



**Chesapeake Bay Program**

*Science. Restoration. Partnership.*

## **Invasive Catfish Workgroup Meeting - October 2025**

Thursday October 16th 2025

9:30am - 12:30pm

[Visit the meeting webpage for meeting materials and additional information.](#)

**Purpose:** The purpose of this meeting is to reconvene ICW members, provide updates related to invasive catfish, facilitate information sharing, and discuss future next steps.

### **Attendees:**

- Christina Garvey (CRC)
- Branson Williams (MDNR)
- Julia Fucci (CRC)
- Mike Bednarski (VADWR)
- Adrienne Kotula (CBC)
- Alexa Galvan (VMRC)
- Anthony Mastitski (MSC)
- Benjamin Simon (GWU)
- Brent Hunsinger (FOR)
- Clint Morgeson (VDWR)
- Daniel Ryan (DOEE)
- Dave Secor (UMCES)
- George O'Donnell (MDNR)
- Ingrid Braun-Ricks (PRFC)
- Jack Buchanan (VIMS)
- Jamie Brunkow (JRA)
- Joe Love (MDNR)
- John Page Williams
- Lauren Gentry (MSU)
- Madison Sholes (UMCES-CBL)
- Margi Whitmore (VADWR)
- Mary Fabrizio (VIMS)
- Micheal Steiger (DNREC)
- Noah Bressman (SU)
- Rhonda McCowan (TIS)
- Robert Hajir
- Stephanie Pazzaglia (JJ McDonnell)
- TD VanMiddlesworth (NCWRC)
- Tom Dunlap (JRA)
- Tom Ihde (MSU)
- Troy Tuckey (VIMS)
- Veronica Lucchese (UMCES)
- Yan Jiao (VT)
- Amy Laliberte (MDE)
- Bailey Robertory (MDNR)
- Steve McHenry (MARBIDCO)
- Mike O'Brien (UMCES)
- Sean Rafferty (PSU)
- Michael Schwarz (VT)
- Brenda Stahl (ProFish)
- Connor Bevan (ASA)
- Mike Hutt (VMRC)

# Meeting Minutes

<b>I. Introduction &amp; Opening Remarks</b>	<b>9:30am – 9:35am</b>
Lead: Christina Garvey (CRC) Introduction to the purpose and goals of today's meeting. Brief update on Beyond 2025 in regard to ICW.	

Notes:

- See [Intro Slides](#) for more details
- Christina provided an overview of the ICW's goal statement and purpose as well as an update on the Chesapeake Bay Program's Beyond 2025 process and possible changes to the Watershed Agreement and the structure and governance of the Bay program.
  - Possible changes include: Sustainable Fisheries GIT merging under an overarching goal team - Thriving Habitat, Fisheries, & Wildlife.
  - How the FishGIT will be affected based on the new proposed structure is still unknown. There was interest from the management board in incorporating invasive species into the Watershed Agreement.

<b>II. Policy Updates</b>	<b>9:35am – 10:05am</b>
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Lead: Brent Hunsinger (FOR)

Updates regarding invasive catfish policy across jurisdictions.

<b>MD Policy Updates (<i>Branson Williams, MDNR</i>)</b>	<b>9:45am - 9:55am</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Maryland introduces pilot programs to increase harvest of invasive blue catfish through various fishing methods.</li></ul>	

Notes:

- See [MD Policy Updates Slides](#) for more details on each pilot program
- Pilot programs include:
  - For-Hire/Commercial Blue Catfish Pilot Program
  - Mid- and Lower-Bay Blue Catfish Trotline Pilot Program
  - Commercial Electrofishing Chase Boat Pilot Program
- Rivers chosen for survey/pilot studies based on recommendations from regional managers as well as where harvest rate is increasing

<b>VA Policy Updates (<i>Mike Bednarski, VADWR</i>)</b>	<b>9:55am - 10:05am</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Virginia proposes regulatory changes to eliminate size and bag limits on blue catfish in specific rivers.</li></ul>	

Notes:

- Compromise bill proposed in August to eliminate the 1 fish, 32 inch minimum on the York and Rappahannock River and below the salt demarcation line in the James River
  - Size and bag limits should potentially go into effect January 1, 2026
  - See [slides](#) and meeting materials for the [August meeting](#) and upcoming [October meeting](#)

<b>III. Commercial Fishing/Processing/Marketing Updates</b>	<b>10:05am – 10:50am</b>
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Lead: Christina Garvey (CRC)

Marketing and processing updates, specifically around the VA Invasive Catfish Marketing Work

Group Report, catfish nonprofit, Fish Consumption Advisory, processing capacity, and standards for MSC certification.

**Fish Consumption Advisory (Amy Laliberte, MDE) 10:05am - 10:10am**

- Amy Laliberte presented Maryland's fish consumption advisory updates, focusing on health benefits and risk reduction for anglers. The advisory emphasizes clear communication of hazards versus risks regarding fish consumption to the public.

Notes:

- See [Fish Consumption Advisory slides](#) for more information
- Interest in the assumptions on the dark meat lateral line -publicly available data regarding the reduction of PCB contamination by removing dark meat from fish
- MDE consumption guidelines for blue catfish in the Patapsco dependant on whether MDE can catch them
  - Anglers are interested in understanding consumption guidelines for blue catfish in the Patapsco River - catching them close to Fort McHenry
  - Opportunity for MDE to accept fish (provide long and lat) and send fish to analysis
  - **Action Item:** Contact Amy Laliberte ([amy.laliberte@maryland.gov](mailto:amy.laliberte@maryland.gov)) if you would like to submit fish to MDE for analysis and development of consumption guidelines.
- Caution against creating advisory for the entire Potomac River

**Catfish Nonprofit Discussion (Rhonda McCowan, TIS) 10:10am - 10:20am**

- Rhonda McCowan highlighted the need for a Catfish nonprofit and marketing support to improve perceptions of blue catfish and promote consumption.

Notes:

- See [Blue Catfish Nonprofit slides](#) for more information.
- Concern over use of "sustainably harvest" due to lack of data available
  - Only one stock assessment available
  - Due to the generality of "sustainability" - the group needs to define what they mean by "sustainable" or use a different term
  - Link [here](#) to the stock assessment by Hilling et al., 2023
- Rhonda requests from the group to let her know how they feel about the idea of a Blue Catfish Nonprofit
- **Action Item:** Reach out to Rhonda McCowan ([rhonda@tilghmanislandseafood.com](mailto:rhonda@tilghmanislandseafood.com)) with feedback on the idea of a wild catfish nonprofit.

**VA Marketing Workgroup Report (Michael Schwartz, VT) 10:20am - 10:30am**

- Dr. Michael Schwarz shared results from the VA Invasive Blue Catfish Workgroup Report - discussing marketing strategies for blue catfish and emphasizing collaboration among various entities.

Notes:

- See [VA Blue Catfish Workgroup Report slides](#) for more information.
- Recommendations included:
  - A full-time position for marketing and promoting local blue catfish products.
  - Educational initiatives aim to enhance consumer awareness and cooking methods for blue catfish.

- The importance of social media in reaching new consumer demographics.
- **Action Item:** Reach out to Michael Schwarz ([mschwarz@vt.edu](mailto:mschwarz@vt.edu)) if you would like a copy of the marketing report

**Processing Capacity Update (*Mike Hutt, VMRC*)** **10:30am - 10:40am**

- Mike Hutt reported on processing capacity challenges and international interest in blue catfish markets.

Notes:

- Total of 4 certified processing companies in VA
- Market has been strong
  - Demand has been high
  - Harvest has been low - could be a concern (but likely that fish are not active where fishermen are fishing)
- Opportunities for exports are available
  - Sampling trade shows
  - Interest abroad - strong trade leads
    - Seafood export of North America
    - Singapore trade show
      - Everyone at trade show loved the taste of blue catfish
    - Watermen have approached VMRC about catfish market
      - Most processors paying 0.60 - 0.70 cents on the lb
- Current hurdle = pipeline flow
  - Need to make sure that we can fulfill blue catfish orders - need steady flow of harvest and ensure infrastructure to process blue catfish
- Feel free to email Mike Hutt ([mike.hutt@vdacs.virginia.gov](mailto:mike.hutt@vdacs.virginia.gov)) if you have any questions

**MSC Certification (*Anthony Mastitski, MSC*)** **10:40am -10:50am**

- Anthony Mastitski introduces the Marine Stewardship Council and how to meet the MSC fisheries standard.

Notes:

- See [MSC Certification slides](#) for more information.
- Fisheries standard:
  - Three principles of fisheries standard (1) sustainability of the stock (2) ecosystem impact (3) effective management
    - 28 performance indicators within each principle
  - Meeting the MSC fisheries standard - scoring by a third party
  - Provisions in standard related to introduced species (not many introduced species in the MSC program)
    - Is there a management plan in place - and where are those management points set?
    - Can take into account wider ecosystem objective

**IV. Break**

**10:50am – 10:55am**

**V. Science & Management Updates** **10:55am – 12:05pm**

Lead: Branson Williams (MDNR)

Information sharing of most recent updates within invasive catfish science and management, including an overview of newly released ICW Project Tracker, and population dynamics, modeling and decision tool sub-team report out.

**ICW Project Tracker Overview (Christina Garvey, CRC)** **10:55am - 11:05am**

- Christina Garvey presents the purpose and objectives of the new ICW Project Tracker and encourages the group to participate by submitting projects and/or publications they have worked on that involve invasive catfish in the Chesapeake Bay.

Notes:

- See [ICW Project Tracker slides](#) for more information
- The ICW Project Tracker will help consolidate the projects/publications that members are working on all in one place which will help the ICW...
  - Understand the scope of work being done across the Chesapeake Bay watershed
  - Identify knowledge gaps
  - Identify collaboration opportunities
- Encourage participation from workgroup members to fill out the ICW Project Tracker google form with past (last 10 years), current/on-going, or future projects related to invasive catfish
- **Action Item:** If you are interested in participating in the ICW project tracker, please submit entries into the ICW project tracker google form
  - Link to ICW Project Tracker [here](#)
- **Action Item:** Christina, Tom, & Branson to decide on sharing method of the ICW Project Tracker google sheet and update the group once available

**Science/Management Sub-Team (Branson Williams, MDNR)** **11:05am - 11:15am**

- Branson Williams presents to the group the creation of the science & management sub-teams for more in-depth discussions related to the science & management of invasive blue catfish in the Chesapeake Bay.

Notes:

- See [Science & Management Sub-Team slides](#) for more information
- Four sub-teams:
  - Population dynamics modeling and decision tool team
  - Ecological impacts team
  - Socio-economics team
  - Strategy team
- Concern over flathead catfish - sleeping giant
- ICW Project Tracker can assist collaboration opportunities
- Follow-Up meetings:
  - Identify & prioritize knowledge gaps
  - Use available models to assess parameter sensitivity
  - Deep dive into vital rates/critical factors

**Socio-Ecological Networks (Veronica Malaban Lucchese)** **11:15am -11:25am**

- Veronica Lucchese presents socioecological network analysis of invasive blue catfish in Virginia's York and Rappahannock Rivers.

Notes:

- See [Socio-Ecological Network slides](#) for more information
- The analysis compares local and broader fishery trends, emphasizing tributary-specific management.
- Blue catfish significantly influence native species' food sources, impacting ecosystems in both rivers.
- Social media emerges as the most influential information source regarding blue catfish management among stakeholders.
- Stakeholder sentiment shows strong support for healthy fisheries, but mixed views on addressing blue catfish invasiveness.
- Link [here](#) for Youtube link and references
- Question around research including impacts to menhaden
- Inclusion of fish processors vs trophy fishery in the research
  - Most fish processors agreed that blue catfish were an issue
- Reach out to Veronica Lucchesse ([vlucchesse@umces.edu](mailto:vlucchesse@umces.edu)) if you would like to follow up on this research

**Maryland Updates (Branson Williams, MDNR)**

**11:25am - 11:35am**

- Branson provides updates to projects related to blue catfish and flathead catfish in Maryland.

Notes:

- See [Maryland Science & Management Update slides](#) for more information
- Fishery independent monitoring
  - Commercial electrofishing chase boat pilot program
    - Catch = primarily blue catfish
    - 4 Rivers surveyed in summer 2025
      - Patuxent, Chester, Choptank, Sassafras Rivers
      - First estimates of relative abundance & population structure in surveyed rivers
- Population Modeling
  - USGS population matrix model for Patuxent River
    - To see how populations respond to different levels of harvest over time
    - Model is running & working - needs to update inputs
  - Co-produced research to control invasive blue catfish populations in the Chesapeake Bay
    - Includes all stakeholders from all jurisdictions
    - Facilitated, structured decision making approach
    - Contact Tom Ihde (email [here](#)) for more information
- Possible interactions between blue catfish and Atlantic sturgeon nursery function
- Assessing population structure and efficacy of targeted removals of blue catfish in Choptank River

**Virginia Updates (Margi Whitmore, VADWR)**

**11:35am - 11:45am**

- Margi provides updates to projects related to blue catfish and flathead catfish in Virginia.

Notes:

- See [Virginia Science & Management Update slides](#) for more information

- Rivers: Rappahannock, Mattaponi, & Pamunkey
- Annual catfish monitoring: increased precipitation = high water = fish spread out
- Overview of the blue catfish movement project
  - Goal: identify aggregation areas & environmental/biological predictors
- Concern over flathead catfish - as apex predators invasion may look different than blue cats
- VMRC - potential commercial catfish hook & line license - proposal for 2026
  - Contact Alexa Galvan ([Alexa.Galvan@mrc.virginia.gov](mailto:Alexa.Galvan@mrc.virginia.gov)) if you have any questions

#### **D.C. Updates (TBD)**

**11:45am - 11:55am**

- Daniel Ryan leads updates on invasive catfish monitoring efforts in the Potomac and Anacostia rivers.

Notes:

- See [D.C. Science & Management Update slides](#) for more information
- Targeting Blue Catfish Surveys
  - Low frequency electrofishing (Potomac & Anacostia Rivers)
  - Gut content analysis
  - Acoustic telemetry
- The focus has shifted from blue catfish to flathead catfish due to their increasing populations.
- Targeted Flathead surveys
  - Low frequency electrofishing (Potomac & Anacostia Rivers)
  - Gut content analysis
  - Acoustic telemetry
    - Interest in reaching out to Margi Whitmore regarding help for mapping telemetry data
  - PIT Tags (sees view recaptures)
- Flathead catfish are now appearing in various surveys, raising concerns about their rapid expansion.
  - Delaware is conducting targeted removals of Flatheads currently in a pond using low frequency. Contact Michael Steiger ([Michael.Steiger@Delaware.gov](mailto:Michael.Steiger@Delaware.gov)) if you would like to see results.
- Recreational angler pressure is currently the most effective management tool for controlling flathead catfish numbers.

#### **VI. Recap & Next Steps**

**12:05pm – 12:30pm**

Lead: Christina Garvey (CRC)

Notes:

- Overall concern (especially from jurisdictions) over flathead catfish
  - Sleeping giant - increasing volume
  - What does this mean moving forward? Something to think about.
- Agreement on understanding what the definition of “sustainable fisheries” means for blue catfish
- Please fill out the [ICW Project Tracker google form](#) with past (within last 10 years),

- current, or future projects and/or publications related to invasive catfish
- Next steps:
  - The group will be updated if anything changes regarding the ICW & Chesapeake Bay Program structure under the revised agreement
  - Next meeting - the group can discuss the results of the ICW project tracker and discuss a path forward.

**VII. Adjourn**

**12:30pm**

**Next Meeting:** TBD