Species Profile
Weakfish

by Russell L. Allen, Principal Fisheries Biologist; Illustration by Diane Peebles

The species profile on these pages traditionally includes useful fishing tactics to help our fellow anglers enjoy catching and eating the featured species. But the uncertain status of weakfish suggests a different slant. Marine biologists recommend a more conservative approach and suggest that anglers refrain from targeting weakfish during this time of low population. Instead of focusing on fishing tips, read on for the life history, interesting facts and statistics on this fish with the misnomer of a name. For an excellent perspective on weakfish stock assessment and management issues, be sure to read the article on page 6, What Happened to Weakfish?

Scientific name
Cynoscion regalis

Common names
Weakfish, squeteague, trout, seatrout, tiderrunner, gray trout, squit, chickwick, drummer, and yellow-finned trout

Biological characteristics
The weakfish body color radiates from a greenish grey on top to silvery below. The back and sides are burnished with purple, green, blue and gold spots with small spots forming undulating dotted lines. Weakfish pelvic and anal fins are yellowish. A pair of large, canine-like teeth are set at the tip of its upper jaw.

Habitat
Larval nursery habitats include nearshore ocean waters as well as bays and estuaries. Juvenile weakfish inhabit the deeper waters of estuaries including their tributary rivers. They also use the nearshore ocean waters as a nursery area. Juveniles are associated with moderate depths of moderate salinity and sand or sand/eelgrass bottom. Adult weakfish reside in both estuarine and nearshore ocean habitats. Weakfish are important carnivores, feeding along the edges of eelgrass habitats as well as other edge habitats such as along channel edges, rock, and oyster reefs.

Spawning
Spawning occurs in nearshore ocean and estuarine areas from March through September, with a peak during April to June. Weakfish are indeterminate batch spawners where females release their eggs over a period of time rather than at all once. In other words, they continuously produce eggs during spawning season and may release a batch of eggs as often as every 2-3 days—or as infrequently as every two weeks or so—depending on the environment. Male weakfish rapidly flex specially adapted abdominal muscles attached to the wall of their swim bladder (a gas-filled organ used primarily for buoyancy control and important for hearing in some fishes) to produce distinctive “drumming” sounds associated with courtship and spawning behavior.

Growth/Feeding
The young remain in nursery areas until fall of their first year, after which the juveniles migrate to the coast. Juvenile weakfish feed on crustaceans (such as shrimp) and small fish, especially bay anchovies. Growth is rapid during their first year and they reach an average length of about 10 inches by the end of the growing season, although growth is highly variable (see What Do Fish Tell Us? page 28). Adult diets are dominated by Atlantic menhaden and bay anchovy, while spot, squid and a variety of other fish (including small weakfish) appear in stomach samples. Size and weight alone do not indicate the age of these fish. For instance, in New Jersey, a 25-inch weakfish can be anywhere from three to eight years of age (Figure 1). Variability of size within year classes is due to the extended spawning period along the coast. Weakfish may grow as large as 38 inches and reach over 19 pounds. Some have been aged to 17 years old. The New Jersey record weakfish is 18 pounds, 8 ounces from Delaware Bay in 1986 (see New Jersey Record Fish, page 25).

Range
Weakfish occur along the Atlantic coast of North America from Nova Scotia to southeastern Florida, but are most common from New York to North Carolina. Weakfish from Delaware into New England tend to grow larger than those in the southern regions.

Migration
With increasing water temperatures in the spring, adult weakfish begin to migrate inshore and north from their wintering grounds along the continental shelf between Chesapeake Bay and Cape Fear, North Carolina to nearshore estuaries and bays to spawn. With decreasing water temperatures in late fall, adults leave the estuaries and begin a southerly, offshore migration back to their wintering grounds.
Management

The current stock status for weakfish is depleted; overfishing is not occurring. Over the past decade, the weakfish stock has declined to an all-time low. New Jersey's 2009 recreational and commercial harvest were also the lowest of their respective time series (Figure 2). Between 1982 and 1990, weakfish declined drastically coastwide, with high fishing mortality rates driving the decline. The stock was overfished at that time. Implementation of management measures in the early to mid-1990s reduced fishing mortality and resulted in an increase in the population. After a slight decline through 2000, the stock began another drastic decline to current levels. The recent decline in the weakfish stock is not attributed to fishing mortality, which has remained relatively low and stable. Rather, natural mortality has increased to be two to four times the level of fishing mortality in recent years. For additional management information see What Happened to Weakfish? on page 6.

![Figure 1. Weakfish Mean Length at Age for New Jersey](image1)

![Figure 2. NJ Weakfish Landings: 1950–2009](image2)

**Fabulous Weakfish Facts**

- There are two theories as to how weakfish got their name. Early Dutch settlers on Manhattan Island in New York gave it the name “weekkeeg,” from old Dutch meaning “soft fish.” The second is that the name weakfish refers to the tender, easily torn membrane of the fish’s mouth. It sure does not refer to its fighting ability while on the line!
- Fortescue is known as the “Weakfish Capital of the World.” It is estimated that in its peak, more than 250,000 people a year visited Fortescue primarily to target weakfish in the Delaware Bay.
- Weakfish can live 17 years (the oldest aged so far) or longer, but most fish become sexually mature at one year of age. All are sexually mature by two years.
- To age weakfish, scientists use otoliths or the “earbones,” counting each distinct ring to get an accurate age.
- The official IGFA all-tackle world record weakfish of 19 lbs., 12 ounces was caught by David Alu of Jackson, NJ (photo with Rich Swistack of Shore Catch Guide Service) on May 6, 2008 from the New York shoreline near Raritan Bay on a bunker chunk.
- The East Carolina University [ECU] Scienid Acoustics Research Team has identified at least two types of weakfish sounds. Males make a purring sound by drumming their swim bladders; an aggregation of spawning weakfish can sound like static. These sounds can be heard at the ECU Scienid Acoustics Research Team website: [http://persona.ecu.edu/sprague/m/Drumming](http://persona.ecu.edu/sprague/m/Drumming)
- There are distinct spawning stocks of weakfish along the coast that return to the same estuaries to spawn each year.
The 19th Annual Governor’s Surf Fishing Tournament will be held Sunday, Oct. 3, 2010. Once again anglers from New Jersey and neighboring states will descend upon the beaches of Island Beach State Park in hopes of catching the longest fish of the day. The tournament aims to encourage youngsters and adults to learn more about surf fishing while taking advantage of a great family activity. Funds raised by the tournament go toward marine resource conservation and education.

Despite a foggy start to the 18th annual tournament, over 800 participants enjoyed a day of fishing off the beaches of Island Beach State Park. Contestants caught blackfish, bluefish, kingfish, striped bass and weakfish. A total of thirty prizes were awarded in categories for children, teens and adults. However, the grand prize went to Gene Brendel of Nutley, with a 32-inch striped bass. DEP Division of Fish and Wildlife Director, Dave Chanda congratulated Mr. Brendel with a plaque and two rod-and-reel combinations. Also, Mr. Brendel’s name has been engraved on the Governor’s Cup, which is on permanent display at Island Beach State Park.

Since its inception, the tournament has generated more than $120,000 for various marine education and restoration efforts, construction of access ramps for disabled saltwater anglers, surf fishing instruction programs and equipment, specialized wheel chairs that provide beach access to the disabled and elderly, plus the purchase of the first mobile automatic heart defibrillator for use at Island Beach State Park.

For more information about the Governor’s Surf Fishing Tournament or to receive a registration form, visit NJFishandWildlife.com/gsft.htm or call (609) 748-4347.

New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife (along with our co-sponsors: New Jersey Division of Parks and Forestry, New Jersey State Federation of Sportsmen’s Clubs, Jersey Coast Anglers Association and New Jersey Beach Buggy Association) would like to thank the following organizations for contributing to the success of the 18th Annual Governor’s Surf Fishing Tournament in 2009:

- Canyon Gear
- Eagle Claw Fishing Tackle Company
- Grumpy’s Bait & Tackle
- Legal Limits Company
- Manns Bait Company
- O Mustad & Son, Inc.
- Sportsman’s Center
- Stanley Jigs, Inc.
- Surf Rocket
- Tru-Turn, Inc.
- TTI-Blakemore Fishing Group
- Wright & McGill Company

A special thanks to Kathy Johnston of Kathy Johnston Custom Artwork for creating the annual tournament t-shirt design. Also thanks to Cannon Gear for printing the t-shirts.

Fish Smart, Eat Smart

Fishing provides enjoyable and relaxing recreation. Fish are an excellent source of protein and other nutrients and play a role in maintaining a healthy, well-balanced diet. Many anglers enjoy cooking and eating their own catch. However, elevated levels of potentially harmful chemical contaminants such as dioxin, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), pesticides and mercury have been found in certain fish and crabs in some New Jersey waters. Fish consumption advisories have been adopted to guide citizens on safe consumption practices.

The current list of fish consumption advisories consists of statewide, regional and water body-specific warnings for a variety of fish species and fish consumers. The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the Department of Health and Senior Services have prepared literature and a new Web site to help you make informed choices about which fish to eat and how to reduce your exposure to these harmful chemicals.

Check online for fish consumption advisories on the local water body in which you fish! Go to FishSmartEatSmartNJ.org

To reduce exposure to harmful chemical contaminants when preparing and eating the fish species taken from the identified waters, it is essential to follow the guidelines provided. The DEP encourages you to consult the Fish Smart-Eat Smart Fish Advisory Guide or www.FishSmartEatSmartNJ.org when making decisions about eating recreationally caught fish and crabs.

The Fish Smart-Eat Smart Advisory Guide includes contaminant information, advisory charts, plus preparation and cooking methods to reduce contaminant levels, as well as specific guidelines, advice and prohibitions for people at high risk, such as children, pregnant women and women of child-bearing age. The Guide also includes Web site links to Pennsylvania, Delaware and New York for information about fish consumption advisories for shared waters.

For a complete list of state and federal marine fish consumption advisories visit: FishSmartEatSmartNJ.org.

The fish consumption advisories and Fish Smart-Eat Smart Web site are updated periodically and are available online or from the Office of Science at (609) 984-6070.
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Skillful Angler Awards Program

The Skillful Angler Awards Program is designed to supplement the New Jersey Record Fish Program. It is comprised of three categories: Adult (for anglers age 16 and older), Junior (under age 16) and Catch and Release (based on length).

A clear, side-view photo that allows accurate species identification must be included with each application. All photo entries become property of the Division of Fish and Wildlife and will not be returned. Well-composed, high resolution photos may be selected for printing in future Digests.

Anglers qualifying for a Skillful Angler award receive a certificate and a bronze pin to adorn their fishing hat or jacket. Only one pin and certificate per species—regardless of category—will be awarded annually to each participant, but an angler may submit applications for larger fish caught even after receiving a pin.

At the end of the year, special recognition is given to anglers who catch the largest fish in each species category. The winner of each category receives a special commemorative gift recognizing his or her accomplishment as the best of New Jersey’s Skillful Anglers.

Fish must be measured from the tip of the nose (with mouth closed) to the tip of the tail. For Adult/Junior categories, fish must be weighed and measured by fishing license agents, tackle shops or authorized Fish and Wildlife fisheries biologists.

Learn more online at NJFishandWildlife.com/skflang.htm.

New Jersey Skillful Angler Application

Name __________________________ Age ________
Address ___________________________________________________________
City __________________ State ______ Zip ______
Daytime Telephone Number (________) __________________________

Entry Category (check only one):
☐ Adult
☐ Junior (16 years and under)
☐ Catch and Release (qualification based on length)

Fish Species (Angler must complete. Subject to verification by a state biologist.)

Weight _______ lb(s.), _______ oz. Length _______ in. Girth _______ in.

Date Caught* _______ / _______ / _______ Time _______

Location ____________________________________________

Caught from (check only one):
☐ Boat ☐ Shore ☐ Surf ☐ Jetty
☐ Other (specify) __________________________________________

Minimum Entry Requirements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Adult Weight</th>
<th>Junior Weight</th>
<th>Catch &amp; Release</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black Sea Bass</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Striped Bass</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Drum</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bluefish</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cod</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dolphin</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter Flounder</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 lb., 8 oz.</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluke</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingfish</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8 oz.</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mako Shark</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Marlin</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Marlin</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pollock</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>22 lb., 8 oz.</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tautog</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albacore Tuna</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Eye Tuna</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bluefin Tuna</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellowfin Tuna</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuna (other)</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weakfish</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The New Jersey State Record Fish Program requires a separate application and is based on weight alone. Scale certification documentation and a weighmaster’s signature are necessary. Other rules apply. Visit Fish and Wildlife’s Web site at NJFishandWildlife.com for a complete list of current state records. See also page 25.

Certification for Adult and Junior Categories

Name of Establishment __________________________________________ (where fish was measured and weighed)

Telephone Number __________________________ (check only one):
☐ Adult
☐ Junior (16 years and under)
☐ Catch and Release (qualification based on length)

Weighmaster’s Name __________________________________________

Weighmaster’s Signature ______________________________________

I certify: 1) this fish was caught in New Jersey waters in accordance with state laws and regulations; 2) the entry was weighed on a certified scale (for Adult and Junior categories only).

☐ I have enclosed a clear, side-view photo.

Applicant’s Signature __________________________________________ Date __________

* Application and photo must be submitted within 30 days of catching the fish. Applications for fish caught in December will be accepted only until January 31.

Mail to:
NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife
Skillful Angler Awards Program
Pequest Natural Resource Education Center
605 Pequest Rd.
Oxford, NJ 07863
New Jersey State Record Marine Sport Fish

New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife’s Record Fish Program honors anglers who catch the largest of select species of freshwater and saltwater fish. Record size is based on weight alone; there are no line classes.

Over the years, revisions have been made to the New Jersey State Record Fish Program for both freshwater and saltwater species. Currently there are 61 marine species eligible for entry into the program.

Anglers are reminded that the objective of the Record Fish Program is to increase awareness of fishing opportunities for species that are regularly sought and routinely found on or off the coast of New Jersey. The original list of 72 species was pared down with that objective in mind.

Eleven species are now retired from the list of program-eligible fish, but remain on a separate list posted on Fish and Wildlife’s Web site. One historical catch is also retired and posted on the list. In addition, the historical record for northern kingfish was removed as the current entry surpassed it by 3 ounces.

Anglers should be aware that several procedural changes are now in effect for the Record Fish Program. First, separate applications are required for freshwater and saltwater species. Second, for saltwater entries, it is now mandatory that a marine biologist inspect any potential record fish, as identification solely by photo is not always accurate. Anglers must call Fish and Wildlife’s Nacote Creek Research Station at (609) 784-2020 to make arrangements for inspection. In most instances, the fish must be transported to this office in Port Republic. However, in the case of extremely large fish (i.e., shark and tuna), a biologist will be available to travel for dockside inspection. Note that all scale certification requirements still apply, including a valid Certificate of Inspection/Test Report and current Registration Certificate issued by the County Office of Weights and Measures.

Other changes include a new entry deadline—applications must now be submitted no later than one month after the date of catch—and the triggerfish category is now defined as gray triggerfish. All other program rules still apply.

For a complete list of state record fish or to print an application with complete program rules, visit the Division of Fish and Wildlife’s Web site at NJFishandWildlife.com/fishing.htm.

New Jersey State Record Marine Fish

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Lbs.</th>
<th>Oz.</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Angler</th>
<th>Where Caught</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amberjack, greater</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Edwin Metzner</td>
<td>Off Cape May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bass, black sea</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Tony Cunha</td>
<td>Inshore Wreck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bluefish</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Roger Kastorsky</td>
<td>Fathom Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonito, Atlantic</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1945</td>
<td>Frank Lykes, Jr.</td>
<td>Off Sandy Hook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cobia</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>John Shanchuk</td>
<td>Off Sea Bright</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cod</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1967</td>
<td>Joseph Chesla</td>
<td>Off Breele</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crab, blue</td>
<td>8½</td>
<td>pt. to pt.</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Raymond Ponik</td>
<td>Off Cape May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croaker, Atlantic</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Frederick Brown</td>
<td>Delaware Bay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Cunner</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Nick Honachefsky</td>
<td>Mud Hole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dogfish, smooth</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Michael LaTorre</td>
<td>Pleasantville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dogfish, spiny</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Jeff Pennick</td>
<td>Off Cape May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dolphin</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Scott Smith, Jr.</td>
<td>Baltimore Canyon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drum, black</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Nick Henry</td>
<td>Delaware Bay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drum, red</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Daniel Yenio</td>
<td>Great Bay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eel, American</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Warren Campbell</td>
<td>Atlantic City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluke</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Walter Lubin</td>
<td>Off Cape May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flounder, winter</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Jimmy Swanson</td>
<td>Off Barnegat Light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hake, white</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Wayne Eble</td>
<td>Off Barnegat Light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingfish, Northern</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Chester Urbanski</td>
<td>Barnegat Bay</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Species Lbs. Oz. Year Angler Where Caught

Ling (red hake) 11 1 2002 Natalie Jones Off Breele
Mackerel, Atlantic 4 1 1983 Abe Elkin Manasquan Ridge
Mackerel, king 54 0 1998 Fernando Alfaia Off Cape May
*Mackerel, Spanish 9 12 1990 Donald Kohler Off Cape May
Marlin, blue 1,046 0 1986 Phil Infantolino Hudson Canyon
Marlin, white 137 8 1980 Mike Marchell Hudson Canyon
Perch, white 2 12 1998 Michael King Little Beach Creek
*Pollock 46 7 1975 John Holton Off Breele
Porgy 5 14 1976 Victor Ronie Delaware Bay
Sailfish 43 4 2006 Dr. John Tallis Linden Kohl Canyon
Seatrout, spotted 11 2 1974 Bert Harper Holgate Surf
Shad, American 7 0 1967 Rodger West Great Bay

Shad, hickory Vacant (Minimum Weight 2 lbs.)
Shark, blue 366 0 1996 William Young, Jr. Mud Hole
Shark, bull Vacant (Minimum Weight 150 lbs.)
Shark, dusky 530 0 1987 Brian Dunlevy Off Great Egg Inlet
Shark, hammerhead 365 0 1985 Walter Thacara Mud Hole
Shark, porbeagle Vacant (Minimum Weight 100 lbs.)
Shark, sandbar 168 8 1987 John Norton Little Egg Inlet
Shark, s-fin mako 856 0 1994 Christopher Palmer Wilmington Canyon
Shark, thresher 683 0 2009 Bennett Fogelberg Fingers
Shark, tiger 880 0 1988 Billy DeJohn Off Cape May
Sheepshead 17 3 2003 Paul Lowe Manahawkin Bay
Spadefish 11 6 1998 Cliff Low Delaware Bay
Spearfish, longbill 42 0 1989 George Algard Poor Man’s Canyon
Swordfish 530 0 1964 Edmund Levitt Wilmington Canyon
*Tautog 25 0 1998 Anthony Monica Off Ocean City
Tilefish, golden 63 8 2009 Dennis Muhlenforth Linden Kohl Canyon
Tilefish, gray 18 7 2007 Joseph Sanzone Tom’s Canyon
Triggerfish, gray 5 12 2008 Ronald Pires High Bar Harbor
Tuna, albacre 77 15 1984 Dr. S. Scannapiego Spencer Canyon
Tuna, big-eye 364 14 1984 George Krenick Hudson Canyon
Tuna, bluefin 1,030 6 1981 Royal Parsons Off Pt. Pleasant
Tuna, skipjack 13 4 1999 Craig Eberbach Wilmington Canyon
Tuna, yellowfin 290 0 1980 Wayne Brinkerhoff Hudson Canyon
Tunny, little 24 15 1977 Mark Niemczyk Off Sea Bright
Wahoo 123 12 1992 Robert Carr 28-Mile Wreck
Weakfish 18 8 1986 Karl Jones Delaware Bay
Whiting (silver hake) Vacant (Minimum Weight 2.5 lbs.)

* Fish was previously certified by the IGFA as a world record.

For information concerning the New Jersey State Record Fish or Skillful Angler programs, visit the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife’s Web site at NJFishandWildlife.com.
New Jersey’s anglers and scuba divers will soon have the opportunity to catch fish and explore one of the largest artificial reefs in the world. The former U.S. Navy warship, the U.S.S. Arthur W. Radford is currently being cleaned and prepared to be sunk as a reef later this year at the Del-Jersey-Land Reef, which is located 30 miles south of Cape May.

THE ARTHUR W. RADFORD is a Spruance-class destroyer that measures 563 feet in length, 55-feet in beam and displaces more than 9,000 tons. Sinking a vessel of this magnitude will provide immediate ecological, recreational and economic benefits and will last more than 100 years on the sea floor, providing essential marine habitat and recreational angling and diving opportunities for generations to come.

The Radford Reefing Project is being accomplished through a collaborative effort between the U.S. Navy and the states of New Jersey, Delaware and Maryland. Each participant contributes equally toward the cost of cleaning, towing and scuttling which is the deliberate sinking by allowing water into the hull. New Jersey’s entire share of the cost is being covered by a donation made to the Program by the Ann E. Clark Foundation. The Foundation has made significant contributions toward reef construction efforts over the past ten years accounting for hundreds of patch reefs throughout New Jersey’s reef network.

Once the Radford is sunk it will lie in approximately 135 feet of water. The distance from the surface to top of the vessel will be 60 feet so novice scuba divers as well as experienced technical divers will be able to explore, spear gun hunt and catch lobsters. It is anticipated that the massive reef will be the premier dive attraction in the northeast.

The Radford’s immense structure on the seafloor will provide unmatched habitat for pelagic and demersal fishes, meaning those that live in the open ocean not near the bottom and also fishes living on or near the sea floor, respectively. This vessel will be a great location to troll for bluefin tuna, drift for mako sharks or catch reef-associated species such as tautog and black sea bass.