



## Overview

The [Atlantic menhaden](#) is an important [forage fish](#) that supports predators like striped bass and bluefish while also providing significant economic value as a major source for the bait fish sector and the fish oil industry. The 2025 coast-wide [Stock Assessment](#) of Atlantic menhaden found that the population is not currently being overfished and that population biomass has remained relatively stable in recent decades. However, region-specific concerns (i.e., areas of the Chesapeake Bay) remain about the low abundance of menhaden and the impact this is having on the predators that rely on the species as a food source (i.e., osprey). Policy options exist for states to mitigate these growing concerns among citizens and interest groups while maintaining healthy menhaden populations.

## Policy Options

- **Funding Further Study:** The coast-wide Atlantic menhaden stock assessment does not track small-scale shifts in species abundance. A more resolute analysis of Atlantic menhaden depletion and distribution in certain regions (e.g., Chesapeake Bay) could improve future management options. Recently, similar legislation has been introduced in Virginia concerning oysters in state waters ([H.B. 599](#)). In 2024, California enacted similar legislation ([A.B. 1881](#)) to establish a panel that would provide scientifically-grounded expertise on coastal erosion.
- **Regional Management:** Precautionary management, or management pathways that aim to prevent future impact, is also being introduced in Virginia ([H.B. 1049](#)). This is in line with previous legislation introduced in Oregon that restricts fishing in certain coastal waters ([H.B. 3827](#)).

## KEY POINTS

- Historically, Atlantic menhaden supported numerous fish oil companies along the East Coast, but only one such company remains. As reliance on the species for fish oil drops, Atlantic menhaden have been increasingly targeted as bait fish, recreationally and commercially. ([ASMFC, 2026](#))
- In the Chesapeake Bay, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) is currently weighing options to address potential localized depletion of Atlantic menhaden. An addendum is also being considered this year that proposes a reduction to fishing variability or an overall reduction to the harvest limit. ([ASMFC, 2026](#))
- Atlantic menhaden depletion and variability in the Chesapeake Bay have more recently been correlated with a reduction in osprey abundance, but there's disagreement among scientists as to whether this is caused by Atlantic menhaden depletion. ([ASMFC, 2026](#); [Latour et al., 2024](#); [Watts et al., 2024](#))

## Other Resources

- **Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission:** [Atlantic Menhaden](#)
- **Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission:** [2025 Atlantic Menhaden Stock Assessment Update](#)
- **NOAA Fisheries:** [Atlantic Menhaden](#)

