



Invasive Catfish Workgroup Meeting

June 23, 2021
Meeting Minutes

Outreach and Marketing Subcommittee Update

Mike Hutt, Geoff Smith

- Currently 3 catfish processors in VA (Wanchese Fish Co., LD Amory Co., Virginia Live Fish Co.).
 - Murray L Nixon Fishery Inc. in NC also buys fish from VA.
- The 2020 and 2021 Seafood Expo North America were canceled due to COVID, but expected to resume again in March 2022. The Seafood Expo Global should resume in Spain in 2022 as well.
 - These are good opportunities to have people sample blue catfish fillets.
- The pandemic set back marketing efforts a bit as all seafood sales/demand decreased. Outside of the pandemic, the market has been great.
- Experts continuing to work on getting more restaurants to offer blue catfish. Some restaurants feature catfish regularly, others offer it as a special.
- VA blue catfish landings were a little over 3M lbs in 2019.
- Branding as wild, local, sustainable blue catfish, offered fresh or frozen.
- Continuing to do market outreach through widespread and targeted emails, factsheets, etc.
- PFBC has been working with Penn State to conduct an angler and public perception survey for flathead catfish. The project is being funded by PASG and MAPAIS and aims to gather information to direct management of flatheads in PA.
 - Survey questions have not been finalized, but will send out draft questions to the ICW for feedback. Hoping to start later in the summer or early fall.
 - Will share project progress and results with the ICW.

Science and Research Synthesis Subcommittee Update

Yan Jiao

- Working on compiling available data sources for the VA tidal rivers, the Potomac River, and MD into 3 tables.
 - Have a lot of info for the VA tidal rivers, but reaching out for more info about the Potomac and MD tributaries.
 - Want to find a suitable place to compile this info to be able to update it over time and provide access to members of the ICW.
- Reached out to folks dealing with invasives in the Great Lakes region, a very experienced team working on this issue.
 - Learned that long-term funding and future cooperation/coordination among the Bay jurisdictions is critical.
- Decided not to rank science needs due to competing interests/preferences among members. Instead considering the needs at spatial and temporal scales.
- Encouraging collaborative research activities for most effective approach to addressing science needs/gaps.
- In general, topics of interest include habitat use, population structure, stock assessment, predation impacts, socio-economic aspects, and fish health/contamination.
- Two invasive catfish projects are being funded by the 2021 S-K Grant Program (VIMS, LSU/UMD/VT).
- The Aquatic Invasive Species Fund is supporting a project on blue catfish movement. Margi Whitmore can more information on this effort.

- Interested in potentially submitting multi-state Sea Grant proposals.
- Continuing to communicate/collaborate with USGS and FWS for future funding and research opportunities.
- Considering two potential approaches to invasive catfish population modeling: (1) building off Corbin's work in the James; (2) developing alternative models based on existing data available for each tributary.
- Data collection/sharing/synthesis program are critical for stock assessment and model development.
- Tagging and movement studies should try to utilize the new Bay telemetry array.
- Invasive catfish is a regional issue and therefore requires support from regional agencies.
- Matt Ogburn: Applied for MDSG funding to fill some data gaps for catfish and, if funded, would be happy to discuss objectives and approaches with the ICW to ensure project usefulness.
- Mary Fabrizio: The S-K project at VIMS is an economic analysis of the fishery conducted by Andrew Scheld.
- Marty Gary: PRFC interested in predation impacts and early life history habitat utilization.
 - Current/recent habitat use work has been focused on spawning habitat/movements.
 - Anecdotal observations of tons of young blue catfish using structured habitats (logs) in the Potomac River
- Mary Groves: MDNR is looking at habitat use of juveniles in the Patuxent River. Only have preliminary info, but they're mainly looking up in the creeks. There is a data gap in more open areas downriver by the Bay due to gear restrictions.
- Dave Secor: Interesting to note the juvenile habitat use in the Potomac. Catfish in MO exhibit nesting behaviors. Seems like there could be a density-dependent Ricker-type recruitment of blue catfish due to disruptive spawning behavior?

Tributary-Specific Management Subcommittee Update

Margi Whitmore

- Focused on collecting harvest/creel metadata from MD and VA to make a map of available data to link to the agencies responsible.
 - Met with the SRS team to discuss the utility of this map for science/research purposes.
- Brainstorming deliverables that can address cross-jurisdictional management issues.
- Considering development of a standardized creel survey for anglers across the Bay jurisdictions.
 - Could help address issues within inter-jurisdictional tributaries.
 - Questions would be modeled after current surveys from agencies, but would be interested in getting feedback from the ICW to ensure that the survey is useful for everyone.
- Want to develop management goals/objectives for each tributary based on invasion stage. This would ensure flexibility to accommodate different goals (e.g. eradication vs. trophy fishing).
- Bruce Vogt: Corbin's work developed recommendations for management in the James. Has his model and recommendations been considered to guide management that you might develop?
 - This hasn't been discussed directly, but should definitely consider this in the next subcommittee meeting.
- The TSM subcommittee will put together a one pager of their intended goals/actions to send out to the ICW for feedback.

Processing Barriers Discussion

- Marty Gary: Before previous Farm Bill went through, there was a team that worked to try to get an inspection exemption for wild-caught catfish due to potential ecological and economic impacts of invasive catfish, but the effort was rejected due to a lack of evidence of the impacts.
- Chris Moore: The politics around this issue have changed and we are in a better place to try to push for this exemption again.
- The ICW should figure out how to move forward with this (i.e. who should be involved, approach, etc.).
- Mike Hutt: Farmed has likely been preferable over wild-caught due to consistency in size, harvest/processing timing, etc. Potential that folks backing farmed catfish would not want competition with cheaper, wild-caught catfish.
- Bruce Vogt: We should make preparations for getting involved again with the upcoming Farm Bill (2023?). Need a strong, simple pitch that quantifies the economic impact and potential of invasive catfish market as well as the ecological impacts in order to change legislation.
 - Need help from processors and economists to put something together.
 - Marty: May be able to help get more processors involved.

Invasive Catfish Mapping Project

Joshua Ramirez, Bruce Vogt

- Developing a platform for invasive catfish information/data on a GIS-based map in the Chesapeake Bay Open Data Portal.
- Mapped data include: presence/absence in each tributary; research completed (where, when, who, type of study), harvest/creel data by jurisdiction, processing plant locations, jurisdiction/state lines
- Would like to include more things like subsistence fishing locations, abundance/density estimates, but may be something to include down the road
- The project deliverables will include ArcGIS Pro project files and geodatabase, a proposal, report, presentation, and web mapping application
- Thoughts on the proposed approach?
 - Mary Fabrizio: At what spatial scale would you present these data?
 - Will depend on the data available or study scale (e.g. presence/absence info are available at the tributary level)
 - Can include data representations at multiple spatial scales
 - Bruce Vogt: We've met with Margi and Christine to talk about how this effort would fill science and management needs.
 - Plan to start simple, maybe just focusing on the tributary level (presence/absence, study metadata), and then can build in more complexity over time (density, fishing interests).
 - Have time constraints with Joshua's summer internship, but we have time to think about what we want to add down the road and how we'll do that.
- Thoughts on list of proposed data?
 - Mary Fabrizio: The first year of occurrence would be informative for the presence data.
 - Alexa Galvan: VDWR might have a map of the introduction points and maybe the years?
 - Christine Densmore: The USGS Nuisance Aquatic Species online database may also have introduction info for catfish.

- Mary Fabrizio: I like the idea of subsistence fishing locations, but don't know if we have that info yet.
 - Mandy Bromilow: More of a wish-list item that won't likely be included by this summer. Maybe the creel surveys being put together by the TSM subcommittee can include questions that will inform this kind of data layer?
- Alexa Galvan: Commercial harvest locations in VA may be available, but will be dependent on the scale of the information you're looking for. Can work with data acquisition specialist at VMRC to see what would be possible.

General Updates

- The Food Safety and Inspection Service is no longer charging for overtime and holidays to inspect catfish processing plants, which will hopefully help reduce some of those processing cost barriers.
- The Great Chesapeake Invasives Count is happening April – Oct 2021. This is a free, virtual event where anglers can upload catch of invasives on iAngler.
 - May be able to pull invasive data from this effort to include on the catfish map.
- The Chesapeake Bay Program is hosting a STAC Workshop on rising water temperatures in early 2022. Interested in knowing how warmer temperatures might impact living resources.
 - Can the ICW provide input regarding increased water temperature impacts on invasive catfish in the Bay?
- Marty Gary: PRFC constituents have been interested in the status of LFE efforts in VA.
 - Alexa Galvan: VMRC is currently cleaning up the data, so can't provide much info at this point, but can share it when they have it.
- Bruce Vogt: Interested in the results of catfish predation/diet studies in the higher salinities of the James River.
 - Mary Fabrizio: Crunching the data now, but should be able to share the results later this fall.