



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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Anglers Top 6000 Citations for the First Time Since 2007

Anglers registered 6,071 trophy-size fish for Citation awards during the 55th Annual Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament that ran from January 1st through December 31st 2012. This was only the eighth time anglers had achieved 6,000 or more Citations in any year since the Tournament began in 1958.

Striped bass lead all other eligible species with 1,331 awards (44-inch for a release and 40 pounds for a kill) in 2012. This total included 425 fish (32 %) for release and 906 fish (68 %) for a kill, and accounted for 22 % of the year's total awards. The season total was the second highest number of striped bass awards in Tournament history. One-hundred and seven of the kill Citations were for fish 50 pounds or greater and 22 of these striped bass weighed 55 pounds or more. Of those 22 fish a total of 11 weighed 60 pounds or more and this total included the new state record striped bass at 74 pounds. The fishery benefitted greatly by a mild 2012 January and February and this meant these fish were available in Virginia's coastal waters much of the time. Likewise the late November period was relatively mild and waters remained in the upper 40's through the end of the year.

Speckled trout accounted for the second largest number of Citations among the 35 eligible species in 2012 with a total of 1,279 awards with 774 (61%) releases and 505 (39%) kills. Trophy trout represented 21% of the year's awards. The 2012 total was the highest in the Tournament's history. The only other year when anglers collected a 1,000 or more awards for speckled trout was in 2008 when 1056 Citation speckled trout were registered. The Virginia's trophy speckled trout fishery is truly a year round fishery and Citation trout were registered in every month of the year in 2012. While the majority of speckled trout registered were released,

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of those that were killed, ten fish topped the magic 10-pound mark and 54 fish weighed 8 pounds or more.

It was another spectacular year off the Virginia coast for white marlin as offshore anglers registered 1,179 white marlin releases in 2012. This was the second highest number of white marlin awards in Tournament history and second only to the 1253 releases registered in 2010. White marlin accounted for the third most Citations and 19% of all Citations registered in 2012. White marlin are only eligible for release so all of these beautiful billfish were released. The marlin fishing was consistently good from July through September although the season's first white marlin was caught June 9 at the Norfolk Canyon and the last was landed December 1 at the Washington Canyon.

Red drum accounted for the fourth highest number of Citations in 2012, representing 13% of the year's total number. The 772 red drum Citations represent the second highest number of awards issued for the species in the Program's history. Red drum Citations became "release only" in 2000, and coincidentally, that was the first time in Tournament history more than 500 Citation red drum were registered in a single year. Since 2000, anglers have failed to register less than 500 reds in only two years, as management measures for the sought after red fish preclude the keeping of the large adult fish. The season for trophy-sized red drum is a long one in Virginia. The season's first red drum was caught on the Ocean View Pier on March 19 and the last red drum of the year was registered November 19 off the bayside of Eastern Shore.

Several species deserve honorable mention in the 2012 review. Gray triggerfish awards reached their highest level since the species was added to the program in 1999 with 54 fish registered, and sailfish numbers (release only) reached their second highest level as 81 were registered in 2012 while blue marlin had an above average year (fourth highest in Tournament history) with 119 releases. Blueline tilefish, with 289 Citations registered, reached their second highest total since this species was added to the program in 2007.

As good of a year as it was for some species the opposite was true for several popular inshore species. Anglers failed to register a single Citation spot for the first time since 1994. Likewise, no gray trout Citations were registered in 2012, as a decreasing trend in trophy sized fish has been evident since 2007. Better news in 2012 was the number of 2 to 4 pound fish reported increased. Spadefish also registered a goose egg in terms of Citation numbers in 2012 and this was the lowest total since this species was added to the Citation program in 1995. Anglers are seeing numerous spades of 5 pounds and less but larger specimens have become scarce. Trophy-sized flounder continued a downward trend that began in 2006, as only 99 flatfish met the minimum qualifying standards in 2012. Croaker, arguably the bottom fishermen's most popular target in the Chesapeake Bay because of the long season and its abundance, saw their lowest number of Citation fish registered since 1993 with just five fish in 2012.

The Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament is operated by the Virginia Marine Resources Commission with funding provided by the Virginia Saltwater Recreational Fishing License Fund. Awards are made to anglers catching fish meeting established weight criteria in 25 species

while an additional 10 species meeting established length criteria are only available for release awards for a total of 35 species eligible for Citation recognition.

Citation awards are full color certificates delivered at the recipient's choice as a plaque or in a plastic album page. Special awards are presented to anglers meeting the eligibility requirements of the Master Angler and Expert Angler programs. The Program also administers the very popular Virginia Junior Angler award program, where any angler 15 years of age and younger can earn a special Virginia Junior Angler Award certificate by catching and releasing 6 different species of saltwater fish in Virginia during a calendar year.

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