

# City blown away by initial response to striped bass tournament

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The Miramichi River is still frozen over and already there are some encouraging signs in the buildup to a massive, city-sponsored striped bass derby.

Jeff MacTavish, the city's acting director of economic development and tourism, said a promotional booth organizers of the first ever Miramichi Striper Cup set up at the recent New Brunswick Sportsmen Show at the Moncton Coliseum last weekend ended being a hit with the expo's outdoorsy crowd.

MacTavish, whose department is hosting the tournament with the help of Saint John-based sport fisherman Jeff Wilson May 29-31, said that based on what he saw a couple of weeks ago, he's optimistic the event should be able to meet and hopefully surpass its targets.

"The quote from (department employee) Peter Murphy, who was there with me and has been to a lot of these things, to our city manager was 'in the 16 years I've been doing tourism, I've never been to a show where so many people were buying and I never had to sell anything'," MacTavish said.

"People were coming up and it was amazing - our booth was beside people who were giving away a boat, we had a hockey jersey and a ballcap set up, some postcards and there were people lined up ... asking all kinds of questions about where to stay, the (prize) money side of things and we must have given away close to 500 or 600 tourism guides."

MacTavish said many of the people he spoke with were already sold on the event and all but confirmed their attendance when the derby, which comes equipped with a \$10,000 prize pool, opens up next month.

During his initial presentation to city council in February, MacTavish said the event could be successful if it attracted something in the realm of 200 boats and about 1,500 fishermen casting from the shoreline.

"I really believe I might have under-estimated, which is a good thing, the numbers I gave to council as far as where our risk exposure was," he said. "If the dynamics we can't control, like the weather, can pull together I really believe this is going to be something that can be very big for Miramichi moving forward after this year."

MacTavish said an official with Moncton's new Cabela's store, one of the most popular outdoor specialty retailers on the planet, came over to the Miramichi table to let the local delegation know that the Cabela's booth was getting a number of people specifically asking about how to catch striped bass in the Miramichi.

"It was a pretty amazing day, all around," he said.

The format of the catch and release tournament will see competition broken down into a handful of different divisions.

The most hardcore fishermen will compete in the pro or semi-pro division which will centre around Ritchie Wharf, while the more casual angler can register for the amateur division, where people can gather along the shoreline at bass hot spots such as Strawberry Marsh.

There will also be a kids and family division, as well as a city council challenge.

Cash prizes will only be awarded in the competitive division, with the first-place team walking away with a \$5,000 top prize.

Second place will garner \$3,000, with the third place team receiving a total of \$1,500. Fourth place will be awarded \$500.

Individual prizes will also be handed out in the amateur shoreline and youth divisions, where participants will be asked to submit photos of their largest catch of the day, which will ultimately be evaluated by tournament officials.

Participants will be given a special measuring device to ensure accuracy and fairness.

Fish caught in the competitive division, by contrast, will be measured and weighed at a designated station.

Each team, consisting of up to four members, will be allowed to weigh up to two fish for each day of the competition. Boats will be launched from Ritchie Wharf, which will serve as the operational hub of the tournament, which promises good fishing given the explosion of the Miramichi River's bass population.

Registration is \$150 per team in the competitive division and just \$20 for any of the individual shoreline categories.

A complete list of rules, prizing details and other information can be found on the event's new website at [miramichistripercup.ca](http://miramichistripercup.ca).

MacTavish said additional information will be posted on the website as it becomes available.

The city has set aside \$95,000 to help organize the event. It expects those expenses to be offset by a projected windfall of about \$400,000 in economic spinoffs. In terms of direct revenues, the city is conservatively estimating a return of just over \$70,000.

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