

2016 Upper Potomac River Catfish Summary

Catfish are one of the more popular gamefish species commonly harvested on the upper Potomac River. Channel catfish and the recently introduced invasive flathead catfish are two species monitored by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MD DNR) Freshwater Fisheries Program. Summer boat electrofishing surveys are used to sample the channel catfish population every 5 years. Flathead catfish distribution and population numbers are monitored through annual boat electrofishing surveys on the river.

Channel Catfish

Widely distributed in Maryland, channel catfish can be found in good numbers throughout the upper Potomac River. Channel catfish can be caught from boat or shore from Cumberland all the way downstream to Washington DC. A total of 480 channel catfish were collected in the 2016 summer boat electrofishing surveys. Average size was 14.3 inches with the largest just under 25 inches in total length (Figure 1). 2016 catch rates for channel catfish were above average when compared to previous monitoring surveys (Figure 2). The average catch rate for stock sized (11-16 inches) channel catfish was 109 fish/hr, the highest catch rate over the past 10 years. The average 2016 catch rate for larger quality sized (16-24 inches) channel catfish was 38 fish/hr. Anglers looking to catch channel catfish on the upper Potomac River should have ample opportunity to catch nice sized fish.

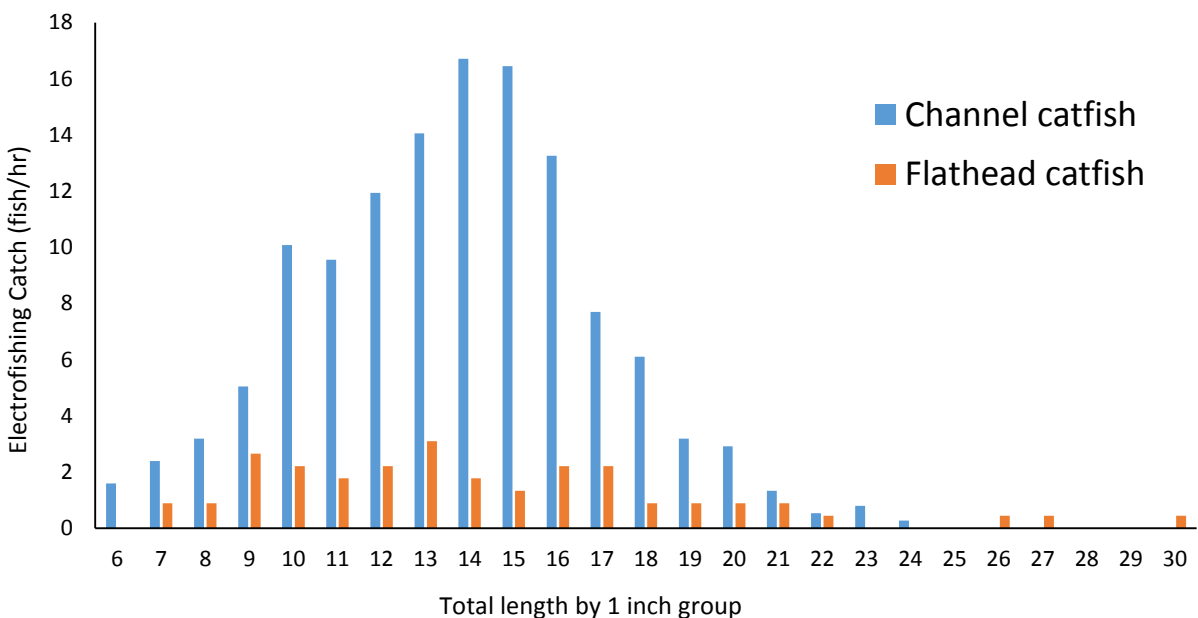


Figure 1. Size distribution of channel and flathead catfish in the upper Potomac River collected by boat electrofishing in summer 2016.

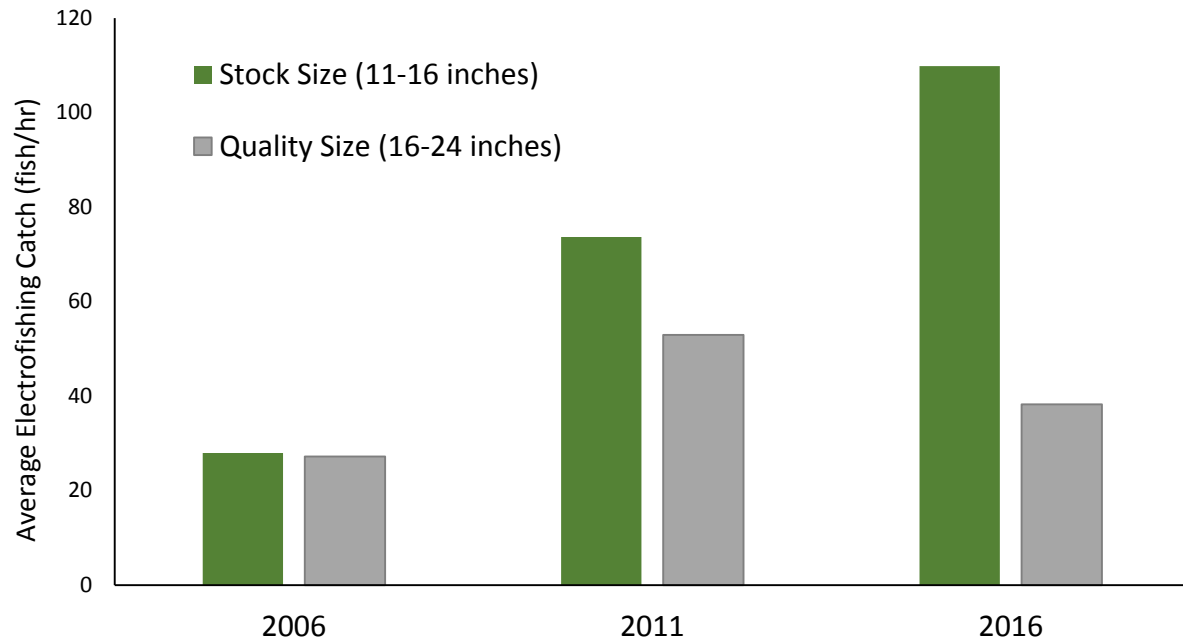


Figure 2. Average electrofishing catch rates for channel catfish collected in the upper Potomac River between Dam 5 and Dam 3 (2006, 2011, and 2016).

Flathead Catfish

Flathead catfish are an aquatic species of specific concern to the MD DNR. Classified as an invasive species in Maryland, flathead catfish were first caught in the upper Potomac River in 2012. Flathead catfish are top predators that reproduce in high numbers and have the potential to grow to a very large size. Research studies in other states where flathead catfish have recently become establish have demonstrated a decline in the abundance and diversity of native species. MD DNR is concerned on the potential impact that flathead catfish may be having on the upper Potomac River ecosystem.



(L and R) Flathead catfish caught by angler in July 2016 below Dam 5 measuring 37 inches

Since initially being collect in 2012, flathead catfish numbers have dramatically increased in sections of the upper Potomac River between Dam 5 and Dam 3. A total of 60 flathead catfish were collected in the 2016 summer electrofishing survey. Average length was 14.7 inches with the largest measuring 30.2 inches (Figure 1). The largest flathead catfish reported to date to MD DNR was a fish caught in 2016 below Dam 5 measuring 37 inches. The 2016 average catch rate for stock sized (11-16 inches) flathead catfish was 10.1 fish/hr (Figure 2). The average quality size (16-24 inches) catch rate was 6.5 fish/hr. Considering no flathead catfish were collected in the 2011 survey from the same locations, this is a rapid increase in the number of small and medium sized fish. Unfortunately, MD DNR expects these average catch rate values for flathead catfish to only increase over time.

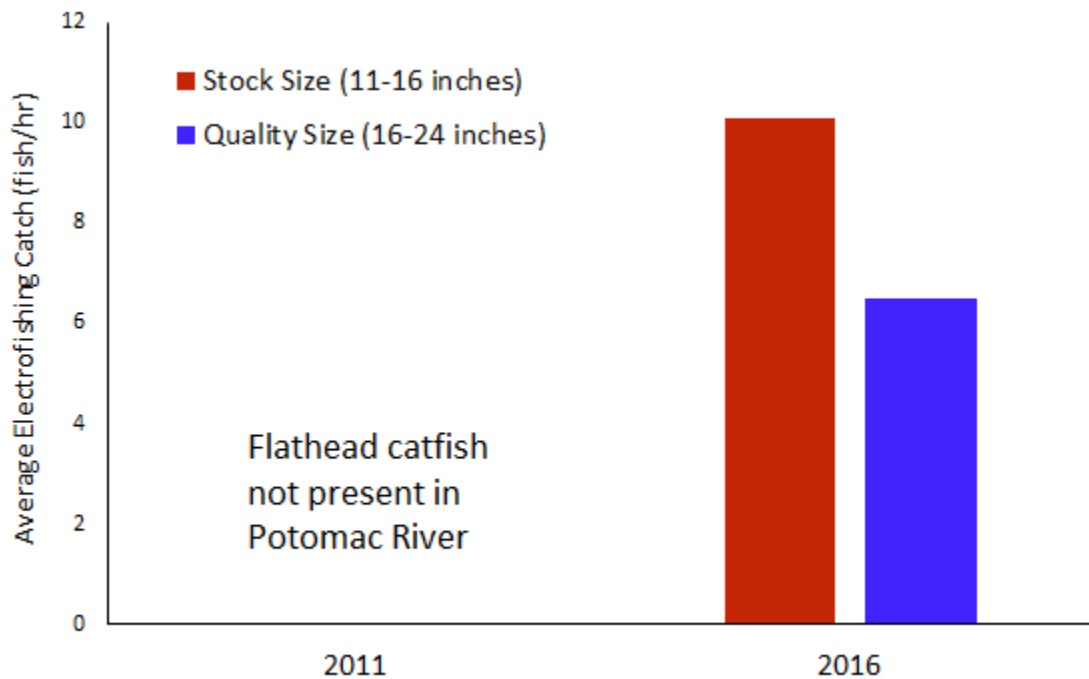


Figure 3. Average electrofishing catch rates for flathead catfish collected in the upper Potomac River between Dam 5 and Dam 3 (2011 and 2016).

MD DNR asks anglers to help in efforts to control this invasive species by harvesting or killing any flathead catfish that they catch. Bringing in live flathead catfish from out-of-state and moving fish between Maryland waterbodies is prohibited. In Maryland it is illegal to transport live flathead catfish from one body of water to another and is punishable by a fine up to \$2,500. MD DNR Freshwater Fisheries Program will continue monitoring the status of the flathead catfish population in the upper Potomac River and its potential impact to the aquatic community.



Juvenile flathead catfish caught in a tributary to the Potomac River in Montgomery County, image courtesy of Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission

MD DNR fishing regulations for catfish species

Channel Catfish

- No minimum size
- Daily creel limit – 5 fish
- Possession limit – 10 fish

Flathead Catfish

- No minimum size
- No creel limit
- Anglers are encouraged to kill and harvest all flathead catfish that they catch

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