2026 State Reports

Alabama

Name of Representative: Chris McKee

Arkansas

Name of Representative: Sean Lusk

Project Name: Exploitation and harvest characteristics of the Striped Bass fishery in Arkansas

Objective: 1) Evaluate the harvest characteristics of the three premier Striped Bass fisheries in Arkansas.

Project overview: Annual stockings of Striped Bass support a popular recreational fishery in Arkansas. In recent years, biologists have become aware of increasing public concern over perceived declines in catch rates and overall fishery quality. A statewide tag-reward study was initiated in February 2022 to evaluate annual exploitation and harvest characteristics of the Striped Bass fishery. A total of 667 legal-sized Striped Bass were doubled tagged in three large flood control reservoirs and each tagged fish offered a $100 return incentive. A total of 154 tagged Striped Bass were reported. None reporting was estimated to 59%.

Project Name: Evaluating hydroacoustics for assessing shad abundance in reservoirs

Objective: 1) Evaluate the utility of daytime hydroacoustics for assessing shad abundance in large reservoirs.

Project overview: Vertically migrating Chaoborus create large amounts of acoustic backscatter at night, making it difficult to gain accurate fish abundance estimates from nighttime hydroacoustic data. During the 2022 field season, we evaluated the use of daytime sampling as an alternative to traditional nighttime sampling, with particular attention to evidence of boat avoidance and acoustic shadowing (attenuation of acoustic signal) when dense schools were present, which are reasons commonly cited for why shad sampling should be conducted at night. We sampled the same transects during day and night using a 200kHz transducer during the months of July - October 2022 at Beaver and DeGray Lakes, and in October 2022 at Lake Carl Blackwell. We evaluated the movement of acoustic targets while in the sound beam to infer the body tilt (assuming fish moved head-first) to assess if fish dove deeper to avoid the boat. We used the bottom echo strength before, during and after the occurrence of dense schools of fish to

determine if fish schools attenuated the signal strength that reached the bottom. During September and October samples, a forward facing-facing multibeam DIDSON echosounder was also used to further evaluate boat avoidance in the horizontal plane (parallel to surface). Boat avoidance was slightly greater during daytime than nighttime but was not significant enough to cause a problem in analysis (mean vertical tilt angle was < 0.65o of horizontal and the mean number of fish targets moving horizontally away from the boat was at most 3% greater than the null value for random movement). We also saw no evidence of acoustic shadowing using the strength of bottom returns under schooling fish. Preliminarily, we believe daytime sampling may therefore be preferable to nighttime sampling.

Florida

Name of Representative: Stephen Stang

Broodstock Collection Information:
Blackwater State Fish Hatchery Manager: Bob DeMauro
Email: robert.demauro@myfwc.com

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) collects Gulf Striped Bass (GSB) annually for spawning activities at FWC's Blackwater Fisheries Center (BFC). The tailrace below Jackson Bluff Dam on Lake Talquin provides a majority of broodstock collected for spawning at BFC annually with occasional contributions from adult GSB collected from the Apalachicola, Blackwater, and Yellow River systems. Additionally, attempts are made annually to obtain a limited number of adult GSB from waters in Alabama and/or Georgia, in cooperation with ADCNR and GDNR, to aid in increasing the genetic diversity of GSB fry/fingerlings produced at BFC and stocked in Florida. Each of the 5 states (AL., FL., GA., LA., and MS.) participating in the Gulf Striped Bass Fishery Management Plan (GSBFMP) have annual stock enhancement programs to supplement and maintain existing GSB populations within their jurisdiction.

Fifty-seven adult GSB (20 females and 37 males) were collected and transported to BFC for spawning in spring 2025. Fifteen females and 25 males were obtained from the tailrace below Jackson Bluff Dam on Lake Talquin, 5 females and 11 males were collected from the Chattahoochee River, GA. in cooperation with GDNR, and 1 male was collected from the Blackwater River, FL. Mean total length (TL) and weight (kg) of females collected from the tailrace of the Jackson Bluff Dam were 668 mm TL and 4.7 kg., respectively. Mean TL and weight of females collected from the Chattahoochee River were 799 mm TL and 7.7 kg. All broodstock were collected by electrofishing or hook-and-line.

Twenty-one adult White Bass females, 4 White bass males, and 14 Striped Bass males were collected from the Ochlockonee River system and transported to BFC for White bass and

Sunshine Bass (*M. chrysops* ♀ *x M. saxatilis* ♂) production. All broodstock were collected by electrofishing or hook-and-line techniques.

2025 Gulf Striped Bass Production and Stocking:

Overall, 13 of 20 (65%) Striped bass females collected from the Lake Talquin tailrace and from the Chattahoochee River contained eggs that were staged and eligible for spawning. Five females collected early season from Lake Talquin held immature eggs and were not eligible for spawning. Two females collected from the Chattahoochee River in April released their eggs in temporary holding tanks before they could be transported to BFC for spawning.

The remaining 13 females contained staged mature eggs were eligible for injection with LHRH and/or HCG and spawning. Ten of the 13 (77%) eligible females spawned successfully post-injection, producing 4,940,000 eggs and 2,070,000 fry. Fry produced from one spawn suffered heavy mortality beginning on day 3 post-hatch resulting in the loss of 161,000 fry. This reduced the number of GSB fry available for stocking in grow-out ponds for fingerling production to 1,909,000. Overall, the fertilization rate from females that spawned post-injection averaged 42% and ranged from 1% - 71.4% for individual females. Fry were distributed to BFC (785,000), Warm Springs National Fish Hatchery (330,000), and Welaka National Fish Hatchery (794,000) for fingerling grow-out to assist meeting statewide stocking requests from the 5 states participating in the GSBFMP. In 2025 these requests totaled 1,925,750 GSB fingerlings.

FWC statewide GSB stocking requests for 2025 totaled 500,000 fingerlings. Overall, 290,846 fingerlings were stocked in 2 Florida waterbodies from GSB fry produced at BFC in 2025. BFC, Warm Springs NFH, and Welaka NFH all contributed fingerlings produced from BFC fry production to meet FWC requests. An additional 28,051 fingerlings obtained from Welaka NFH spawning and fingerling production activities were also stocked in Florida waters. In total, 318,897 GSB fingerlings were stocked in Florida waters during 2025.

Both BFC (29,520) and Warm Springs NFH (99,123) contributed fingerlings produced from BFC fry production to West Point Reservoir in Georgia. In total, 419,489 GSB fingerlings produced from BFC fry production were stocked both in Florida and out-of-state waters. Overall, 1,239,191 GSB fingerlings were stocked in waters of the 5 participating states representing 64.3% of the total requests. In order to meet increasing stocking requests in the future there will need to be an increase in GSB fry production. This will likely require additional hatcheries participating in GSB spawning and fry production. Collaboration between states and agencies participating in the GSBFMP is critical towards meeting future stock enhancement goals of participating states.

2025 Hybrid Striped Bass and White Bass Production

Nineteen White bass females were spawned at BFC during 2025 and fertilized with milt from 14 Striped bass males to produce Sunshine bass (Hybrid striped bass). A total of 3,676,000 sunshine bass fry were produced from these spawns, with fertilization rates ranging from 15% - 70% with an average fertilization rate of 52%. All Sunshine bass fry were transported to FWC's Florida Bass Conservation Center @ Richloam State Fish Hatchery (FBCC) for fingerling grow-out prior to stocking. A total of 505,604 fingerlings were recovered at harvest and stocked in Florida waterbodies. Additionally, 250,000 Palmetto bass (*M. saxatilis* ♀ *x M. chrysops* ♂) fry were obtained from Richmond Hill State Fish Hatchery (Ga.) and stocked in FBCC fingerling grow-out ponds yielding 161,046 HSB fingerlings that were stocked in Florida waterbodies. An additional 140,000 Palmetto bass fingerlings were obtained from Dawson (Ga.) State Fish Hatchery and stocked in Florida waterbodies to assist in meeting FWC Hybrid striped bass stocking requests. In total, 806,650 HSB fingerlings were stocked in Florida waters during spring 2025 including 301,046 fingerlings obtained from Georgia DNR hatcheries in a cooperative effort between the two agencies.

Two White bass females and 4 White bass males were utilized for spawning for White bass fry production and fingerling grow-out at BFC. Two successful spawns produced 270,000 White bass fry. Fry were stocked in 2 ponds (0.9 ha. total) for grow-out yielding 56,414 fingerlings which were stocked in the Ochlockonee River.

Atlantic Striped Bass Production/Stocking:

Approximately 28,000 Atlantic Striped Bass fingerlings were produced and stocked by Welaka National Fish Hatchery into the St. Johns River at Welaka, Florida. Fry for grow-out were received from South Carolina Department of Natural Resource's Jack D. Bayless Hatchery or spawned at Welaka NFH.

Gulf Striped Bass Regulation Evaluation on Lower Ochlockonee River:

Contact name: Stephen Stang
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Exploitation data collected in Lake Talquin and the tailrace during 2021 revealed that limited cohorts of sexually mature fish were heavily targeted by anglers before and during broodfish collection efforts, which also take place primarily in the tailrace. As a result, a new regulation aimed at reducing harvest of the sexually mature fish required for hatchery production took effect in January 2023. The new regulation allows anglers to harvest three Striped Bass per person per day with only one fish greater than 609 mm TL (24") in the lower Ochlockonee River (including Lake Talquin's tailrace) and all its associated tributaries. The primary goal of this regulation is to reduce the harvest of sexually mature Striped Bass in the lower Ochlockonee

River during the months with the highest angling pressure and when/where annual broodstock collections occur.

To evaluate this regulation, follow-up exploitation studies were conducted in 2024 and 2025 to compare to the pre-regulation change exploitation data that was collected in 2021. Additionally, access creel surveys were conducted from February through May in 2024 and 2025 in Lake Talquin's tailrace. Results from the creel survey were paired with total effort estimates derived from game cameras mounted below Jackson Bluff Dam to estimate Striped Bass effort, catch, and harvest in the tailrace during the peak-seasons in 2024 and 2025.

The results of the 2024 exploitation study didn't indicate a reduction in overall exploitation of fish >24" TL (35%) compared to 2021 (31%). However, exploitation was likely inflated in 2024 because there were fewer adults in the fishery (pressure was more heavily focused on fewer fish) in 2024 due to a weak age-4 year class resulting from low stocking numbers in 2020 and lower winter-spring flows (reduced escapement from reservoir) compared to 2021. The results of the exploitation study in 2025, a year with more typical age-3 and age-4 year classes, did show a significant reduction in overall exploitation of fish >24" TL (17%) compared to 2021 (31%). The results of the exploitation studies suggest that during years where strong adult year classes of adults exist in the tailrace (high stocking survival and escapement from reservoir), the new regulation is effective at reducing exploitation of fish >24" TL.

There were 1,794 (± 1.9) hours of Striped Bass effort in 2024 and 2,051 (± 1.58) hours of Striped Bass effort in 2025. Catch rates of Striped Bass ≥ 24" TL ranged from 0.24 (± 0.04) fish per hour in 2024 to 0.43 (± 0.06) fish per hour in 2025. It was estimated that 163/411 (39%) of Striped Bass ≥ 24" TL caught in 2024 and 373/919 (41%) of Striped Bass ≥ 24" TL caught in 2025 were released. Based on observed catch rates per angling trip, it was estimated that Striped Bass ≥ 24" TL were protected from harvest on 21% and 39% of trips during the 2024 and 2025 seasons, respectively. For comparison, the old regulation would have protected Striped Bass ≥ 24" TL from harvest on an estimated 1% and 6% of trips during the 2024 and 2025 seasons, respectively. These findings suggest that to date, the new regulation has protected more Striped Bass >24" TL from harvest than the old regulation would have. As angler catch rates of Striped Bass >24" TL increases, the proportion of angler trips catching more than one Striped Bass >24" TL increases, as does the occurrence of mandatory release due to the regulation. This suggests that the new regulation will have a greater impact on protecting fish >24" TL from harvest as older fish contribute (or exist) in the fishery.

Gulf Striped Bass Acoustic Telemetry Project in Pensacola Bay:

Contact Name: Bradford Warland
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During the Winter and spring of 2023-2024 a total of 20 Vemco Acoustic tags were implanted in Striped Bass (425mm-1050mm) in the Blackwater River and Blackwater Bay. These tags were passively monitored with a fixed telemetry array throughout the Pensacola Bay watershed (N=76 receivers) and supplemental manual tracking by biologists to observe seasonal movements. All tagged individuals retreated to the upper Blackwater River or a spring influenced tributary called Pond Creek during the highest water temperatures showing some broad areas of thermal refuge in the system. During the winter months most individuals remained near the mouths of the Blackwater River or Yellow River in estuarine habitat, however one individual did make larger movements traveling over 95 miles in one month ending in the Escambia River, a tributary of Pensacola Bay that is not currently stocked with Striped Bass.

During the winter of 2024-2025 an additional 16 Striped Bass have been tagged with 4 more tags to be deployed by spring. Passive and active acoustic monitoring will continue to take place to observe thermal refuge use and help identify spawning aggregations in the spring that may aid in broodstock collection for hatchery production.

Georgia

Name of Representative: Kyle Rempe

Region 2 Reservoir Report (Josh Stafford)

Spring sampling for striped bass in Lanier showed that there are really good numbers (almost twice the historical amount) of Preferable size class (30-35 inch) from a strong 2018-2019 year class. Local anglers have corroborated these numbers by reporting increased catch rates of fish in this size class.

Worked with local striped bass angler clubs to modify a tournament creel survey that Hunter Roop put together with them in the past. This survey collects valuable data such as CPUE, angling techniques, and fish metrics.

Gill lice/Achtheres have been reported on striped bass in Lanier for several years. Previous biologists have monitored the amount of gill lice observed on individual striped bass during spring sampling. That has not been done in a few years so we will be collecting that data again this year to continue our long term data set on gill lice prevalence on striped bass in Lanier.

Region 2 Reservoir Report (Kyle Rempe)

Lake Hartwell had some productive Morone sampling in 2025, with multiple large 10 -20 lb Striped Bass individuals caught during spring electrofishing scouting runs and higher than average catch rates for Hybrid Striped Bass and Striped Bass during fall gill netting. Lake levels were down a few feet compared to the normal fall pool, so that likely had a large impact on those heightened CPUEs.

After speaking with SCDNR biologists at this year's border waters meeting, GADNR plans on increasing Striped Bass stocking rates in Hartwell as production allows for spring 2026. GADNR currently contributes around 111,900 (2 fish /acre) fingerlings annually in the 55,900-acre reservoir and was last scaled back due to the summer 2018 die off event.

Gill net sampling and angler reports on Lake Yonah have turned up a few Hybrid Striped Bass individuals in the lake despite no stocking efforts occurring there or in upstream reservoirs. This is likely due to bucket biologists from around the area, with Flathead Catfish also showing up in recent sampling events.

Region 3 Reservoir Report (Aaron Gray)

Last year, GADNR stocked 270,000 Striped Bass, 446,000 Hybrid Striped Bass, and 80,000 White Bass fingerlings into Clarks Hill.

GADNR appreciates the Clarks Hill Striper Club for their volunteer support of habitat enhancement efforts on the reservoir, as well as sharing their tournament data with the agency.

Region 6 River Report (Matt Phillips)

Flathead Catfish have established populations in all major coastal river systems in Georgia. These non-native fish pose a direct threat to the recruitment of Striped Bass in the Savannah River, which is almost entirely dependent on hatchery supplementation. In the fall of 2024, Georgia DNR staff began removing and assessing gut contents of Flathead Catfish from stocking locations of phase II Striped Bass in the lower Savannah River. A total of 112.5 Kg of Flathead Catfish biomass (96 individuals) was removed over 7.7 hours of electrofishing effort. One individual, measuring 600 mm TL, was observed with three recently stocked Striped Bass in its stomach, highlighting the potential negative impact of this non-native species on Striped Bass recruitment within the system.

To provide a rough assessment of the effect of Flathead removal effort on the recruitment of Striped Bass stocked in 2024, I compared the CPUE of age-2 Striped Bass captured during electrofishing samples on the lower Savannah River in 2025 and 2026. Age-2 Striped Bass captured in 2025 correspond to a stocking date in 2023, the year prior to Flathead removal effort. Preliminary results from electrofishing samples in 2026 indicate that Flathead removal efforts had a positive impact on Striped Bass recruitment in the Savannah River. Samples conducted in

2026 have produced a CPUE of 7.4 age-2 Striped Bass per hour (8.6 hrs of effort), compared to a CPUE of 1.1 age-2 Striped Bass in 2025 (19.5 hrs of effort).

Flathead removal effort increased in 2025, which removed 388.4 Kg of Flathead biomass from the Savannah River. We are hopeful that the CPUE of age-2 Striped Bass in the spring of 2027 will show a continued increase in recruitment as we continue to remove Flathead Catfish biomass from the lower Savannah River. However, further research will be necessary to determine whether increases in age-2 Striped Bass CPUE are influenced by other factors, including natural recruitment variability.

Production Report (Alex Cummins)

During 2025, Georgia DNR produced 5.7 million striped bass fry and 6.4 million reciprocal hybrid striped bass fry for stocking hatchery ponds across the state. Production of striped bass fry averaged 27,005 fry per pound of female. Additionally, we only required 11 female striped bass brood fish from Region 1 to meet our annual production needs. Reciprocal hybrid striped bass production averaged 45,316 fry per female white bass. A total of 1.2 million striped bass, 2.3 million hybrid striped bass, and 171,000 white bass were stocked by DNR into 21 reservoirs and 1 rivers across the state throughout 2025. Approximately 250,000 Hybrid Striped Bass fingerlings were sent to Tennessee and Florida in exchange for other species.

Kentucky

Name of Representative: Marcy Anderson

Statewide Morone Management Plan

During 2025, the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources (KDFWR) Morone Committee continued revising the draft statewide Morone management plan and working on associated documents, including historic stocking tables, history of regulations on Morone fisheries, and standardized sampling protocols.

Hatchery Production

Striped Bass fry were obtained from TWRA, and Hybrid Striped Bass fry were purchased from Keo. Fish were grown out at Minor Clark Fish Hatchery near Morehead. In 2025, a total of 581,517 Striped Bass were stocked in one lake (Lake Cumberland) and two tailwaters (Kentucky and Barkley) at an average size of 1.6 inches. Although production goals were met for Lake Cumberland (500,000), the stocking in the tailwaters fell short of the production goal of 100,000 Striped Bass. 1,075,802 Hybrid Striped Bass were stocked in eight lakes and two river systems at an average size of 1.6 inches.

Lake Cumberland

On Lake Cumberland (50,250 acres), Striped Bass were stocked at a rate of 10.0 fish per acre (500,076 total) and met the planned stocking goals of 10.0 fish per acre. 2025 was a fall gill net sampling year, and for the second consecutive fall sample, catch rates were down despite anglers having a successful year. Growth rates remain strong, with age 2 Striped Bass averaging 23.0 inches during the fall, and the 2023- and 2024-year classes made up 60% of the fish sampled. Water quality was poor in the late summer and fall, but no Striped Bass mortality was observed and fish looked in relatively good condition.

Lake Cumberland Oxygen Injection System

Work continued in 2025 to install an oxygen injection system that was placed in the forebay of Wolf Creek Dam. The goal of the system is to improve oxygen levels near the turbine intakes to meet mandatory oxygen levels in the tailwater without having to operate sluice gates in the late summer and fall. The system came online in October 2025. Currently, we are leaving the area open to fishing but will be monitoring usage and will adjust regulations if needed.

Commercial Fishing Guides: Reporting and Licensing

Mandatory reporting for all commercial fishing and hunting guides was initiated in March 2024, and fishing guides are required to submit completed trip data, including number of anglers, hours fished, number of legal fish harvested, and number of sublegal and legal fish released, on a monthly basis. Statewide in 2025, 51 fishing guides completed 2,648 trips targeting Morone species, and these guides took out 8,292 anglers and fished a total of 12,694 hours. Seventy-five percent of the targeted Morone trips occurred on Lake Cumberland (1,988 trips) and accounted for 80% of the anglers (6,652) and 75% of the fishing hours (9,486). On Lake Cumberland, 8,023 Striped Bass were harvested, 167 legal-sized (22 inches minimum length limit) were released, and 2,516 sublegal fish were caught and released. Kentucky Lake and Lake Barkley and the associated tailwaters accounted for 20% of the total Morone trips, with most of the effort going towards White Bass and Yellow Bass.

Commercial fishing guides are now operating under a tiered licensing system. Under this system, fishing outfitters fall into two tiers: Tier 1 (no guides under them)- $264.25 Resident/$1,057.00 Non-Resident and Tier 2 (1 or more guides)- $792.75 Resident/$1,585.50 Non-Resident. Guide licenses are $105.70 Resident/$422.80 Non-Resident.

Louisiana

Name of Representative: Jonathan Winslow

Striped Bass Acoustic Telemetry Project

After sampling through the winter (late 2024/early 2025) into early spring 2025 with limited success, LDWF was able to work with MDWFP on April 2, 2025 to collect Striped Bass (n=27) near the tailrace of Ross Barnett Reservoir and the low head dam at Waterworks Curve. These fish were transported to Booker Fowler Fish Hatchery where they were held in a pond until tagging day, April 10, 2025. On that date, with assistance from USFWS, we surgically implanted Innovasea transmitters (10, V13x; 10, V92x) into 20 Striped Bass. We held the tagged fish in round tanks for the next 2 days to assess post-surgery health. Unfortunately, 11 of the 20 Striped Bass perished during the observation period due to an outbreak of Saprolegnia. The 9 Striped Bass that survived (5, V13x; 4, V92x) were released into the Pearl River on April 15, 2025. On December 10, 2025, 2 more Striped Bass donated by Cole Cochran with Private John Allen Fish Hatchery were outfitted with V13x transmitters and released into the Pearl River on the same day. This brings the total number of active transmitters to 11. LDWF is planning to implant the 9 remaining transmitters in Striped Bass in late winter / early spring of 2026.

The 16 receivers loaned to LDWF by the USFWS are being downloaded quarterly. Ashley Baer and Kayla Kimmel have taken the lead in analyzing the telemetry data. With limited data available at this point, no patterns or thermal refugia have been detected. Thus far, after only 2 sets of receiver downloads, 5 tagged fish were detected.

Striped Bass Genetics in the Pearl River and Lake Pontchartrain Basins

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries is interested in determining the genetic makeup of the Striped Bass population in the Pearl River and Lake Pontchartrain Basins. Specifically, we need to determine if the Striped Bass in this area are Gulf Strain or Atlantic Strain, or a combination of both. The study area is of particular interest because of its influence from both the Mississippi River and the Pearl River. Historically, multiple states along the Mississippi River have used Atlantic Strain Striped Bass for stocking while the Pearl River has been stocked with Gulf Strain Striped Bass. With easy access to both rivers, we hypothesize that this area contains a combination of both Gulf and Atlantic Strain Striped Bass.

Combining dependent and independent captures, LDWF has a total of 37 fin clips waiting to be analyzed. Dr. Mike Sandel with Mississippi State University is analyzing an additional 5 specimens.

Mississippi

Name of Representative: Brooks Warren

Broodstock Collection Information:

Turcotte Fish Hatchery: Brooks Warren

Email: brooks.warren@wfp.ms.gov

Mississippi Department of Wildlife Fisheries and Parks (MDWFP) collect Gulf Striped Bass (GSB) annually for spawning activities at Turcotte Fish Hatchery in Canton, MS. Brood stock is collected on the Pearl River at the tailrace below Ross Barnett Reservoir. In spring of 2025, numerous efforts were made looking for viable adult Gulf Striped Bass in the Pearl River. Six adult male striped bass were collected with no adult females found. All broodstock was collected via electrofishing. 12 adult white bass females were collected from the tailrace at Grenada lake and transported to Turcotte Fish Hatchery for Sunshine Bass (reciprocal Hybrid Striped Bass) production.

2025 Gulf Striped Bass Production and Stocking:

No GSB production occurred during the 2025 spring at Turcotte Fish Hatchery. No viable adult females were collected from the Pearl River. Pvt. John Allen National Fish Hatchery in Tupelo, MS received 197,600 GSB fry from Marion (AL.) State Fish Hatchery. From those fry, 58,916 GSB fingerlings were stocked at Ratliff Ferry boat ramp on Ross Barnett. Initial requests were 150,000 to Ross Barnett Reservoir.

2025 Hybrid Striped Bass Production and Stocking:

Eleven of twelve (91%) female White Bass collected spawned successfully following injection with HCG. An estimated 312,208 fry were transported to grow out ponds at Turcotte Fish Hatchery. 64,575 HSB fingerlings were stocked into the Pearl River and 15,606 HSB fingerlings were stocked into Whites Creek CFAP (Community Fishing Assistance Program). Initial Requests were for 15,000 to Whites Creek CFAP and 150,000 to Pearl River at Ross Barnett Reservoir spillway.

North Carolina

Name of Representative: Kelsey Roberts

Project Name: Angler Exploitation of Bodie Bass in Lake Norman

Contact Information:
Name: Casey Joubert
Co-Authors: Michael Fisk, Corey Oakley, Kelsey Roberts
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Objective: To better understand the Bodie Bass population and angler dynamics in Lake Norman using a tag-return model.

Current Status: Complete. Final Report.

Project Description: This project involved a multi-year tag and tag return model to estimate harvest from boat and bank anglers in Lake Norman. The results from this study were used to adjust regulations at Lake Norman and inform management decisions for other popular moronid fisheries.

Project Name: Reservoir Morone Management Plan

Contact Information:
Name: Kelsey Roberts
Co-Authors: Casey Jouberts, Powell Wheeler, TJ Johnson, Kik Rundle
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Objectives: 1) Create a management plan using biological and human dimensions data; 2) assess angler awareness, use, and satisfaction of currently stocked reservoir populations; 3) evaluate the motivational factors driving anglers to target Morone species.

Current Status: Complete, awaiting approval.

Project Description: This management plan will serve as a knowledge base for historic and current Striped Bass and hybrid Striped Bass data, including but not limited to sampling methods, stocking history, unique considerations, and current reservoir physical characteristics. It will also include guidelines to inform stocking decisions and improve angler satisfaction, use, and awareness of the program.

Project Name: White Bass Spawning Movements in a Piedmont Reservoir, NC

Contact Information:
Name: Seth Mycko
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Objective: To evaluate spawning movement patterns in relation to various environmental and biological factors such as fish sex.

Current Status: Data analysis and final report are in progress.

Project Description: White Bass have highly variable spawning patterns and recruitment success, making angling and broodfish collections difficult in recent years. A total of 50 White Bass were implanted with acoustic telemetry tags in spring 2019 and an additional 30 White Bass were tagged in spring 2020. Spawning migrations were tracked in two tributaries of Falls Lake (located in the Piedmont of North Carolina) using an array of passive receivers. Results from this study will allow biologists and anglers to better predict peak spawning conditions, improving both angler and surveying success across the state.

Project Name: Using Hybrid Striped Bass as a Management Tool to Control Stunted Black Crappie Populations

Contact Information:
Name: Seth Mycko
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Objectives: 1) Determine the diet composition of hybrid Striped Bass in a small reservoir with a stunted Black Crappie population, and 2) monitor the Black Crappie and Largemouth Bass populations annually over 5 or more years to determine any population changes post-stocking of hybrid Striped Bass.

Current Status: Fieldwork is ongoing. Stomach collection and analysis will begin fall of 2026.

Project Description: Stocking hybrid Striped Bass, or Bodie Bass, is a popular tool to control stunted crappie populations in small ponds or impoundments despite the lack of research on whether Bodie Bass consume crappie or how predation impacts crappie populations. Thus, the NC Wildlife Resources Commission began stocking Bodie Bass at Farmer Lake in 2022 and monitoring the stunted Black Crappie population annually in 2022. Stomach content and genetic

analyses will be used to determine the seasonal percent composition of Black Crappies in the diets of Bodie Bass. Black Crappie and Largemouth Bass populations will be monitored for a minimum of five years post-stocking to determine any population changes.

Project Name: Roanoke River Striped Bass Catch-and-Release Mortality Study, April−May 2024-2025

Contact Information: Jeremy McCargo
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Objectives: To estimate release mortality of Striped Bass caught using live bait and artificial lures and to evaluate the effects of water temperature, degree of bleeding, air temperature, hooking location, and injury may have on catch-and-release mortality.

Current Status: Field work is complete, data analyses and final report are in progress.

Project Description: Striped Bass were collected in 2024 and 2025 during spring months via angling with artificial and natural bait to assess mortality. A total of 90 control fish were caught with electrofishing, 73 fish with live bait, and 54 fish with artificial lures. All fish were tagged with numbered dart tags and placed in cages mounted to a pontoon boat that was anchored in the river near Weldon. Trials were conducted weekly during the spring, such that catches were spread out through time and different water temperatures. We monitored the cages for mortalities once per day for three days in 2024 and two days in 2025. All fish in the control group survived, indicating there was no effect of tagging or the cages on mortality. Overall, we documented a catch and release mortality rate of 8.7% (11 of 126 fish). All mortalities occurred either on the day of capture or the following day, which is why we shortened the trial length from 72 hours in 2024 to 48 hours in 2025 (to reduce travel and field time). Mortality was higher for fish caught with artificial lures (11%) compared to live bait with circle hooks (6.8%). We recorded information on hooking location, degree of bleeding, fight time, handling time, and water temperature for most fish, but are still analyzing the effects of these factors on mortality.

Project Name: Ongoing Neuse and Tar Rivers Striped Bass Spawning Grounds Survey

Contact Information:
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Objective: Monitor and quantify population metrics of Striped Bass populations migrating to spawning grounds of the Neuse and Tar rivers

Current Status: Ongoing

Project Description: Monitoring, research, stocking, and harvest closures intended to improve Striped Bass populations in the Neuse and Tar rivers are ongoing. Despite this, Striped Bass population metrics remained consistent in both rivers including low abundance, low recruitment, truncated size and age distributions, and high mortality. In response, management has proposed transitioning to a put, grow, take fishery during spring 2026. This will provide access to the fishery while continuing monitoring, research, and stocking to understand why bottlenecks are occurring and determine if sustainability is possible in the future. In addition, organic chemicals (PFAS) are currently being investigated to determine whether they may be affecting Striped Bass in North Carolina coastal river systems.

Project Name: **Stocking Report**

Contact Information:
Name: Jeff Evans
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Objective: To aid in the conservation of some Striped Bass populations and to provide unique angling opportunities throughout the state of NC.

Current Status: Ongoing.

Project Description:

SPECIES	SIZE	# Requested	# Stocked
Striped Bass	1-2"	1,174,000	1,525,669
Bodie Bass	1-2"	401,500	717,453

- Accomplished production level spawning to produce reciprocal hybrid Striped Bass utilizing domesticated broodstock
- Accomplished some success with experimental tank spawning to produce Striped Bass utilizing domesticated broodstock
- Initiated rotifer culture as the first feeding for reciprocal hybrid Striped Bass fry
- Refined *Artemia* culture protocols as first feeding for Striped Bass fry
- Successfully managed impacts of problematic invertebrates for phase I fingerling production ponds (2 ppm KMnO4 treatment for Fairy shrimp, 0.12 ppm Trichlorfon treatment for Clam shrimp)
- Completed the final year of 3-year phase I Striped bass restoration stocking project for the Roanoke River/Albemarle Sound

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Oklahoma

Name of Representative: Matt Mauck

ODWC Hatchery Section (2025 results):

- Stocked 927,516 Hybrid Striped Bass fingerlings in 15 Oklahoma reservoirs. Stocking rates vary between 5-10 fingerlings/acre pending biologist discretion
- An additional 540,000 fry stocked
- Overall, 2025 was a good production year and 133% of requests were met.
- Surplus fry produced for trade w/ other states
- Byron Hatchery staff – Evaluating production limitations attributed to PH swings during high temperature swings. Treating with lime to buffer. 2025 water temps never spiked but will continue treatment trials in 2026 season.

Research/Management Efforts:

1. **Continued concern of declining white bass population and potential backcrossing with F1 hybrids at Grand Lake.** Utilizing the genetics panel to evaluate F1 hybrids produced in the hatchery, white bass collected in the Grand Lake system, and phenotypically questionable fish collected in the Grand Lake system.
2. **Fry vs. Fingerling stocking success evaluation in Thunderbird Reservoir**. Fry and fingerlings stocked within same year and batch marked for future identification of

stocked cohort and relative contribution. Results pending. Contact Information: Jory Bartnicki and Doug Zentner

3. **Correlation of inflow characteristics with annual year class formation of striped bass at Lake Texoma, a naturally sustaining fishery.** Collaborative effort between ODWC and TPWD. Mauck, Bennett, Zentner, Mollenhauer

4. **Mechanistic Insight into Gape Limitation and Growth-mediated Competition Among Moronids (accepted: Oklahoma Academy of Sciences)**

Gape limitation is a key mechanism controlling the size of prey a predator can consume, as a fishes gape is intrinsically linked to its body size and changes with growth. Previous studies have shown that gape limitation influences competition among game fishes and helps estimate prey availability. High utilization of shad (*Dorosoma* spp.) by the Moronidae family provides an opportunity to examine gape-limitation theory. Moronids are widely pursued across the United States, with five species present in Oklahoma. This study aimed to determine potential diet overlap among these species using gape-limitation theory and a common forage species, Gizzard Shad (*Dorosoma cepedianum*). Objectives were to: (1) develop equations estimating the proportion of Gizzard Shad vulnerable by size and age to each Moronid species, (2) compare vulnerability among similar-sized Moronids to identify competitive advantages, and (3) assess whether advantages exist when accounting for prey and predator growth trajectories. Results indicate that growth-mediated exploitation occurs among Moronids, allowing individuals that grow faster to achieve a larger gape and better compete for prey. Thus, growth rates and resulting size structures are critical to mediating resource overlap. Managers can apply gap-based vulnerability to estimate forage availability, competition, and exploitation, guiding decisions on whether to manipulate forage or predator populations to meet management goals.

5. **Use of harvest modeling for hybrid Striped Bass management on Lake Thunderbird, OK based on population dynamics and angler harvest (beginning)**

To better manage hybrid Striped Bass we are working on developing a harvest model that takes into account the unique put-take-grow style fisheries currently present in Oklahoma. Population dynamic and vial rate data are currently being collected on Lake Thunderbird and will be used along side creel estimates to better understand how varying stocking may influence yield and abundance of hybrid Striped Bass in Oklahoma.

6. **Arkansas River Striped Bass Microchemistry (ongoing)**

Currently a predictive random forest model has been completed for the sections of the Arkansas River where samples have been obtained (Figure 1). Mean predictive accuracy was estimated to be 96.67%, with the only misclassification being one Fort Gibson sample that was predicted to originate from Webbers Falls. Variable importance estimates from the random forest model suggested the magnesium-calcium ratio was the most important predictor followed by strontium-calcium and barium-calcium ratios, respectively. We are still obtaining more Striped Bass from

various portions of the Arkansas River, as otolith laser ablation for microchemistry has only been performed for ~120 individuals (target ~400 individuals). Once these data are collected and processed, we will begin to investigate likely natal origins for different sections of the river along with estimating coarse movement based on chemical signatures during various age estimates.

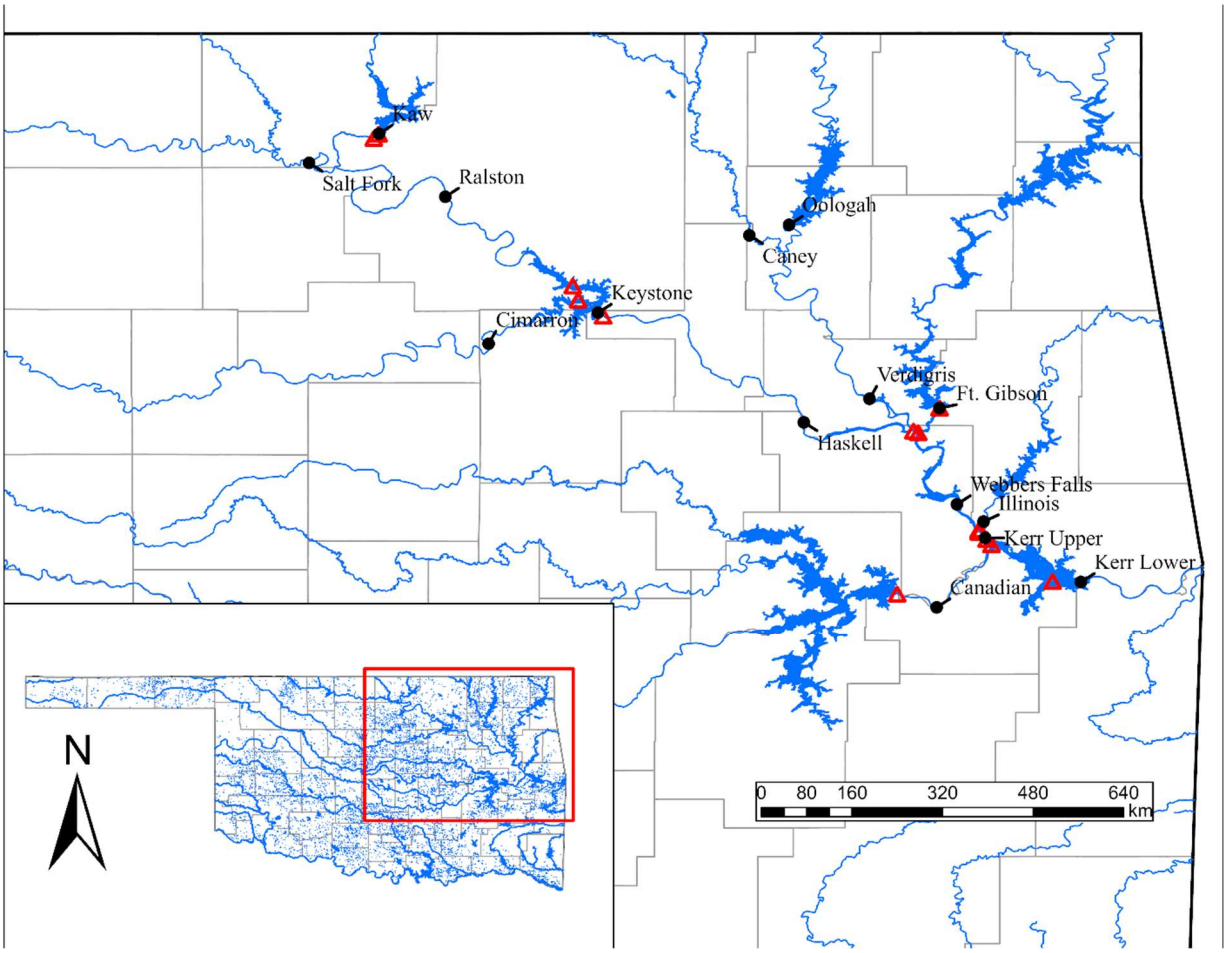

Figure 1 – Water sample locations (black circle) along the Arkansas River drainage and current locations where Striped Bass otolith microchemistry results have been obtained (red triangle).

South Carolina

Name of Representative: Jason Bettinger

Tennessee

Name of Representative: Ted Alfermann

Stocking

Morone fishery enhancements have been conducted in Tennessee since the 1960s with the first striped bass stockings occurring in Kentucky Lake. Today, opportunities exist across the state in reservoirs, rivers, and small lakes to catch striped bass, hybrid striped bass, white bass, and yellow bass. Annual fingerling production goals are currently around 1 million for striped bass and 250,000 for hybrid striped bass. No white bass are currently produced by state hatcheries. In 2025, four state hatcheries produced 1.32 million striped bass fingerlings (65-673/lb.) which was slightly more than 2024 (1.2 million). Three hatcheries produced 317,000 hybrid striped bass (138-506 fish/lb.) in 2025, which was significantly more than 2024 (198,000). Striped bass are stocked in 10 reservoirs across the state annually, whereas four reservoirs and four small lakes are stocked annually with hybrid striped bass.

Monitoring and Research

J. Percy Priest Reservoir

Annual sampling of hybrid striped bass occurs at J. Percy Priest Reservoir each November to monitor survival of fingerlings stocked in June or July. Twelve gill net nights, six at the upstream end and six at the middle of the reservoir, are used along with creel surveys to evaluate stocking survival. Six experimental gill nets with mesh sizes of 1, 1.5, 2, 2.5, and 3” changing every 25 feet are set on two separate nights.

A total of 107 hybrid striped bass were collected by gill netting in November 2025 on J. Percy Priest Reservoir. The total CPUE of 9.0/net night was good and is consistent with the previous four years. Age-0 CPUE was estimated at 1.8/net night (n=22, a decrease from 2024 and slightly below the five-year average). Catch per unit effort for fish greater than 15” was 6.7/net night, which is slightly below the five-year average. Hybrid striped bass grow fast in Percy Priest, averaging close to 10 inches at age-0 (November), exceed the minimum length limit of 15 inches before age-2 and exceed 20 inches by age-3. Around 161,000 hybrid striped bass were stocked into J. Percy Priest in 2025 (11.3/acre), which is the most since 2015 and around 50% more than the five-year average.

Unfortunately, we only had one set of parents that contributed to our hybrid striped bass stockings on Percy Priest in 2025, so we did not get to conduct our second year of the parentage analysis study. However, we do have interesting results from the first year to report. In summary, we had two sets of parents, one from GA and one from TN. Percent contribution by each stocking was almost identical to what was expected given the number of fish for each stocking. We also had a perfect match of observed and expected percent contribution when looking at two groups of fish (n=43 and 20) that were captured with gill nets. We were able to use the genetics of only the striped bass female to assign parentage, which saved a lot of effort and money not using the 15-25 white bass males. Fish were stocked at almost the exact same size; however, the GA fish were stocked a month earlier and were 0.5" longer on average by November. We hope to have our second year of data in 2026.

Cherokee Reservoir

TVA decided to leave the O2 lines operational and in place, due to public pushback from the fish kill in 2024 and that the news spread they would likely not operate the diffusion lines. It was a good partnership outcome for TWRA, the anglers, and TVA. Props to TVA for operating the lines this past summer (2025) when they didn't have to. We did not see a fish kill, but there would have been, according to our O2 and temp profiles, had they not operated their lines. It looks like we will continue stocking STB into Cherokee because of that. We did a survey of all anglers and 60% of Cherokee anglers preferred us to no longer stock STB, given the information that the O2 lines could be "turned off". However, none (0%) of the Morone anglers preferred no stocking. Their response was 100% preferred to keep the current stocking rate. Below are some of the tables from the data.

South Holston Reservoir

We have been seeing several hybrid striped bass show up in S. Holston and so has Virginia. Likely some illegal stockings or something going on. We've seen them for years, but the numbers are (anecdotally) increasing.

Creel

Angler creel surveys are administered at reservoirs across TN each year. Because of the difficulties of sampling striped bass effectively, creel surveys are our best indication of the status of the fishery. The most popular location across the state for hybrid striped bass fishing is J. Percy Priest Reservoir, which has experienced 50-70,000 angler hours a year over the past five years.

Anglers from many states come to fish for 50 plus pound striped bass in Old Hickory and Norris reservoirs each year. Most of the effort is found at Old Hickory Reservoir with 52,000 angler hours recorded in 2023. Creel was not performed on Old Hickory in 2024.

Morone anglers only

Date Range of Respones	Current Stocking Rate	Reduced Stocking Rate	No Longer Stock STB	Total
2/1/2025 thru 2/28/2025	0	0	0	0
3/1/2025 thru 3/31/2025	0	0	0	0
4/1/2025 thru 4/30/2025	1	0	0	1
5/1/2025 thru 5/31/2025	0	0	0	0
6/1/2025 thru 6/30/2025	5	0	0	5
7/1/2025 thru 7/31/2025	7	0	0	7
8/1/2025 thru 8/31/2025	18	0	0	18
9/1/2025 thru 9/30/2025	22	0	0	22
10/1/2025 thru 10/31/2025	1	0	0	1
				0
				0
Total	**54**	**0**	**0**	***54***
Total Percent	***100.0%***	***0.0%***	***0.0%***	***100.0%***

Other than Morone anglers only

Date Range of Respones	Current Stocking Rate	Reduced Stocking Rate	No Longer Stock STB	No Opinion	Total	Total with an opinion
2/1/2025 thru 2/28/2025	3	6	17	0	26	26
3/1/2025 thru 3/31/2025	3	13	59	4	79	75
4/1/2025 thru 4/30/2025	11	22	33	10	76	66
5/1/2025 thru 5/31/2025	2	11	48	5	66	61
6/1/2025 thru 6/30/2025	0	0	7	0	7	7
7/1/2025 thru 7/31/2025	0	0	11	2	13	11
8/1/2025 thru 8/31/2025	2	0	17	3	22	19
9/1/2025 thru 9/30/2025	7	0	17	3	27	24
10/1/2025 thru 10/31/2025	2	3	11	0	16	16
0					0	0
0					0	0
Total	**30**	**55**	**220**	**27**	***332***	***305***
Total Percent	***9.0%***	***16.6%***	***66.3%***	***8.1%***	***100.0%***	
Total Percent with an Opinion	**9.8%**	**18.0%**	**72.1%**			**100.0%**

All anglers (Total)

Date Range of Responses	Current Stocking Rate	Reduced Stocking Rate	No Longer Stock STB	No Opinion	Total	Total with an opinion
2/1/2025 thru 2/28/2025	3	6	17	0	26	26
3/1/2025 thru 3/31/2025	3	13	59	4	79	75
4/1/2025 thru 4/30/2025	12	22	33	10	77	67
5/1/2025 thru 5/31/2025	2	11	48	5	66	61
6/1/2025 thru 6/30/2025	5	0	7	0	12	12
7/1/2025 thru 7/31/2025	7	0	11	2	20	18
8/1/2025 thru 8/31/2025	20	0	17	3	40	37
9/1/2025 thru 9/30/2025	29	0	17	3	49	46
10/1/2025 thru 10/31/2025	3	3	11	0	17	17
0	0	0	0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	84	55	220	27	386	359
Total Percent	21.8%	14.2%	57.0%	7.0%	100.0%	
Total Percent with an Opinion	23.4%	15.3%	61.3%			100.0%

Texas

Name of Representative: Dan Bennett

Production

- Broodstock now combination of wild fish, captive brooders and full domesticated fish
- Captive brooders held for one year inside with controlled light and temps
- Domesticated brooders ~ 5 years old
    - 2nd generation held over from previous spawns
    - Seeing greater fry production
    - Domesticated fish are becoming more of requirement of sharing and/or trading fish with other states
        - Full virology (70 males and 70 females) needed if source fish are not 100% domestic
- 5-6 female and ~15 males needed to meet STBS production needs
- ~100 female WTBS and 40-50 Male STBS needed to meet Sunshine Bass production needs

<u>2025</u>

- STBS: ~ 1 million requested and stocked (5 lakes)
    - Additional 1.9 million fry and 430,000 surplus fingerlings stocked
- HSB: ~ 3 million requested and 3.2 million stocked (19 lakes)
    - Additional 3.2 million fry and 300,000 surplus fingerlings stocked

<u>2026</u>

- STBS: ~ 1million requested again (7 lakes)
- HSB: ~3.3 million requested (23 lakes)

Management notes

- **Lake Belton** shifting back to fingerling stockings
- Guides reporting two years of minimal success
- Had been previously maintaining fishery with fry only stockings
    - 10 plus years of data to support it
    - Evaluated varying stocking rates
        - 100 fry/acer was working until recently
- Potential decline from shifting to Sunshine bass
    - Gape limitations?
- Also potentially drought induced
    - Multi year historic drought for the reservoir
    - Potentially negatively impacting plankton communities and habitat.

- **Lake Texoma** underwent severe flooding in 2025
    - Effectively shut lake down for most of the summer months
        - Significant influx of guides on nearby (~1.5 hours) Lake Tawakoni
    - 2026 GN CPUE substantially lower in Red River Basin (12 fish/nn) vs Ouachita basin (32 fish/nn)
        - Red River basin caught most of the heavy rains in 2025
    - Age-2 fish catch rate much lower in 2026
        - Typically, is the largest year class collected in GN surveys.
        - Low water/drought conditions in 2024 potential cause
        - Population cycling is very common on Texoma
- Palmetto vs Sunshine bass evaluation finally wrapping up.
    - Analysis complete
    - Overall, expected results
        - Growth rates similar
        - Max size slightly larger for Palmettos, but negligible.

Virginia

Name of Representative: Dan Wilson

West Virginia

Name of Representative: Katie Zipfel
