**Invasive Catfish Workgroup**
**Meeting Minutes**

October 6, 2020

**Participants:**

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Alexa Kretsch
Barbara Dwyer
Bruce Vogt
Corbin Hilling
Cathy Liu
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Danny Ryan
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Don Orth
Gina Hunt
Julie Luecke
Justin Shapiro
Kim Couranz
Mandy Bromilow
Margie Whitmore
Marty Gary
Mary Fabrizio
Mary Groves

Matt Balazik
Matt Ogburn
Mike Bednarski
Mike Hutt
Pat Geer
Steve Minkkinen
Troy Tuckey
Wendy Stuart
Yan Jiao

➢ **Next Steps for the ICW**

Participants brainstormed actions and strategies that the ICW could focus on over the next year to address each management approach outlined in the management strategy. Below are the highlights from this brainstorming session.

- o What actions can the ICW take over the next year to improve outreach and marketing?
  - ▪ Distribute information pamphlets at bait and tackle shops and public access points
  - ▪ Collaborative social media efforts (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, Youtube, Instagram, blogs) by agencies and fishers to share messages about ecological impacts, outreach events (e.g. tournaments), and recipes
  - ▪ Have a reporter join a commercial/recreational fisher for a day
- o What actions can the ICW take over the next year to address processing barriers?
  - ▪ Survey and economic analysis of USDA inspection impacts on catfish processors and distributors
  - ▪ Engage with commercial fishers to understand how the inspection affects their operations
  - ▪ Build relationships with elected officials to modify existing legislation pertaining to the processing inspection requirements
- o What actions can the ICW take over the next year to synthesize scientific research for managers and the public?
  - ▪ Investigate how jurisdictions in other regions (e.g. Great Lakes) have addressed this issue
  - ▪ Compile available data sources and develop a stock assessment framework to match the data available, management needs, and identify gaps
  - ▪ Develop indicators to show invasion status and risk across tributaries to target local action
  - ▪ Evaluate opportunities for alternative survey methods and sampling standardization
  - ▪ Identify spawning and aggregation areas and better quantify predation impacts
- o What actions can the ICW take over the next year to support tributary-specific management?
  - ▪ Fund recreational angler surveys to understand fishing targets and interests
  - ▪ Identify and engage with stakeholders in each major tributary
  - ▪ Develop preliminary population models for individual tributaries and identify solutions to data-poor situations

- ➢ **Blue Catfish Stock Assessment Model**

  Corbin Hilling (formerly VT) presented a stock assessment model that he developed for blue catfish in the James River. Below are the highlights from this presentation.

  - o A statistical catch-at-length model was developed to estimate blue catfish population dynamics (1994-2016) based on abundance indices, length-frequency data, and commercial harvest information.
    - o Fit the data reasonably well and indicated a gradual increase in population size until 2002, when the population increased more rapidly
    - o Large fluctuations during period of rapid increase; estimated large recruitment event in 2011, followed by slight population decline
    - o 2016 abundance estimated at 7.4 million (2.6-20.9M confidence interval)
    - o Instantaneous fishing mortality rates increased over the time period
  - o A management strategy evaluation was developed to examine the response of the blue catfish population and predation on native species to various management interventions (unregulated, max length limit, slot limit).
    - o Simulations at 10 levels of fishing suggested that the fisheries (commercial and recreational) and conservation objectives are in direct conflict
    - o Fishing policies that increased yield and the proportion of larger fish in the population (>60 cm) also increased predation on three native taxa (American eel, Alosa spp, and blue crab)
    - o Slot limits maximized yield and the proportion of large fish as well as consumption of all three native taxa of interest
    - o Controlling large fish abundance appears to be important for reducing predation on native species, but may reduce sport fishing opportunities
  - o Both modeling frameworks are adaptable and can be applied to other populations within the Chesapeake Bay region.

- ➢ **Member Updates**
  - o A group of ICW members submitted a proposal for NOAA's Saltonstall-Kennedy Grant Program focused on developing a stock assessment model/framework for blue catfish to improve development of the Chesapeake Bay fishery. The proposal was unsuccessful, but feedback was provided to strength the proposal for a future grant opportunity.
  - o Cathy Liu (MDSG) and Bob Fisher (VASG) helped develop a new blue catfish factsheet that was published by University of Maryland Extension which can be used for marketing and outreach purposes.
  - o Kim Couranz, the NCBO communications specialist, is developing a new blue catfish webpage on the NOAA Fisheries website. Kim will work with Mandy to share the webpage with the ICW and obtain feedback.