



Sean Corson
Chair, Sustainable Fisheries Goal Implementation Team Executive Committee
410 Severn Ave.
Annapolis, MD 21403

Mr. Sean Corson and members of the Executive Committee,

The Invasive Catfish Task Force (ICTF), established by the Sustainable Fisheries Goal Implementation Team (Fish GIT) in 2012 has since been working to fulfill the charge given us. The charge directed by the Fish GIT Executive Committee was to:

- 1) to slow and reduce the spread of invasive catfishes into currently uninhabited waters;
- 2) to minimize the ecological impacts of invasive catfishes on native species;
- 3) to promote a large-scale fishery to significantly reduce abundance of invasive catfish populations and provide economic benefits to the region; and
- 4) to increase outreach and education to improve public awareness that Blue and Flathead catfishes are not native and pose a risk to native species and to continue to lessen the probability of unauthorized introductions into other water bodies in the Bay watershed.

In response, we drafted a 2014 report summarizing the problem, documenting information on blue and flathead catfish biology and ecological impacts, and providing seven recommendations resource managers could take to respond to invasive catfishes. The report was presented to the Fish GIT and each recommendation was reviewed and agreed to by the Executive Committee.

We also identified research needs and worked through the NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office to coordinate over \$900,000 of research into blue catfish predation, population, and growth dynamics. These studies helped to further evaluate the impacts of invasive catfish on Chesapeake Bay ecosystems.

In fall 2017 at the direction of the Fish GIT Executive Committee, a science symposium was held to bring together fishery managers, scientists, and interested stakeholders to discuss the latest research and review progress toward addressing blue and flathead catfish challenges. Presentations characterized what is known about the life history, diet, movement patterns, contaminant burdens, and population dynamics of these catfishes in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. The attendees also recognized that while some progress had been made to implement a subset of the recommendations from the 2014 ICTF report significant challenges remain.

Presentations, by a stakeholder panel comprised of commercial watermen, a recreational fishing guide, a seafood processor, and a representative from the restaurant industry made it clear there are user conflicts influencing the ability to effectively manage invasive catfish. It was also apparent that these conflicts are exacerbated by the absence of a clear goal that seeks to balance stakeholder interests and mitigate ecological impacts of invasive catfish.

The ICTF has responded to the Executive Committee charge and continues to provide a coordination role, however, the ICTF does not have the authority set management objectives or implement recommendations. We are seeking guidance from the Fish GIT Executive Committee what role and tasks the ICTF should focus on next. Based on the issues raised above in this letter the ICTF recommends the development of an inter-jurisdictional fishery management plan for invasive catfish (most likely focused on blue catfish). This plan would contain a systematic description of the fishery and set clear management goals around the commercial fishery, recreational fishery, and ecological sustainability.

Please advise on the future need and focus of the ICTF.

Respectfully,

Bruce Vogt

Chair, Invasive Catfish Task Force