Invasive Catfish Workgroup

Winter 2024 Meeting

January 10th 2024

VCU Rice Rivers Center

(Switched to virtual due to weather concerns)

Meeting Summary

Attendance (in alphabetical order, after coordinator and chair)

Bailey Robertory (Coordinator, CRC/NOAA)	Katlyn Fuentes (CRC)
Bruce Vogt (Chair, NOAA)	Kendall Weingard (Salisbury U)
Adrienne Kotula (CBC VA)	Kim Couranz (NOAA)
Alexa Galvan (VMRC)	Madeleine Jepsen (MD Sea Grant)
Allison Colden (CBF)	Margi Whitmore (VDWR)
Amy Laliberte (MD Sea Grant)	Mark Hoffman (CBC)
Beth Brewster (CCPS)	Mary Fabrizio (VIMS)
Branson Williams (MD DNR)	Mary Groves (MD)
Brent Hunsinger (James River Friends)	Matt Ogburn (Smithsonian)
Capt. Mike Ostrander (Discover the James)	Matt Shank (PA)
Cathy Liu (MD Sea Grant)	Matthew Scales (MDA)
Chris Luckett (MDE)	Michael Fisk (NCWRCO
Chris Moore (CBF)	Michael Steiger (DNREC)
Chris Sopko (Sea Farms INC)	Mike Bednarski (VADWR)
Capt. Christian Moore (Reel Country Guide Service)	Mitchell Bode (JJ McDonnell)
Christine Densmore (FWS)	Noah Bressman (Salisbury U)
Clint Morgeson (VADWR)	Pat Campfield (ASFC)
Connor Bevan (ASA Fishing)	Pat Geer (VMRC)
Corbin Hilling (USGS)	Pat Hudson (True Chesapeake)
Daniel Ryan (DC)	Patrick Kocovsky (USGS)
David Sikorski (CCAMD)	Ronald Owens (PRFC)
Doug Nemeth (FWS)	Roxanne Wolf (Shore Gourmet)
Geoff Smith (PA)	Ryan Walsh (James River Association)
George O'Donnell (MDNR)	Stephanie Pazzaglia (JJ McDonnell)
Heather Walsh (USGS)	Sung Chung (Sen. Van Hollen)
Ian Park (DE Fisheries)	T.D VanMiddlesworth (NCWRC)
Ingrid Braun-Ricks (PRFC)	Tiffany Risch (Recreational Angler)
Jack Buchanan (VIMS)	Timothy Ellis (Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership)
Jaclyn Higgins (TRCP)	Tom Dunlap (James River Association)
John Page Williams (Recreational Angler)	Tom Ihde (Morgan U)
Johnny Moore (Delaware)	Trey Thorpe (James Catfish Club)
Jorge Holzer (UMD)	Troy Tuckey (VIMS)
Joseph Love (MD DNR)	Yan Jiao (VT)

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Introduction/Scope of the Meeting – Bailey Robertory (Coordinator, CRC/NOAA) and Bruce Vogt (Chair, CRC/NOAA)

Summary: Thanked members for attending and for their flexibility. Member introductions verbally and in the chat. Reviewed agenda and discussed general housekeeping items. Reminded members that the purpose of this meeting is to discuss and learn. Acknowledged that different members have differing opinions on catfish and asked members to be respectful and stay on task.

Meeting Objectives:

- Reconnect the diverse interests represented on the ICW and renew our common goal
- Identify what is going well, what the gaps are, and what actions the ICW should take

Meeting Focus:

- Positive and forward thinking
- Learning from each other
- Finding a common goal and identifying next steps towards that goal
- Recognizing and respecting that different individuals, stakeholders, and jurisdictions have different ideas/beliefs/opinions around catfish

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Progress and Learning – Updates from members of each sub group (Science, Management, Policy, Commercial Fishing, Recreational Fishing, Processing, and Marketing.

Key findings/takeaways from each sub group:

Science

VA - Mary Fabrizio (VIMS)

- Blue Catfish – Blue Crab Interactions
- Study conducted in the James River
- Overlap in spatial distribution between Blue crabs and Blue catfish
- Blue crab predator avoidance strategies may not be as effective against Blue catfish prey detection strategies
- Studies show that Blue catfish do consume Blue crabs
    - Higher occurrence in diets in summer/fall and in higher salinity areas
- Predation likelihood varied spatially, temporally, and by predator (fish) size
    - Intermediate sized Blue catfish predicted to consume the most crabs
- Findings consistent with other studies (Hilling et al. 2023
- Reducing numbers of Blue catfish may not be effective as growth rates increase

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Science (Cont.)

MD - Noah Bressman (Salisbury U)

- Eastern Shore Blue catfish update
- Came to Eastern shore about 20 years ago
- Recent thesis study on diet ecology: Blue catfish are eating lots of crabs on the Eastern shore
    - Larger catfish are eating more Blue crabs
- Catfish in this area may be undergoing shifts towards piscivory sooner
    - Driver unclear: might be something specific to Nanticoke River
- Also eating White Perch, Gizzard Shad, River Herring, and Atlantic Menhaden
    - Not believed to be an overall cause of decline in Menhaden decline, but might be an additional driver
- Some seasonality in prey types
- Stable isotope analysis: fish tissue and prey item samples and compare chemical ratios to determine what they are eating
    - Large size Blue catfish are a high level predator on par with Largemouth and Striped bass
- Juveniles have a high trophic level, enrichment during Nitrogen may be due to high numbers of fish eggs (Striped bass and possibly River herring)
- Blue catfish may be having a large impact on spawning and recruitment of Striped bass
    - Small and large eating Striped bass eggs
    - Adult Striped bass aren't normally found in diet
- Other studies looking at reproductive rate and fecundity
    - Preliminary results show high fecundity
- Seasonal variability in diet and trophic level
- Have also described a few different diseases in Blue catfish, will be studied further
- Second year in a row that catfish were found with eggs in the middle of fall (not in their regular spawning season)
- Will be working with MD DNR to assess the impacts of using electrofishing to target certain size class selected target removal

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Management

VA - Margi Whitmore (VADWR)

- DWR Management Priorities
    - Redesigning Blue catfish sampling
        - Fixed station sampling design switched to random
            - Bi-annual sampling
        - Movement ecology project: second year is complete
        - Currently developing a Catfish management plan
            - Hoping to have update next time
- Low frequency electrofishing data results
    - Pretty consistent data across rivers
    - Peak across rivers in mid-2000's
    - Some rivers have held steady or decline, James River is a solid decline
    - Over time early size classes have grown in abundance
    - Lots of bias in fixed station design
    - Less size bias in hybrid design
    - This data goes in to population assessments and therefore must be accurate and accurately represent size distribution and number
    - Roughly shift to piscivory around 50 cm – need to make sure monitoring accurately reflects
- Movement ecology project results
    - Uses acoustic telemetry to track movement
    - Looking at baseline seasonal movement and drivers, high use area/predictors, and shifts due to low frequency electrofishing
    - Tagged 80 Blue catfish ranging from 319-1134 mm TL
    - Want data to be available to commercial and recreational fishermen so they can target
    - Preliminary results show high use areas
        - Fish did not stay in high salinity areas for long
    - Tributary fidelity (Powell Creek group)
    - Consistent community structure (movement tactics and aggregation area)
    - Lower percentage downstream habitat use, seasonal variability
    - Consistent high-density areas in the tidal fresh reaches from Westover to Sturgeon point
- Big goal of project to fill in gaps

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Management (Cont.)

MD - Branson Williams (MDDNR)

- Population has gotten larger in Maryland waters over the past decade
- Harvest has increased since 2014
- Successes
    - Development of a policy statement
        - Blue catfish is an invasive aquatic nuisance species
        - Commitment to goals in policies and plans
        - Reduce and deplete invasive catfish to minimal levels which benefits ecosystem and Marylanders
    - Research and science
        - Patuxent River projects for population estimates, diet studies, and blue catfish hotspots
        - Partner support and collaboration
        - MDE Fish Consumption Advisories
        - Flathead catfish life-history and diet
        - Fish removal and donation to needy people
    - Building and promoting the fishery
        - Marketing campaigns
        - Recreational anglers: supporting and organizing fishing tournaments with a focus on harvest
        - Attempting to remove barriers to harvesters and processors and promote to consumers
    - Creating the Invasive Fishes Program within MDNR
        - Guide and oversee research and management of invasive fishes
        - Support commercial and recreational harvest
        - Work towards reduce populations
    - Various upcoming projects
        - Population modeling and survey design
        - Expanded marketing efforts
        - Continued support for commercial markets
        - Refine MDE Fish Consumption Advisories
        - Explore distribution of toxins in fish

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Policy

Allison Colden (CBF)

- Main focus on Farm Bill and trying to address hurdles
- Agricultural Appropriations Bill
    - In past years have been successful about acquiring a small amount of money to help with USDA inspector cost
    - This year's in the House does include language that would direct USDA APHIS to provide pass through funding related to invasive catfish
        - 750k to Maryland for studies and mitigation plans
        - Bills still in development
- Farm Bill
    - Currently underdevelopment
    - Ask for a waiver or removal for USDA inspection for catfish
    - Have not seen a draft yet
    - Some issues and barriers
- VA General Assembly Bill
    - Infrastructure that would help with processing reduced to $250k
    - Still waiting for that grant program to roll out
- VA discussion about reforming recreation fish regulations that have size, bag, and creel limits for catfish
- MD Federal Fisheries Disaster Regulation was declined
    - Was a unique request and was a long shot
    - Hopefully that new data can possibly support future re-application
- Policy Barriers
    - Waiver or full elimination of USDA requirements getting strong pushback from Mississippi Delta catfish farming
    - Has led to some potential "misinformation" in Senate Appropriations Bill
        - Has since been removed
    - Group Ask: Consider proactively addressing some arguments that have to do with the health and safety that deal with consuming catfish and the broad generalizations made
        - Opportunities for science and management communities to draft a statement
- Feedback from the industry on the lack of clarity on the best next steps for processing
- Some larger processors aren't opposed to USDA regulations (because it can open more doors) but hurts smaller processors who are trying to start up
- Want to talk to processors and see what the best ways forward are, ensuring that policy priorities are met

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Recreational/Charter Captains

VA – Christian Moore (Reel Country Guide Service)

- Showed a 10 minute video showing testimonials from various recreational anglers in Virginia
- Provided recreational fishery point of view from recreational anglers and charter captains
- Highlighted the importance of catfish to recreational fishing industry
- Catfish are abundant and very popular to catch
    - Smaller are easier for younger anglers
    - Trophy sized are a challenge for advanced anglers
- People travel thousands of miles and spend large sums of money to try and catch Blue catfish at the James River
- Recreational fisherman would like catfish to be managed correctly
    - Believe it can support recreational and commercial fishery
- Anglers are interested in a way to maintain the population while still protecting the ecosystem
- Main message: recognize that they are a pest and this population boom was unintended, but want the ICW to consider the recreational point of view

MD – David Sikorski (CCAMD)

- Blue catfish has been in Maryland shorter than Virginia
- Important to realize the general public has a diverse opinion and experience across different regions on Blue catfish
- Believe that all stakeholders should be given a chance to have input
- Empowering anglers to provide data to the department
    - Focused on anglers role
    - Advise people to get engaged and support MDNR program
- Recreational angling has a diverse opinion on catch and release
    - Vital continued engagement
    - Agency education of potential biomass changes
    - Help include angling community in studies
- Limited access/access issues
    - New signage
- Fish Hunt Maryland will be bringing together different groups to tell stories of ways to use this resource
- Encouraging people to keep or catch and release as they see fit

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Commercial Fishing

VA – Ingrid Braun-Ricks (PRFC)

- 2003 was the Potomac's first reported harvest (low due to different factors and limited)
    - Demand of Bleu catfish and increased abundance has led to increased commercial catch
- Average 2.5 million pounds in Potomac river each year since 2018
- Harvested 3 million plus pounds in 2022
    - 2023 preliminary data suggests the same
- Potomac harvests catfish between 15 and 30 inches in length
    - Fishery is 70-90 fishermen
    - Trotline, fish pots, and gill net
- Virginia harvests 2-3 million pounds of Blue catfish annually since 2018 (expect 2020)
    - 2500-3000 trips per year
    - Fish pots and hoop nets have increased
- Experimental low frequency electrofishing in James and Pamunkey Rivers
    - Efficient removal effort (6000+ fish an hour)
- Increased demand and harvest

MD – George O'Donnell (MDDNR)

- 2019 Invasive Catfish Finfish trotline License
    - 312 have been given out (with 95 being given out last year alone)
    - Has allowed for increased participation in industry
    - $15 license and requires no others
    - Only restriction is 12,000 foot maximum
    - One of the least expensive gears for commercial harvest
- Majority in Maryland caught with haul seines
- Maryland commercial harvest has doubled since 2018
- Commercial fisherman have mentioned a big issues is that there is not a strong enough developed market and that prices fluctuate too much
- MDDNR is working hard to promote the harvesting catfish
- Complaint from haul seining: some locations in Maryland require homeowners to give written permission to haul seine in front of their houses in the water
- Blue catfish are the only fish you cannot process without an inspector standing there
    - Has limited some processors due to challenges
- Loan program: loans and grants for processing facilities will be distributed at the Waterman's Expo in Ocean City, MD

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Processing and Marketing

VA – Mike Hutt (VDACS)

(Update given by Bailey Robertory on behalf of Mike Hutt)

- 4 companies in Virginia processing Blue catfish
  - 5th opening soon
  - Interest from others as well
- Processing infrastructure grant
  - Was originally higher but cut down to $250k
  - 6 applicants, one company given the award, winner announced soon
- Fish have moved well (despite multi-week lull where prices dropped)
- Some harvesters selling catfish to North Carolina and Maryland
- National: Seafood Expo North America March 10-12 2024
  - Boston
  - Goal is to put product in front of people
  - Previous success at these shows…may continue to get stronger
  - Interest in smoked catfish at some shows
    - Small operation interested in opening up in Virginia
- International: Seafood Expo Global April 23-25 2024
  - Barcelona
  - Will send catfish samples
  - Potential international market and demand for catfish
  - Different market forms in Canada and Poland for whole fish (gutted and frozen)
  - Multiple avenues for demand

MD – Beth Brewster (CCPS) and Matthew Scales (MDA)

- Trying to get into school systems
- Introduced 5 years ago
- Small grant through culinary center to hire marketing group to market fish
  - Looking for consistent market
  - Research on low amount of seafood available to schools
- Large concern during pandemic that food pantries did not have enough good protein
  - Want fishermen to get their money and for people to get nutritious food
  - People are starting to realize that it is not a bottom dweller
- Working on comprehensive marketing, social media, advertising, and events
- Targeted markets
  - Military, national, state
  - Schools and institutions, food banks, seafood markets, etc.

- Working on value added product
    - USDA regulations on product
    - Ready to serve item with a child nutrition label
- Video advertising Blue catfish as invasive and a delicious food source
- Supply-side outreach strategy
    - Delicious, sustainable, un-eradicable nutritious food source as the advertisement
    - Association outreach strategy
        - Leveraging state and local waterman associations to reach greater numbers of watermen
    - Educational and resource strategies: types of materials needed to support waterman's understanding
    - Event strategies
    - Incentive strategies
- Looking for consistency – refer to as "wild-caught Chesapeake" for word association

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Invasive Carp Case Study – Patrick Kocovsky (USGS)

Summary: Patrick Kocovsky provided a case study overview of the USGS invasive carp research program. Invasive carps (Bighead, Black, Grass, and Silver) in the Mississippi River Basin and Great Lakes Basin. Large diverse partnership (similar to ICW) that makes the program possible. Program started in the early 2000's with a risk assessment that identified the risks of bigheaded carps in potential spawning rivers. For this case study, they focused on controlling the spread through integrated pest management. Conducted research on different biological and chemical methods of deterrence and removal. Proposed roadmap to Blue catfish program that is being followed by the ICW.

Common Goal of Group – Bailey Robertory (CRC, NOAA) and Bruce Vogt (NOAA)

Revisiting common goal statement of group from 2020 Invasive Catfish Management Strategy

"Invasive Catfish Outcome: Reduce the abundance and mitigate the spread and ecological impacts of invasive catfishes in Chesapeake Bay through increased public education and awareness and development of fishery management strategies that ensure ecosystem health and productivity." – Current Goal Statement

Asked members for input on goal and what, if anything, they would add or change with the current goal statement.

- "What would you like to see achieved regarding Blue catfish over the next 5 years?"
- "What does success look like to you?"

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Feedback:

- Overwhelming support for changing “mitigate” to minimize
- Goal not to eradicate; find balance for ecosystem and commercial-rec fishing values
- Maximizing benefits to the public - that would include economic benefits to both commercial and recreational sectors and food availability for consumers
- Success = maintaining consideration for the wide variety of interests and stakeholder groups involved with invasive catfish management
- Evaluation of management strategies so we can make significant progress on this goal (reduce abundance/mitigate spread). We need science-based assessments of change (is abundance declining?). Success would be to develop a bay-wide management plan that is adopted by all jurisdictions in the bay area - the plan would be prescriptive enough to ensure that regulations throughout the bay area are consistent. We also need a measure of 'increased public education' - who is tracking this activity and what do gains look like?
- See Maryland and other Bay states have catfish tournaments focused on the recreational fun side of catching trophy blue cats. And most important, make these catch and release tournaments. The small towns, hotels and tackle shops on the Nanticoke River and other tributaries of the Bay would greatly benefit from this kind of tourism
- For USDA bids, to include wild blue catfish as an accepted fish. To make an impact on volume and to help steady market demand we need additional volume opportunities. Currently, Supplement 511 excludes wild blue catfish from USDA catfish bids.
- Develop of list of values for the ICW (food, rec fishing, support ecosystem balance) –look at MSA for example
- * minimize ecological impacts ; * existing "development of fishery management strategies that ensure ecosystem health and productivity" is important to retain ; * a common vision for a future Chesapeake system that recognizes our diverse stakeholder interests in this species
- A rigorous, science-based assessment of the economic value of the recreational fishery (including the trophy fishery). We still do not know the value, other than through anecdotes. Another aspect of success is to diversify the fishery in terms of participants.
- Anglers work with state agencies to find a way to feed the homeless with a slot limit to help this issue? Fishing ambassadors have a reach that could help join forces with the community to spread education on the issue while taking action to reduce smaller size catfish numbers.
- Quantify at the population scale the effects of predation on native species and their fisheries. Continue/expand surveillance to inform quantitative estimates.

- All stakeholders have the ability to create a synergistic relationship and work together to manage the fish. I feel we can be successful if population study continues and commercial harvest is allowed to the point of controlling the fish. Removing a large portion of the biomass of smaller fish if done correctly
- See the blue catfish population/biomass stay the same, or even go down, instead of continuing to increase, with the help of a sustainable commercial fishery and recreational anglers that can enjoy the experience of catfishing for sport and dinner, while populations of imperiled native species increasing in the Bay, like striped bass, blue crabs, river herring, and sturgeon. I would also like to see a strong market developed for Blue catfish where waterman are consistently paid enough to target them, and for the fish to be put to good use, whether it is feeding people, creating fertilizer, etc., instead of wasted in landfills after harvest.
- Success is making strides towards reducing abundance (with population monitoring to confirm) and increasing recreational and commercial harvest in an appreciable way. There are quite a few data gaps we need to fill, and coordinated efforts bay-wide are needed.
- Bring awareness to institutions (schools, hospitals) having BC on USDA formulary as is farm raised catfish to have a ready buyer for processors. Increase the need for more and larger processing.
- Subsequent documentation on the strategies to meet these goals and THERE is where the details about how do go about that including the stakeholder interests, science needs, etc.
- Add "stock assessment model and" or "population dynamics assessment " before "fisheries management"
- Achieve a steady market for the Blue catfish paying commercial fisherman a fair wage, and a constant supply of fish to a developed market so that the market does not get glutted and the price per pound goes down. Getting Blue catfish on the national and international market. Collaboration amongst states on policy and practices, and recreational and commercial fisherman to benefit from the fish.
- Ask the USDA for reduced regulations since Fish is different than meat as far as processing and health standards.
- We need to be clear while our goals may involve reducing abundance, complete eradication (or anything close to that) would be impossible (without like poisoning the entire Chesapeake Bay watershed) as they are so wide-spread and established. So while we want to reduce their abundance, I don't realistically see it dropping too low to support commercial and recreational fisheries
- Development of regional fishery management strategies that ensure ecosystem health, productivity and benefit for the general public.

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- Acknowledgment of trophy fishery
- Maryland's aim is to reduce abundance appreciably throughout the watershed. I can't envision a situation where the population is extirpated, but we really want to reduce biomass and deplete populations if possible, at least in some locations
- Best available science
- While promoting a catch-and-release trophy catfish fishery could increase tourism around the Bay, so could a recreational fishery where people can catch and keep as many fish as they want to fill their freezers. So, an analysis of the blue catfish "economy" could be very helpful to determine how much money catch and release recreational fishing, catch and keep recreational fishing, and commercial fishing are generating so we can better understand the balance between these activities
- Have measurable KPIs, what measurement are we aligning with to show success towards such goals
- Tournaments are a good way to connect with the community. We offered the live fish the fisherman did not take to the community members. We advertised pick up through social media and the local schools. All the fish were taken and fed families!
- Stock assessments that provide realistic catch targets
- Watershed-specific monitoring that integrates estuarine and freshwater sampling methodologies in support of stock assessments
- The work quantifying and characterizing the Ecological impacts (AND impacts to valuable fishery resources) of invasive species needs to continue.
- Include the economic development for commercial blue cat fishermen - many com fishermen fish blue catfish when they are not in their targeted season, and it helps support their year-long income.

Summary: Goal statement is a good starting point, but needs tweaking. Strong support for changing “mitigate” to minimize. A desire to make sure all stakeholder types are incorporated into the goal. A suggested list of “goals, values, or factors” underneath the goal statement that clarify the stance of this group.

Action Items:

- Bruce Vogt and Bailey Robertory to incorporate suggestions into new goal and work on wording/ present ICW with revised goal and allow for a vote
    - Will changed mitigate to minimize
    - Reflecting diverse interests
    - Economic opportunity
    - Best available science/quantifying damages/ need clearer objective
- Create a list of goals/values/factors to include underneath

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Breakout Groups to Discuss Actions and Solutions – Bailey Robertory (CRC, NOAA) and Bruce Vogt (NOAA)

Summary: Originally planned as breakout groups and ended up being all in one, which was arguably more efficient. Went through the different small groups and posed questions/asked for needs and solutions.

Decision: Combine science and management into one small group

Action Item: Bailey Robertory to re-assess interest in small groups

- Email members about small groups
- Assign new members to groups
- Email groups individually and set up meetings prior to next full ICW meeting

Science/Management

What are the science/research needs in order to support management of invasive catfish?

- Stock assessments that provide realistic catch targets
- Experiments that test most efficient removal techniques
- Funding!
- Economic assessment of invasive on seafood market (5, 10, 15 years)
- Tributary specific impacts/ watershed specific monitoring
- Continue science needs committee model - collaborative identification of research needs
    - Use Corbin Hilling's stock assessment as a start
- Work on quantifying/characterizing ecological impacts
- Where we have good data sources and where we need more
- Economic development for blue cat fishermen
- Quantify prey-population scale effects on striped bass/river herring/menhaden populations (similar to that of blue crab)
- Incorporate management perspective in research
- Look at multi-species level with multi species ecological reference points
- Development of ecosystem tools to put all the pieces together (ecosystem models) - always looking at ecosystem impacts and putting together what we know
- Catch composition of commercial harvest - infrastructure exists, there is just not funding for it
- Watershed-specific monitoring that integrates estuarine and freshwater sampling methodologies in support of stock assessments

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What are the next steps to coordinate science and management? How do we make this more collaborative?

- We have a science and management group. We should have them get together and combine the list.
- More diverse groups

What are new areas we should prioritize for research?

What are funding sources for research priorities?

- Need for supporting USGS research and approving understanding is being voiced through ASMFC

Recreational Anglers

What are the needs of recreational anglers?

- Market catch and keep and the trophy aspect
- Wording around catfish
- Diversify fishery techniques so that it draws in other anglers from outside
- Promote different attributes of recreational fishery
- Making sure recreational needs are considered equally
- Looking for charter captains to not be listed just as "recreational fishermen"
    - **Decision**: Charter Captains to be referred to as "Charter Captains" as opposed to being lumped with recreational anglers and recognizing that fishing for Blue catfish is their source of income.

What messaging would you like to see changed?

- Issues with word invasive
    - In certain fishing applications
- Positive descriptions as a recreational fishery
- Marketing: "wild caught" "locally sourced"
- Some suggest use of "introduced" instead of invasive
- Have to address and makes it harder to market
- Possibly do a better job or explaining
- Using "wild caught Chesapeake Blue catfish" and "abundance" and use positive word choices

How can we get more recreational anglers to attend meetings?

- Make sure they felt valued or heard
- Include more commercial fishermen, women and underrepresented groups in the recreational fishery
- **Action Item:** Bailey Robertory reach out to more anglers from underrepresented groups

What does a balance between commercial and recreational fishing look like?

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Action Item: Mike Bednarski and George O'Donnell to meet

Processing Capacity and Marketing

What actions are needed to support processing capacity and infrastructure and build new markets?

- USDA Grant for $5 million dollars, to apply for equipment need proposal over $5 million
- Need to rely on grants due to price of fish
- Whatever subsidies that can help with price point
- Yield isn't great…price point will range through the year
    - Would more studies to increase yield be beneficial?
    - Fishermen's pay varies throughout the year
        - 1-2 lb fish not very marketable
        - Pay more for fish over 2 lbs
- Get subsidies from the states to encourage fish being used in institutions

What can the ICW provide to help process more catfish?

Are there any needs to expand the commercial fishery?

- Price, gear, etc.
- If we are trying to move volume, the most impactful market is larger contracts (military, USDA) - bids currently exclude wild caught Blue catfish (which excludes VA and MD processors)
    - Takes a year to redo definition
    - Some work being done trying to change
- Monterey aquarium released seafood update

What issues still occur with the inspection requirements?

Policy

What policy changes are needed to achieve stated goals?

- Potentially changing H2B visas (some might have issues getting workers off the plan)...some talk about moving seafood industries out…something else we should consider
- More funding would be good for this issue, policy as an avenue for funding

Action Item: Can this group put together concise messaging for an advocacy group?

Action Item: Incorporate Madeline Jepsen, Noah Bressman, and MD Marketing Specialist in messaging/communication

- Possibly changing USDA inspection requirements (maybe simplify)
    - Modification would help
    - Drilling down into needs is probably needed…there is some pushback…might not be the hurdle it appeared to be

- Messaging as it relates to how we want to describe an species that is invasive by definition
- Rethinking, from a communications aspect, how we want to carefully straddle the line

What are potential resources we have to support actions and address current hurdles?
What types of advocacy can be done to acquire necessary resources?

Future Meetings

- Next ICW Meeting: Summer 2024 in-person at Rice Rivers Center (TBD)
- Post Meeting: Poll Results
    - Weekday mornings work best for most people
    - Members prefer a mix of virtual and in-person meetings
    - Meeting frequency: 2x a year
- **Verdict:** 2 meetings a year, one in-person (hybrid) and one virtual
    - Summer 2024 and Winter 2025
- Small group meetings: 2x a year, virtual or in-person
- **Action item:** Identify small group chair and vice chairs

End of Meeting

Please direct any questions and/or comments to Bailey Robertory (Coordinator)
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