

**Invasive Catfish Workgroup
Conference Call
August 27, 2019**

Workgroup Overview

- High expectations to begin addressing invasive catfish issues in the Bay with this workgroup and upcoming fall 2019 workshop
 - Issue that requires bringing together multiple stakeholders
 - New membership reflects action to become more inclusive
- Where did this interest and focus in trying to address invasive catfish begin?
 - Chesapeake Bay Program refers to blue catfish and flathead catfish
 - Sustainable Fisheries Goal Implementation Team under CBP, brings together fishery managers, scientists, NGOs, to discuss fishery issues and apply science
 - GIT felt that this issue warranted concern and big enough to coordinate a Bay-wide effort to mitigate impacts of invasive catfishes
 - Established Task Force charged with set objectives, ways to slow spread, mitigate impacts, promote fishery, and educate with outreach
 - 2014 report recommendations
 - Targeted removals in high impact areas
 - Develop commercial fishery to increase blue catfish removals
 - Alternative removal methods (e.g. commercial electrofishing)
 - Monitoring and response plan - lacking monitoring in most areas, target actions
 - Evaluate barrier removals - dams impacting ability to move/spread, coordinated with fish passage workgroup
 - Review policies and regulations - least amount of effort, there are conflicting policies creating incentives for keeping invasive catfish area, interest in looking holistically across
 - Develop communications strategies to get message out about known science and potential impacts, if known - funded project for signs in MD
 - Research investments by NOAA on diet, abundance, movement, etc.
 - VDGIF also conducted long-term diet study, other jurisdictions did other work
 - By 2017 all studies underway
 - Science pulled together in Fall 2017 symposium - reference report for detail (online)
 - Learned a lot, still many gaps, some potential impacts based on diet/species being eaten, a little difficult to quantify what level of ecological impact
 - Learned some about abundance, densities in some tributaries, data gaps on population size throughout the Bay
 - Blue catfish move more than other catfish, implications for low salinity years like 2018-19
 - Stakeholder panel during symposium, included rec fishers, some commercial, at least one seafood processor - helpful because it became clear the need to bring other stakeholders to the table
 - New inspection requirement put in place by USDA (transferred from FDA to USDA) through Farm Bill, concerns over creating bottleneck in processing,

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- limiting ability to remove catfish in large quantities, barrier to continuing to promote and grow commercial fishery
- Letter in December 2018 to Ex Comm recapping all this history of what was done, what comes next?
 - Management guidance on how to proceed
 - Recommend Bay-wide fishery management plan
 - Response from Ex Comm not to move forward w/ a management plan
 - Clear goals needed - target levels of removal?
 - Criteria to coordinate across jurisdictions for cohesive approach
 - Wanted to maintain Task Force, renamed to Workgroup focused on communications and regular reporting on state of science
- June 2019 GIT meeting - renewed sense of urgency among managers to take more specific action against invasive catfish
 - Changed from having workgroup as strictly communication to wanting to develop concrete actions to address the issue
 - Interest in expanding the workgroup, bring in more stakeholders, MD and VA considering developing FMPs, better quantify and communicate the impacts of invasive catfish on shad, herring, blue crab
 - Others saying we have enough science, need to take action
 - Continued emphasis on developing the fishery, recognizing barriers and conflicting interests
- Need clear, specific SMART goals that have positive impacts on fishery economy and ecology

Introductions

- Capt Mike Ostrander (Discover the James catfish guide, Richmond, VA) - involved since 2011; wants to emphasize that catfish can hopefully be managed as commercial food source and trophy rec fishery; hoping that through involvement he can share potential for harvesting small catfish, leave larger catfish; available anytime beyond meeting
- Mike Bednarski (VDGIF) - goal to look at management strategies that minimize ecological impacts while recognizing economic potential of fishery; possible to pursue strategy that provides benefits for all; supportive of efforts to remove smaller catfish; implement strategies at VDGIF that balance objectives appropriately
- Bob Greenlee (VDGIF) - ditto Mike
- Matt Balazik (VCU/USACE) - working with catfish for a while; gill nets, electrofishing, pots; make the most of situation we are in; modify USDA regulation for processing (maybe don't include wild-caught)
 - USACE and Great Lakes putting major resources into invasive species - how do we access the same level of support? Matt working on that now with technical directors

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- Alexa Kretsch (VMRC) - working on commercial blue catfish fishery; VMRC sees big future in encouraging fishery while removing population and slowing growth and invasion; looking to increase communication across jurisdictions through the workgroup
- Troy Tuckey (VIMS) – at the science end of issue; interested in seeing what else can be done to address the invasive catfish issue
- Corbin Hilling (VT) - BCF stock assessment for VA; running simulations to evaluate how various management strategies impact population; also looking at comparisons to LMB fishery; manages Chesapeake Catfish blog
- Don Orth (VT) - interested in keeping conversation going to develop acceptable goals and management objectives
- Yan Jiao (VT) - interest in estimating population size and changes over time; how to manage population to meet economic and ecological objectives
- Andy Lacatell (TNC) – evaluating TNC’s role in the invasive catfish issue
- Vaskar Nepal (VIMS) – student interested in organismal biology; studying how environmental factors (e.g. salinity) affect range expansion throughout the Bay
- Greg Garman (VCU) - involved in BCF research, hope to stay involved
- Mary Groves (MDNR) - original Task Force; MD still in invasion stage; trying to gather data on population in various regions in MD; working closely with commercial watermen to find out how new USDA regulations have impacted daily production; want to keep commercial marketing up and look for ways to remove roadblocks to sell in market
 - Information on BCF exceed attention of anglers for LMB - Mike Bednarski creel survey
- Jorge Holzer (MDSG) - economics perspective; would like to see repository of data on economics and catch data
- Alison Colden (CBF) - interest in mitigating impacts of invasive catfish; looking for opportunities to activate capacity for outreach and education to public
- Matt Ogburn (SERC) - involved in BCF research for Task Force; interest in science-based management of populations; working with various stakeholders to find actions and solutions; identify more resources and learn more about catfish distribution and ecology
- Dave Secor (UMCES) - new to BCF; working in Nanticoke, alarming to see increasing abundance there; interest in multispecies interactions including striped bass and other anadromous fish
- Tim Sughrue (Congressional Seafood) - started selling BCF in 2014; buys ~2M lbs per year from watermen in Northern Neck, process by hand; hoping to add perspective to the problem; worked as tidewater biologist at MDNR; not being fished in Nanticoke or Choptank
 - AL commercial cutting houses can do large-scale production; invest \$\$\$ to create commercial catfish industry similar to AL and MS; not going to reduce by processing by hand
- Wendy Stuart (Wide Net Project) - work to increase demand of catfish and look for new markets; provide fish to hunger relief agencies; need to think bigger, expand way beyond where we are; hope to be part of solution

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- Pat Welsh (Reliant Fish, Jessup MD) – in wholesale and processing for years; goal to understand what is being discussed and what we can do to exploit catfish economically to benefit for fishermen, wholesalers, retailers, and general public; limit proliferation to avoid overrunning other species; needs to be approached in a sustainable manner to keep the market going (already put \$\$ into developing the market)
- Rocky Rice (commercial waterman) - targeting blue cats 6 years; member of commercial watermen association; continued development of market and increase demand; try to mitigate spread and limit negative impacts on native species
- Gary Lengerhuis (recreational fisherman) - fishing for 16 years mainly on Potomac R; practices catch and release, some removal; promote taste to increase demand around CB; need to develop better processing methods to control them and better ways to market them
- Marty Gary (PRFC) - interested in all aspects of discussion; one snapshot of ecological component is predation of various species in sensitive habitats; feeding in critical nursery and spawning habitats in the Potomac River; a lot to be learned still despite all the works that's been done; great opportunity in getting this group together
- James McKittrick (MDNR) - listening in; happy to be taking an active stance on this issue; advocacy around DC area on USDA regulations; learning from group
- Edna Stetzer (DNREC) – located in the headwaters and benefiting from downstream control; in the invasion phase in DE, but interested in how to control/manage; concerned about interactions w/ striped bass fishery, Atlantic sturgeon, and shad restoration efforts; particularly concerned about preventing flatheads from invading DE
- Danny Ryan (DDOE) – comprehensive recap of the workgroup was helpful; similar perspective as stated previously; looking for to working with the group
- Roberta Wagner (FDA/FSIS) – food safety inspection; here to listen and ensure that regulatory oversight is as painless as possible
- Andrea Ostroff (USGS) – focus on fisheries and aquatic ecology; \$20m invasive species program; opportunity to bring those resources to CB; learn more about specific management objectives and how USGS can help address them

General Objectives

- Alison Colden - do we envision USDA issue under objective 3 or should we be more explicit?
 - Not including it in our overarching objectives
 - Should add fishery expansion objective though
 - Need to further develop the market and expand the commercial fishery
 - Spell out USDA issue under this objective
- Capt Mike - would sport and trophy fisheries be included in this new fishery objective?
 - Yes, should be captured in the objective
 - Need to find the right balance for commercial and recreational fisheries while meeting other mitigation goals
- Dave Secor – need common framework in developing an FMP; need a common assessment
 - Mary Groves - MD is developing an FMP for catfish

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- Mike Bednarski - VA not quite ready to develop an FMP; haven't delineated fishery goals or economic benefits/ecological impacts
 - MD and VA would deal with catfish differently – conservation equivalency approach?
- How does this group inform the jurisdictions? What is our role?
 - Mike Bednarski - VA will ultimately develop an FMP; ICW would inform this effort (couple yrs away)
 - Alexa Kretsch - VA seeing big development in catfish w/ commercial electrofishing license; working with VDGF and commercial anglers; even without FMP, compilation of scientific knowledge would be a useful tool
 - Mary Groves - WG incredibly useful to FMP development at MDNR; starting preliminary assignments of workload; need more info/results before completing their FMP too (still a ways off)
 - Would it be useful to set Bay-wide goals/targets?
 - Mary Groves – This would be difficult; MD managing by tributary in some cases due to different environmental conditions
 - Mike Bednarski - still intend to work collaboratively, just consider how differently constituents view fishery, one size fits all not possible; but cooperation and learning from each other is important
 - Matt Ogburn - agree with the idea of moving toward using science and info from fishermen to inform more proactive management of BCF, whether it's a single set of metrics or working with each state to address specific management objectives on tributary-specific basis; both states want to be more proactive, role for WG to facilitate
 - Consensus: Workgroup would play a role in communication and collaboration to address needs of jurisdictions
- Gary Lengerhuis – a lot recreational fishermen can remove biomass; need to include this catch/eat fishery in addition to trophy; public needs to be educated to increase pursuit of catfish
 - More research in mercury/PCB issues – could be scaring people away from them
 - Some info already – MDE outreach showed toxin levels are lower for BCF than other catfish (e.g. channel cats)
 - Work to inform the public on the taste of BCF
 - Give different connotation to get people to try it (e.g. Chesapeake Bay BCF)
- Science and fishery objectives need to be specified; will adjust objectives based on feedback

Next Steps

- Meeting in person in late fall/early winter to dig deeper into developing solutions around objectives w/ more specific goals, targets, and recommendations
- Develop a smaller steering committee to help prepare for the meeting
 - Representation from management, commercial, recreational, and science communities
 - Marty Gary – supports steering committee approach; need balanced representation
 - Volunteers to be on the committee?
 - Marty Gary – management

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- Gary Lengerhuis – recreational fishery
- Wendy Stuart – marketing
- Mike Ostrander – recreational trophy fishery
- Matt Balazik – commercial (working closely w/ them)
 - Need another official rep from commercial fishery
- Pat Welsh – processing (will work w/ Marty for input)
- Troy Tuckey – science
- Will leave the steering committee open for volunteers
- Plan to meet 3-4 times prior to the fall meeting to determine date, time, location, and an agenda
 - Envision this meeting to be an interactive workshop to develop and collect feedback on SMART goals and actions