

2016 Catfish Summit

Meeting Summary: Ohio Catfish Summit IV

Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Wildlife

Deerassic Park Educational Center

14250 Cadiz Road (Route 22), Cambridge, Ohio

February 27, 2016 10:00 AM – 1:00 PM

Summit Purpose

To share updates and discuss statewide catfish management, including production of catfish in state fish hatcheries, new research for evaluating stocked and naturally reproducing catfish, and preliminary results from our Ohio River blue and flathead catfish tracking study.

Attendees

Anglers: A total of sixteen anglers pre-registered for the 2016 summit. Nine of the sixteen that pre-registered attended the summit with four walk-ins making a total of 13 anglers attending the summit.

ODNR-Division of Wildlife: Rich Carter (RC) (Fisheries Program Administrator), Kevin Kayle (KK) (Acting Fish Hatchery Program Administrator), Rich Zweifel (RZ) (Fish Biology Supervisor, Inland Fish Research Unit), Jeremy Pritt (JP) (Fisheries Biologist, Inland Fish Research Unit), Steve Tyszko (ST) (Fisheries Biologist, Inland Fish Research Unit), Todd Beisser (TB) (Senecaville State Fish Hatchery Manager), Joel Plott (JP) (Fisheries Biologist, District 2), Mike Greenlee (MG) (Fish Management Supervisor, District 4), Don Swatzel (DS) (Fisheries Biologist, District 4), Matt Hangsleben (Fisheries Biologist, District 4), Steve Siron (SS) (Fisheries Management Technician, District 4), David Zacharias (DZ) (Fishing Awareness and Procurement Coordinator, District 4), Bryan Postlethwait (BP) (Wildlife Officer Supervisor, District 4), Brad St.Clair (BS) (Noble County Wildlife Officer, District 4), Debra Walters (DW) (Fish Management Supervisor, District 5), Mike Porto (MP) (Fisheries Biologist, District 5), Kelsea Downs (KD) (Fisheries Management Technician, District 5).

Welcome

Rich Carter started the meeting with a welcome and thanked everyone for coming. Rich updated the group on the changes in Chief Scott Zody leaving and Ray Petering becoming the new Chief. Rich discussed goals to increase communication and interaction with anglers as well as hunters. Rich indicated that this is the fourth summit and reviewed the agenda and ground rules for the meeting, then encouraged attendees to provide feedback on the meeting by completing a survey that was handed out at the registration table.

Agenda

- Welcome: Overview, Ground Rules and Introductions
- Catfish Management Program Overview
- Catfish Production in Ohio Hatcheries
- Break

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- Assessment of Stocked and Wild Catfish Populations
- Preliminary Results: Ohio River Catfish Telemetry project
- Open Forum

Ground Rules

- All catfish topics are fair game
- One person speaks at a time
- Respect the opinions of others
- Understand that there are other interests that are not represented today
- Please share information with fellow anglers that couldn't attend
- Hold questions to the end of the presentations and long topics will be reserved to be discussed during the open forum

Open Forum Topics/Meeting Survey and Comments

During registration attendees were given a form to list topics that they felt should be discussed during the "Open Forum" portion of the meeting. Division of Wildlife staff collected the sheets at the break and then listed them on a laptop and then projected on the screen. A "Survey and Comment" sheet was also given to each attendee to provide comments about the meeting and catfish issues or fisheries management by the ODNR Division of Wildlife.

Introductions

After the first presentation, Rich Carter asked if everyone in attendance would introduce themselves, tell us where they are from and how long you have been catfishing. It was very interesting to hear everyone share their story and passionate interest in catfishing.

Presentations

Presentations were as followed. Matt Hangsleben, focused on a program overview of catfish management and angler opportunities in Ohio. Todd Beisser, provided an overview of catfish production in Ohio's hatcheries. Steve Tyszko provided an overview of the research being done to assess the stocked and wild catfish populations in Ohio. Jeremy Pritt, focused on preliminary findings of the Ohio River Catfish Telemetry Project. A summary of each presentation follows. After each presentation there was time allotted for a brief question and answer session (AC=angler comment; AQ=angler question).

Overview: Ohio Catfish Management

Don Swatzel and Matt Hangsleben
Fisheries Biologists, District Four, Athens

Summary: Matt began his talk by highlighting the importance and popularity of catfishing, emphasizing that the Ohio Division of Wildlife (DOW) recognizes the importance of catfishing in Ohio as well as nationally. According to the 2011 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation 36% of Ohio's 1.3 million anglers fished for catfish. Ohio has many public and private

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opportunities to fish for catfish including the Ohio River, Lake Erie, and inland reservoirs and streams. Matt discussed the Fish Ohio program highlighting the increasing trends in catfish entries. Channel and flathead catfish Fish Ohio recognition program submissions have gone up since 2001. Ponds (public and private) and Lake Erie account for the most Fish Ohio channel catfish since 2001 where the Ohio River and ponds (public and private) account for the most Fish Ohio flathead catfish. Matt also announced that the 2016 Fish Ohio pin will feature a blue catfish. Matt then noted that catfishing has not only increased in popularity but there has been a shift from a consumptive fishery to more of a trophy fishery in recent years. However, there are many different users of the fishery and the DOW takes that into account when managing catfish. The second part of Matt's talk was centered on the DOW's management of catfishing opportunities in the state. Currently, channel catfish and blue catfish are stocked in Ohio to create fishing opportunities. Approximately 23.5 million channel catfish have been stocked since 1935, mainly in waters less than 700 acres. Blue catfish stocking are just beginning in Ohio with Hoover Reservoir being stocked since 2011 and Clendening Reservoirs getting its first stocking in 2015. Historically, gill nets were used for assessing channel catfish populations; however this method is not specifically designed for catfish. To improve our population assessments there are plans to use hoop netting this year. Angler surveys have also been used to generate data on catfish angling that includes the percentage of anglers seeking catfish, harvest and catch rates and angler opinions through questionnaires. Each year 15-18 reservoirs are surveyed from April through July. In 2017 an Ohio River angler survey is planned. Law enforcement projects and regular enforcement have been carried out in reservoirs and on the Ohio River to address regulation compliance. Law enforcement efforts have resulted in recent cases on the Ohio River. Partnerships with adjoining states along the river as well as catfish clubs have also been an important part of our catfish management plan. Matt ended his talk reiterating that catfish are important and popular with Ohio anglers and the DOW is committed to protecting and improving catfish angling opportunities.

Catfish Production in Ohio's Hatcheries

Todd Beisser

Superintendent, Senecaville State Fish Hatchery

Summary: Todd gave the second talk of the day, discussing catfish production in the state hatcheries. Catfish stocking (channel catfish and blue catfish) is a large part of the production from the Division of Wildlife's (DOW) hatcheries, involving up to 50% (70 water acres) of the production ponds at the three warm water hatcheries during the summer months. Channel catfish (CCF) stocking was initiated by the DOW in 1935 and has continued to present. The DOW currently produces 150,000-200,000 yearling CCF for stocking annually and stocks 150-200 different bodies of water. These fish are produced entirely in-house from eggs collected from adults maintained at the Senecaville State Fish Hatchery. The brood fish are held in two one-acre ponds and typically spawn in mid-June when water temperatures approach 75F. Eggs are collected three times per week and incubated indoors until hatching. Newly hatched fry are fed a commercial fish feed for approximately ten days and moved to production ponds for grow out. The fish remain in production ponds for approximately 16 months until harvested for stocking into Ohio's public waters as 8-12" yearlings. In 2009, the DOW obtained blue catfish (BCF) eggs from the Kentucky Department of Fish and Game for incubation at the Hebron hatchery. These fish were hatched and raised at the Hebron State Fish Hatchery for 16 months, with the bulk of the fish going to Dillon Lake. A portion of those fish were retained as future brood fish and are currently in the 20 lb. range. Those fish

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spawned for the first time at the St. Mary's State Fish Hatchery in 2015. The DOW currently stocks two reservoirs (Hoover and Clendening) with BCF and hopes to continue to grow this program to create new trophy fisheries in the future.

Questions for Todd:

AQ: Are blue catfish produced using the same methods as channel catfish and do you use copper sulfate?

TB: Yes, blue catfish are produced the same way as channel catfish and we use hydrogen peroxide in our methods.

AQ: Are the blue catfish hybrids or natural?

TB: We are producing pure stock and not hybrids.

MG: Our primary goal with blue catfish is to develop a trophy fishery and hybrid blues are raised primarily for aquaculture.

AQ: Does overflow production go into Ohio River?

TB: No catfish are stocked in the Ohio River; however we do stock some hybrid striped bass.

RZ: We do not stock catfish where they naturally reproduce.

Assessment of Stocked and Wild Catfish Populations in Ohio

Steve Tyszko

Fisheries Biologist, Inland Fisheries Research Unit (Hebron)

Summary: Steve began his talk discussing reservoir channel catfish populations and a new research project aimed at assessing channel catfish reproduction, size and numbers. Most reservoirs in Ohio support channel catfish (*Ictalurus punctatus*) and they are very popular with anglers. The Ohio Division of Wildlife (DOW) manages these populations to provide quality recreational angling opportunities for Ohio anglers. Populations are managed with length limits, bag limits, and stocking, but critical information that is necessary for making management decisions, such as indices of abundance, age and growth information, and measures of stocking success, are lacking. The DOW (Inland Fisheries Research Unit) will conduct research to develop a population assessment protocol that will index population abundance and size structure and develop a method to estimate age from channel catfish otoliths. About 20 reservoirs each year from 2016-2018 will be sampled with tandem, baited hoop nets to explore structure and variability of channel catfish catch data to guide sampling effort in standard surveys. Subsamples of channel catfish will be taken from these surveys to estimate ages from lapilli otoliths and precision among independent readers will be evaluated with the coefficient of variation of age estimates. Preliminary age estimates from Dillon Reservoir have revealed channel catfish up to age 21. The Aquatic Ecology Lab at The Ohio State University will conduct research to determine if channel catfish fingerlings can be stocked rather than yearlings, and will also estimate the contribution of stocked channel catfish to adult reservoir populations. Fingerling and yearling channel catfish will be stocked simultaneously at 8 reservoirs in 2016 and 2017 with high and low predator densities, and their relative abundance in subsequent sampling efforts will index relative survival. Contribution of stocked fish to

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adult populations will be evaluated with chemistry analysis of otoliths from channel catfish collected in the tandem hoop net assessment surveys. Stocking fingerlings instead of yearlings and optimizing efficiency by better understanding stocking needs will free hatchery resources to expand opportunities for Ohio anglers. This research will lead to better channel catfish management in Ohio reservoirs.

Questions for Steve:

AQ: How many net sets per reservoir?

ST: On small reservoirs 10 sets; large reservoirs 20 sets.

AQ: How many fish do you usually catch per net?

ST: It can be variable but usually between 10-40 fish.

AQ: How deep are you setting nets?

ST: Nets are set shallow (~10ft) and parallel to shore.

AQ: How many fish are you keeping?

ST: For each sampling event roughly 80- 100 fish are taken. Five fish per centimeter group (i.e. for each inch group approximately 12 fish are sampled). When we develop our protocol we will reevaluate how much sampling we need to do.

AQ: Would electroshocking work better than the hoop nets?

ST: Shocking is not as effective, there is evidence in the literature that shows hoop netting to be most effective, for catching channel catfish.

Preliminary Results: Ohio River Catfish Telemetry Project

Jeremy Pritt

Fisheries Biologist, Inland Fisheries Research Unit (Hebron)

Summary: In the last presentation of the day Jeremy provided an update of the Ohio River catfish telemetry project that was first introduced during the 2014 summit. Catfish angling has increased in popularity and large river systems offer opportunities for catching trophy-sized Blue and Flathead Catfish. However, large rivers are multi-jurisdictional and fragmented by dams that may be barriers to fish migration, complicating management of catfish. Understanding movement of catfishes in large river systems is an important first step for establishing effective fishery regulations and managing fish habitats. We used acoustic telemetry and angler reports of Carlin-tagged fish to determine the spatial extent of movement of Blue and Flathead Catfish and quantify among-pool movements (i.e., passage through dams) in the Ohio portion of the Ohio River. Beginning in fall 2014, we implanted 46 Blue and 21 Flathead Catfish with acoustic tags and used a fixed receiver array to monitor fish movement. External Carlin tags were placed on all fish with transmitters as well as an additional 34 Blue Catfish (80 total with Carlin tags) and 21 Flathead Catfish (42 total with Carlin tags) to understand recreational and commercial catch and harvest. During preliminary monitoring (fall 2014 to winter 2015), we observed four Blue

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Catfish making downstream passages of the Meldahl Dam, with two of these individuals returning to make upstream passages through the Meldahl Dam. In addition, one Flathead Catfish was reported by an angler upstream of the Greenup Dam. Blue and Flathead Catfish regularly made long-distance movements (>25 km) in relatively short time periods (<one week). The maximum observed range (upstream most detection to downstream most detection) during the preliminary period was 129 miles for Blue Catfish and 70 miles for Flathead Catfish. In addition, 14 of the 46 Blue Catfish with acoustic transmitters used tributary systems whereas only one of the Flathead Catfish with acoustic transmitters was detected in a tributary. We received 15 angler reports of 13 individual fish (two fish were reported twice), consisting of 10 Blue Catfish and 3 Flathead Catfish. We also received three commercial reports of caught fish, all were Flathead Catfish. Our results suggest that Blue and Flathead Catfish in the Ohio River should be managed at large spatial scales rather than pool-by-pool or within-jurisdiction approaches. Jeremy discussed future plans for this project including more tagging efforts in 2016, exploring environmental factors that affect movement, identifying key habitats and mobile tracking using barges. Jeremy concluded his talk with a video showing time lapsed movement of some of the tagged fish.

Questions for Jeremy:

AQ: Have you tracked how far they move within hours?

JP: We have not looked at that fine of a scale yet, but they can move quickly.

AQ: What are the average sizes that you have tagged so far?

JP: We are tagging fish that are over 25 inches. The average is 30 inches but some are smaller. The biggest blue catfish we tagged is 37 inches (35 lbs) and the biggest flathead is 40 inches (40 lbs). This summer we hope to increase the sample size with more fish in the trophy category.

Open Forum:

Prior to the start of the meeting, attendees were given open forum forms which they filled out and turned in during the break. Open forum topics and questions are listed below followed by a response from the Division of Wildlife.

Bait:

- Is it legal to bring bluegill as bait from other bodies of water?

RC: Yes, it is legal to use bluegill from another body of water as bait. It is illegal to catch bait from a lake and sell it to another person. We have a proposed baitfish regulation for the sale of sunfish and bullheads by bait dealers if obtained from a licensed aquaculture facility or from out of state. RC reiterated that we will be vigilant about enforcing baitfish laws.

AQ: What if a person buying the bait does not know where it comes from?

RC: You must have a receipt from a licensed bait dealer and the bait dealers must have receipt of sale from the licensed aquaculture facility or from out of state.

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BP: From a law enforcement perspective it is your responsibility to buy from a legal/reputable bait dealer.

RC: We have improved monitoring of the bait dealer industry through increased inspections and by developing a bait dealer advisory work group.

- Bait/fish transportation.

RC: The transport of fish from one water body to another for stocking purposes is illegal. Moving bait between waters within the state is legal, however with disease issues such as VHS and aquatic invasive species we discourage you from releasing bait and encourage you to participate in the trash your bait program. Invasive species such as Asian carp are illegal to possess alive.

DNA:

- Stocking vs. Native Fish

AQ: What has been done by DNR in Ohio to look at DNA?

RC: Wild fish genetic composition makes them better suited for survival. Rich highlighted an example of this in the Manistee strain of steelhead trout.

Headwaters and Tailwaters Boating Access

- How can anglers work through government to gain better access to Ohio River Tailwaters?

AC: Army Corp will not negotiate with public about fishing access. We have zero access to tailwaters (TW) and these areas are prime fishing spots. Fishermen feel entitled to access.

MG: Discussed changes made after 9/11 in restricted zones as well as safety concerns. Mike stated that this would be a good topic to bring up at an Ohio River Fisheries Management Team meeting to see how other states are dealing with access issues. Mike commended angler grass roots movements and discussed the land mark case at Cumberland TW and how anglers were able to gain improved access.

Enforcement of Commercial Fishing Laws in States Bordering Ohio and the Ohio River

- With new regulations on Kentucky commercial fishing has law enforcement made any cases on the Ohio River?

RC: Can't comment on any cases. We do not know any details until something happens.

AC: Anglers feel Kentucky law is useless and is not being enforced.

RC: We can't speak to the specifics of Kentucky's enforcement. We rely on your tips and we will do everything we can on the Ohio side of the river to enforce our laws. Ohio officers have no jurisdictional authority in Kentucky and West Virginia waters. Rich reiterated that Kentucky has taken positive steps and is moving in the right direction.

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AQ: Why isn't Coast Guard involved?

RC: The Coast Guard has no jurisdictional authority.

Telemetry Study

- Results of Catfish Project

RC: We discussed several questions regarding this project at the conclusion of Jeremy's talk. No further questions were presented.

Regulation Changes

- Any changes in limblines, trotlines and jugging?

RC: There are no changes in the limits for limblines, trotlines and jugging.

- Changes in rod limits?

RC: We conducted a creel survey to evaluate how anglers feel about changes in pole limits. Most anglers preferred two rods and are unsure about how they feel about changing the limit.

RZ: Data collected from the creel survey showed there was a 50/50 split on supporting a change in the regulation.

- Is it legal to bow fish for catfish?

RC: It is illegal to bow fish for catfish.

Pay Lakes

- What state entity oversees pay lakes?

RC: Pay lakes are private businesses and neither the Division of Wildlife nor the Department of Agriculture has authority to regulate them. Pay lakes have business requirements and permits from the community they are in. The Ohio Division of Wildlife requires fish transportation permits to haul 500 pounds or more of live fishes and the Department of Agriculture require import permits for bringing live fish into Ohio from other states.

AQ: New testing for fish going across state lines?

RC: Ohio Department of Agriculture has jurisdiction over testing.

Closing

Rich closed the meeting by thanking all the participants. Rich thanked the anglers for their comment, input and love of the resource. The meeting adjourned at 1:45 PM.