

Acadia students take on leadership role at Miramichi Striper Cup

2018-08-22 11:27



The Miramichi Cup is a “catch and release” bass fishing tournament that attracts around 2000 people to the Miramichi River every year. The tournament also welcomes the Acadia Striped Bass research team each year. Students attend the event to conduct research relevant to the preservation of Striped Bass and to study the effects of environmental stressors on the fish. The team is led by Biology Professors Dr. Trevor Avery and Dr. Russell Easy.

The overall purpose of the Striper Bass Research team is to “maintain a healthy population of Striped Bass,” says Dr. Easy. He explains how students are on site to collect samples from the fish when they are transferred from the live well of the boat to the weigh table to the recovery tank. The goal is to identify stress biomarkers in the epidermal mucus of the fish in the catch and release process.

Fish are under significant stress when handled or removed from the water. This leads to a release of mucus from specialized cells that can carry proteins to the skin which can be further analyzed in the lab. . Using non-lethal sampling methods, the teams collect epidermal mucus from the fish along the path from boat to release. The main research focus is to correlate the presence or absence of proteins with the physiological status of the fish. The end goal is to ultimately identify possible protein biomarkers of stress in striped bass.

The tournament is an example of how research entails more than scientific findings for students. Conducting research allows them to develop leadership roles in the community. Throughout the tournament, the team takes an active part in informing and guiding participants about proper ways to handle Striped Bass to ensure their health and survival during the catch and release process.

“The team is there for education,” says Dr. Easy. “At the opening event, students explain the risks to fish health to the derby participants.

“A lot of people don’t seem to realize catch and release is extremely stressful to the fish,” he explains. “When the fish are released back into the water, they’re exhausted which makes them more susceptible to predators. We don’t put them back in the water unless we know that they’re healthy and strong.”

The team’s involvement in the Miramichi Striper Cup continues to be successful. While fish mortality rates were very high in the past, with a survival rate of only four out of 10 through education and better handling practices this has been reduced to a mortality rate of 0.01% .

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