

2017 Upper Potomac River Walleye Summary

The upper Potomac River walleye fishery provides Maryland anglers the opportunity to target a gamefish species not commonly found in the mid-Atlantic region. Walleye were first stocked into the Potomac in 1979. Since then the walleye population has steadily increased through the combination of natural reproduction and supplemental stocking. Walleye can be found from Cumberland, MD downstream to Washington D.C. The highest concentration of walleye are located in the middle section of the river between Dam 3 (Harpers Ferry) and Dam 5 (Clear Springs). The Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Freshwater Fisheries Program monitors the fishery through annual spring and fall boat electrofishing surveys.



Upper Potomac River walleye collected in the spring and fall electrofishing surveys

Results from the 2017 spring electrofishing survey showed a good size distribution of young and old fish (Figure 1). A total of 119 walleye were collected during approximately 2.1 hours of sampling. Walleye ranged in size from 9.5-27.5 inches with an average total length of 16.3 inches and average weight of 1.7 lbs. Adult fish from the strong 2015 year-class comprised roughly 50 percent of the sample. This year-class will support a very productive fishery over the next several years. Signs of juvenile recruitment from the 2016 year-class were also positive with young walleye (<12 inches) comprising 20 percent of the sample.

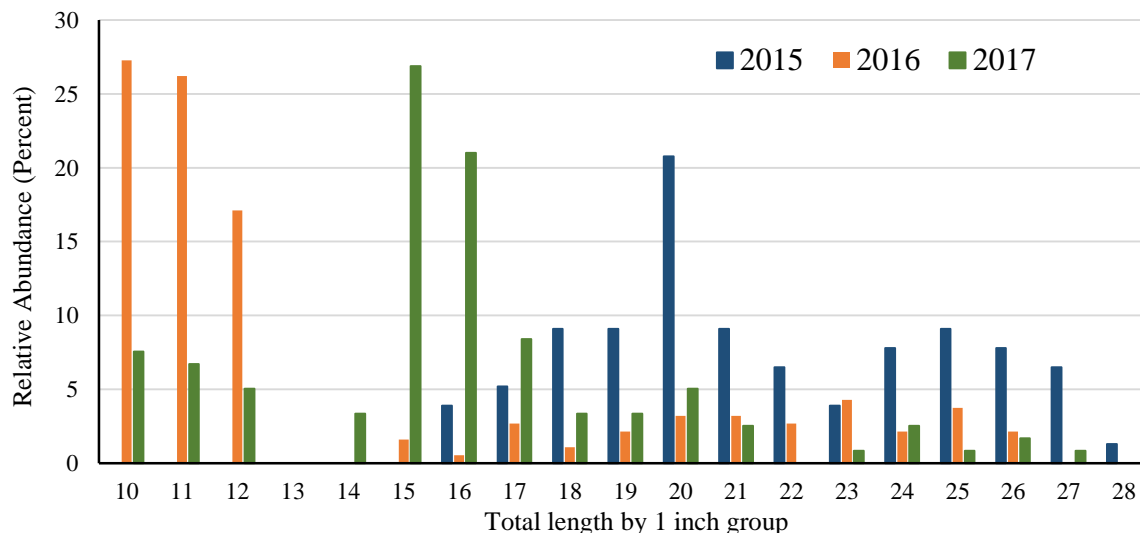


Figure 1. Size distribution of upper Potomac River walleye collected by boat electrofishing in spring 2015-2017

The catch rate for adult walleye (>15 inches) is determined from the fall electrofishing sample. For 2017 the average electrofishing catch rate was 15 fish/hr (Figure 2). This is above the long-term average of 12.3 adult walleye/hr. Both the spring and fall electrofishing surveys show a healthy fishery that has good numbers of legal size adult walleye (>15 inches) available for anglers.

One of the main management tools used by the Freshwater Fisheries Program to maintain this high quality walleye fishery is the supplemental stocking of juvenile fish. Every spring since 2013, adult broodstock walleye are collected from the upper Potomac River and transported to a state hatchery for spawning. The resulting 1 inch fingerlings are then stocked back into the river at multiple locations from Little Orleans, MD to Harpers Ferry, WV. A four year study of young-of-year fish found that roughly 50 percent of juvenile walleye collected in the fall electrofishing sample were hatchery stocked. Supplemental fingerling stockings significantly contribute to year-class strength. Broodstock collection and fingerling stocking will continue in 2018.

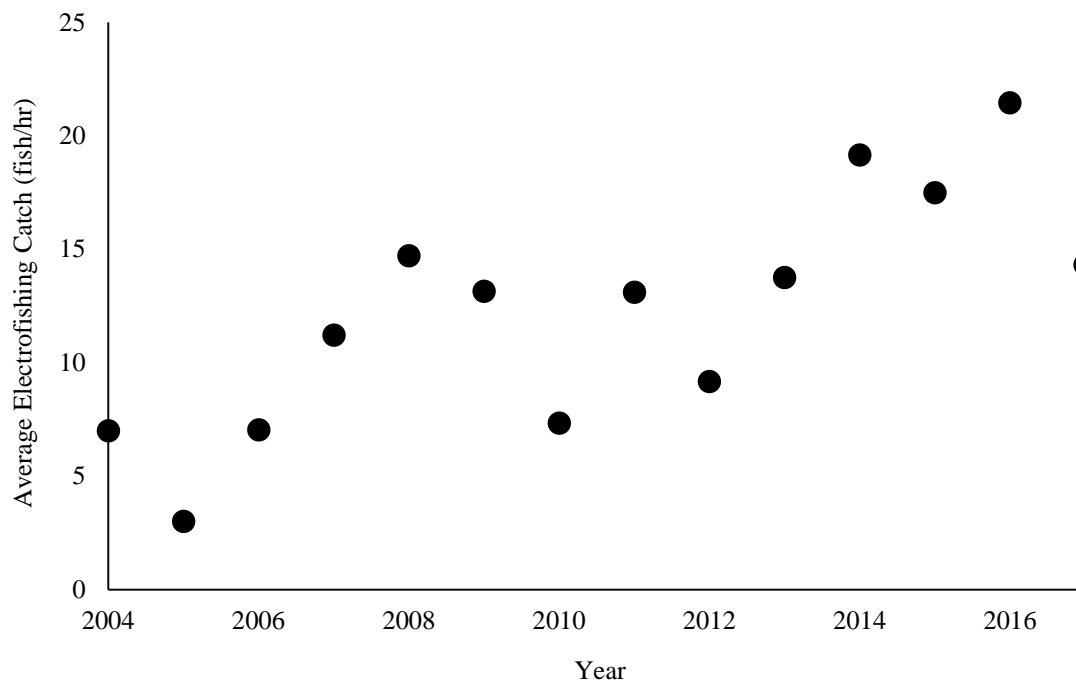


Figure 2. Adult walleye (>15 inches) fall boat electrofishing catch rates (2004-2017) collected from the upper Potomac River between Dam 3 and Dam 4

For 2018, anglers can expect good numbers of walleye greater than 15 inches thanks to the very strong 2015 year-class. These 3 year old fish will be in the 17-20 inch range. Additionally, walleye from the moderately strong 2016 year-class will just be reaching 15-16 inches. Anglers are reminded of the current Maryland regulations for walleye.

- Year round minimum size = 15 inches
- January 1 – April 15 maximum size = 20 inches (mainstem Potomac River from Chain Bridge in DC to Cumberland, MD)
- Daily creel limit = 5 legal size fish

For more information or question regarding the upper Potomac River fisheries, please contact Michael Kashiwagi (Michael.kashiwagi@maryland.gov).