



JOE FITZGERALD PHOTOS

**PENSIVE:** Anglers fish for striped bass at the Guzzle, just off Evangeline Beach in Grand Pre.

# Stripers cruise the surf



**JOE FITZGERALD  
CHASING PISCES**

Curious cows watched me inch over the dirt road in the July heat. The trucks parked near the end of the field told me I was at the right place. A line of people stood or sat patiently at the water's edge, large fishing poles in their hands. The highest tide in the world had just turned, revealing patches of eel grass as it retreated. The anglers stepped forward, following it with fresh casts.

I was at The Guzzle, just off Evangeline Beach in Grand Pre. Tight balls of sandpipers flew around like airborne baitfish. The extensive intertidal flats that ring the Minas Basin make it an ideal habitat for shrimp-like amphipods, which, provide vital food for migratory birds. These same flats are perfect for surf casting. And one fish is synonymous with surf casting: the striper.

Striped bass are the most popular salt-water sportfish on North America's east coast. Though most anglers seeking them are in the United States, a growing number of Nova Scotians are taking advantage of these superior fighting fish.

I had never surf cast or caught a

striped bass, but was excited to give it a try. Striped bass grow large, anywhere from five to 50 pounds. The world record, caught off a wharf in Atlantic City, N.J., weighed more than 78 pounds. Despite Nova Scotia's myriad fish species, nothing gives an inexperienced angler the opportunity to hook into a large, world-class fighting fish like striped bass.

Strong fish such as stripers need gear to match them, and I had a large surf-casting rod and reel filled with 12-lb. test line. I tied a swivel on the end and clipped on a heavy sinker. Then I attached a long wire leader and baited the hook with a chunk of herring. I waded into the surf and heaved my rig with a two-handed cast. Now to wait.

### Screaming off the reel

I started to wish I had brought a lawn chair, like some of the other anglers, but that evaporated when my fishing rod was almost yanked from my hands. Line started screaming off the reel. I tightened the drag and braced myself to keep from stumbling into the water. I lost my fear of snapping the line and leaned back, reeling hard. Soon there was splashing in the shallows, and I turned, put the rod over my shoulder and dragged a beautiful fish onto the beach.

Telltale blue stripes ran down its silvery sides. At 24 inches it was not large enough to keep, but it was still more than five pounds, and I beamed as I removed the hook and carried my first striper back into the turbulent tidal waters.

**Joe Fitzgerald is a freelance writer living in Halifax.**

### DOWN TO BASS FACTS

- Striped bass are found in inshore waters, estuaries, and rivers along the east coast of North America. They are not related to solely fresh-water bass species such as small-mouth bass.

- Striped bass enter rivers in Atlantic Canada to spawn. Throughout the summer they can be found all along Nova Scotia coastlines, but are fished extensively in the Bay of Fundy and the Minas Basin, and rivers such as the Annapolis, Stewiacke, and Shubenacadie.



- Along the U.S. coast, most anglers use eels as bait for striped bass. In Nova Scotia, the baits most commonly used are squid, herring, mackerel, shrimp, and gaspereau. Striped bass will also take lures and flies.

- While it is legal to fish striped bass on Nova Scotia's Atlantic coast, including the Bay of Fundy, the population of striped bass on the Gulf of St. Lawrence side is protected from anglers.

- Anglers are allowed to keep one striped bass per day, as long as it exceeds 28 inches. There is worry all sport fishing will be halted in the near future, as stocks have been steadily declining since the 1970s.