

# VIRGINIA SALTWATER FISHING TOURNAMENT



An angler's first thought upon catching a large fish in Virginia is to wonder if it is big enough to earn a Citation from the Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament.

The Tournament, which was inaugurated in 1958 to promote and develop Virginia's abundant recreational fishing resources, is the premier state-sponsored angling awards program in the country. Over the years it has significantly enhanced the quality, quantity, and enjoyment of fishing in Virginia.

## PROGRAM AWARDS

Anglers who catch fish meeting established minimum weights, or who catch and release fish meeting established criteria, are awarded handsome wall plaques, called Citations. There are no entry fees for the program and no preregistration requirements, although recipients must possess a valid Virginia saltwater fishing license, must be fishing from a boat or pier which possesses the appropriate "blanket" saltwater fishing license, or must be exempt from licensing due to age. More than 28 different species of fish are eligible, from the diminutive spot to bruising blue marlin. An angler need only weigh his fish, or register his release, at one of over 100 designated weigh

stations located primarily at marinas, tackle shops and piers throughout the state. If the fish qualifies, the angler will be mailed a Citation plaque after the close of the Tournament (December 31). Anglers are eligible to earn one Citation plaque per species, annually.

## PROGRAM HISTORY

On May 1, 1958, Governor Lindsay J. Almond initiated the Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament with a ceremonial "first cast" in the waters off

Ocean View in the city of Norfolk.

Joining the governor for the festivities were New York

Yankee great Joe DiMaggio, Chicago Bear Hall

of Fame quarterback

Sid Luckman and

Speaker of the United

States House of

Representatives

Sam Rayburn, all of

whom participated

in a boat parade off

Ocean View.

The ceremonial first

cast was the culmination

nearly six years of work by

state officials and members

of the recreational fishing commu-

nity to implement a strategy to develop

and promote Virginia's recreational fisheries. The

process started in the early 1950's when Sidney

S. Kellam was director of the state's Department

of Conservation and Development. Kellam's policy

was carried forward by his successor Raymond

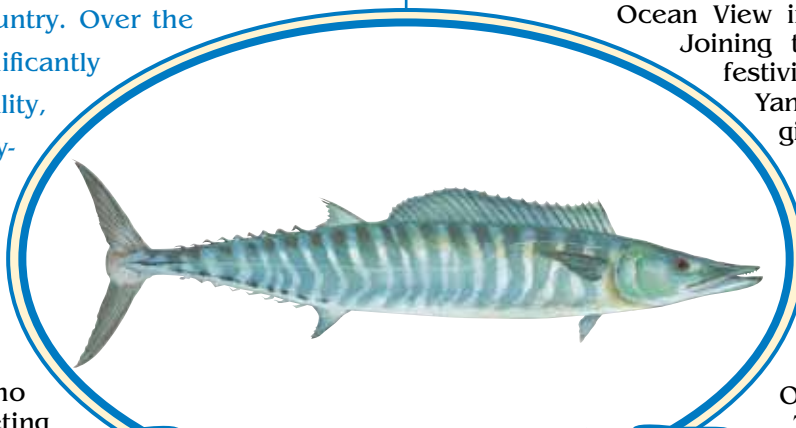
Long. Both men explored multiple ideas for

developing Virginia's recreational fishing industry,

including regional tournaments, a statewide

tournament, and a statewide marketing organization.

With the help of Eastern Shore Delegate Melvin Shrieves, they settled on a plan in 1957.



WAHOO



The Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament maintains and certifies state records for more than 50 species of marine gamefish commonly found in Virginia waters.



The Saltwater Sportsfishing Association of Virginia (SWSFA) was formed. This statewide organization composed of five regions was a private-sector membership organization formed to take over the state's marketing efforts for the sportsfishing industry, as well as to work on conservation and other issues important to recreational fisheries. The Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament was a program to be run by the SWSFA. Delegate Shrieves obtained a \$30,000 appropriation to fund the fledgling Tournament and its staff for a two-year period. Claude Rogers was hired to run the Tournament. Other SWSFA expenses were handled privately and kept separated from the appropriated monies. The SWSFA was scheduled to take over the funding responsibility in two years (1960) but the SWSFA never achieved financial security. Instead, the highly successful Tournament became a state program under the Department of Conservation and Development. The SWSFA continued to assist in the operation of the Tournament until 1969, and its leaders became the basis for the development of the Tournament Committee, which has oversight responsibility and sets Tournament policy.

Fifteen species of fish were eligible for Citation recognition in the Tournament's inaugural year. The list included white marlin, which were eligible for release awards—making Virginia's Tournament one of the first to provide recognition for releasing a trophy fish alive. The Tournament ran from May 1 through November 30 during the first year, when anglers registered 500 fish for Citation awards. Citation numbers more than doubled in 1959 to 1170 and program expansion began in 1960 when the number of eligible species was increased to 22.

The Tournament, which celebrated its 52nd anniversary in 2009, has awarded more than 170,000 Citation plaques for outstanding catches—an average of more than 3,300 per year. Bluefish have produced the most tournament awards, with more than 13,000 Citations issued during the program's rich history. Flounder have yielded over 11,000 awards, with white marlin producing over 10,000 awards (almost all for released fish).

## OUTSTANDING ANGLER AWARDS PROGRAM

Special recognition is given to anglers who earn Citation awards for several species of fish in a single year. Anyone winning Citation awards for six different species of fish in a single year automatically qualifies as a Virginia Expert Saltwater Angler. The angler receives a certificate and a specially designed patch to mark his achievement.

The Virginia Master Angler Program recognizes the accomplishments of anglers over longer periods of time. This award is based upon the cumulative number of Citations an angler earns over an unlimited period of time, starting in 1996—the year the program began. To



qualify an angler must earn 25 Citations in a minimum of five different species, with credit given for a maximum of one Citation per species per year. Recipients receive a certificate and a specially designed pin. Additional levels of Master Angler recognition can be achieved by anglers in increments of 25 Citations.

## STATE RECORD PROGRAM

The Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament maintains and certifies state records for more than 50 species of marine gamefish commonly found in Virginia waters. Special "State Record" Citations are awarded to anglers who catch fish that are certified as new records.

Registering a fish for state record recognition is not complicated, but the requirements must be strictly followed. Potential state record fish must be weighed on the scales of an official weigh station of the Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament and all aspects of the catch must conform to the rules of the Tournament. In addition, the special state record application form must be filled out in its entirety and must

be accompanied by a clear, side-view photograph of the fish. Finally, the actual fish must be preserved and viewed by a member of the Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament State Record Committee. Weigh stations and anglers should contact the Tournament Director or a member of the committee as soon as possible of potential record fish. These officials will assist in the weighing of the fish and the completion of the necessary paperwork. Each weigh station has a state record folder with complete information about state record requirements and a list of all members of the State Record Committee.

## JUNIOR ANGLER PROGRAM

One of the most popular programs operated by the Tournament is the Junior Angler Awards Program. The program seeks to encourage youngsters to enjoy saltwater fishing and develop a conservation ethic by releasing fish alive.

Open to all children under the age of sixteen, this program challenges youths to catch and re-



lease six species of saltwater fish during the year. Participation in the program is free. There are no minimum sizes limits and almost all species of fish qualify.

Junior Angler Cards, with space for participants to record their catches and releases, are available at Tournament weigh stations and from the Tournament office. Successful youngsters receive a handsome certificate, suitable for framing, signed by Virginia's governor and one of the program's logo gifts. Awards are shipped to qualifying youths approximately three weeks after the completed card is received by the Tournament office.

## INFORMATION

More information and brochures about the Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament, the State Record Program, the Junior Angler Awards and fishing opportunities and facilities in Virginia can be obtained from:

**Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament**  
**2600 Washington Ave., 3rd Floor**  
**Newport news, VA 23607**  
**(757) 491-5160**  
**vswft@mrc.virginia.gov**

The Tournament and all of its programs are a division of the Virginia Marine Resources Commission.

