INVASIVE CATFISH TASKFORCE UPDATE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Chesapeake Bay Program

A Watershed Partnership

INVASIVE CATFISH TASK FORCE MEMBERSHIP

- Bruce Vogt (NCBO)
- Geoffrey Smith (PFBC)
- Matt Fisher (DE - DNREC)
- Nancy Butowski (MD DNR)
- Mary Groves (MD DNR)
- Steve Vilnit (MD DNR)
- Danny Ryan (DC DOE)
- Ellen Cosby (PRFC)
- Mary Fabrizio (VIMS)
- Robert Hale (VIMS)
- Greg Garman (VCU)
- Bob Greenlee (VDGIF)
- Joe Grist (VMRC)
- Mike Hutt (VA Marine Products Board)
- Andrew Turner (NCBO/Versar)
- Howard Townsend (NCBO)
- Matt Ogburn (SERC)

ACTIONS FROM LAST MEETING

- Focus on “low hanging fruit”, public outreach and education
  - Working with Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP) to update and improve blue and flathead catfish information on their website
  - 200 signs to be placed at Maryland public access sights to deter illegal transport and encourage “catch and keep”
  - Language for use on websites and sport fishing guides to deter illegal transport and highlight ecological risks of invasive catfish
  - Continued development of an invasive catfish portal with mapping tools to track distribution and target action

ACTIONS FROM LAST MEETING

- Conduct a pilot removal study
  - VCU and VDGIF attempted a pilot removal in the Dragon run. Conditions were not ideal for electrofishing.
- Sharpen recommendations and be clear about the desired outcome
  - Held an in person meeting in October to discuss recommendations
  - Most recommendations were still considered reasonable but will require several steps to complete
  - Developed a logic model to better communicate desired outcomes and actions needed to achieve outcomes

FINDINGS

- Populations are likely larger and more wide spread than initially thought (make up >70% biomass in some areas)
- Spread continues into upper bay tributaries
- High nutrient levels (eutrophication) likely a contributing factor to high abundances and conditions advantageous to invasive catfish
- Status of invasion different in each tributary (need for targeted, trib specific actions)
- Predation of native species is high and ecological impacts are likely, however, not fully quantified
- No effective control/removal mechanisms have been identified and proven
- No dedicated blue and flathead catfish surveys/monitoring programs
- Few tributary population assessments (needed to understand impacts of removal efforts)
- No biomass reduction targets established
- Models suggest fishing would need to increase 10,000 times to begin reducing abundances
- Recreational fishing likely provides economic benefits in some places

NEXT STEPS

- Review logic model with Fish GIT and stakeholders
- Use feedback to revise catfish response plan and submit for peer review
- Brief Mid Atlantic Aquatic Invasive Species Panel mid December
- Continue public communication and outreach efforts (spring media event in MD)
- Complete research synthesis
- Decisions on specific actions jurisdictions will take