



# Salty Bytes

*Newsletter of the Saltwater Fly Anglers of Delaware*

Winter 2025-2026

Editor Roy Miller

Club Website: [www.sfaod.com](http://www.sfaod.com)

Our Club Facebook address is:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/sfaod/>

## PRESIDENT'S NOTES

What happened to last year? Suddenly, we are digging out of a blizzard in the New Year and Spring is already around the corner. Club members have been readying for spring by meeting on Saturday mornings and creating their best fish-catching "Magic" flies. Well, I always think the next fly is going to be the ONE, the *Magic* fly that will entice a Striper or Bluefish to chow down on my first cast. Ok, so it didn't happen on the first cast most of the time, but I am just as excited about the next cast, and the next cast after that. Last year the continued optimism paid off – I caught a very nice Bluefish with my *Magic* fly at Cape flats on my first cast in April and the next evening, a Striped Bass on my first cast. Even though the rest of the year was slim for big fish, I never lost hope. Hope and optimism – never lose it!

Happy Spring everyone! I'll see you on the water.

Keep Fishing

*Loretta Smith*

## MEETING NOTES

### DECEMBER 10 2025 MEETING

**Opening** – The meeting was convened at 7:00 PM at the Rolling Meadows Clubhouse. There were 27 members present, including the following directors: Bill O'Connor, Roy Miller, Hans Feindt, Loretta Smith, Ron Smith, and Walt Clark. Absent: Joe Helbe.

**Speaker** – Roy Miller was our speaker that evening. As he has done for a number of years, Roy presented a Power Point talk on the results of the most recent Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission meeting which was held Oct. 27-30, 2025 at the Hyatt Place in Dewey Beach, DE. It was Delaware's turn to host the Annual Meeting of the Commission this past year. There are at least four Commission meetings per year with three being held in Arlington, VA and the other, the Annual Meeting, at one of the host states. Roy serves as the Delaware Governor's Appointee to the Commission, a volunteer position he has held since 2009.

Roy summarized the following Species Board deliberations held at this meeting: tautog, American lobster, horseshoe crabs, American eel, Atlantic menhaden, striped bass, sciaenids (drum fishes including red drum), cobia, and sharks. He also provided an update on summer flounder, scup, black sea bass and bluefish, as of the date of our meeting on December 10.

Probably the two Board meetings of most interest to Delawareans included the Menhaden Board meeting and the Striped Bass Board meeting. For striped bass, the Board approved a motion to not require any additional conservation measures for striped bass in 2026. Instead, the only action taken was to mandate a uniform way to measure striped bass caught in every coastal state, as well as allow Maryland to change and simplify their recreational seasons. For menhaden, the Board elected to reduce commercial menhaden landings 20% in 2026. This compromise measure was less than some environmental groups had hoped for and more than the commercial menhaden industry wanted.

After the presentation on ASMFC meetings, Roy showed Power Point slides of fly fishing trips he took in 2025 including trout fishing in West Virginia and on the Big Horn River in Ft. Smith, Montana, and for freshwater species on the Delaware ponds, saltwater species on the Cape Henlopen Flats, and for shad and other species below Concord Pond, DE.



This picture by Roy Miller is of Bill Douwes with a shad he caught this past spring.

**Director Reports** – Walt Clark said the deadline for paying for your tickets for the Club’s Annual Banquet is December 30. Tickets are \$25/person. As usual the banquet will include a raffle for table prizes with each attendee contributing a door prize. Walt said that we currently have \$6,135 in our Club treasury as of the end of November. Bill O’Connor has been working on updating the Club website. Hans Feindt said we have two presentations lined up for the upcoming year so far: Bob Collins from the Center for the Inland Bays in February and Jim DiDonato will give us a presentation on the salmon fly fishing trip he made to the Pulaski area of upstate NY in 2025. Loretta Smith said that six Club fly tiers submitted entries for judging after our meeting.

**Fishing Reports** – Jim Page took a 25 inch redfish and a flounder in the Broad River south of Beaufort, SC. The weather was quirky, but he managed to catch several flounder on flies while his companions fished with conventional gear. Jerry Groll also reported fishing in SC this fall. He had strikes from redfish up in a flooded marsh, but he only caught one. Jim DiDonato fished a stormwater pond in Magnolia, DE and hooked and landed a big bass on a black wooly bugger. He also fished in South FL (Alligator Alley

and Naples area) for three days. His son and he landed peacock bass, warmouth sunfish, an oscar, and a bluegill.

*Club member Jim DiDonato poses with his son Michael – a novice fly angler – and his first butterfly peacock bass on a December trip to South Florida. Along the Tamiami Trail, Jim poses with one of his reptilian friends. Jim will go to any extreme to retrieve a fly for his son. Next time he should befriend an iguana to help him!*



**Raffle** – Ron Smith won the monthly 50/50 raffle and donated the proceeds back to the Club.

### **ANNUAL CLUB BANQUET**

The Annual Banquet was held January 9, 2026 at the Lewes Presbyterian Church Fellowship Hall. It was a well-attended affair and featured one of the best meals we have ever had at one of our banquets thanks to the efforts of our catering service.

Our speaker that evening was Dale Clifton of DiscoverSea Ship Wreck Museum 708 Coastal Highway in Fenwick Island, DE. Dale presented an enthralling description of his adventures collecting memorabilia and relicts from old shipwrecks off our shores and in FL working with famed treasure hunter Mel Fisher. Dale prefers to be called a marine archeologist because his discoveries add considerably to our knowledge of historic shipping and ship wrecks. He brought some samples of his discoveries to view and invited all to visit his museum to see more.



*Clockwise from top: Roy Miller gives the invocation. Loretta Smith introduces guest speaker Dale Clifton. We celebrated the 92<sup>nd</sup> birthday of club founder Don Avondolio. Winners of the 2025 fly tying contest: 1<sup>st</sup> Place Morgan Krell (center), 2<sup>nd</sup> Place Roy Miller (left), and 3<sup>rd</sup> Place Jim DiDonato (right), with Loretta Smith presiding.*

## **FEBRUARY 11 MEETING**

**Opening** – The meeting convened at 7:00 PM at the Rolling Meadows Clubhouse. There were 24 members present, including the following directors: Hans Feindt, Loretta Smith, Roy Miller, Ron Smith, Bill O’Connor, Walt Clark and Joe Helbe.

**Speaker** – Our speaker that night was Bob Collins from the DE Center for the Inland Bays. Bob serves as the property manager for the James Farm Ecological Preserve near Ocean View, DE. The DE Center is the Advocacy Group for the lower three inland bays in Delaware’s coastal zone.

Bob talked about projects he is involved in. Those include the Living Shoreline Projects, like the 68-acre site on Thompson Island in northern Rehoboth Bay owned by the Division of Parks and Recreation, and the Pasture Point Living Shoreline project. The Thompson Island project includes lines of 3.5' tall concrete structures to attenuate wave impacts and build up the eroding natural shoreline of Thompson Island. The Pasture Point project includes restoration of an oyster reef site.

He also talked briefly about oyster restoration elsewhere in the Inland Bays, which involves planting natural oyster shell which is collected from restaurants by Center for Inland Bays personnel and volunteers as part of the "Don't Chuck Your Shucks" program. The oyster shell collected is stored in piles outdoors for six months to ensure that any soft tissue on the shells has been cleaned. He ended his talk with slides on restoration of Inland Bays submerged grass beds, chiefly widgeon grass rather than the prior efforts (largely unsuccessful) to re-establish eel grass. The members asked questions and thanked Bob for his interesting talk.

**Director Reports** – Derek Hopley introduced himself as a new member. Derek is from Pennsylvania, where he was a freshwater fly fisherman. Walt Clark distributed the latest treasurer's report. Our balance at the end of January after paying the bills for our annual banquet and other annual expenses was \$5,005. Ron Smith said that Club caps have been ordered, as were shirts, jackets and vests – some of which he has for sale now. Anyone wanting a logo jacket can save \$25 if they want embroidery only on the front of the jacket and not on the back. Roy Miller said he intends to start on the latest Club newsletter soon, probably next week. Bill O'Connor said our website is up to date. He noted that we pay \$23 annually for our domain name. Hans Feindt said that our March speaker will be Club member Jim DiDonato, who will talk about his salmon fly fishing trip to the Pulaski, NY area.

**Fishing Reports** – Jim DiDonato spent some time in Florida in December. A cold snap made the fishing tough, so he only caught a few fish – among them a few peacock bass, an oscar, and a largemouth bass. He was in the Sunshine State to help take care of his father-in-law, but found some time to fish along Alligator Alley. He also mentioned the upcoming fly fishing show in Lancaster, PA on March 14-15 and the Sportsman's Show that the Cheswold, DE Fire Company is planning for March 7, 2026, from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM at the [Cheswold Fire Hall](#) (371 Main Street). This is not a fly fishing show, but will include fishing and hunting. Admission is \$5/person.

## **BIOLOGIST CORNER**

Although summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass are seldom typical fly rod quarries in Delaware, all of us long-rod aficionados welcome the occasional catch of a summer flounder.

Non-saltwater fly rodders are sometimes surprised that summer flounder will take a fly. It has been my experience that if they see a fly and think it looks like food, they will actively pursue it. I have even had a few of these normally bottom-feeding predators chase a fly all the way to the surface if they think it is getting away.



It is always a treat when a nice-size flounder takes my fly, especially one that is legal size since they are a favorite eating fish in my household and in many others as well.

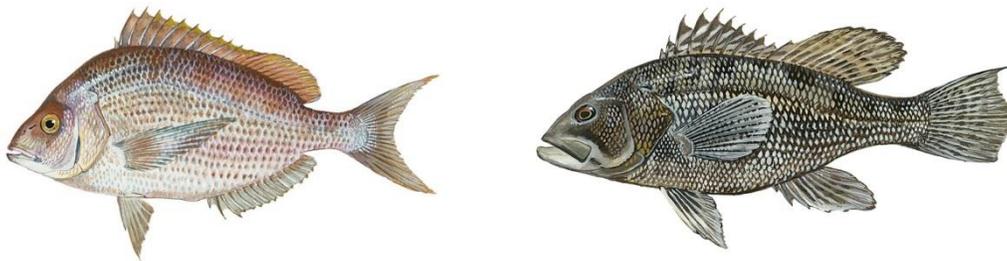
As for the other two species, I have caught a few black sea bass on flies, mainly when fishing from the rocks at Indian River Inlet, but they were not big enough to keep and eat. I have never caught a scup (also known as a porgy) on a fly, nor do I know of anyone who has. Scup are typically found on structure and wrecks in deeper water, too deep to reach with a fly rod.

On the fisheries management scene, summer flounder, scup, and sea bass are managed jointly by the Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council and NOAA Fisheries for offshore stocks and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission for inshore waters inside the 3-mile limit. I typically participate in joint meetings of both the Council and Commission, if not in person, then virtually.

The most recent assessments show that summer flounder are not overfished, nor is overfishing occurring. However, since the most recent estimate of stock biomass is still below the target level, no liberalization in recreational fishing regulations was approved for 2026. In other words, expect to see continuation of the present recreational harvest limits in Delaware, Maryland and Virginia in 2026. For Delaware that means the minimum sizes are likely to stay at 16 inches from Jan. 1-May 31, and 17.5

inches from June 1-December 31. During these open seasons, an angler may keep 4/day.

Scup are not overfished either, and biomass estimates are high relative



to the target, but no liberalization has been approved for 2026 yet. Delaware regulations state scup must be at least 9 inches, and you can keep 30/day. Thirty would be an extraordinary catch for Delaware, as most of the legal size scup are located further north of us.

Black sea bass, on the hand, also have a high relative biomass and the states within the range of black sea bass can liberalize 20% in 2026. It looks now like Delaware will be able to relax its season closures by opening in late April or May 1, and there probably will be no need to have a closed season October 1-10. That would leave it open through the end of December at 13" and 15 fish/person/day.

*rwm*

Fish illustrations by artist Dwayne Raver, courtesy of the DE Div. of Fish and Wildlife. That is a scup on the left and a black sea bass on the right.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

- March 11** Meeting at Rolling Meadows, featuring speaker Capt. Murray deMuth. 7:00 PM
- April 8** Meeting at Rolling Meadows, featuring speaker Jim DiDonato. 7:00 PM
- April 29** First Club Fishing in 2026 between the piers at Cape Henlopen, evening.

- May 9** Picnic at Cape Henlopen State Park pavilion. 1200 noon. Fishing between the piers before the picnic.
- June 10** Meeting at Rolling Meadows, featuring outdoor casting and grilled food. 6:00 PM
- July 8** Meeting at Rolling Meadows, featuring outdoor casting and grilled food. 6:00 PM
- August 12** Meeting at Rolling Meadows, featuring outdoor casting and grilled food. 6:00 PM
- September 9** Meeting at Rolling Meadows, speaker TBD. 7:00 PM
- Oct. 3** One Fly Fishing Tournament for Club members.
- Oct. 4** Coast Day at U of D campus, Lewes. The Club will be doing casting demos.
- Oct. 14** Meeting at Rolling Meadows, speaker TBD. 7:00 PM.
- Oct. 24** Fall Pickerel, Bass, & Crappie Tournament week with new rules, state-owned ponds only.
- Nov. 11** Meeting at Rolling Meadows, speaker TBD. 7:00 PM
- Dec. 9** Meeting at Rolling Meadows, featuring Roy Miller, speaker. 7:00 PM

**THIS AND THAT**



*Activity from recent Saturday morning fly tying sessions, held at Lewes Presbyterian Church fellowship hall. Pictures by Jim DiDonato and Roy Miller.*





## PROJECT HEALING WATERS FLY FISHING

Jim DiDonato reports that he has turned over the leadership of the Dover Program to David White. The program, one of more than 160 in the country, has grown to more than 20 active participants. Project Healing Waters is a 501-c-3 non-profit organization that exists to assist disabled military veterans in their recovery. Programs have limited budgetary funding, but they largely benefit from both cash and in-kind donations. He encourages club members to keep them in mind as they look for donation opportunities.

The Dover Program’s regular meetings are the first and third Wednesday of each month in Dover. Participants generally fish during warm months and tie flies when it’s cold outside. They also occasionally make overnight fishing trips; recently they’ve fished the upper Delaware River for brown trout, and the Salmon River near Pulaski NY for steelhead. Though the Dover Program has no official connection to the SFAOD, over the years several club members – Roy Miller, Bill Douwes, Steve Tracy and the late Paul Dolbec to name a few – have provided expert instruction on fishing, tying and casting.

In addition to Jim, club members Joe Helbe, Bernie Stasko and Mike Nichols also are active volunteers with the group.



**David White**  
PHWFF Dover  
Program Lead

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Magnolia DE

## CLUB DIRECTORS

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### *Editor's notes:*

*Observant readers may notice that this newsletter has a different look to it. Club member Jim DiDonato suggested these changes and sent me the format, so I am trying it out to see if the difference generates any comments. I haven't made up my mind whether to make the change permanent.*

*As always, contributions of articles, comments, or pictures that I can include in subsequent newsletters are welcome. You can reach me at the above number or send them via email to Bill O'Connor at [sfaod@outlook.com](mailto:sfaod@outlook.com).*

*I took the pictures below when the water was a little too hard for fly fishing. The one on the left was taken of the State boat ramp on the Broadkill River looking downstream toward Roosevelt Inlet and the one on the right was from the Cape Henlopen Pier, both on February 10. The ice and sub-freezing weather lasted for several weeks in late January and early February this year. It has been a long time since I have seen so much ice in Delaware Bay. Even the Cape May-Lewes ferry terminal was closed to ship traffic during part of the month. – Roy*

