

2024 Skillful Angler Program Winners

This year marks the 42nd anniversary of the New Jersey Fish and Wildlife's Skillful Angler Program. For four decades Fish and Wildlife has been recognizing anglers who catch fish of "not quite record" size but large enough to have tested the angler's skill and be worthy of recognition in each of the freshwater and marine species categories.

The **Skillful Angler Program** is designed to supplement the New Jersey State Record Fish Program. Multiple changes were made in January of 2024. Although the program's three divisions remained the same (Adult, Junior, and Catch and Release), a new category was created creating more opportunities for qualifying fish to earn the angler a series of personalized certificates:

- **Specialist Angler** – catch five qualifying fish of the same species within one calendar year
- **Master Angler** – catch five qualifying fish of five different species (saltwater and/or freshwater) within one calendar year
- **Elite Angler** – catch ten or more qualifying fish (saltwater and/or freshwater) within one calendar year
- **Grandmaster Angler (NEW)** – catch ten qualifying fish of ten different species (saltwater and/or freshwater) within one calendar year
- **First Fish** – catch your first fish ever of any species

Three additional categories (the **Slam Series**) include:

Freshwater

- **Salmonid Slam (NEW)** – catch three qualifying fish out of the five listed within one calendar year: Lake Trout, Brook Trout, Brown Trout, Rainbow Trout, or Atlantic Landlocked Salmon
- **Bass Slam** – catch one each of a qualifying Smallmouth and Largemouth Bass within one calendar year
- **Panfish Slam** – catch one each of a qualifying Sunfish, Crappie, and Yellow Perch within one calendar year

Saltwater

- **Inshore Slam I** – catch one each of a qualifying Striped Bass, Bluefish, and Fluke within one calendar year
- **Inshore Slam II** – catch one each of a qualifying Black Sea Bass, Tautog, and Weakfish within one calendar year
- **Offshore Pelagic Slam** – catch one each of a qualifying Bluefin Tuna, Bigeye Tuna, Yellowfin Tuna, and Dolphin within one calendar year
- **Marlin Slam** – catch one each of a qualifying White and Blue Marlin within one calendar year

In 1983, the program began with 31 applicants and in 2024, 432 applications representing 24 different species from 102 individuals were officially processed. Since the program's modest beginning, Fish and Wildlife has granted Skillful Angler status to 5,037 anglers!

Skillful Angler Summary/Facts

The total number of applications received in 2024 was 432 applications which is a 54.84% increase from 2023 which had 279 applications. The most frequently entered species by skillful anglers in 2024 (junior, adult, and catch and release categories combined) were Smallmouth Bass with 59 applications, followed by Chain Pickerel with 56 applications. Christopher Pereira led anglers with 39 applications submitted followed by Sean Sullivan with 27 applications submitted. Christopher Pereira led anglers with 13 different species submitted followed by Katherine McGrath and Joseph Santiago submitting 10 different species.

The following is a breakdown of applications received per species (by categories):

Freshwater

Adult

Chain Pickerel (1), Crappie (1), Lake Trout (1), Northern Pike (1), Rainbow Trout (1), Smallmouth Bass (1), Walleye (1)

Catch and Release

Atlantic Landlocked Salmon (14), Brook Trout (2), Brown Trout (3), Bullhead Catfish (50), Carp (6), Chain Pickerel (56), Channel Catfish (7), Crappie (29), Hybrid Striped Bass (21), Largemouth Bass (28), Muskellunge (1), Northern Pike (6), Rainbow Trout (15), Smallmouth Bass (58), Sunfish (51), Tiger Muskie (2), Walleye (20), Yellow Perch (25)

First Fish

Largemouth Bass (2), Sunfish (1)

Junior

Chain Pickerel (1), Lake Trout (1), Rainbow Trout (1)

Saltwater

Adult

Black Sea Bass (1), Fluke (1),

Catch and Release

Black Sea Bass (2), Bluefish (3), Striped Bass (16), Tautog (1)

The Catch and Release Category (both Freshwater and Saltwater) had the greatest number of entries with 415 applications, followed by the Adult Category with 9 applications. Freshwater applications remain the most popular with 406 applications while Saltwater only received 24 applications.

Specialist Angler: Michael Ferralasco (Sunfish), John Forestano (Bullhead Catfish), Mark Griffith (Rainbow Trout), Mike Hermann (Atlantic Landlocked Salmon), Rick Hess (Chain Pickerel), George Horvath (Bullhead Catfish), Katherine McGrath (Smallmouth Bass), Anthony Morrow (Chain Pickerel), Andrew Noonan (Walleye), Christopher Pereira (Bullhead Catfish, Crappie, and Smallmouth Bass), Christopher Pettersen (Largemouth Bass), Jim Piascik (Hybrid Striped Bass), Frank Ruczynski (Chain Pickerel), Sean Sullivan (Sunfish), Brett Whitlow (Smallmouth Bass), Max Wilson (Sunfish), Gen Wong (Bullhead Catfish, Chain Pickerel, and Smallmouth Bass)

Master Angler: Kevin Brogan, Duane Chapman, Brian Cronk, Katherine McGrath, Kevin Meininger, Anthony Morrow, Christopher Pereira, Joseph Santiago, Katie Skolsky, Sean Sullivan, Max Wilson, Gen Wong, Jason Yuhas

Elite Angler: Duane Chapman, John Forestano, Rick Hess, Katherine McGrath, Kevin Meininger, Anthony Morrow, Andrew Noonan, Christopher Pereira, Jim Piascik, Frank Ruczynski, Joseph Santiago, Sean Sullivan, Max Wilson, Gen Wong, Jason Yuhas

Grandmaster Angler: Katherine McGrath, Christopher Pereira, Joseph Santiago

Bass Slam: Kevin Brogan, Allen Chesner, Christopher Pereira, Christopher Pettersen, Katie Skolsky, Brett Whitlow, Max Wilson, Jason Yuhas

Panfish Slam: Kevin Brogan, Brian Cronk, Katherine McGrath, Kevin Meininger, Christopher Reutlinger, Joseph Santiago, Katie Skolsky, Max Wilson

The 2024 Skillful Angler Winners are as follows:

Freshwater

Adult Category

Chain Pickerel: 4lbs. 10oz. caught by Sean Sullivan of Levittown, Pennsylvania on July 14th. Sean was fishing Merrill Creek Reservoir from his boat when he landed the fish at 10:07 AM. Six-pound test was used with a light action spinning rod and reel while fishing with an artificial minnow.

Crappie: 2lbs. 2.5oz. caught by Sean Sullivan of Levittown, Pennsylvania on November 19th. Sean was fishing Manasquan Reservoir from his boat when he landed the fish at 2:15 PM. Six-pound test was used with a light action spinning rod and reel while fishing with an artificial minnow.

Lake Trout: 20lbs. 6oz. caught by Matt Yannetta of Whitehouse Station, New Jersey on April 21st. Matt was fishing Round Valley Reservoir from his boat when he landed the fish at 2:05 PM. Eight-pound test

was used with a Medium-Light Okuma White Diamond rod paired with an Okuma Coldwater reel while fishing with a Warrior Spoon.

Northern Pike: 11lbs. 10oz. caught by Sean Sullivan of Levittown, Pennsylvania on March 31st. Sean was fishing Cranberry Lake from his boat when he landed the fish at 11:00 AM. Six-pound test was used with a Panfish Elite light action spinning rod and reel while fishing with a 1/16oz. jig head with an artificial minnow.

Rainbow Trout: 5lbs. 0oz. caught by Justin Yannetta of Whitehouse Station, New Jersey on June 9th. Justin was fishing Round Valley Reservoir from his boat when he landed the fish at 12:30 PM. Ten-pound test was used with a Medium-Light Okuma White Diamond rod paired with an Okuma Coldwater reel while fishing with a Warrior Spoon.

Smallmouth Bass: 4lbs. 1oz. caught by James Worthington of Fairless Hills, Pennsylvania on July 14th. James was fishing Merrill Creek Reservoir from his boat when he landed the fish at 2:00 PM. Twelve-pound test was used with a Medium-Heavy Toad Fish spinning rod and reel.

Walleye: 4lbs. 1oz. caught by James Worthington of Fairless Hills, Pennsylvania on March 6th. James was fishing the Delaware River (Lambertville) from shore when he landed the fish at 2:00 AM. Twenty-pound test was used with a 7'6" Toad Fish spinning rod paired with a Stratic spinning reel while fishing with a Blue/Yellow swimbait.

Catch and Release Category

Brook Trout: 13.50" caught by Gen Wong of Cranford, New Jersey on April 17th. Gen was fishing Echo Lake Park from shore when he landed the fish. Four-pound test was used with an Ultra-Light spinning rod and reel while fishing with a jig and float.

Brown Trout: 24.75" caught by Joseph Santiago of Moonachie, New Jersey on February 11th. Joseph was fishing the Musconetcong River while wading when he landed the fish at 2:30 PM. Six-pound test was used with a St. Croix rod paired with a Shimano reel while fishing with a Power worm.

Bullhead Catfish: 17" caught by Joel Prussin of Franklin, New Jersey on June 1st. Joel was fishing Ryker Lake from shore when he landed the fish at 9:30 AM. Twenty-pound test was used with an Ugly Stick rod paired with a Mitchell reel while using a hot dog with BBQ sauce as bait.

Carp: 41" caught by Damian Haba of Garfield, New Jersey on May 25th. Damian was fishing the Ramapo River from shore when he landed the fish at 7:47 PM. Eighteen-pound test was used with a 10' Sonic Dominator rod paired with a Fox EOS 10000 reel while using an almond pop-up as bait.

Chain Pickerel: 27.25" caught by Frank Ruczynski of Bridgeton, New Jersey on February 10th. Frank was fishing May Elmer Lake from his kayak when he landed the fish at 12:15 PM. Eight-pound test was used with a spinning rod and reel while fishing with a 6th Sense Provoke jerkbait.

Channel Catfish: 33.75" caught by Mark Muzer of Pompton Lakes, New Jersey on August 31st. Mark was fishing Dahnerts Lake from shore when he landed the fish at 8:15 AM. Twenty-pound test braid with a seventeen-pound mono leader was used with a 7' Mad Katz Orange Crush rod paired with a Penn Pursuit IV reel while using a strawberry pop-up boilie as bait.

Crappie: 16.75" caught by Sean Sullivan of Levittown, Pennsylvania on November 23rd. Sean was fishing Manasquan Reservoir from his boat when he landed the fish at 12:18 PM. Six-pound test was used with a spinning rod and reel while fishing with an artificial minnow.

Largemouth Bass: 24" caught by Thomas Ballerini of Mount Laurel, New Jersey on June 11th. Thomas was fishing a small pond in Mount Laurel from his boat when he landed the fish at 12:00 PM. Twenty-pound test was used with a Shakespeare rod paired with an Alpha reel while fishing with a spinner.

Muskellunge: 48.50" caught by Dan Pryor of Belvidere, New Jersey on April 10th. Dan was fishing Oxford Furnace Lake from shore when he landed the fish at 6:30 PM. Twenty-pound test was used with a Rhino rod paired with a spinning reel while fishing with a BassDash sunfish lure.

Northern Pike: 37" caught by Gen Wong of Cranford, New Jersey on March 16th. Gen was fishing the Passaic River from shore when he landed the fish at 3:40 PM. Eight-pound test was used with a composite rod paired with a spinning reel while fishing with a Rapala Mavrik 110 Jerkbait.

Rainbow Trout: 25.25" caught by Michael Iannuzzi of Bloomingdale, New Jersey on July 1st. Michael was fishing Green Turtle Pond from his boat when he landed the fish at 1:05 PM. Ten-pound test braid with a ten-pound test fluoro leader was used with a Savage Gear Battletek rod paired with a Daiwa Procyon MQ while fishing with a ned rigged Berkley Maxscent Flatnose Minnow.

Salmon, Atlantic Landlocked: 27" caught by Mike Hermann of Clinton, New Jersey on April 29th. Mike was fishing Merrill Creek Reservoir from his boat when he landed the fish at 8:20 AM. Eight-pound test was used with a conventional rod and reel while fishing with a spoon.

Smallmouth Bass: 22.5" caught by Colson Gascoyne of Annandale, New Jersey on July 19th. Colson was fishing Merrill Creek Reservoir from his boat when he landed the fish at 4:14 PM. Six-pound test was used with a Pflueger rod and reel while using a shiner as bait.

Striped Bass Hybrid: 26.75" caught by Jim Piascik of Randolph, New Jersey on May 21st. Jim was fishing Lake Hopatcong from his boat when he landed the fish at 3:00 AM. Fifteen-pound test was used with a Fenwick rod paired with a Daiwa reel while fishing with a Storm Thunderstick.

Sunfish: 10" caught by Michael Ferralasco of Sussex, New Jersey on July 30th. Michael was fishing Big Swartswood from his boat when he landed the fish at 7:47 AM. Ten-pound test was used with a spinning rod and reel while fishing with a Texas rigged worm.

AND

10" caught by Victoria Yannetta of Whitehouse Station, New Jersey on June 9th. Victoria was fishing Round Valley Reservoir from her boat when she landed the fish at 7:30 AM. Eight-pound test was used with an Okuma White Diamond rod paired with an Okuma Coldwater reel while fishing with a Warrior Spoon.

Tiger Muskie: 44" caught by Dan Pryor of Belvidere, New Jersey on June 4th. Dan was fishing Oxford Furnace Lake from shore when he landed the fish at 7:00 PM. Thirty-pound test was used with a Rhino rod paired with a spinning reel while fishing with a Rapala Subwalk.

Walleye: 27.75" caught by Dan Pryor of Belvidere, New Jersey on February 18th. Dan was fishing the Delaware River from shore when he landed the fish at 8:00 PM. Twenty-pound test was used with a Rhino rod paired with a spinning reel while using a live shiner as bait.

Yellow Perch: 15.50" caught by Mike Hermann of Clinton, New Jersey on February 8th. Mike was fishing Round Valley Reservoir from his boat when he landed the fish at 9:00 AM. Six-pound test was used with a conventional rod and reel while fishing with a Rapala.

AND

15.50" caught by Steve Turner of Martins Creek, Pennsylvania on March 30th. Steve was fishing Merrill Creek Reservoir from his boat when he landed the fish at 10:00 AM. Eight-pound test was used with a Conventional rod and reel while fishing with a spoon.

Junior

Chain Pickerel: 4lbs. 12oz. caught by Jameson Stokes of Flemington, New Jersey on November 23rd. Jameson was fishing Merrill Creek Reservoir from his boat when he landed the fish at 10:30 AM. Ten-pound test was used with a Conventional rod and reel while fishing with a small trolling spoon.

Lake Trout: 10lbs. 8oz. caught by Alexandra Navas of Califon, New Jersey on August 31st. Alexandra was fishing Round Valley Reservoir from her boat when she landed the fish at 2:05 PM. Ten-pound test was used with a Conventional rod and reel while fishing with bait.

Rainbow Trout: 3lbs. 8oz. caught by Victoria Yannetta of Whitehouse Station, New Jersey on May 18th. Victoria was fishing Round Valley Reservoir from her boat when she landed the fish at 1:00 PM. Eight-pound test was used with an Okuma White Diamond rod paired with an Okuma Coldwater reel while fishing with a Warrior Spoon.

Saltwater

Adult

Black Sea Bass: 6lbs. 2.5oz. caught by Kyle Stigale of Landenberg, Pennsylvania on December 26th. Kyle was fishing the North Atlantic Ocean from a boat when he landed the fish at 2:10 PM. Fifty-pound test braid was used with a Phenix Black Diamond rod paired with a Shimano Tranx 401 reel while using clams as bait.

Fluke: 8lbs. 12oz. caught by Michael Moscufo of Sicklerville, New Jersey on June 25th. Michael was fishing the BL reef from his boat when he landed the fish at 10:00 AM. Thirty-pound test braid was used with a Penn rod paired with a conventional reel while fishing with a 3oz. white bucktail loaded with squid.

Catch and Release Category

Black Sea Bass: 20.5" caught by Katherine McGrath of Lebanon, New Jersey on April 30th. Katherine was fishing the Atlantic Ocean from a boat when she landed the fish at 12:18 PM. Thirty-pound test was used with a Shimano rod paired with a Daiwa reel while using clams as bait.

Bluefish: 33.5" caught by Howard Collins of Neptune, New Jersey on May 22nd. Howard was fishing the Manasquan Inlet from shore when he landed the fish at 7:44 PM. Fifty-pound test braid with a thirty-pound mono leader was used with a 7' Ande ATS-700A rod paired with an Offshore Angler Tightline reel while fishing with a Storm Wildeye Swim Shad in a perch pattern.

Striped Bass: 50.50" caught by Katherine McGrath of Lebanon, New Jersey on June 1st. Katherine was fishing the Atlantic Ocean from a boat when she landed the fish at 12:01 PM. Thirty-pound test was used with a Shimano rod paired with a Daiwa reel while using an eel as bait.

Tautog: 28" caught by Christopher Pereira of Lebanon, New Jersey on December 18th. Christopher was fishing the Atlantic Ocean from a boat when he landed the fish at 7:00 AM. Fifty-pound test was used with a Jigging World rod and reel while using a White Crab as bait.

Congratulations to all our winners!