

Valley Angler

New Saltwater License

by Bill Thompson

It would seem that New Hampshire anglers, who fish in saltwater, will be required to purchase a license in 2011. The bill in favor of licensing saltwater anglers has passed the New Hampshire House and Senate and awaits the Governor's signature. It was enviable that this would happen and in the end it may be for the good, although I still have my doubts.

The Federal government, in the interest of collecting data on coastal fisheries, is pressuring states to enact legislation requiring saltwater fishing licenses under the threat that they would do it if the states did not. If this were not enough our Department of Fish and Game has, in the past few years, had a tough time raising enough revenue to keep itself in business. The Department is entirely funded by the sale of hunting and fishing licenses. The new license will no doubt add some needed funds to their coffers.

Interestingly enough, our neighbors over in Maine have rejected the idea of a saltwater license. Apparently they feel they can collect the needed data required by the Federal Government without having to license anglers. On a personal note, I say bully for them. On those rare occasions, when I get the time to fish in saltwater I just about always fish the Maine coast.

It is my belief that the New Hampshire license is going to be a hard sell. Let's face it New Hampshire has one of the most beautiful coast lines in the world. However, there is not a lot of it and a lot of what we have is inaccessible to anglers. Most of our coastline is private and most of the public areas are the beaches which are geared towards swimmers and sunbathers. Some of the state owned property comes with metered parking and limited hours of access leaving very little room for fishermen. True there are some good access points and there is some great fishing to be had in our little state. My guess is that a lot of fishermen will simply continue on to Maine to do their fishing.

As I understand it those fishing on party boats and their guides will not be required to purchase a license. Party boat owners and guides will be able to buy an all inclusive license that will cover their customers. The fee will simply be passed on to the consumer in the price of the trip. This is no doubt the fairest way to handle the issue and my guess is that it will have little impact on the industry.

Once the new license goes into effect we will be the only New England state to require a salt water license. It has always been my contention that the five New England states with coastal water should have got together and issued one inclusive license good in all of them. At the same time they could have come together and agreed on one set of laws regarding bag limits and minimum length on coastal game fish. As it is now each state has a different minimum length for striped bass. I realize that this is "pie in the sky" thinking, as it is very doubtful that any two states could come to an agreement on anything much less fishing regulations. Those who fish the waters of the Piscataqua River between Portsmouth and Kittery know how confusing it can be when it comes to guessing what state you are in and whose regulations apply.

It is pretty much history now and we will wait to see how it all works out in the end. In the mean

time, for the next few weeks anyway, I will be concentrating on fishing right here in my own neck of the woods.

See you on the river.