backing on your reel. This serves two purposes. First, you use less of the expensive



Steakers are common when the fish get going around Block Island. Courtesy Cpts. Paul & Steven Forsberg, Viking Fleet, Montauk.

may need a de-greaser if these haven't been done in a while. Use the pipe-cleaners to get out the old grease, hit the gears with WD40 and scrub. Clean them again and wipe them down. Then lightly grease. Put them back together, put some grease in the outside grease fittings and wipe them clean. Shake the spool side-to-side and adjust the spool tension knob until the spool spins smoothly with very little or no side-to-side motion. Fill it with line again and then spin the handle and throw it in free-spool. That spool should spin free for 10 or 15-seconds if it's tuned. Line goes on last after all the wiping and cleaning.

Last thing you want is oil or grease on your new line. And remember to wash your hands well before you fill the spools. Grease left on your hands will be just as bad. Also, every couple of years, depending on how much use, change the drag washers. Drag washers - (1) never store a reel with the drag socked down, back off the drag and (2) when you replace drag washers, there is an

braid. Second, braid will spin on the spool shaft without the backing underneath. Standard knot for braid to mono is a double uni-knot. Before you respool though, the reel needs to be cleaned, greased and maybe the drag washers changed. On reels, scrub the outside of everything with a toothbrush and soapy water. Put them in the slop sink and fill it up with warm soapy water and let them sit; overnight can't hurt. Let them dry.

Next, if they are Penns or something simple, take off the gear end side-plate for greasing. If they are higher tech like Ambassadeurs or others, take them to a shop and let them ship the reels to the manufacturer. You

Toss the tarnished and rusted hooks and any swivels that look beat. Check the hair on your teasers and bucktails; you may want to shampoo the salt and weed out of them or just toss and buy new. If you want to, get online with the tackle websites and by deer tails dyed in the colors of your choice and retie the bucks.

Surf anglers: regarding plugs - check the hooks as well as the rings and through-wires. They may be ready to fail. Also think about changing trebles to single hooks. Remember - that will change presentation, so go to the online discussions and find out what size and brand single hooks to use. StrippersOnline.com is an excellent website for the surf fisherman. All of my plugs and bass bucktails are tied with a 12- to 18-inch fluorocarbon shocker to a barrel swivel, as opposed to clips. And, when I tie a plug or buck, I'm not tying a clinch knot to the ring. I tie a perfection loop through the ring to let the lure work and not fight the knot. It takes time to tie loops on all my lures, so I start now.

For rigging you will need hooks, bucktails, leader, swivels, fishfinders, Mylar and bucktail rivets and crystal flash. Also, get some light cable, crimps and a crimping tool. You'll like the way crimps act as mono fasteners, and using some of the light cable for fluke bucktail/teaser rigs will surprise you. If you tie your own hooks and rigs,



The Viking Fleet has been the staple for local Montauk codfish since the 1950's. Courtesy Cpts. Paul & Steven Forsberg, Viking Fleet, Montauk.

also look at purchasing hooks and leader material in bulk. I prefer tying my own as opposed to the packaged hooks. For fluke and striper eel or clam rigs, I like longer snells; for cod, sea bass and blackfish, I prefer an assortment of hooks on different pound test snells at lengths from 12 to 18 inches.

For bluefish, I wire hooks from 4/0 to 6/0 on different length wires without swivels. If I use a barrel swivel, it's tied 3 to 4 feet above my hook, not on the wire. Jigs and tins need to be cleaned and maybe even waxed. Metal cleaners or something as simple as toothpaste and an electric toothbrush may be all you need.

So, you have your work cut out for you and be sure to get some winter trips in, especially for codfish. You may never see the likes of this Block Island codfishing again.