

Summarized Material from Northern Snakehead Taskforce Meeting 2015

Status of the northern snakehead population in the Chesapeake Bay watershed was discussed at a northern snakehead task force meeting in February at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Maryland Fishery Resources Office. The discussion included: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, D.C. District of the Environment, Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control, and U.S. Geological Survey. Biologists from each jurisdiction shared new information regarding northern snakehead fisheries in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Northern snakehead has naturally spread beyond its range in the Potomac River, into Patuxent River, Rappahannock River, Nanticoke River, Wicomico River, and Blackwater River. Genetic evidence indicates that at least one fish captured in Nanticoke River originated from a population near Philadelphia, PA. Once in Nanticoke River, northern snakehead naturally spread to Wicomico River and Blackwater River. The species may naturally spread from Blackwater River to Little Choptank River and the Choptank River through ditches and canals. Genetic evidence also indicates that the species naturally spread from Potomac River to Patuxent River. To help prevent spread of the fish from tidal Potomac River to the non-tidal, upper Potomac River, State and Federal biologists are working with the National Park Service to survey some locks associated with the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal.

Densities of snakeheads in 2014 were similar to densities in 2013 for some streams, and lower than they were in 2012. There were over 2400 pounds of snakehead taken out of Maryland's streams in Potomac River by commercial harvest in 2014. This is 6-times the commercial harvest reported in 2012. Recreational anglers and bow hunters also harvested snakeheads in 2014, and most of those anglers ate the fish. Creel survey results by Maryland Department of Natural Resources and University of Maryland College Park indicate that only a small percentage of anglers actually target snakeheads. In addition to eating the fish, other incentivized control programs include state record awards in Maryland, D.C. and Virginia, the Maryland fishing challenge awards, and snakehead tournaments. Students with the University of Maryland College Park reported that only a third of those interviewed knew about raffle contests promoted by Maryland Department of Natural Resources. This raffle contest will be offered again in 2015 for anglers who submit their catches to the Multispecies, Freshwater Volunteer Angler Survey (available via <http://dnr2.maryland.gov/fisheries/Pages/survey/index.aspx>). There were two invasive species, state records awarded in Maryland in 2014. Regulations in Virginia have been changed for 2015 to allow the harvest of an unlimited number of snakeheads.

Some people continue to possess live snakeheads. The species has been introduced into five public reservoirs in the Northern Virginia area. Northern snakehead is also being illegally introduced into impounded waters of Delaware. There are state regulations in Delaware, Virginia, and Maryland that prohibit the possession of live northern snakehead. To avoid heavy fines, anglers are encouraged to continue to harvest the fish by decapitation, evisceration, removing gill arches on both sides of the fish, or filleting the fish as soon as it is caught. All species of snakehead are listed as injurious wildlife under the Federal Lacey Act. Violations of the Lacey Act include interstate transport and/or importation of live fish, and penalties can include fines up to \$200,000 and prison sentences up to 5 years. A nationwide management plan for northern snakehead is now available for public comment at:

<https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2015/03/17/2015-06024/national-control-and-management-plan-for-members-of-the-snakehead-family-channidae>