



SDAFS – Catfish Management Technical Committee – 2024 State Reports

Alabama

Name of Representative to Technical Committee: Rob Andress

Nothing to report / No future project planned

Arkansas

State Reporting: Arkansas

Name of Representative to Technical Committee: Justin Homan

Project Name or Description: Optimizing Sampling Protocols: Evaluating how electrofishing settings affect the capture of Flathead Catfish in the field.

Contact Information:

Name: Jacob Martin

Coauthors: Tyler Thomsen

Email: Jaocb.Martin@agfc.ar.gov

Phone: 870-375-3066

Objective: Compare waveforms to optimize sampling efforts for Flathead Catfish

Current Status: Project Complete

Abbreviated Abstract:

Understanding how varying duty cycle affects capture efficiency and length distributions of Flathead Catfish can aid fisheries managers in data collection and subsequent management decisions. Two pools of the Ouachita River and a segment of the White River were sampled for this project. River kilometers were randomly selected within each study area for low frequency electrofishing. At each randomly selected

river kilometer, two 10-minute long electrofishing runs were conducted using a duty cycle of 10% and a duty cycle of 30%, pulse-width was held constant at 15Hz. Length distributions among the two settings varied significantly in Felsenthal Pool and the White River, but did not differ in Thatcher Pool. Catch per unit effort (CPUE) did not differ significantly among duty cycles for Flathead Catfish overall. However, a zero inflated negative binomial model revealed CPUE of quality sized (≥ 510 mm) Flathead Catfish was 28% higher with a duty cycle of 10 than a duty cycle of 30 ($P=0.004$). Furthermore, the likelihood of not catching any Flathead Catfish >510 mm during a sampling run is 58% higher when using a duty cycle of 30. These data suggest that a length bias associated with duty cycle for Flathead Catfish may exist and it appears that a duty cycle of 10% is superior at sampling larger Flathead Catfish.

Project Name or Description: An evaluation of the Channel and Flathead Catfish populations in the Little Missouri and Ouachita Rivers after the closure of commercial fishing.

Contact Information:

Name: Tyler Thomsen

Coauthors: Jacob Martin

Email: tyler.thomsen@agfc.ar.gov

Phone: 870-291-5546

Objective: Evaluate the Channel and Flathead catfish populations in the Little Missouri and Ouachita Rivers to determine the effects of the removal of the commercial fishing season.

Current Status: In progress, sampling will end in June of 2024.

Abbreviated Abstract:

Commercial fishing took place on sections of the Little Missouri and Ouachita Rivers until 2005. Anecdotal information from anglers suggested that Flathead and Channel Catfish populations were declining, resulting in the closure of the commercial fishing season. District 6 fisheries biologists evaluated the catfish populations using hoop nets from 2004 to 2006. To determine how the removal of commercial fishing affected the catfish fishery, we started repeating that study in 2022. The lower section of the Little Missouri river is the only section that has been sampled so far. The next two years will focus on the Ouachita River. Data collected during this study will aid fisheries managers in making decisions on the opening or closing of commercial fishing seasons.

Project Name or Description: Tandem Baited Hoop Net Bait and Month Evaluation

Contact Information:

Name: Justin Homan

Coauthors: Micah Tindall

Email: justin.homan@agfc.ar.gov

Phone: 870-318-5987

Objective: Compare cheese bait and soap in TBHN for channel catfish in small impoundments and evaluate monthly catch through summer.

Current Status: Writing final report.

Abbreviated Abstract: We evaluated catch rates, size structure, and turtle bycatch of TBHN in two lakes in eastern Arkansas (Lake Greenlee and Lake Des Arc) using Zote™ soap and cheese bait by month from May to October of 2022. We did not detect a difference in catch rates among months. We did find significantly higher catch rates with cheese bait than with Zote™ soap in both lakes. Mean length of Channel Catfish collected was larger with Zote™ soap than with cheese bait in both lakes and the length distributions of fish collected by bait type were significantly different in both lakes. Mean turtle bycatch by bait type was not significantly different in either lake, though Zote™ soap bycatch was overall lower. Due to differences in CPUE and size structure of Channel Catfish collected by the different bait types, TBHN samples collected with Zote™ soap and cheese bait should not be compared or analyzed together. Also, because we did not detect a difference in monthly CPUE, TBHN sampling can be performed during the entire growing season (May to October) in lakes with a similar climate to ours.

Project Name or Description: Low frequency electrofishing monthly evaluation

Contact Information:

Name: Justin Homan

Coauthors: Micah Tindall

Email: justin.homan@agfc.ar.gov

Phone: 870-318-5987

Objective: Determine if catch rates and size structure of Flathead Catfish and Blue Catfish vary by month on the White River.

Current Status: Sampling complete, analyzing data.

Abbreviated Abstract: We used low frequency electrofishing once a month from May to September to evaluate changes in Flathead Catfish and Blue Catfish catch rates and size structure on the White River near Des Arc during summer 2023. Twelve random river kilometers were selected for sampling and two 10-minute electrofishing transects were completed at each river kilometer. The same river kilometers were sampled each month. The two 10-minute transects at each river kilometer were sampled randomly

using either 15 pulses per second and 30% duty cycle or 8 pulses per second and 10% duty cycle. Flathead Catfish catch rates increased through the summer and peaked in July (58 fish/h; SE=7.5) and decreased slightly in August (54 fish/h; SE=5.0) and September (51 fish/h; SE=5.7). Blue Catfish CPUE increased from 4 fish/h (SE=1.5) in May to 13 fish/h (SE=3.1) in September. Mean size of Flathead Catfish was not significantly different by month while Blue Catfish mean size declined throughout the summer, likely due to increased catch of young-of-year or age-1 fish. The waveform data have not been analyzed yet.

Project Name or Description: Mississippi River low-frequency electrofishing pilot project

Contact Information:

Name: Justin Homan

Coauthors: Micah Tindall, Chelsea Gilliland

Email: justin.homan@agfc.ar.gov

Phone: 870-318-5987

Objective: Perform pilot electrofishing for catfish to inform a more robust catfish evaluation on the Mississippi River

Current Status: Sampling complete, analyzing data.

Abbreviated abstract: We sampled twelve randomly selected river miles

A one over 34-inch regulation change for catfish in the Mississippi River was discussed by the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission during 2023 but was never proposed due to low public support and much opposition from commercial fishermen. The Mississippi River has never been sampled for catfish by the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission and this pilot project was performed to help design a sampling protocol for catfish along the Arkansas section of the river. We sampled via low frequency electrofishing during May (five river miles), June (10 river miles), and September (10 river miles). Catch rates in May were low as flow was still high and dikes were not even visible. Catch rates increased in June and September as flows decreased. We did not see a significant difference in catch rate for Flathead Catfish by month but catch rate of Blue Catfish was highest in September (121 fish/h; SE=19) versus June (75 fish/h; SE=15). Flathead Catfish size distribution was highly skewed toward small fish that were captured along rip-rap banks in flow. Blue Catfish mean size was not significantly different by month. Of the 759 Blue Catfish collected during the study, 5% were over 34 inches and 52% were between 18-28 inches. A final protocol has not been developed but low frequency electrofishing in the fall similar to this study will likely be used to assess the Blue Catfish population on the Mississippi River. Other methods may be needed to increase catch of larger Blue Catfish. Flathead Catfish were not sampled effectively in our study and effect of habitat type on catch rates needs to be assessed as most of our catch came from a few sites with similar habitat type (small fish from rip rap in flow).

Project Name or Description: Flathead Catfish length and age at maturation

Contact Information:

Name: Justin Homan

Coauthors:

Email: justin.homan@agfc.ar.gov

Phone: 870-318-5987

Objective: Determine age and length at maturation for Flathead Catfish in the Cache River, Arkansas.

Current Status: Pilot data collected.

Abbreviated Abstract: The Cache River is open to commercial fishing and Flathead Catfish harvest is regulated with an unlimited creel and 16" minimum length limit. We are evaluating the population to determine if the current length limit allows for spawning before harvest. We collected 95 Flathead Catfish (39 females, 56 males) in 40 hoop net sets during May and June 2022. Of the females collected, 31 were either spent or spawning. We are still analyzing the data and ageing fish structures. We plan to continue this work in the coming years, particularly in waters open to commercial fishing.

We found limited information in the literature regarding catfish age and length at maturation. If anyone has any information, we'd appreciate anything you can share.

Florida

State Reporting: Florida

Name of Representative to Technical Committee: Morgan Winstead

Project Name or Description: Status of catfish in North Florida rivers

Contact Information:

Name: Morgan Winstead (FWRI)

Coauthors: Andy Strickland (FWRI), Ryan Henry (FWRI), Jacob Cunningham (DFFM), Stephen Stang (DFFM), & Chris Paxton (DFFM)

Email: Morgan.Winstead@MyFWC.com

Phone: 850-717-8737

Objective:

- 1) Determine the relative abundance of invasive Flathead Catfish (*Pylodictis olivaris*) as well as native Ictalurids species in North Florida rivers
- 2) Produce an age at length key from fish collected in 2023

Current Status: Ongoing Effort

Abbreviated Abstract:

Flathead Catfish (*Pylodictis olivaris*) are a large body North American catfish species that are non-native to Florida that were first documented in Florida Panhandle rivers in the early 1950s (USGS). Since their introduction, they have spread through unlawful transportation and introductions, and now are found in most major Florida Panhandle rivers. Catfish monitoring has been limited within North Florida over the past decade, with the most recent targeted Flathead Catfish sampling being conducted in 2012 on the Choctawhatchee River. Other rivers such as the Apalachicola and Ochlockonee have not been sampled since the late 2000s. In recent years, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) biologists noticed an abundance of Flathead Catfish in systems where few were previously observed, leading to concerns regarding the status of Flathead Catfish and native Ictalurids in Panhandle rivers. Due to those concerns, research was conducted in 2023 and 2024 on the Chipola River, Ochlockonee River, and Choctawhatchee River. The objectives of this research were to 1.) determine the relative abundance of Flathead Catfish as well as native Ictalurids species in Panhandle rivers, and 2.) produce an age at length key for Chipola River Flathead Catfish.

In September 2023 the Chipola River was sampled within a 48-km section between Yancey and Johnny Boy Landing. Standardized, low-pulse electrofishing surveys with two boats side-by-side were utilized to target all catfish species. Each catfish was identified to species, measured (TL) and weighed. A subsample of 131 Flathead Catfish were kept for diet analysis and aging. Lengths of sacrificed catfish ranged from 150-951 mm. Seven species of Ictalurid were collected, with Flathead Catfish being the most abundant species collected. The upper portion of the Chipola River had the highest abundance of Bullheads (*Ameiurus* spp.) and lowest abundance of Flathead Catfish. The abundance of Bullheads decreased as the abundance of Flathead Catfish increased downstream (Table 1 & 2). The ages of Flathead Catfish ranged from 0 to 10 years old with the majority being age-4 and younger (Figure 1). A mean-length-at-age graph was generated and indicated growth leveling at age-5 (Figure 2).

The Ochlockonee and Choctawhatchee Rivers were sampled in 2024, with 25 random sites selected. We conducted standardized low-pulse electrofishing surveys with one boat, randomly selecting a side of the river targeting all catfish species. On the Ochlockonee River, four Ictalurid species were collected with Flathead Catfish being the most abundant (Table 3). When compared with past data, all native Ictalurid species decreased in composition. Spotted Bullhead decreased from 43% to 6%, and White Catfish from 17% to 0.30% of the total Ictalurid species composition (Table 4). Flathead Catfish increased from 20% to 80% of the total Ictalurid species composition. On the Choctawhatchee River, Flathead Catfish were also the most abundant species (Table 5). In 2024 there were no Bullheads detected, but they had been detected in historical sampling (2005-2011). In the 1990s, the Spotted Bullhead species comprised 84% or higher of the total Ictalurid species composition, but in the 2011 sample they only comprised 7% (Table 6). This was a dramatic decrease in composition and coupled with detecting none in 2024, data suggests that the Spotted Bullhead population has been detrimentally impacted in the Choctawhatchee River. Flathead Catfish have seen an increase in their representation to the total Ictalurid species composition, in the 1990s they comprised 0% of the Ictalurid species composition, and in the early 2000s only 4% of the Ictalurid species composition. The first major Flathead Catfish species composition was in 2005 with 49%. Since

2005, the Flathead Catfish composition has ranged from 32% to 86%, with 2024 having 61% species composition. Also, the Choctawhatchee River had its first Blue Catfish record during standardized sampling in 2024, and they accounted for 10% of the Ictalurid species composition. Blue Catfish (*Ictalurus furcatus*) are a riverine large-bodied catfish species native to North America rivers but not native to Florida.

Current plans are to repeat our sampling in summer 2025 on the Chipola River with additional sampling below Johnny Boy landing and collect additional diet and age data on Flathead Catfish. We are planning to continue standardized targeted catfish sampling throughout Panhandle rivers. This will provide information on Flathead Catfish abundance over time within Florida and establish a long-term monitoring program.

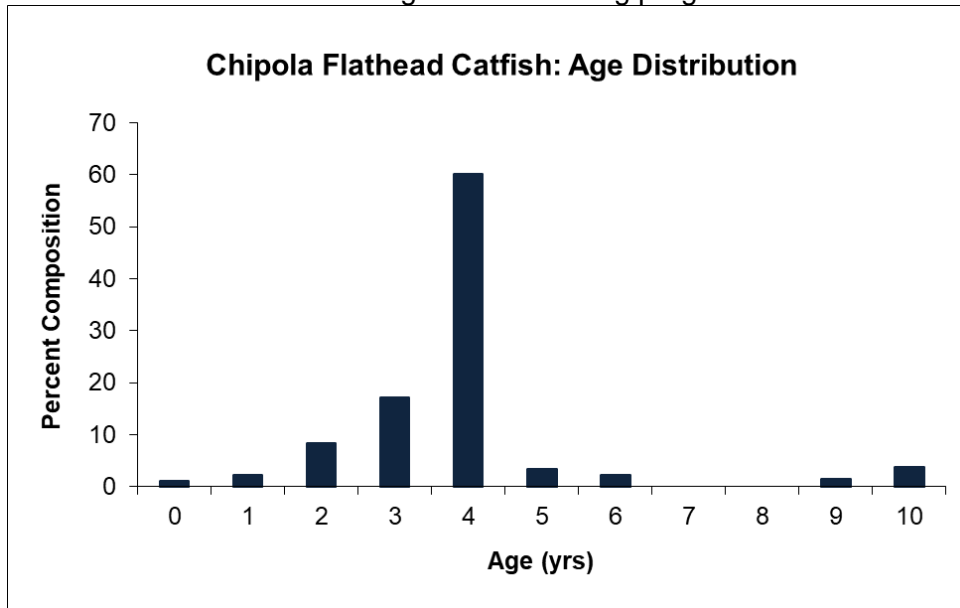


Figure 1: Age distribution of Chipola River Flathead Catfish collected during September 2023.

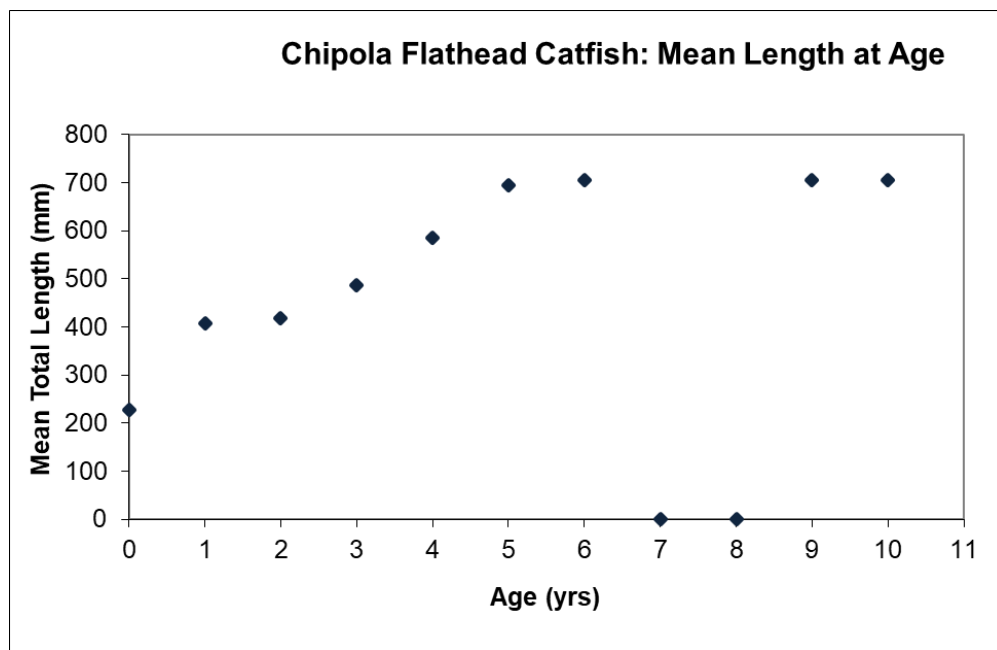


Figure 2: Mean Length at Age of Chipola River Flathead Catfish collected during September 2023.

Table 1: CPUE of Flathead Catfish in Chipola River in 2023.

Reach	# Flathead Catfish	CPUE (fish/min)
A	1	0.004
B	129	0.26
C	102	0.32

Table 2: CPUE of Bullheads in Chipola River in 2023.

Reach	# Bullheads	CPUE (fish/min)
A	37	0.17
B	45	0.09
C	35	0.11

Table 3: CPUE of catfish species in Ochlockonee River in 2024.

Species	CPUE (fish/min) 2005	CPUE (fish/min) 2024
Channel Catfish	0.36	0.13
Flathead Catfish	.31	0.73
Spotted Bullhead	.66	0.05
White Catfish	.18	0.00

Table 4: Composition of catfish species in Ochlockonee River in 2024.

Species	Composition 2005	Composition 2024
Channel Catfish	23%	14%
Flathead Catfish	20%	80%
Spotted Bullhead	43%	6%
White Catfish	17%	0.30%

Table 5: CPUE of catfish species in Choctawhatchee River in 2024.

Species	CPUE (fish/min) 2005	CPUE (fish/min) 2006	CPUE (fish/min) 2007	CPUE (fish/min) 2008	CPUE (fish/min) 2009	CPUE (fish/min) 2011	CPUE (fish/min) 2024
Channel Catfish	0.24	0.16	0.06	0.53	0.09	0.47	0.49
Flathead Catfish	0.61	0.61	1.28	0.69	0.84	1.28	1.04
Spotted Bullhead	0.13	0.79	0.09	0.56	0.48	0.14	0.00
White Catfish	0.28	0.35	0.06	0.12	0.09	0.03	0.00
Blue Catfish	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.17

Table 6: Composition of catfish species in Choctawhatchee River in 2024.

Species	Composition 2005	Composition 2006	Composition 2007	Composition 2008	Composition 2009	Composition 2011	Composition 2024
Channel Catfish	19%	8%	4%	28%	6%	25%	29%
Flathead Catfish	49%	32%	86%	37%	56%	67%	61%
Spotted Bullhead	10%	41%	6%	29%	32%	7%	0%
White Catfish	22%	18%	4%	6%	6%	1%	0%
Blue Catfish	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	10%

Project Name or Description: Channel Catfish fishery on Gator Lake

Contact Information:

Name: Matt Swerdfeger (DFFM)

Coauthors:

Email: Matthew.Swerdfeger@MyFWC.com

Phone: 863-581-6941

Objective:

- 1) Create catfish centered fishery through stocking and habitat enhancement

Current Status: In progress

Abbreviated Abstract:

This research is taking place on Gator Lake (Hardee 4) in Hardee Lakes County Park. Gator Lake is 47 acres and is an old phosphate mine pit. It historically has experienced

issues with poor sportfish numbers and several non-native fish species that enter the lake from Payne Creek. The overall goal is to make Gator Lake a catfish-centered fishery through stocking and habitat enhancement. Biologists have placed artificial and natural fish attractors in both 2023 and 2024 for cover around the lake. Channel catfish were stocked in 2024 and have been stocked at least one other year pre-2024.

Currently, they are trying to experiment with trotlines to monitor catch rates of catfish. A few have been done, with mixed success and limited sample sizes. There have been two sampling events in 2024, the first in January with four lines that soaked for six hours and resulted in three catfish. The second was in July of 2024 with four lines that soaked overnight, resulting in nine catfish collected, two lines partially entangled with alligators, and one line was a total loss. Biologists moving forward will do overnight sets during cold months to avoid alligators as much as possible. Eventually they would like to get a few catfish spawning boxes deployed and check on catfish CPUE compared to the other lakes within the county park.

Georgia

Name of Representative to Technical Committee: Jim Page

Project Name or Description: Noteworthy Recreational Angler Catches

Contact Information:

Name: Jim Page

Coauthors: Hunter Roop, Greg Abercrombie

Email: Jim.Page@dnr.ga.gov

Phone: 912-285-6485

Objective: To report catches of noteworthy catfish captured by recreational anglers

Current Status: Ongoing

Abbreviated Abstract: The Georgia Dept. of Natural Resources (GADNR) is tasked with managing natural resources in our state, including those enjoyed for the purposes of fishing. In that realm, GADNR celebrates and promotes the diversity of fish species we have to offer to the fishing public, including several catfish species. During the reporting period, the following notable catfish catches were reported:

NEW LAKE AND RIVER RECORDS:

Clarks Hill Lake – Blue Catfish – a new record 72lb, 3oz blue catfish was caught in May 2024

Oconee River – Blue Catfish – a new record 50lb, 6oz blue catfish was caught in April 2024.

Lake Sinclair – Blue Catfish – a new record 79lb, 8oz blue catfish was caught in April 2024

Lake Lanier – Blue Catfish – a new record 19lb, 5.5oz blue catfish was caught in August 2024

Savannah River – Channel Catfish – a new record 33lb, 8oz channel catfish was caught in March 2024



Oconee River – Blue Catfish



Lake Sinclair – Blue Catfish

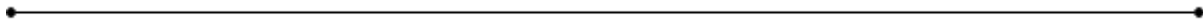


Clarks Hill – Blue Catfish



Lake Lanier – Blue Catfish

We congratulate each of the anglers who captured these impressive fish, and we are excited to see records continue to fall! For those who haven't done so yet, **GO FISH GEORGIA!!!!**



Project Name or Description: Non-native Catfish Removal on the Satilla River

Contact Information:

Name: Jim Page

Coauthors: Jason Mitchell, Chad Sexton

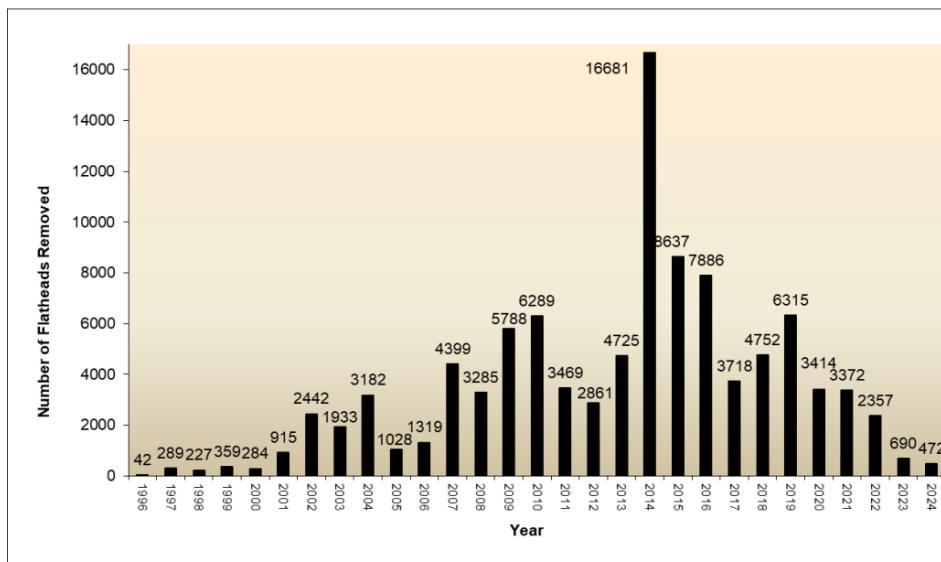
Email: Jim.Page@dnr.ga.gov

Phone: 912-285-6481

Objective: To Remove Non-native Catfish in the Satilla River, GA.

Current Status: Ongoing

Abbreviated Abstract: Modeling indicates that increased exploitation on the flathead catfish (*Pylodictis olivaris*) can be an avenue for native species recovery. After flatheads were introduced into the Satilla River in the 1990's, the GADNR initiated an intensive electrofishing removal effort in 2007. From 2007 to 2024, over 89K flatheads (472 in 2022) totaling over 83,00 kg (818 kg in 2024) were removed from roughly a 150-km stretch of the Satilla River. Size structure has changed substantially from containing many large individuals (≥ 510 mm TL) in 2007 to mainly small fish (≤ 375 mm TL) in recent years. Total biomass per effort ranged from 57.05 kg/hr in 2007 to a 10.3 kg/hr in 2024. The average weight of removed fish ranged from 2.6kg in 2007 to 0.4kg in 2013, equaling 0.8kg in 2024. Fish age structure continues to be truncated, and there is evidence for higher recruitment and earlier maturation, which would require that intensive harvest be maintained to prevent the population from rebuilding within 2-5 years. Catch-curves revealed total annual mortality (*A*) rates for the 10-year period (2007-2017) ranged from 37-63%, averaging 51%. For a long-lived species that presumably cannot withstand excessive rates of exploitation (i.e., $>25\%$ U), flatheads do seem to be responding to removal efforts. Our results indicate that an electrofishing removal program is a reasonable management option for state agencies aiming to control this apex predator, though continual removal will be required.



The discovery of 7 blue catfish (*Ictalurus furcatus*), a second non-native, in 2011 led to GADNR staff to remove this species as well. Zero fish were seen from 2012 – 2015. In 2016, 224 blue catfish were removed, including a large gravid female (840mm and Age 7), suggesting reproduction is occurring. In 2019, staff removed 663 blue cats, followed by 187 in 2020 and 80 in 2021. In 2022, staff removed the highest number of blue catfish ever from the river, with 1,552 blue catfish being harvested, followed by 1,127 individuals in 2023. While 2024 numbers were significantly down (170 fish in 2024), such reductions in 2024 are likely the result of high water levels and not indicative of a population decrease. The continued presence of gravid females suggest reproduction is occurring in the river. In an effort to better understand movements and fishing mortality of blue cats in the river, GADNR staff conducted tagging of blue cats in the Satilla River in 2023 and 2024.



Project Name or Description: Annual Standardized Sampling of Catfish on Various GA Rivers

Contact Information:

Name: Jim Page

Coauthors: Several DNR staff

Email: Jim.Page@dnr.ga.gov

Phone: 912-285-6485

Objective: To Monitor and Manage Catfish Populations in Various Georgia Rivers

Current Status: Ongoing effort

Abbreviated Abstract: The GADNR conducts standardized sampling of catfish populations via electrofishing in several Georgia rivers and gillnet in some lakes. Annual catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE) estimates are generated from these efforts and compared with historical data to assess current population status.



Project Name or Description: New or Recent Discoveries of Non-Native Catfish in GA Waterbodies

Contact Information:

Name: Jim Page

Coauthors: Several DNR staff

Email: Jim.Page@dnr.ga.gov

Phone: 912-285-6481

Objective: To Identify New or Recent Discoveries of Non-native Catfish in Waterbodies Across Georgia.

Current Status: Ongoing effort

Abbreviated Abstract: The GADNR has ramped up efforts in recent years to encourage members of the public and angling community to not introduce fish species, including catfish, into waterbodies in which they are not native. While these efforts have been well received and do seem to impact decision-making processes by some anglers, we are subject to receiving reports of new species being discovered in various waterbodies across the state.

No new reports of non-native catfish in waterbodies in which they previously have not occurred were received in 2024.

Kentucky

Name of Representative to Technical Committee: Jay Herrala

Project Name or Description: Evaluation of new recreational and commercial regulations on catfish in the Ohio River

Contact Information:

Name: Jay Herrala

Coauthors:

Email: jason.herrala@ky.gov

Phone: (502) 892-4468

Objective: 1) Determine abundance (CPUE), size structure, and condition of blue catfish, channel catfish, and flathead catfish in the Ohio River. 2) Evaluate the effects of new regulation on blue catfish, channel catfish, and flathead catfish in the Ohio River, particularly trophy-size catfish. 3) Quantify age, growth, and mortality of the three species.

Current Status: Ongoing

Abbreviated Abstract:

The conflict between commercial fishermen and recreational catfish anglers on the Ohio River has been apparent for nearly a decade, with the main issue being a perceived switch from a harvest market predominantly for flesh to a market for sale of largely trophy fish to pay lakes. In 2013, KDFWR standardized its catfish data collection methods and began expanding the effort river-wide to more accurately estimate population dynamics of blue catfish, channel catfish, and flathead catfish. On December 1, 2014 the following regulation became law:

Recreational anglers on the main-stem Ohio River are allowed one blue catfish ≥ 35.0 in, one flathead catfish ≥ 35.0 in, and one channel catfish ≥ 28.0 in per day. Harvest of fish below their respective length limits is not regulated.

The majority of commercial fishers fishing in the legal waters of the Ohio River and its tributaries are allowed one blue catfish ≥ 35.0 in, one flathead catfish ≥ 35.0 in, and one channel catfish ≥ 28.0 in per day. However, up to 50 commercial fishers (this number was reduced to 15 commercial fishers in 2019) that harvested over 10,000 lbs of catfish in at least 2 of the last 3 years along with an additional six commercial fishers, who are chosen by a lottery drawing, are allowed a daily harvest of four (in aggregate) blue catfish and flathead catfish ≥ 40.0 in and channel catfish ≥ 30.0 inches in Kentucky's portion of the Ohio River and its tributaries open to commercial fishing below Cannelton Lock and Dam. Harvest of fish below their respective length limits is not regulated.

Accusations by recreational anglers that overharvest was still occurring on the Ohio River surfaced again in 2018. Multiple meetings were held with KDFWR staff, recreational anglers, commercial fishermen, and paylake owners to work towards another compromise. Several regulations were proposed and submitted for review. At the time of this report the following regulations have been made law:

The number of commercial fishers awarded trophy permits was reduced to 15 (previously 50).

There will be no more than two licensed commercial fisherman per boat. If more are present, they may only keep two limits of trophy catfish.

A possession limit (twice the daily limit) was placed on trophy catfish for commercial fishers. This applies when on the water and when trailering fish.

Regulations talk resurfaced once again, and KDFWR suggested the following regulations which were passed unanimously by the Commission and went into effect in summer 2024:

All commercial fishers are allowed one blue catfish ≥ 35.0 in, one flathead catfish ≥ 35.0 in, and one channel catfish ≥ 28.0 in per day on commercially fishable waters statewide. Trophy permit harvest is now only allowed on the Ohio River from Cannelton Dam downriver to the Ohio River's confluence with the Mississippi River.

Commercial fishing on several waterbodies across the state was closed permanently due to low use, low harvest, and/or low abundance of fish (identified by KDFWR sampling).

Trotlines—CPUE of blue catfish in 2024 was 5.3 fish/50 hooks. Catch rate of blue catfish had been gradually increasing since 2013 until 2023. Catch rate of trophy-size (≥ 35.0 in) blue catfish has remained consistent since 2018.

Hoop nets—Catch rate of channel catfish was 2.6 fish/net-night which is the highest since 2019. Flathead catfish CPUE was 1.0 fish/net-night, and was just below the historical average (CPUE 1.1 fish/net-night). Unseasonably low flow and below average water temperatures during the 2023 and 2024 sampling season likely had negative impacts on catch rates.

Electrofishing—Electrofishing was conducted on the Kentucky River and Green River. Catch rate of blue catfish in the Kentucky River (CPUE = 2.8 fish/hr) and Green River (CPUE = 3.2 fish/hr) were much lower than expected and compared to historical averages in the Ohio River. Flathead catfish in the Kentucky River (CPUE = 26.9 fish/hr) and Green River (CPUE = 32.4 fish/hr) were slightly lower than Ohio River averages. Additionally size structure of both blue catfish and flathead catfish in the Kentucky River and Green River were noticeably skewed towards smaller fish compared to the Ohio River.

Louisiana

Name of Representative to Technical Committee: Brian J. Heimann

Project Name or Description: Lake Maurepas Monitoring Project

Contact Information:

Name: Dr. Kyle Piller

Coauthors:

Email: kyle.piller@southeastern.edu

Phone: 985-549-2191

Objective: Catfish population assessment

Current Status: Ongoing

Abbreviated Abstract: Lake Maurepas is a large (59,000-acre) coastal lake in southeast Louisiana. It is currently the proposed site for an underground carbon sequestration project. As part of the preliminary work for the project, a seismic survey was performed in 2023 to locate preferred areas for carbon injection. Through the normal course of the seismic survey, some fish mortality was observed due to

detonation of seismic charges. As a result, Southeastern Louisiana University has been and will be performing independent, scientific monitoring of the Lake Maurepas ecosystem. The overall goal of the monitoring project is to target the entire fish assemblage in order to understand spatial and temporal variation across the lake. One particular aspect will be to quantify population dynamics of catfishes in the lake. Basic information on condition and abundance of channel, blue, and flathead catfish populations will be collected using experimental gill nets, open water trawls, and boat electrofishing throughout the lake across seasons.

Mississippi

Name of Representative to Technical Committee: Buford Lessley

Project Name or Description: Mississippi River Angler Catfish Tagging Project

Contact Information:

Name: Buford Lessley

Email: Buford.lessley@wfp.ms.gov

Phone: (601) 859-3421

Objective: To obtain recapture and movement data for large angler caught catfish in the Mississippi River

Current Status: ongoing

Abbreviated Abstract:

MDWFP is cooperating with trophy catfish fishing guides to monitor large catfish recapture and movement on the Mississippi River. The fishing guides are collecting length (in) and weight (lbs) for catfish caught, along with GPS coordinates of the release locations. Catfish are caught using hook and line, double tagged with floy tags, and released at or near the capture locations. Fishing guides report the data to MDWFP on a monthly basis. The tagging project began in March 2020 and as of January 10, 2025, five recaptures have been reported with all recaptures occurring in tributaries of the Mississippi River. 2024 recaptures were in the Missouri River (AR), Arkansas River (AR), and Tallahatchie River (MS).

Missouri

Name of Representative to Technical Committee: Kyle Winders

Nothing to report

Project Name: Flathead Catfish Population Assessments in Several of Missouri's Large Reservoirs and Small Impoundments

Contact Information:

Name: Zach Ford (Missouri Department of Conservation)

Co-PI: Dr. Leah Berkman (Missouri Department of Conservation)

Email: zach.ford@mdc.mo.gov

Phone: 660-885-8179 x4936

Objectives:

- 1.) Sample Flathead Catfish populations in a suite of large reservoirs (ranging from 2,400 to 55,600 acres) and small impoundments (<200 acres) to determine population demographics (e.g., mean total length, proportional size distributions, age structure, total annual mortality, etc.).
- 2.) Examine the population genetic structure including genetic effective population size (N_e), level of inbreeding, population mixing/isolation, and predict the effects of low, medium, and high exploitation on N_e and reproductive variance of Flathead Catfish in each waterbody.
- 3.) Conduct modeling simulations of each Flathead Catfish population to assess existing regulations and explore the potential to improve or sustain each fishery.
- 4.) Develop long-term standard sampling protocols for managers to examine population trends.

Status: Low-frequency electrofishing (15 Hz/30% duty cycle pulsed DC) was conducted again in 2022 (Year 2) in large reservoirs (Table 1) and small impoundments (Table 2) using standardized electrofishing outputs recommended by Thomas and Morris (2020). Processing and aging of >2000 total pectoral spines and genetic analysis from sampled Flathead Catfish continued in 2022.

Population genetic analysis focused on developing and testing microsatellite primer pairs, testing primers for reliable amplification in a multiplex framework, extracting DNA from fin clip samples of *P. olivaris* individuals collected in 2021-2022, genotyping *P. olivaris* individuals using the identified markers, and analyzing the preliminary data for effective population size & population genetic structure. The accuracy and precision of N_e estimates has also been conducted to determine remaining tissue samples needed for further analysis.

Additional project sampling will be conducted in 2023 to obtain additional population data and fill sample size quotas for age-growth and genetic analysis.

Table 1. Catch statistics for Flathead Catfish in each **reservoir** collected with boat electrofishing in 2021. Ranges are shown in parentheses. Effort is the time (h) electrofishing output power was on. CPUE is number of fish/hour. Proportional-size distributions (PSD) of Flathead Catfish collected in each waterbody were calculated using Flathead Catfish length categories described by Anderson and Neumann (1996) as follows: stock (14 in or 350 mm), quality (20 in or 510 mm), preferred (28 in or 710 mm), memorable (34 in or 860 mm), and trophy (40 in or 1020 mm).

Reservoir	Surface Acres	Year	Sample Runs ¹ (N)	Fish Collected (N)	Total Effort (hrs)	Total CPUE	CPUE _{<14"}	CPUE _{≥28"}	Mean TL (in)	PSD _Q	PSD _P	PSD _M	PSD _T
Pomme De Terre ²	7,820	2021	5	49	1.69	29.0	17.2	2.4	14.2 (3.3 – 39.9)	45	20	5	0
Smithville	7,190	2021	27	427	6.75	63.3	26.7	12.9	19.0 (3.3 – 46.3)	73	35	17	5
Stockton	25,900	2021	38	109	8.50	12.8	2.1	1.8	19.9 (6.8 – 46.8)	45	17	8	1
Table Rock	43,100	2021	10	100	3.09	32.3	4.2	1.6	19.6 (9 – 38.8)	53	6	2	0
Truman	55,600	2021	59	421	13.89	30.3	11.4	3.9	18.2 (4.1 – 51.25)	57	21	11	3

¹Number of individual sampling runs conducted with electrofishing power on for a discrete amount of time (~3-15 minutes) across a range of sample dates and sites distributed throughout each reservoir.

²Pilot sampling conducted to explore habitats and examine electrofishing success for future sampling efforts.

Table 2. Catch statistics for Flathead Catfish in each **small impoundment** collected with boat electrofishing in 2021 during population marking (day 1) and recapture (day 2) runs where fish were marked with fin clips. Ranges are shown in parentheses. Effort is the time (h) electrofishing output power was on. CPUE is number of fish/hour. Proportional-size distributions (PSD) of Flathead Catfish collected in each waterbody were calculated using Flathead Catfish length categories described by Anderson and Neumann (1996) as follows: stock (14 in or 350 mm), quality (20 in or 510 mm), preferred (28 in or 710 mm), memorable (34 in or 860 mm), and trophy (40 in or 1020 mm).

Small Impoundment	Surface Acres	Day 1 Marking Run (N)	Day 2 Recap Run (N, %)	Total Fish Collected (N)	Total Effort (hrs)	Total CPUE	CPUE _{<14"}	CPUE _{≥28"}	Mean TL (in)	PSD _Q	PSD _P	PSD _M	PSD _T
Bilby Ranch	110	166	21 (12.7%)	307	1.70	180.6	96.5	20.0	16.4 (4.2 – 41.3)	66	24	11	4
Cameron #3 (Eagle Lake)	96	71	10 (14.1%)	120	1.67	72.1	11.4	39.0	28.4 (7.2 – 47.2)	91	64	42	21
Che-Ru Lake	160	44	13 (29.5%)	94	1.81	52.0	26.0	3.9	15.8 (7.5 – 40.5)	34	15	11	2
Higginsville City Lake	150	57	7 (12.3%)	86	3.04	28.3	2.6	9.5	24.7 (7.8 – 43.8)	77	37	17	5
Limpp Lake	29	6	2 (33.3%)	15	0.76	19.9	0	4.0	24.4 (18.8 – 30.2)	87	20	0	0
Little Compton Lake	40	7	3 (42.9%)	22	1.25	17.7	3.2	4.8	23.9 (10.3 – 35.8)	100	33	6	0
Willow Brook	100	72	4 (5.6%)	130	1.78	72.9	9.5	21.9	23.7 (8.2 – 38.8)	86	35	8	0

Project Name or Description: Post-regulation evaluation of a protected slot-length limit for Blue Catfish at Harry S Truman Reservoir and Lake of the Ozarks

Contact Information:

Name: Zach Ford (Missouri Department of Conservation)

Email: Zach.Ford@mdc.mo.gov

Phone: 660-885-8179 x4936

Objectives: 1) Evaluate changes in length distributions and age structure of Blue Catfish populations that have occurred since the regulation change in 2014. 2) Characterize current angler satisfaction and support for the regulations.

Status: The Department implemented a regulation change for Blue Catfish *Ictalurus furcatus* at Truman Reservoir (55,600 acres) and Lake of the Ozarks (54,000 acres) effective March 1, 2014: a protected slot-length limit of 26 – 34 inches total length (TL) and a daily limit of 10 with no more than 2 Blue Catfish (of the 10-daily limit) longer than 34 inches.

Abbreviated Abstract: The management objectives of this regulation change were to:

- 1) Protect medium-sized and increase the number of larger Blue Catfish
- 2) Increase harvest of smaller Blue Catfish below the protected slot to improve growth rates across the population
- 3) Retain the level of participation by catfish anglers
- 4) Maintain good relations with all stakeholders while continuing to promote local catfish-based economy
- 5) Provide a sustainable, quality, Blue Catfish fishery for present and future generations to enjoy

For this evaluation, three consecutive years of post-reg sampling will be conducted using methods identical to three years of baseline sampling (prior to the reg change) at randomly selected sites (from a pool of known angling sites) throughout each reservoir during late summer into fall (August to November). Anchored jug lines baited with Gizzard Shad will be deployed at sites throughout both reservoirs in desired habitats (e.g., river channel bends and flats close to timber, etc.) to maximize catch rates of larger Blue Catfish during each sampling period. This method is commonly used by catfish anglers and is effective at both reservoirs to catch Blue Catfish during the fall. Sampling commenced in August-November 2022 with data entry/analysis and pectoral spine processing underway.

Project Name or Description: Big Rivers Catfish Questionnaire and Public Comment

Contact Information:

Name: Kyle Winders

Email: kyle.winders@mdc.mo.gov

Phone: 660-646-3140 x1377

Name: Joe McMullen

Email: joe.mcmullen@mdc.mo.gov

Phone: 314-301-1506 x4215

Status: Completed

Abbreviated Abstract: To determine public preferences related to catfish fishing and management on

Missouri's big rivers an electronic questionnaire was distributed during July 2021. All licensed Missouri residents with an email address on file were invited to complete the questionnaire. A public comment period was advertised and comments were collected from 7 July to 15 August 2021.

Email invitations were sent to sport (n = 447,405) and commercial (n = 123) fishing permit holders. Among sport fishing respondents (n = 46,083; 10.3% response rate), 30,613 indicated that they fished for catfish, which ranked third in popularity behind crappie and largemouth bass. Of those who sport fished for catfish, 6,381 fished the Missouri River and 3,625 fished the Mississippi River. The preferences of big rivers catfish anglers and commercial fishers included:

- Most sport anglers fished St. Louis and Central regions.
- A majority of sport anglers and commercial fishers indicated that the size and number of catfish caught were equally important.
- Sport anglers and commercial fishers indicated that catching catfish to eat was more important than catching trophy size catfish.
- Sport anglers preferred creels of intermediate numbers and weights of catfish (four 5-pound fish); commercial fishers preferred larger flathead catfish (two 10-pound fish) and preferences varied for blue catfish.
- A majority of sport anglers and commercial fishers preferred keeping catfish 18" in length or smaller.
- Sport angler support for/opposition to a '1-over' rule (one catfish over 30" may be kept as part of a daily limit) for blue and flathead catfish was split.
- Sport angler support for/opposition to a minimum length limit on blue and flathead catfish was split; a majority of commercial fishers were opposed.

Project Name or Description: Commercial Fishing Program

Contact Information:

Name: Joe McMullen

Email: joe.mcmullen@mdc.mo.gov

Phone: 314-301-1506 x4215

Objectives: Document and summarize Missouri's commercial fish harvest for 2021 and annual harvest trends since 1945.

Status: Ongoing

Abbreviated Abstract: Blue catfish accounted for the largest proportion (63%) of the total catfish harvest and increased from 75,281 lbs. in 2020 to 91,752 lbs. in 2021. Flathead catfish accounted for 22% of the total catfish harvest, decreasing 32,840 lbs. in 2020 31,202 lbs. in 2021. Channel catfish accounted for 15% of the total catfish harvest, increasing from 16,619 lbs.

in 2020 to 21,176 lbs. in 2021 (highest harvest since 2012). No bullhead harvest was reported during 2021.

Pounds of commercially harvested catfish, by river and for all rivers combined during 2010.

Species/ Species Group	Mississippi River	Missouri River	St. Francis River	Total
Blue Catfish	91,613	Prohibited	139	91,752
Flathead Catfish	29,983	Prohibited	1,219	31,202
Channel Catfish	20,324	Prohibited	852	21,176
Bullheads	0	0	0	0
Total	141,920	0	2,210	144,130

North Carolina

Name of Representative to Technical Committee: T. D. VanMiddlesworth

Project Name or Description: Assessing the Blue Catfish population in the Roanoke River, 2023

Contact Information:

Name: Deon Kerr

Coauthors: Chris Smith

Email: deon.kerr@ncwildlife.org

Phone: 252-548-4933

Objective: Provide the first detailed description of the Blue Catfish population in the Roanoke River by assessing relative abundance, size and age structure, condition (relative weight; Wr) and mortality estimates.

Current Status: In review

Abbreviated Abstract: During summer 2023, Blue Catfish *Ictalurus furcatus* in the Roanoke River were surveyed using high and low-frequency boat electrofishing. A total of 500 individuals were collected. Low-frequency settings yielded the highest catch for Blue Catfish, with 487 individuals compared to 13 at

high frequency. Catch per unit effort was highest for low-frequency settings at 88.7 fish/h over a total effort of 5.5 hours. The length frequency distribution for Blue Catfish was skewed right, with most individuals falling into the stock and quality size PSD categories. Age data suggest that the Roanoke River population is relatively younger than other established populations in coastal systems, with age 4 being the most abundant, having a mean length of 364 mm. Mortality rate estimates indicate low fishing mortality ($F = 4.7\%$), with natural mortality being the more influential variable ($M = 29.9\%$). Given their relative abundance, potential to reach large sizes, and omnivorous generalist feeding behavior, the presence of Blue Catfish in the Roanoke River is an ongoing concern for the public and fish managers.

Project Name or Description: Distribution and status update of the endemic Broadtail Madtom.

Contact Information:

Name: Emilia Omerberg

Coauthors: Brena Jones

Email: Emilia.omerberg@ncwildlife.org

Phone: 415-609-1215

Objective: Update records, survey new areas, and provide cover structures in targeted habitat within historic range

Current Status: Ongoing

Abbreviated Abstract: The Broadtail Madtom (*Noturus* sp. c.f. *leptacanthus*;) is a rare endemic species in the coastal plain of the Carolinas, currently in the process of description. In the last fifty years, there has been an observed decline in Broadtail Madtom detections in North Carolina, where it was previously documented in the Cape Fear and Lumber River basins. The species has not been found in the Cape Fear watershed since 2001, in part attributed to exotic Flathead Catfish introduction and predation. From 2019 through 2024, WRC staff conducted surveys and deployed artificial cover structures to increase understanding of the species' current population status. The cover structures, called 'madtom motels,' had two goals: to decrease predatory pressure on the fish and to increase the chances of detecting the tiny, cryptic fish during monitoring. A few populations of Broadtail Madtom persist in the Lumber basin, albeit in low abundance, in the mainstem Lumber River, Shoe Heel Creek, and Joes Creek. This year we added a new locality to the map for these unique catfish. We located five individuals in Gum Swamp Creek in the Lumber River basin. Two of these individuals were brought into the Yates Mill Aquatic Conservation Center to begin learning about their requirements and hopefully propagate them in the future. Two individuals were located in Joes Creek also in the Lumber Basin. Two individuals were also detected in Lake Waccamaw this fall, one in an empty mussel shell and another in a madtom motel; these were exciting finds as less than five animals have been found in the lake since 2002. More 'madtom motel' deployments and monitoring will continue.

Oklahoma

State Reporting: Oklahoma

Name of Representative to Technical Committee: Jeremy Duck

Project Name or Description: Examining biases of low-frequency electrofishing for sampling Blue Catfish populations in Oklahoma reservoirs

Contact Information:

Name: Douglas Zentner - *Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, Oklahoma Fishery Research Laboratory, 500 East Constellation, Norman, OK 73072*

Coauthors: Graham Montague – *University of Vermont, Burlington, VT*

Dan Shoup - *Oklahoma State University, Department of Natural Resource Ecology & Management*

Richard Snow - *Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, Oklahoma Fisheries Research Laboratory*

Austin Griffin - *Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, Oklahoma Fisheries Research Laboratory*

Email: douglas.zentner@odwc.ok.gov

Phone: (405) 325-7288

Objective: Evaluate the accuracy of low-frequency electrofishing (LFE) size-structure data for Blue Catfish in Oklahoma Reservoirs

Current Status: analysis, manuscript preparation in progress

Abbreviated Abstract: Blue Catfish, *Ictalurus Furcatus*, are a popular sportfish amongst anglers in the United States, particularly due to their trophy size potential and quality table fare. In Oklahoma, anglers can harvest 1 Blue Catfish over 760 mm with the goal being increased abundance of larger fish. Anecdotal evidence from Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC) standardized sampling suggests that low-frequency electrofishing (LFE; 15 pulses per second) inaccurately samples the true population and may underrepresent larger size classes of fish (>760 mm), making the assessment of upper size classes of Blue Catfish populations difficult to interpret. Therefore, we designed a study to quantify the capture probability of Blue Catfish sampled with LFE by conducting a mark-recapture study in 3 Oklahoma reservoirs (Lake Arcadia, 2021; Wiley Post Reservoir, 2021; and Lake Ellsworth, 2022). We captured fish using LFE, gill nets, and juglines and tagged and released fish > 200-mm TL with modified Carlin dangler tags. Each lake was further sampled with LFE, gill nets, and juglines to collect recapture data. Size structure data suggests that LFE collects small individuals relative to gillnets and jug

lines with low overlap in the density of observations when comparing LFE with the other two gear types. Preliminary Cormack Jolly Seber mark-recapture models suggest that capture probability decreases as fish size increases for LFE, while capture probability increases as fish size increases for gillnets and juglines.

Project Name or Description: Retention of operculum Carlin dangler tags in Flathead Catfish and Blue Catfish

Contact Information:

Name: Douglas Zentner - *Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, Oklahoma Fishery Research Laboratory, 500 East Constellation, Norman, OK 73072*

Coauthors: Graham Montague – *University of Vermont, Burlington, VT*
Dan Shoup - *Oklahoma State University, Department of Natural Resource Ecology & Management*

Richard Snow - *Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, Oklahoma Fisheries Research Laboratory*

Email: douglas.zentner@odwc.ok.gov

Phone: (405) 325-7288

Objective: Evaluate retention of operculum placed modified-carlin dangler tags for Blue and flathead catfish

Current Status: sampling complete, data being analyzed

Abbreviated Abstract: Mark-recapture is commonly used to estimate fisheries metrics such as abundance, growth, survival, movement, and exploitation, but requires the assumption that tags are retained. Blue and Flathead Catfish are popular sportfish across North America. However, tag retention estimates for these species are less studied than other popular sportfishes. We estimated short- and long-term retention of Carlin Dangler tags placed between the opercle and preopercle of Blue and Flathead Catfish. Short-term retention (15-day) was estimated by laboratory observation of tagged Blue (TL 195-715 mm) and Flathead Catfish (TL 201-637 mm). Long-term retention (up to 833 days) was estimated by tagging and recapturing Blue (TL 201-949 mm) and Flathead Catfish (TL 165-1,075 mm) using multiple gears across six Oklahoma reservoirs. A subset of fish were double tagged with Carlin Dangler tags or triple tagged with Carlin Dangler, passive integrated transponder (PIT), and self-piercing tags. We used single-tagged fish to determine if species, total length, study duration, or sample gear influenced discrete tag retention. We used double and triple tagged fish to estimate discrete retention and instantaneous tag loss. Short-term tag retention and survival in the laboratory were 100% for both species. Mean discrete retention estimates from single-tagged fish in the field ranged from 97 to 100% for Blue Catfish and 89 to 100% for Flathead Catfish. Species, study duration, and total length correlated with tag loss. Mean

discrete retention estimates from double and triple tagged fish was 97% for Carlin Dangler tags, 84% for PIT tags, and 65% for self-piercing tags. Instantaneous retention estimates were similar for Carlin Dangler and PIT tags but were significantly lower for self-piercing tags. Our results suggest that opercular placement of Carlin Dangler tags are suitable tags for Mark-Recapture experiments on Blue and Flathead Catfish.

Project Name or Description: An Evaluation of limitations to Channel Catfish Recruitment in Small Impoundments

Contact Information:

Name: Austin D. Griffin - *Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, Oklahoma Fishery Research Laboratory, 500 East Constellation, Norman, OK 73072*

Coauthors: Douglas L. Zentner, Jory B. Bartnicki, Richard A. Snow

Email: austin.griffin@odwc.ok.gov

Phone: (405) 325-7288

Objective: To create a more complete picture of Oklahoma Channel Catfish fisheries and increase natural recruitment with the intent to free up stocking resources through the evaluation of spawning habitat, predation, and competition with other species.

Current Status: ongoing

Abbreviated Abstract: Due to the popularity of channel catfish throughout the United States, many natural resource agencies invest substantial effort stocking and managing channel catfish populations to provide harvest and trophy opportunities (Bodine et al. 2013). In lieu of inadequate natural recruitment, it is commonplace for natural resource agencies to maintain put-grow-take channel catfish fisheries in small impoundments (< 500 acres; Michaletz and Dillard 1999, Michaletz et al. 2011) using advanced fingerling or larger fish to deter predation (Storck and Newman 1988). Management and evaluation of stocking success of these populations requires reliable estimates of population rate functions (including recruitment). Variation in annual recruitment has been documented for channel catfish in reservoirs (Hubert 1999, Holley 2006, Settineri 2015) and recruitment can vary considerably between lakes (Tyszko et al. 2021). Also, minimal research has been conducted examining the habitat effects on channel catfish population characteristics in reservoirs and further research assessing natural recruitment is needed (Tyszko et al. 2021). Griffin et al. (2022) associated higher recruitment with increased exchange rate and volume and lower recruitment with increased total water hardness. However, a follow up tank experiment revealed no significant differences in hatch rate or larval abnormalities associated with increasing total hardness for channel catfish (Griffin et al. *in press*). Most of the previously mentioned factors that potentially effect recruitment are outside the control of fisheries managers. However, a major

limiting factor that is likely within our power to manipulate is a lack of high-quality spawning habitat (Porta and Smith 2013).

To aid regional managers in the evaluation of fisheries stocked with seven-inch fish (per ODWC stocking criteria) and decrease the cost of stocking/rearing these fish we propose to evaluate spawning habitat in small impoundments and determine the feasibility of positively impacting recruitment with artificial nest boxes where needed. Forty-eight boxes in total (24 in 2023 and 24 in 2024) have been placed in three small central Oklahoma impoundments. Boxes were checked weekly beginning in mid-May and the first year of observation resulted in a window of active spawning activity that spanned from May 22 to July 24, 2023. The spawning activity window the second year ranged from May 20 to August 20, 2024. On average, fish, eggs, fry, or some combination of the three were present for 28 % of box checks the first year and 27 % the second year. Continued installment of boxes and fish sampling will be ongoing.

Project Name or Description: Evaluation of Recruitment Variability Factors and Indexing Techniques for Channel Catfish in Oklahoma

Contact Information:

Name: Austin D. Griffin - *Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, Oklahoma Fishery Research Laboratory, 500 East Constellation, Norman, OK 73072*

Coauthors: Douglas L. Zentner, Jory B. Bartnicki, Alexis N. Whiles

Email: austin.griffin@odwc.ok.gov

Phone: (405) 325-7288

Objective: 1) Assess the feasibility of indexing channel catfish recruitment variability with single samples using RVI and RCD and 2) Examine spatial, abiotic, and biotic factors that influence recruitment variability across study reservoirs.

Current Status: in press (SEAFWA)

Abbreviated Abstract: Commonly, fisheries management decisions are based on one-time samples, which are generally adequate for assessing key rate functions, such as age and growth, but are limited when assessing recruitment. Recruitment variability has not been indexed for channel catfish (*Ictalurus punctatus*). Further evaluation of practical recruitment indexing methods from single sampling events and identification of potential drivers in recruitment variability could provide biologists with additional information needed for improved management of channel catfish populations. In this study, we assess the feasibility of indexing channel catfish recruitment variability with one-time samples using the recruitment variability index (RVI) and recruitment coefficient of determination (RCD). Then we examine spatial, abiotic, and biotic factors that influence recruitment variability across 15 study reservoirs in Oklahoma. Agreement among quartile range-based recruitment categories between RVI and RCD was 60%. The RVI

was positively correlated to the CV in mean CPUE of channel catfish for all reservoirs combined. The strongest predictor of RVI from the candidate model set was longitude and no additional predictors fell within 2 Δ AICc of the longitude model. We see utility in using RVI as a ranking tool for multiple channel catfish populations in a given region, providing managers with an additional method to prioritize stocking needs or identify candidate reservoirs for habitat improvement efforts (e.g., spawning structure, nursery habitat). This method may also provide insight into the application of improvement efforts through the identification of systems that support self-sustaining populations.

Project Name or Description: Population Dynamics of lotic Blue Catfish and Flathead Catfish in Oklahoma

Contact Information:

Name: Eric Cox

Coauthors: Devlin Carraway

Email: eric.cox@odwc.ok.gov

Phone: 918-230-8449

Objective: Establish a baseline contemporary dataset to monitor trends in dynamic rate functions, generate statewide standards for growth and size structure to facilitate population comparisons, and evaluate harvest regulations under an adaptive management framework.

Current Status: Ongoing

Abbreviated Abstract: Surveys of Oklahoma angler preferences have revealed that Blue Catfish *Ictalurus furcatus* and Flathead Catfish *Pylodictis olivaris* are the most sought-after species by anglers in rivers and streams. Therefore, catfish represent an important natural stream resource warranting management in Oklahoma. Despite their popularity, catfish population management has received very little attention in lotic Oklahoma systems. Consequently, lotic catfish population dynamics data are almost non-existent. Beginning in 2016, the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation Streams Program instituted a catfish monitoring effort for Blue Catfish and Flathead Catfish. In May of 2024, ten electrofishing surveys were conducted on the Cimarron River. We collected 110 Blue Catfish and 19 Flathead Catfish in 2024. Data from this sampling will be analyzed this winter. Currently, the ODWC Stream Program has sampled eight rivers since 2016 with cumulative sample sizes of 1,811 Blue Catfish and 840 Flathead Catfish. Max size, max age, fecundity, sex ratios, catch-per-unit effort, proportional size distributions, growth rates, and annual mortality rates are being estimated to inform management decisions for lotic catfish populations. In the future we plan on adding additional rivers to this statewide dataset and supplementing sampling sizes in rivers where necessary.

Project Name or Description: Evaluating the Population Dynamics of Flathead Catfish on Grand Lake with low frequency electrofishing, gill-netting and noodling.

Contact Information:

Name: Kendall Robbins – *Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, Northeast Office, 61091 E 120 Road, Miami, Ok 74354*

Coauthors:

Email: kendall.robbsins@odwc.ok.gov

Phone: 918-504-2303

Objective: Analyzing the distribution of sizes of Flathead Catfish at age within the population as well as looking at the average growth within the population.

Current Status: Ongoing but have collected 263 individuals for aging between 15 and 46 inches.

Abbreviated Abstract: The Flathead Catfish (*Pylodictis olivaris*) is one of the most important non-game fish species that resides in our Oklahoma waters. These fish are found statewide in most lakes, creeks, river and streams. There are a lot of people who value this fish whether it be catching by rod and reel, noodling, or just for eating. Although they are a fairly popular fish among anglers and are one of the largest apex predators in our systems (Oklahoma unrestricted state record is 106 pounds) little is known about them. Unlike most fish species in our state there seems to be no historical data sets of any size when it comes to Flathead catfish in our state, let alone in Northeast Oklahoma. Flathead catfish are generally sampled in our state via the use of low-frequency electrofishing. As this seems to work across most of our state, the use of electricity when sampling catfish in general on Grand Lake is ineffective. Whether it be due to the conductivity, salinity, water temperature, substrate or a combination of these; the data on Flathead Catfish is lacking on Grand Lake.

South Carolina

Name of Representative to Technical Committee: Steve Meyer

Project Name or Description: Santee Cooper Lakes Gillnet Survey

Contact Information:

Name: Zach Dailey

Coauthors: Steve Meyer

Email: DaileyZ@dnr.sc.gov MeyerS@dnr.sc.gov

Phone: 803-605-0271 843-809-2870

Objective: 1) Estimate relative abundance, condition, age, and growth of Blue Catfish population in Lakes Marion and Moultrie. 2) Use stomach content analysis to determine diet habits of Blue Catfish in Lakes Marion and Moultrie.

Current Status: Yearly sampling has occurred since 1984. Field work and data analysis completed for winter 2023-24 sampling season. 2024-25 sampling season is underway.

Abbreviated Abstract: Blue Catfish (BCF) were originally stocked in Lake Moultrie by SCDNR in 1964-65 with the introduction of 180 juvenile fish. Because of their potential to reach a large size, Blue Catfish were viewed as a species that could add to the sportfish community of Lakes Marion and Moultrie. Once established in the 1970s, interest in BCF angling gradually grew to the point of being the most sought-after species in the system. Currently, the fishery provides a highly valued resource for catfish anglers. To monitor the population, experimental gillnets were deployed during the months of December, January, and February in Lakes Marion and Moultrie. Gillnets were made up of one sinking and one floating section, each consisting of seven monofilament panels ranging from two to eight inch stretched mesh. Individual panels were 50 feet long and eight feet deep, making each net a total of 700 feet long with a total area of 5,600ft². Eight sites were sampled monthly (four in each lake) for a total of 24 sampling events/year. Four hundred and fifty-two BCF were collected in the 2023-24 winter gillnet survey. A CPUE of 18.8 BCF/net night for 2023-24 exceeded both the 15 year and 35-year average CPUEs of 9.7 and 11, respectively. Twenty-five percent of the sampled BCF were juveniles (TL < 500mm). This is the lowest percentage of the juvenile BCF in the past five years. The preceding sampling year (2022-23) had the highest percentage of juvenile BCF in that same time period (62%). It appears that the recruitment of juvenile BCF is beginning to recover to pre-2006 levels and has begun to exhibit the cyclic strong and weak year classes common before the drought. Restrictions that were put in place to protect the BCF population during the drought of 2006-2013 may no longer be necessary. Over the past ten years, relative weight values for the BCF population have generally decreased as catch rate has increased. This is indicative of a population that has begun to reach carrying capacity. During the 2022-23 and 2023-24 sampling seasons, a diet study was conducted to determine what prey items BCF in the Santee Cooper system are eating. The breakdown of stomach contents are as follows (note that percentages may add up to > 100% as many fish had multiple items in their stomach): empty (45%), shell (25%), vegetation (20%), fish (12%), and other (7%).

Project Name or Description: Coastal River Survey (2023 Cooper River)

Contact Information:

Name: Zach Dailey

Coauthors: Steve Meyer

Email: DaileyZ@dnr.sc.gov MeyerS@dnr.sc.gov

Phone: 803-605-0271 843-809-2870

Objective: 1) Assess sportfish communities in coastal rivers including Blue Catfish and Flathead Catfish.
2) Use stomach content analysis to determine diet habits of Blue Catfish in the Cooper River.

Current Status: Surveys have been completed on the Black (2017-2018), Santee (2019-2022), Cooper (2023-2024), and Ashley (2024) Rivers. Data analysis completed for the 2023 Cooper River survey.

Abbreviated Abstract: The Cooper River was sampled using a randomized block design with the area of interest broken into four zones of approximately equal length (~12 km sections). Thirty minutes of low frequency electrofishing took place at 4 sites within each zone using a shock boat and chase boat to target catfish. Blue Catfish (BCF) were the most abundant species of interest collected over the course of surveying the Cooper River in 2023. The distribution of BCF, however, was not equal among zones with the population abundance being highly skewed towards the lower portion of the river. Despite a highly uneven distribution throughout the river, BCF relative weights were far more similar throughout the sampled section ranging from 93 in Zone 4 to 100 in Zone 1. Von Bertalanffy growth estimates were calculated for BCF collected from the Cooper River, with an asymptotic length of 1169 mm and a growth coefficient of .09. Sampled BCF ranged in age from 1 to 20 years old. Additionally, a diet study was conducted on sampled BCF from the Cooper River. BCF demonstrated a varied diet, with the most common items being vegetation, mussels, and mud crabs. Individuals taken closer to the freshwater/saltwater dividing line were more likely to have prey that live in these brackish environments, such as shrimp and mud crabs. Fish taken in the upper section of the river predominantly had vegetation and mussels in their stomach contents. Flathead Catfish (FCF) do not seem to be abundant in the Cooper River. Fourteen FCF were collected from zones 2 through 4. Sampled FCF were in average condition, with a mean relative weight of 87. The relatively small population size of sunfish in the Cooper River, when compared to other sampled coastal rivers, may constrain the numbers and condition of FCF. Captured FCF ranged in age from 3 to 18 years old. The small sample size precluded any von Bertalanffy growth modeling.

Tennessee

Name of Representative to Technical Committee: Eric Ganus

Nothing to report / No future projects planned

Texas

Name of Representative to Technical Committee: Lynn Wright

Project Name or Description: Blue and channel catfish growth, mortality, and size specific exploitation rates in Texas reservoirs.

Contact Information:

Name: Lynn Wright

Coauthors: Michael Homer, Greg Cummings, Quintin Dean

Email: lynn.wright@tpwd.texas.gov

Phone: 325-651-5556

Objective: 1) Estimate instantaneous mortality and growth rates for Blue and Channel Catfish populations, 2) Estimate size specific exploitation on reservoirs with available catfish harvest data, 3) Estimate size selectivity of TPWD experimental gill nets for Blue Catfish and Channel Catfish

Current Status: Fieldwork and otolith aging completed. Data analysis and manuscript work ongoing.

Abbreviated Abstract: As part of the work done by the TPWD catfish regulation committee, it was identified that we lack estimates on Blue and Channel Catfish dynamic rate functions in Texas, specifically growth and mortality estimates. This project will provide a significant number of needed growth and mortality estimates and help fill a vital data gap, which would allow us to make more informed decisions regarding appropriate catfish regulations. Additionally, size-specific exploitation can be indirectly estimated when creel data is paired with other population level data. Understanding how or if catfish exploitation changes by length would be vitally important when developing length-based harvest regulations. Finally, evaluating size bias in our experimental gill nets would benefit biologist statewide by providing a size-bias correction that can be used to improve the quality of our data.

A total of 10 reservoirs were sampled for Blue Catfish and 6 reservoirs for Channel Catfish totaling 377 gill net nights sampled from 2020-2023. A total of 3,584 blues and 2,266 channels were collected. A total of 2,930 otoliths were retained for age analysis. Gill net contact selectivity curves for the TPWD gill net configuration have been estimated for both Blue and Channel Catfish and work on a manuscript is ongoing.

Project Name or Description: TPWD Angler Recognition Program

Contact Information:

Name: Grace Simms (Angler Recognition Program Coordinator - TPWD)

Coauthors: NA

Email: Willa.Simms@tpwd.texas.gov

Phone: 903-670-2275

Objective: Reporting of 2024 Catfish entries into the TPWD angler recognition program

Current Status: Established Outreach Program

Abbreviated Abstract: In 2024 a total of 93 catfish from 68 different waterbodies were submitted to the TPWD angler recognition program. This included 39 Blue Catfish (largest entry: 69.4 lb. Inks Lake), 36 Channel Catfish (largest entry: 20.25 lb. Frio River), 17 Flathead Catfish (largest entry: 56.3 lb. Lake Pinkston), and 1 Yellow Bullhead (3.68 lb. Lake Tyler - State Record). Out of the 93 entries, 13 were waterbody records, and 33 were junior angler (age 16 and under) waterbody records. Out of the 93 entries, 75 were caught by rod and reel, 15 were caught by jug-lines, limb-lines, or other passive gear, and 3 were caught on fly rods.

Project Name or Description: Angler Characteristics, Catch, and Harvest for Neighborhood Fishin' Program Lakes

Contact Information:

Name: Patrick Ireland

Coauthors:

Email: Patrick.Ireland@tpwd.texas.gov

Phone: 512-353-0072

Objective:

This is a comprehensive statewide survey undertaken to evaluate effort, catch, and harvest of stocked Channel Catfish *Ictalurus punctatus* and Rainbow Trout *Oncorhynchus mykiss* into 18 NFP reservoirs across the state of Texas. Evaluate Neighborhood Fishing Program (NFP) success in terms of child participation percentage and new angler creation. Assess NFP angling participation, catch, and harvest to optimize fish stocking schedules. Analyze angler catch using the success percentage as an index. Gauge angler expectations for stocked fish catch and harvest. Understand NFP angler expectations, motivations, behaviors, and barriers to fishing to inform the continued development and refinement of NFP offerings that may help keep these anglers engaged in fishing and purchasing future fishing licenses. Assess angler utilization, catch, harvest and satisfaction in lakes stocked monthly with Rainbow Trout versus bi-weekly and compare

those results to the previous NFP evaluation at those same program lakes. Assess Cormorant use of NFP lakes and does it vary by lake, schedule and season.

Current Status: Data Analysis – Field work / creel surveys complete.

Abbreviated Abstract:

In 2003, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) initiated the Neighborhood Fishing Program (NFP) with the goal of providing fishing opportunities in urban areas, particularly for youth. An evaluation occurred in 2003 and a subsequent evaluation occurred in 2012 and 2013. There are eight specific objectives of the program and it is essential to measure our progress. The objectives requiring evaluation are:

1. Maintain a child-to-adult fishing ratio of at least 1:3 at NFP sites.
2. Ensure at least one new angler for every traditional angler.

As the program has evolved with new sites and site changes, it's crucial to determine our current success in achieving these goals. Eleven years have elapsed since the program was last evaluated. Five new NFP sites have been added and one site has been dropped since the last evaluation. Further, five sites have moved to a monthly stocking schedule during parts of the year to potentially reduce cormorant predation on stocked fish. With these changes, is the NFP program remaining successful in meeting our stated objectives?



Virginia

State Reporting: Virginia

Name of Representative to Technical Committee: Margaret Whitmore

Project Name or Description: Bioenergetic strategies contributing to the invasion success of blue catfish. Ecological Modelling

Contact Information:

Name: Vaskar Nepal

Coauthors: Mary Fabrizio, Romain Lavaud, Jaap van der Meer

Email: v-nepal@wiu.edu, mfabrizio@vims.edu

Phone:

Objective: Identification of the eco-physiological mechanisms and strategies that contribute to the establishment and spread of this species in novel environments.

Current Status: Complete

Abbreviated Abstract:

Blue catfish *Ictalurus furcatus* is an invasive species in many lakes and coastal rivers of the eastern United States. Due to high population densities and negative effects on native species, the potential for blue catfish to invade and colonize aquatic ecosystems is a key management concern. In addition, managers are interested in understanding the efficacy of harvest removals for controlling population sizes of blue catfish in these systems. These issues would benefit from identification of the eco-physiological mechanisms and strategies that contribute to the establishment and spread of this species in novel environments. In this study, we developed a full life-cycle bioenergetics model for blue catfish based on Dynamic Energy Budget (DEB) theory. We found that blue catfish have low maintenance costs but relatively high reserve capacity, two traits that help explain the success of this invasive species. Specifically, blue catfish seem well adapted for life in low and spatially or temporally patchy food conditions, such that individuals can mature and potentially reproduce even when food levels are as low as 13 % of maximum. Blue catfish may thus outcompete native species in many habitats, including those in estuarine systems. Moreover, blue catfish allocate a large fraction (42 %) of assimilated energy towards reproductive processes. Changes in food availability due to competition can have substantial compensatory effects on the age and size at first reproduction, maximum size, and reproduction rates of blue catfish. At seasonal scales, however, the reproductive output of large individuals is relatively insensitive to food availability during the spawning season. Managers seeking to reduce the abundance of the species in estuarine habitats via increased harvest must consider the metabolic capabilities of blue catfish, along with dynamic density-dependent processes that contribute to increased production of blue catfish in response to lower abundances.

Project Name or Description: Physiologically-informed predictions of climate warming effects on native and non-native populations of blue catfish

Contact Information:

Name: Vaskar Nepal

Coauthors: Maggie Dillon, Mary Fabrizio, Troy Tuckey

Email: v-nepal@wiu.edu, mfabrizio@vims.edu

Phone:

Objective: Predict the performance of blue catfish under prevailing conditions and under climate warming at seven locations throughout their current range in the U.S

Current Status: Complete

Abbreviated Abstract:

Blue catfish *Ictalurus furcatus* has been widely introduced throughout the United States to enhance recreational fisheries. Its success in both its native and non-native range, especially in the context of climate change, will be influenced by its thermal performance. We conducted a laboratory experiment to investigate the responses of wild-captured, subadult blue catfish to temperatures ranging from 7 °C to 38 °C. Blue catfish had relatively low standard metabolic rates, indicating low energetic demands, and hence an ability to survive well even during low-food conditions. Metabolic scope and food consumption rate increased with temperature, with metabolic scope peaking at 29.1 °C, and consumption rate peaking at 32 °C. Body condition remained high up to 32 °C, but decreased drastically thereafter, suggesting limitations in maintaining metabolism through food consumption at temperatures >32 °C; blue catfish cannot survive in such habitats indefinitely. Yet, many fish were able to survive temperatures as high as 38 °C for 5 days, suggesting that acute and occasionally chronic heat waves will not limit this species. Using these results, we also predicted the performance of blue catfish under prevailing conditions and under climate warming at seven locations throughout their current range in the U.S. We found that some blue catfish populations in southern and southeastern areas will likely experience temperatures above the optimal temperature for extended periods due to climate change, thus limiting potential habitat availability for this species. But, many non-native populations, especially those in northern areas such as Idaho, North Dakota, and northern California, may benefit from the expected warmer temperatures during spring and fall

Project Name or Description: Expanding Participation in Virginia's Emerging and Invasive Commercial Blue Catfish (*Ictalurus furcatus*) Fishery

Contact Information:

Name: Shelby B. White

Coauthors: Andrew M. Scheld and W. Reid Calhoun

Email: sbwhite@vims.edu

Phone: (804) 684-7345

Objective: Evaluate the impact of ex-vessel prices on fishing days for blue catfish, as well as understand participation and perceptions regarding fishery.

Current Status: Revisions for North American Journal of Fisheries Management

Abbreviated Abstract:

There are efforts to expand exploitation of blue catfish (*Ictalurus furcatus*) in the Chesapeake Bay to reduce the population of this harmful invasive species. However, recent growth in the commercial fishery has been limited with low ex-vessel prices thought to be a key constraint. The objective of this research is

to evaluate the impact of ex-vessel prices on fishing days for blue catfish, as well as understand participation and perceptions regarding the fishery. A survey instrument was used to collect information on participation in the fishery and perceptions of blue catfish in terms of environmental impacts and fishery expansion. The survey also included a series of contingent behavior questions wherein targeting of blue catfish was explored under different hypothetical price regimes. Robust regression models and a two-step hurdle model were used to assess contingent behavior responses. Results indicate that fishing effort responds strongly to increases in the ex-vessel price of blue catfish, regardless of price variability. Aligned with this finding, respondents indicated that the most concerning aspects of expanding the commercial fishery for blue catfish were the availability of buyers and ex-vessel price. Respondents noted, however, that the blue catfish fishery offers opportunities for diversification and may provide ecological benefits. Overall, increased development of the fishery may yield ecological and economic benefits, although concerns regarding buyer availability and harmful environmental impacts remain.

Project Name or Description: Market development for an invasive fish species: Blue catfish in the Chesapeake Bay, US

Contact Information:

Name: Andrew M. Scheld

Coauthors: W. Reid Calhoun, Caela B. Gilsinan, Shelby B. White

Email: scheld@vims.edu

Phone: (804) 684-7160

Objective: Understand seafood processor interest and constraints related to the blue catfish fishery, and assess consumer perceptions and demand for invasive blue catfish products.

Current Status: Published in Fisheries Research

Scheld, A.M., W.R. Calhoun, C.B. Gilsinan, and S.B. White. 2024. Market development for an invasive fish species: Blue catfish in the Chesapeake Bay, US. *Fisheries Research* 278, 107099. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fishres.2024.107099>

Abbreviated Abstract:

This research investigated market development for invasive blue catfish from the Chesapeake Bay, US. A small number of interviews with seafood processors and a large online survey of seafood consumers in the US Mid-Atlantic and Southeast (n = 1010) were used to understand factors influencing demand. The survey included a choice experiment to elicit consumer preferences for blue catfish in comparison to substitute seafood products and tested the effects of providing various types of information. Processors noted broad industry concerns related to labor availability and input costs and felt that expansion of the blue catfish market depended upon increasing consumer awareness and product familiarity. Consumer surveys revealed only one-third of respondents had consumed wild-caught blue catfish, though another third indicated they would be willing to try it. In the choice experiment, providing information on

production method and product origin were found to increase consumer demand across seafood products. For blue catfish, providing additional information increasing consumer product familiarity or detailing the harmful ecological effects also increased demand. Mean consumer willingness-to-pay for blue catfish was estimated to be \$9.70/lb, but increased to \$22/lb in an information-rich scenario. These findings suggest a large potential market for invasive blue catfish in the US Mid-Atlantic and Southeast, with demand dependent on consumer product familiarity.

Project Name or Description: Expanding Participation in Virginia's Emerging and Invasive Commercial Blue Catfish (*Ictalurus furcatus*) Fishery

Contact Information:

Name: Shelby B. White

Coauthors: Andrew M. Scheld

Email: sbwhite@vims.edu

Phone: (804) 684-7345

Objective: Assess the potential to expand local markets and increase consumer awareness of an invasive and emerging blue catfish fishery in North Carolina

Current Status: Project anticipated to start January 1, 2025

Abbreviated Abstract:

Blue catfish (*Ictalurus furcatus*) is a non-native, invasive species of growing management concern in NC due to its biology and ability to outcompete native species. While the commercial blue catfish fishery has grown within the past two decades, little has been done to further enhance the fishery or local market demand for the species. There are noted barriers to expansion of the fishery, including low ex-vessel prices, lack of buyers and processors due to USDA inspection requirements, and limited consumer demand. This research aims to assess the potential to expand local markets and increase consumer awareness of an invasive and emerging blue catfish fishery in NC. There are four components to this research: 1) interview fishermen, processors, distributors, and wholesalers to evaluate the supply chain and estimate production cost; 2) evaluate the prevalence of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in blue catfish; 3) assess consumer preferences and perceptions of blue catfish using focus groups and 4) develop a market strategy that increases consumer awareness of blue catfish in NC. There are several anticipated benefits from this research that will impact North Carolina's coastal stakeholders. Seafood processors and distributors will have a better understanding of consumer demand and production costs, allowing for more informed decisions on whether processing blue catfish is viable. Fishermen will have an opportunity to increase diversification within the industry, which has the well-documented benefit of revenue stabilization and reducing vulnerability to abrupt changes. Increasing consumer awareness of blue catfish as a fresh, sustainable, and local seafood product is the initial step to enhancing the short food supply chain and increasing demand. Broadly,

understanding the marketing capacity of blue catfish could have economic and cultural benefits to NC's commercial fishermen and coastal communities, while reducing an invasive population with harmful ecological and economic impacts.

Project Name or Description: James River Blue Catfish Movement Ecology

Contact Information:

Name: Margaret Whitmore

Coauthors: various

Email: Margaret.whitmore@dwr.virginia.gov

Phone: (757) 406-2168

Objective: 1) Identify spatiotemporal patterns of Blue Catfish movement and distribution and drivers of those patterns 2) Identify spawning, overwintering, and summer aggregation areas 3) Evaluate transboundary movements and spillover from commercially unexploited areas 4) Evaluate behavioral response to low frequency electrofishing

Current Status: Ongoing

Abbreviated Abstract:

Non-native Blue Catfish (*Ictalurus furcatus*) were intentionally introduced into the James River in the 1970's to create a recreational fishery. The success of these efforts has led to increasing abundance and spatial distribution of Blue Catfish within the James River watershed and has prompted concern over the impacts of Blue Catfish on native species. The James River supports an active recreational fishery and a commercial low-frequency electrofishing (LFEF) fishery, with the commercial zone limited to a 100-rkm section of the tidal mainstem. The purpose of this project is to identify movement and distribution patterns and assess Blue Catfish response to LFEF in an effort to inform guidance, management decisions, and angler outreach.

A total of 80 blue catfish, ranging in size from 319 to 1134 mm total length were tagged with V13 and V16 acoustic tags, with a tag life of three and 10 years, respectively. This project relies on the existing passive receiver array in the James River in addition to receivers newly deployed in six major tributaries to assess movement into and out of the mainstem. Active tracking methods are being used to identify overwintering areas, spawning habitat, and response to LFEF.

West Virginia

State Reporting: West Virginia

Name of Representative to Technical Committee: Macey Rowan

Project Name or Description: Ohio River Catfish Population Assessment

Contact Information:

Name: Katherine Zipfel

Coauthors: Stephen Floyd and Macey Rowan

Email: Katherine.j.zipfel@wv.gov ; macey.j.rowan@wv.gov

Phone: 304-420-4550

Objective: Assessment of Catfish Population Characteristics in various Ohio River Pools

Current Status: Ongoing

Abbreviated Abstract: In cooperation with the Ohio River Fisheries Management Team states, Flathead Catfish populations were assessed throughout the entirety of the Ohio River. WVDNR conducted surveys in the Belleville and Racine pools in 2023 and in the Hannibal and Willow Island pools in 2022. Low-frequency electrofishing surveys (DC output ~200V, 2 amps, 15 pulse/second) were conducted throughout all pools, focusing on areas with outside bends and/or rocky shorelines. All catfish collected were identified to species and measured for total length (mm). Flathead Catfish CPUE via boat electrofishing surveys ranged from 104.6 ± 18.5 fish/hr in the Belleville Pool to 41.9 ± 10.7 fish/hr in the Willow Island pool. A sub-sample of Flathead Catfish per size class were kept for age and growth analyses. Otoliths from nearly 800 individuals across the four pools of the Ohio River were collected. Age and growth data will be compared between pools for all states. WVDNR will also compare data to an earlier age and growth assessment conducted in 2010, prior to the implementation of our harvest regulation change (4 fish daily creel/one over 35") to assess any changes in population structure. Age and growth analyses are ongoing.

Project Name or Description: Ohio River Catfish Population Assessment

Contact Information:

Name: Katherine Zipfel

Coauthors: Macey Rowan

Email: Katherine.j.zipfel@wv.gov ; macey.j.rowan@wv.gov

Phone: 304-420-4550

Objective: Assessment of Catfish Population Characteristics in Winfield Pool-Kanawha River

Current Status: Ongoing

Abbreviated Abstract: As a continuation of our pool by pool, all species catfish population assessment, the WVDNR conducted a multi-gear survey of catfish populations in the Winfield Pool, on the Kanawha River in summer 2024 to add to the sample set. The Kanawha River is a navigable tributary of the Ohio River and the Winfield Pool (36.7 mi; 3100 acres) is one pool upstream of the portion of the Ohio River's R.C. Byrd Pool located within the lower reach of the Kanawha River. Hoop nets, trot lines and low-frequency electrofishing (DC output, ~200V, 2 amps, 15 pulse/second) techniques were employed. To target Channel Catfish, 45 hoop nets were set throughout the pool, targeting multiple substrates and outside bends, baited with Zote Soap and left to soak for three nights. All fish collected via this method were identified to species and measured for total length (mm). Channel Catfish were the most common species collected, as expected, but also several larger (1000mm+) Flathead Catfish were captured. Mean CPUE of Channel Catfish was 1.6 ± 0.9 fish/net night, which is greater than that of the R.C Byrd pool (1.17 ± 0.91 fish/net night) from 2019-2021. Low-frequency electrofishing surveys targeting Flathead Catfish were conducted in June at six sites (6 hrs, 22 transects) throughout the pool, focusing on areas with outside bends and/or rocky shorelines. Surveys consisted of four 15-min transects at each location with an associated chase boat. All catfish collected were identified to species and measured for total length (mm). Mean CPUE for Flathead Catfish via electrofishing was 86.5 ± 14.8 fish/hr, which is significantly higher than the mean CPUE of the R.C Byrd Pool (47.93 ± 22.40 (fish/hr). Also in June, trotline surveys targeting Blue Catfish were conducted. Trotlines varied in length and number of hooks from 150' in length with 25 hooks to 300' with 50 hooks; set according to habitat availability at each site. A total of 13 lines (500 hooks) were set targeting multiple substrates but focusing on deeper holes. Lines were baited with pieces of cut rough fish and set to soak for one night before being pulled and rebaited to soak for an additional night (two nights total). All fish collected were identified to species and measured for total length (mm). Mean CPUE for Blue Catfish was 1.5 ± 0.5 fish/line (0.05 ± 0.02 fish/hook), lower than the mean CPUE of Blue Catfish in the R.C. Byrd Pool of 1.68 fish/line/night (0.07 ± 0.03 fish/hook). Blue Catfish were more commonly found in the lower (i.e. deeper) portions of the Winfield pool, while the other two species were found throughout the pool.