

# 150 Years of *Transactions of the American Fisheries Society*

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The American Fisheries Society’s flagship scientific journal, *Transactions of the American Fisheries Society* (TAFS), recently celebrated 150 years. Although the journal contents have changed over the years—and few years were missed!—we want to take a moment to reflect on a century and a half of evolving fisheries science. This short exposé is intended to provide a snapshot of how the journal has changed over the years and some interesting trends we’ve observed. The data you see here likely includes you, so thanks for contributing to the legacy of the oldest fisheries science journal in print.

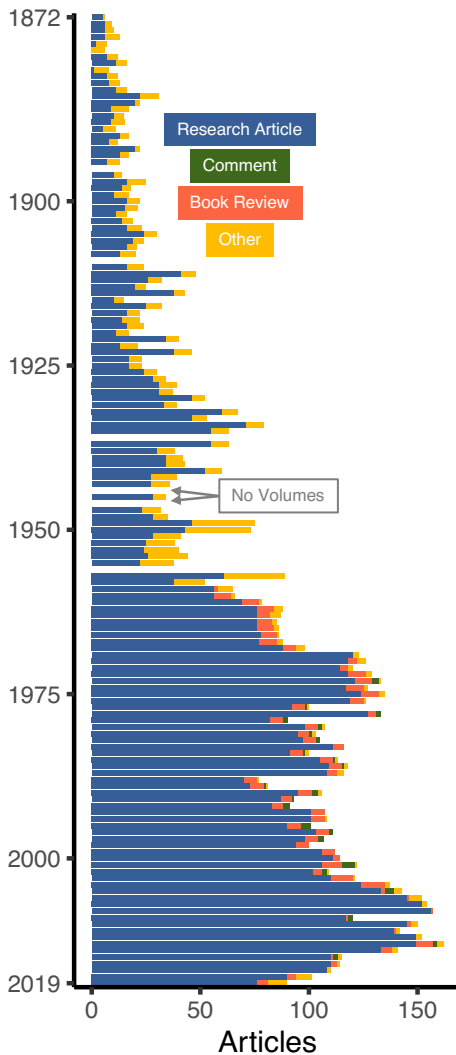
## BIG PICTURE

By our count, from the first 150 years of TAFS, we found 8,188 research articles, 316 book reviews, 52 comments, and 743 articles of “other” type (recall that in early years TAFS published a lot of society-specific content that doesn’t fall into contemporary article categories). What is clear is that the first few decades saw relatively few research articles and many odds and ends—again, think about society reports and other tidbits we no longer publish in TAFS. Then, around the middle of the 20th century, TAFS began to evolve into what it is today—primarily a research journal with some book reviews and comments.

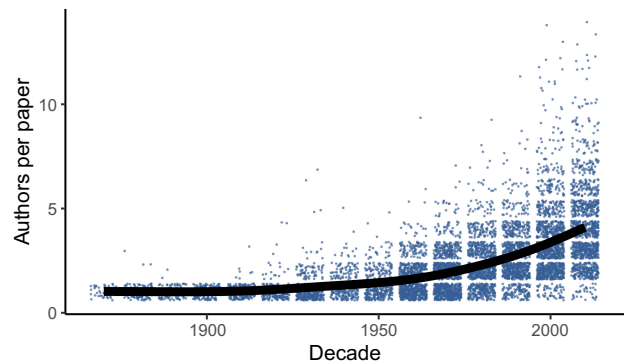
This modern era has seen up to 162 articles published in one year (2013), the vast majority of which described original research. For the past 50 years, TAFS has published around 100–150 research articles per year—that’s a lot of science!

## VERBIAGE AND VERBOSITY

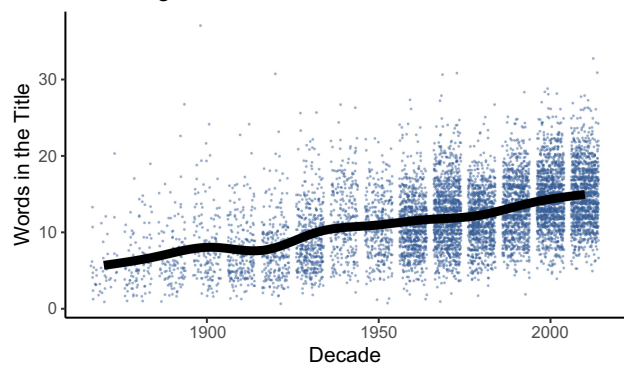
Trends that we see in TAFS typically reflect those in scientific publishing more broadly. For example, it is well established that articles have more coauthors now than decades ago. In fact,

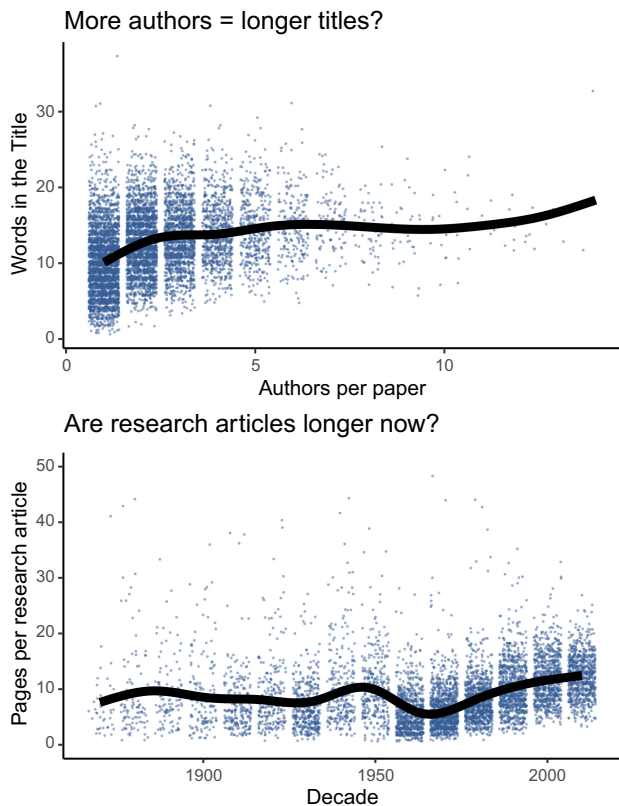


How many authors?



How long is the title?

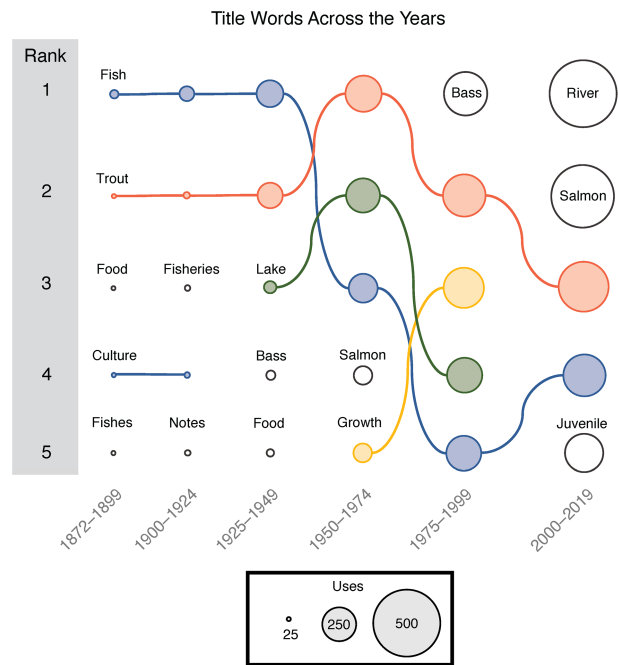




For the scatterplots in this and the previous figure, the jittered blue points represent research articles and the black line represents a moving average intended to summarize the trend.

TAFS typically had one to two authors per research article until the 1950s and now averages four to five. And of course, with the increase in scientific complexity of the phenomena studied, we have witnessed a similar increase in the length of research article titles. Current titles average over 10 words, and 20 or more is not uncommon!

We also wondered if more authors per article resulted in longer titles, but that relationship was not particularly strong. Research articles are, indeed, longer now than decades ago. It's hard to make a reasonable comparison to research articles from the early years of TAFS, but since the 1950s article lengths have doubled from around 5–6 pages to more than 10.



#### WORDS TO PUBLISH BY

Finally, we were curious about topical trends as measured by keywords in research article titles. Looking at intervals of about every quarter century we see that the term *fish* has been consistently important and has increased in use through time—though it is no longer the top-ranked term. The term *trout* was popular in early years and has remained common, an observation perhaps underscored by the current popularity of *salmon*. Fish habitat has gotten more attention as well, with the term *lake* reaching its peak in the mid-20th century; the term *river* is presently the most common title word. Interestingly, popular early terms like *culture* and *food* suggest anthropocentric and consumptive topics; those have largely disappeared while terms like *juvenile* and *growth* are now more common—perhaps reflecting growing emphasis on the study of fish biology, or the compartmentalization of journals and the availability of more aquaculture-specific outlets.

Although unscientific, we think it is interesting to step back and reflect on the trends in fishery science publications through time. There is little doubt that what we see in *Transactions of the American Fisheries Society* mirrors AFS and the larger fisheries enterprise. What will the next 150 years bring? **AFS**