Proposal to Develop Hybrid Striped Bass Fisheries in New Mexico

Hybrid striped bass fisheries could potentially be developed in several reservoirs in New Mexico to increase angling opportunity. This document aims to succinctly describe hybrid striped bass, explore the potential to develop new fisheries, and review the potential benefits, negative impacts, and challenges of stocking the species. Finally, we will propose a pilot project to establish a hybrid striped bass fishery in Caballo Reservoir and future consideration of other waters.

What is a hybrid striped bass?
Hybrids, also known as "wipers", are an artificial cross between striped bass *Morone saxatilis* and white bass *Morone chrysops*. Hybrids are intermediate in appearance to striped bass and white bass. They are functionally sterile and have never been documented to establish wild, self-sustaining populations.

Where do they thrive?
Hybrids do well in slow moving deep streams, large reservoirs, lakes, and ponds. Hybrids are not found in shallow waters or where aquatic vegetation is abundant. They are pelagic in nature and are found in open water areas. Hybrids are most active during low-light periods (dawn and dusk). Hybrids will move to deep areas near in-flowing water during late winter. Hybrids often thrive where gizzard shad, their preferred forage, are abundant.

What are the benefits of developing hybrid striped bass fisheries?
Angling Opportunity
Hybrids readily attack fishing lures, and they fight vigorously once hooked. Anglers that already target white bass would not need to alter their fishing techniques to target hybrids. A novel large fish species that is available to anglers should spur angler interest in the reservoirs where they are stocked. Hybrids can grow quickly to 5 – 10 pounds (within 3 to 4 years). Quick growth in their first two years can put them between 18 – 22 inches in length by age-2. Thus, providing a quick growing, aggressive, and large sportfish. Hybrid striped bass are also great table fare, providing a mild flaky white flesh that can be baked, broiled, fried or pan seared.

Economic Boost
Communities neighboring reservoirs where hybrid fisheries are established should experience an increase in angler presence and therefore increased spending at local gas stations, bait shops, and lodging accommodations. Regional anglers would spend money at gas stations and restaurants located near the reservoirs. Anglers that decide to spend more than one day would spend money on lodging accommodations, whether in a local hotel, campground, or state park. Sporting goods stores would benefit from purchases of fishing tackle and associated camping equipment.

What are potential negative effects of establishing hybrid striped bass?
Negative interactions with existing sportfish species are of concern. Specifically, the introduction of hybrids could negatively affect existing predator species such as largemouth bass, walleye, and white bass through competition. We do not expect that hybrids will have any significant impact on other sportfish species in the reservoirs where they are stocked. They are not likely to prey on other sportfish and are not likely to deplete prey species to the extent of impacting other sportfish's diets. Escapement from reservoirs is unlikely and there is no expectation of impacts to sensitive species.

Given their sterile nature we could cease or reduce stocking and wait for the hybrids to naturally decline in the reservoir if undesirable impacts occur.

What are the regulations to manage hybrid striped bass?
Currently regulations consider hybrids within the daily bag limit of 25 white bass per day. The presence of white bass in most of the reservoirs will make correct identification by anglers difficult. There are several characteristics that can be used to differentiate white bass, from hybrids, and striped bass. Identification sheets could be created and distributed to anglers to raise awareness that there is a new and different species. The Department will monitor harvest and recommend adjustments to regulations as necessary.

Proposed Water Body: Caballo Reservoir
The Department considered several factors, such as habitat quality and prey base, when considering potential water bodies and concluded Caballo Reservoir should be the starting point for the introduction of hybrids. Caballo Reservoir has a stable gizzard shad population, relatively stable water levels, little to no aquatic vegetation, and the existing sportfish populations are not limited by forage. The establishment of a hybrid striped bass fishery in Caballo Reservoir would provide anglers with a unique angling opportunity. If this proposed project proves successful it could serve as a model to establish hybrid striped bass fisheries in other waters around New Mexico.