

# Invasive Catfish Workgroup Meeting Agenda

Monday, January 13 · 10:30am – 11:30am EST

**Video call link:** [meet.google.com/wnp-sapt-xjx](https://meet.google.com/wnp-sapt-xjx)

**Or dial:** (US)+1 662-967-1286 PIN: 728 052 226#

## Meeting Minutes

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### Introduction

New members introduce themselves:

- **Benjamin Simon:** economics of blue catfish, new member
- **Mike Mangold:** project leader at MD fish and wildlife- interested if office can lend a hand
- **Chris Jones:** biologist at dnr, team of invasive fisheries
- **Tammy Heath:** Mataponi reservation interested to see what group can offer
- **Steve McHenry:** Director of MARBIBCO - want to help finance commercial catfish businesses- just approved loan for new facility in southern md- funded one of the three other processes on the eastern shore

### Small Group Progress Updates (5 minute presentations for each)

**Bruce Vogt:** Background on development of small groups and action plans- purpose was specificity to help large group have progress for the needs of interests in the group

- Goal: Establish a few priorities and create actions that small groups can implement
- Bay program Beyond 2025 process will discuss later (*information will be shared in follow-up email*)

### Science/Management (Tom O'Connell)

- Flathead catfish- commercial fishermen are seeing increase
- Need to bring additional resources to science needs and partnerships
  - populations projections
  - WWF focus on blue catfish as invasive species
- Academic work
  - targeted removal/diet studies
- As chair, wants to foster more scientific leadership and collaboration, leverage collective resources better- need to take a step back and develop adaptive research framework to identify high level priorities for agencies and leverage resources to reach goals and support outreach

### Discussion:

- **Bruce Vogt:** How do you need support? Do you have what you need?

- *Tom O'Connell*: I would like to reach out to sub-group members to understand what works what does not - circle back with Bruce- need coordination and more engagement - collaborative opportunities
- *Bruce Vogt (in chat)*: Danny are those diet studies year round?
- *Danny Ryan (in chat)*: Bruce, the District Diet Studies for Flathead Catfish are from March through November.
- *Bruce Vogt (in chat)*: How does the disease affect the fish? Any issues for marketability or populations?
- *Branson Williams (in chat)*: Bruce, I'm not sure but the manuscript is: Densmore, C.D., M. Hendrix, S.R. Reichley, C.D. Raines, N.R. Bressman, Z.S. Crum, L.H. Khoo, G.C. Waldbieser, M.J. Griffin, T.J. Welch and L.R. Iwanowicz (2025). Identical sequence types of *Yersinia ruckeri* associated with lethal disease in wild-caught invasive Blue Catfish (*Ictalurus furcatus*) and cultured hybrid Catfish (*Ictalurus punctatus* ♀ x *Ictalurus furcatus* ♂. *Journal of Aquatic Animal Health* (In press)
- *Noah Bressman (in chat)*: Bruce, this manuscript is based off of a single sick catfish that we saw swimming erratically at the surface of the water in Barren Creek, a tributary of the Nanticoke. We caught that fish, sent it to USGS to test it and they identified *Yersinia ruckeri* as the pathogen. We have not seen similar symptoms in any other fish on the Nanticoke, so it is not currently wide-spread. Therefore, I do not for see it substantially affecting marketability or populations, at least for now
- *Tom O'Connell (in chat)*: Tammy - If you can share your contact information, I'd be happy to connect if you are interested in talking more about invasive catfish. I'd be interested in having the Science and Mgt subgroup understand Mattaponi concerns/needs. Thanks. Tom
- *Tammy Heath (in chat)*: Thank you Tom, yes, I would like to connect to discuss further. My contact information is [tammy.heath@mattaponi.gov](mailto:tammy.heath@mattaponi.gov) . Thank you.
- *Tom O'Connell (in chat)*: Great. Thanks Tammy. I'll reach out to you.

#### Commercial Fishing, Processing, & Marketing (Matthew Scales)

- Goal: Increase commercial harvest landings, dockside value processing capacity, and grow additional domestic and international markets to reduce blue catfish biomass in the Bay and support local economies.
- Working with lots of different agencies
- The blue catfish cake gained Child Nutrition Label
  - Being served in Caroline co public schools
  - Tested in St Mary's co and Mo Co
- Group of school chefs are meeting this spring to test more products with blue catfish
- Rewording food products helped sell catfish - gets people to eat it, seafood cakes vs catfish cakes
- Representation of MDE in ICW

- **Action Items (Deadline=2026):**
  - Work with Science/Management Small Group to conduct studies showing the density in the Bay
  - Explore the utility of all gear types to increase annual harvest, especially in the winter when fish are dormant and July-August when harvest is difficult due to extreme temperatures
  - Identify/create larger volume opportunities for processors to move blue catfish
- On trajectory to see large volume markets

Discussion:

- *Tom O'Connell*: With flathead catfish growth- they taste better than blue catfish, Have you looked into using it?
- *Matthew Scales*: No we haven't but that is a good point
- *Bruce Vogt*: Contaminant issues- how is that dealt with regarding nutrition labeling? How do we speak to that?
- *Matthew Scales*: That is why we wanted MDE involved. Commercial fishermen and processors are responsibly sourcing fish. Doing due diligence.
- *Branson Williams*: MD advisors are based on recreational subsistence fishers. Those consumption advisors are based on if you exceed recommendation. A lot of misunderstanding.
- *Stephanie Pazzaglia*: JJ McDonald processor-selling/processing blue catfish for 12 years. The market needs to grow more to help catfish get on plates. Happy for the attention from md and va- flathead are a tough sell because we need to remove the lateral line- gives 20-40% yield, making fish expensive. Not too attractive and less marketing around them. Overall not given much attention. If there was more need from fishermen, maybe MD can look into another item to add to the market.
- *Noah Bressman (in chat)*: On a similar line as getting catfish in school, I have students planning on doing a campaign to try to get blue catfish in the dining hall of Salisbury University, and perhaps other USM schools.
- *Branson Williams (in chat)*: Noah, the folks at College Park have been providing blue catfish to their students. I'll try to find a contact there for you.
- *Noah Bressman (in chat)*: Thanks! We saw that and that inspired my students to get on that
- *Tom O'Connell (in chat)*: Thank you Stephanie for you and JJ's continued interest in opening your doors to those looking to learn more about the market and processing side of blue catfish. Our USGS team really enjoyed their visit last year. Look forward to learning if there are science collaborations to leverage the amount of fish you handle.
- *Stephanie Pazzaglia (in chat)*: Thank you, Tom!! Appreciate your kind words!

- Not much going on at federal level because of farm bill- congress will continue to work on that
  - No specific recommendations for farm bill
- [VA bill HB1097](#)- concerns over legislation from recreational fishermen/charters
- 2nd bill in VA for
- DNR- invasive catfish committee- regulatory changes in MD
- MD legislation- limit catfish trotlining- link in chat

#### Discussion:

- *Tom O'Connell (in chat)*: MD SB186 <https://legiscan.com/MD/bill/SB186/2025>
- *Christina Garvey (in chat)*: <https://lis.virginia.gov/bill-details/20251/HB1907>
- *Bailey Robertory (in chat)*: From the link: "Board of Wildlife Resources; creel limits; blue catfish. Requires the Board of Wildlife Resources to amend regulations to remove the one-fish daily limit for blue catfish longer than 32 inches in Lake Gaston, Kerr Reservoir, and the James, Rappahannock, and York Rivers and their tributaries below the fall line."
- *Adrienne Kotula (in chat)*: I missed the conversation on H1907. Do we know where this came from?
- *Pat Geer*: HB1907 coming from commercial folks to control size limits
- *Tom O'Connell*: Action item to increase funding for processing capacity- but need more funding for research - are there plans for a comprehensive outlook for funding?
- *Allison Colden*: Small group only met once or twice- open to recommendations from broader ICW for policy/advocacy recommendations to request at fed/regional level. VA made strides towards creating programs for infrastructure buildout.
- *Christopher Jones*: DNR catfish committee that is meeting on Wednesday- talking about opening up south of bay bridge as pilot sp186. Something that is already on the radar.
- *Branson Williams (in chat)*: What's the proposed reg change?
- *Allison Colden (in chat)*: I'll go over it, Branson
- *Branson Williams (in chat)*: Thanks, Allison
- *Patrick Geer (in chat)*: There was a VA bill last year to fund processing. Initially, the bill asked for \$4 million. When all was done it was only \$250k. Not much to assist processing facilities.

#### Discussion on ICW Small Group value/needs:

The purpose of the workplans and small groups was to help organize the team more effectively and identify near term (2 year) focus areas. How's that going?

- Are the workplans still reflective of current priorities?
  - Are the workplans helpful in organizing the small teams to implement actions?
  - What changes are needed or what support is required to advance the workplans?
  - What are the next steps? Should we plan to meet again? When?
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- *Bruce Vogt*: Is the ICW/small groups still working for you all?
  - *Allison Colden*: I find the group valuable because of the diversity of folks in the group. As the small group leads, things get away from us easily. Would like plans set for the year and send it out early.
  - *Tom O'Connell*: Very valuable but scratching the surface of what is needed. The level of resources and effort that is needed is a lot. We need to harness interest and energy and improve upon coordination. It's important to continue and find ways to improve upon it. How can we attract the level of resources that our agencies need? Case study: invasive carp in Mississippi.
  - *Matthew Scales*: I see value. Maybe if there was a timeline/months that we should get together with small groups. Goals are broad, more specific. Re-orient people on what groups they are a part of.
  - *Bruce Vogt*: We will work on communication and timeline and address that.
  - *George O'Donnell*: I am from MD DNR, work in the commercial sector, promote blue catfish - watermen think we are making headway in decreasing biomass of catfish. We need more accessible meetings for watermen- not 10:30am.
  - *Andrew Leight (in chat)*: Super important work George!
  - *Tom O'Connell (in chat)*: Billy Rice said to me the same thing. He said something like "we used to just catch blue catfish, and now we have to fish for them!"
  - *Andrew Leight (in chat)*: Anecdotal evidence are useful
  - *David Secor*: To follow up on Tom's comment on coordinated science- concerned we haven't worked in the direction of adaptive science framework. Is there room for an external group to come in and review our science? Linkage between science and management? Have there been any external reviews of blue catfish science and management?
  - *Bruce Vogt*: Not that I know of David
  - *Mary Fabrizio (in chat)*: Dave brings up an excellent question. We really need this!
  - *Clint Morgeson (in chat)*: I agree - an objective look may be incredibly revealing. We are all awfully close to the subject in this group.
  - *David Secor*: It is one of the most important issues. This is definitely linked to striped bass and other native fishes.
  - *Bruce Vogt*: This is something the science/management team can take up. Happy to reach out to Mark Chandler. Talk about feasibility and need for this first.
  - *Tom O'Connell*: Trying to find a way for USGS to get involved. USGS provides unbiased review of science- maybe USGS can serve that role. A review like that could be helpful.
  - *Bruce Vogt*: Beyond 25- updating 2014 agreement, outcome assessment. ICW is not an outcome- opportunity to elevate this as an outcome. Is that something we

want to pursue? More info provided through email. Meet up again and discuss in the next couple of months. Please share your feedback. The more specific we are within outcomes, the more likely we are to achieve results. Too broad= hard to identify priorities and take action.

- *Tom O'Connell (in chat)*: In regards to CBP outcomes, I believe there is a need for a broader invasive species outcome. Invasive species are a significant driver/stressor to Bay natural resources and socio-economic impacts. Here is a 2020 report on Ches Bay partner perspectives on aquatic invasive species which I believe supports the need for a broader focus on invasive species in the Bay. <https://www.usgs.gov/publications/aquatic-invasive-species-chesapeake-bay-drainage-research-based-needs-and-priorities> And, then there is another set of terrestrial invasives.
- *Branson Williams (in chat)*: Thanks, Tom.