

ICTF Role and Objectives 2019

SUBJECT: Revise the role and objectives of the Sustainable Fisheries Goal Implementation Team (SFGIT) Invasive Catfish Task Force to better address current science and management priorities.

ISSUE: In 2012, the Sustainable Fisheries Goal Implementation Team (SFGIT) formed a group to address the growing problem of invasive catfish in the Chesapeake Bay. Blue and flathead catfish, originally introduced in Virginia as sportfish in the 1960s-80s, are long-lived species native to the Mississippi River drainage. Over the last several decades, both blue and flathead catfish have expanded greatly in population size and range. The SFGIT Executive Committee, comprised of fishery managers from Maryland, Virginia, and the Potomac River Fisheries Commission, determined that action was warranted to examine possible negative ecological impacts and to evaluate the potential measures needed to reduce densities and limit range expansion of these fishes. The Invasive Catfish Task Force (ICTF) was originally charged with recommending science, management, and communications actions that could be utilized by all Bay jurisdictions to mitigate spread and ecological impacts.

In 2014, the Invasive Catfish Task Force produced a report documenting information on blue and flathead catfish biology and ecological impacts. It also included seven management recommendations aimed at removing biomass of blue and flathead catfish via a fishery and other means, facilitating coordination among Bay jurisdictions, and educating the public about these invasive species. The report was presented to the Fisheries GIT and each recommendation was reviewed and agreed to by the Executive Committee. Since that time, progress has been made on some of the recommendations, but a coordinated, Baywide management plan has not been adopted. In November 2017, a symposium was held to bring together scientists, recreational anglers, state fishery managers, commercial watermen, and other stakeholders to share the latest research on blue and flathead catfish. A detailed report was produced following the symposium.

Facing an uncertain path forward, the ICTF requested guidance from the Executive Committee in November 2018. Without clearly defined outcomes developed by managers and stakeholders, the ICTF concluded that progress will continue to be limited. Development of an interjurisdictional fishery management plan was suggested to define outcomes surrounding the commercial fishery, recreational fishery, and ecological sustainability. The Fisheries GIT Executive Committee and broader membership do not support development of a fishery management plan at this time but do agree the ICTF has fostered collaboration and should continue to play an information exchange and coordination role. The SFGIT Executive Committee requested at the December 2018 Biannual SFGIT meeting, that the ICTF role and objectives be modified.

RECOMMENDATION:

OBJECTIVES

The original objectives laid out by the SFGIT Executive Committee were to work together to:

- Include blue catfish and flathead catfish in public awareness campaigns targeting invasive species, including efforts to prevent further introductions;

- Improve scientific understanding of blue catfish and flathead catfish biology and population dynamics;
- Develop models that will aid in better understanding the potential impacts of non-native species on the fish community;
- Develop, evaluate, and implement a set of management measures (e.g. increased harvest and/or nutrient reduction) aimed at controlling populations and mitigating adverse effects of blue and flathead catfish while recognizing that these two catfish species currently support fisheries with economic and recreational value;
- Identify high-risk/high-value opportunities for containment and/or mitigation; assessing risk of expansion and ecological resource valuation by developing an integrated online decision support tool.

Significant progress has been made on some of these tasks. Moving forward, the team shall be known as the Invasive Catfish Workgroup and be tasked with the following objectives:

- To convene twice a year state and federal agencies, academic institutions, environmental organizations, commercial and recreational interests, and regional entities in order to exchange information and evaluate needs regarding invasive blue and flathead catfish.
- To collate and disseminate quarterly science and research updates to the SFGIT and other stakeholders.
- To continue to educate and raise public awareness of blue and flathead catfish status, impacts, and management.
- Evaluate impacts on key managed and threatened species, such as herring and blue crab, through analysis of existing data and modeling.
- When specifically requested by the SFGIT Executive Committee, to aid in developing and implementing strategic, coordinated, action-oriented approaches to mitigate the spread and ecological impacts of invasive catfish in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

As resource managers make management decisions based on the best available data, and must make assumptions when data are unavailable, the Invasive Catfish Workgroup will continue to highlight key research gaps in invasive catfish ecology.

MEMBERSHIP

Originally comprised of members from the state and local fishery management jurisdictions, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, academic experts from the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS), Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), and Smithsonian Environmental Research Center (SERC), and seafood marketing specialists from Maryland Department of Natural Resources and the Virginia Marine Products Board, the Workgroup may benefit from a broadened membership going forward. The inclusion of recreational fishermen, charter boat captains, commercial watermen, and representatives of the food and beverage industry will ensure that all interests are being recognized. A stakeholder panel at the 2017 symposium demonstrated the diverse goals and concerns surrounding blue and flathead catfish. Representation beyond the scientific and management communities will be key going forward.

MEETINGS

The Invasive Catfish Workgroup shall meet in person or virtually twice a year at which time members can share relevant updates or research projects. Maintaining a database of invasion status for each major tributary will allow the Workgroup to keep abreast of new range expansions or areas of concern. Additionally, a representative of the Invasive Catfish Workgroup

will attend regular meetings of the Mid-Atlantic Panel on Aquatic Invasive Species in order to report out on recent activities, stay abreast of other invasive fish research efforts, and be aware of funding opportunities.

DOCUMENTS AND REPORTS

The Workgroup will produce one annual report to summarize outcomes of meetings and provide an update on recent science and monitoring results. When requested, or when deemed necessary by the majority of Workgroup members, additional synthesis reports may be produced.

Additionally, communications materials may be produced and distributed at the discretion of the Invasive Catfish Workgroup or at the request of the SFGIT.