

Black Bass Roundtable (2016)
Meeting Minutes

Prepared by Dr. Joseph W. Love, Tidal Bass Manager
Minutes taken by Mike Porta and Branson Williams

Administrative Matters

The 2016 Black Bass Roundtable meeting was held on February 4, 2016 at the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, 580 Taylor Avenue, B-2, Annapolis, MD. The meeting was called to order at 9:20 am, with Dr. Joe Love, Chairing.

It was announced that Tony Prochaska had become the new Director of Inland Fisheries.

There were 28 members of the roundtable. The attending members were: Steve Chaconas (National Bass Guide Service), Scott Sewell (Let's Go Fishin' Guide Service, Conservation Director Maryland Bass Nation), Roger Trageser (President Maryland Bass Nation, Sportfish Commissioner), Dick Berich (Maryland Bass Nation, Membership Director), Darwin Poler (M.R. Bass), Denis Schanberger (Maryland Bass Nation, Secretary), Stephen Carman (Maryland Bass Nation), Nick Kuttner (Potomac Riverkeeper Network), Bob Lunsford (Angler), Nick Nicosia (MSSA, angler), Keith Barker (Life Outdoors Guide Service), Kenny Penrod (Life Outdoors Unlimited), Edna Stetzar (Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Conservation), Brett Coakley (Maryland Department of Natural Resources, MDDNR), Mike Porta (MDDNR), Adam Eshleman (MDDNR), Todd Heerd (MDDNR), John Mullican (MDDNR), Mary Groves (MDDNR), Tim Groves (MDDNR), Gina Hunt (MDDNR, Deputy Director of Fisheries), Joe Love (MDDNR), Brian Richardson (MDDNR), Susan Rivers (MDDNR), Mark Staley (MDDNR), Branson Williams (MDDNR), Erik Zlokovitz (MDDNR), and Mike Malpezzi (MDDNR).

Reef Ball Status

Erik Zlokovitz noted that the state wetlands permit has been approved for developing a reef project at Smoots Bay near National Harbor. Joe Love will distribute a copy of the permit to this reef subcommittee. The Army Corps permit has not yet been issued. Funding for the project has been allocated: \$4,900 from the Maryland Artificial Reef Committee, \$100 from Pro-Formance Fishing Team, \$10,000 from National Harbor, \$5,000 from Inland Fisheries. An additional \$10,000 is being requested from B.A.S.S. in a proposal developed by Dick Berich and Scott Sewell. Work to establish the reef will be done later this year.

Black Bass Stamp

A black bass stamp is being discussed among stakeholders. There was question on whether to model the stamp after the Trout Stamp. There was concern expressed by Roger Trageser that the stamp may not have much momentum because there is currently a house bill (H.B. 389) proposed to reduce certain license fees to 2006 levels. The focus now is to prevent this revenue loss of about \$2 million dollars. This reduction potentially removes funding from the tidal bass program. Roger Trageser noted that the fee increase of 2007 led to the hiring of a tidal bass specialist. Revenue lost due to the fee reduction may be offset with contribution by general funds. There is no guarantee that general funds will be allocated to the Department. Gina Hunt mentioned that the bill can be changed based upon stakeholder input. Kenny Penrod indicated that the stamp should be considered a #1 priority. The stamp would not generate revenue for the Department. Roger Trageser noted a sponsor is needed for the bill. Public awareness was considered necessary to generate support for the bill or to prevent H.B.389 from being passed as proposed. Roger Trageser and Kenny Penrod will work together to help construct a bill for the black bass stamp. Gina Hunt noted that the stamp cannot be free and meet the goals, but can be cheap and the fee could be applied to only non-residents. Steve later suggested by email that voluntary donations could be encouraged during licensing.

Charter Boat Guide License Issues

Gina Hunt noted that the current charter boat website is a promotional tool that requires bi-annual maintenance. The website will be emptied of information and charter boat guides will apply to be part of the website. In addition, the application form will be updated to include a DNRid that will allow the Department to verify licenses for individuals wishing to be part of the listing; Virginia guides could use a license number rather than DNRid. Individuals who indicated they wanted to guide in Maryland via Compass On-line will receive an email with information on how to apply and how to become a guide. Joe Love will send that email once the application is updated to include a field for a DNRid. The new listing will be posted in April. The listing of charter boat guides will be routinely maintained in March and September around license renewal deadlines, to ensure that guides are appropriately licensed. Steve Chaconas expressed disappointment with Natural Resources Police in their handling of suspected illegal guides. Not all licensed guides will want to be advertised by on the Department's website. It is hoped that over time the website will become a tool for customers seeking licensed guides and that will inevitably increase the number of people who want to be advertised.

Catch-and-Return Areas

Joe Love described the catch-and-return areas, highlighting the 2-week scoping period that solicits feedback from the public. The scoping period will begin the second week of February. The roundtable discussed whether to implement the catch-and-return areas during the spring or year-round. Because of persistent changes in habitat, the roundtable will evaluate catch-and-return areas every 3 years to determine whether to swap areas or not. Steve Chaconas noted he liked year-round catch-and-return areas, but studies should be conducted to possibly assess their effectiveness. The habitat near Quantico provides a possible study area to evaluate a catch-and-return regulation. Steve Weimer wanted to limit the catch-and-return areas to spring. Comments on the details of the possible regulation can be sent to joseph.love@maryland.gov or to fisheriespubliccomment.dnr@maryland.gov.

Dennis Schanberger identified the need to advertise these areas to the public. Kenny Penrod fully supported the implementation of catch-and-return areas. He suggested Piscataway Creek should be considered. It is an area important for spawning in spring. Steve Chaconas also noted the value of Piscataway Creek as a potential catch-and-return area. There was also support from Keith Barker and Scott Sewell. Steve Chaconas emphasized that giving up the areas to fish may not be a big deal, but will it help the fishery? Bob Lunsford suggested that the areas may be too small in size and may become magnets for recreational anglers, to the detriment of the fishery. Joe Love noted that funding was not currently available for a creel survey in the area. Steve Chaconas suggested that anglers may flock to Mattawoman if it becomes catch-and-return, but that crowding in those areas shouldn't generally a problem. Scott Sewell suggested that a site, perhaps Dundee Creek, should additionally be considered as a catch-and-return area. Nick Nicosia also suggested that areas in Gunpowder River, such as the quarry pits, would be good catch-and-return areas. Joe Love wasn't sure that the areas of Gunpowder River could be put into this regulation this year. But the suggested catch-and-return areas in Potomac River and upper Bay should serve as a test to determine effectiveness. Joe Love will generate an experimental design to help assess the effectiveness of the catch-and-return areas. Denis Schanberger identified a paper written on a mid-western lake that had half designated for recreational fishing and half off-limits to fishing.

Rogues Harbor

Tony Prochaska commented that the Department's Integrated Policy and Review Unit had concerns about the proposed breakwaters at Rogue's Harbor. Following an early meeting of some roundtable members with Elk Neck State Park in 2015, there were concerns regarding siltation and damage to submerged aquatic vegetation. These concerns were reiterated upon review of the proposal in mid-2015 by Integrated Policy and Review Unit. This Unit suggested that alternatives be examined. These alternatives could include the creation of a marina with steel bulkheads or wave attenuating buoys. The alternatives are currently be considered. Roger Trageser noted that a marina with slips will not

help bass tournament anglers, which is one reason that breakwaters were considered for Elk Neck State Park. Tony Prochaska noted that boat slips are not necessary for the marina. Scott Sewell emphasized the need for permanent stone breakwaters and suggested that these breakwaters would additionally serve as aquatic habitat. Funding of the project may come from Waterway Improvement Funds. As new alternatives are developed, Joe Love suggested including Scott Sewell and other interested roundtable members.

Tournament Permitting

Branson Williams described the new permitting system and review period for permits. The permit will be sent for internal review before being issued to tournament director. This review will allow Department staff to better coordinate with tournament directors on issues pertaining to conservation of black bass. The new permitting system also encourages the use of best management practices during tournaments. Directors who use some or all practices may be awarded a Bass Stewardship Award from the Department. Two levels of enforcement will be used to ensure directors obtain a permit, if required. The two levels are enforcement from angler self-policing and from natural resources police. The new permit system will be finished by the end of February 2016.

Steve Weimer noted that some tournament organizations invest heavily in tools that improve handling of bass during tournaments. He also noted that a self-patrolled off-limits area during tournaments was useful. These should be considered in best management practices for tournaments.

Kenny Penrod suggested that the 3-bass creel limit and 15-inch minimum size limit should be instituted. Scott Sewell and Steve Chaconas both noted that some clubs have adopted a self-imposed 3 fish creel limit as a best management practice. Steve Chaconas added that smaller clubs may adopt a lower creel limit and that could have an important effect on the fishery. Roger Trageser additionally noted that some reduction in creel number was useful as a best management practice, particularly for smaller tournament organizations (less than 50 boats). Joe Love highlighted the wording of best management practices and that they could raise awareness of valuable strategies for helping to protect resources.

6 Knot Zone on Gunpowder

Joe Love indicated that the 6 knot zone near Days Cove, requested by Nick Nicosia and supported by the 2015 roundtable, will be implemented in 2016. Bob Lunsford said that the regulation should be in effect by March 15. Nick Nicosia also discussed the nearby quarry and its potential for stocking largemouth bass. Joe Love and Mark Staley agreed to survey the area in spring to assess habitat quality for young largemouth bass. Joe Love then circulated a petition for a 6 knot zone for the Spoils, which had been suggested by the roundtable in 2015 and supported by the 2016 roundtable. Denis Schanberger had also suggested a 6 knot zone for Mattawoman Creek near Smallwood State Park. The paperwork for that zone will be drafted for signature by Joe Love. Both petitions will be sent to Boating Services by April so that the scoping process can begin.

Status of Fisheries

Joe Love identified a stocking strategy that put thousands of advanced fingerlings or fingerlings into the Potomac and upper Bay. All fish will be marked with oxytetracycline as fry. Keith Barker asked about the proportion of fish that survive when stocked. Steve Chaconas asked about the differences in proportion by size of fish stocked. Joe Love answered that Department suggest about 10%, but that the actual percentage varies a lot with habitat conditions. Bigger fish (3 to 4-inches) tend to do better according to some published work, but research was inconclusive from Maryland tagging studies. The contribution of stocked fish to the fishery will be determined in 4 - 5 years. Scott Sewell asked if the Department would collaborate with Wheelabrator again. Joe Love answered yes, with some identified success in the past and good public relations for the fishery.

Joe Love mentioned that the annual review that has more details on the status of fisheries is not yet ready for distribution. He then encouraged everyone to attend the meeting at the Potomac River Fisheries Commission if they were interested in more details on the Potomac River fishery. Neither Virginia nor DC demonstrated recent problems with bass fisheries in the areas they survey.

Gunpowder River has recently been incorporated into the tidal bass survey. There are established sites on the river, but only 3 years of data so far. The intent is to extend the time series of data.

Potomac River fishery has exhibited catch indices below the reference points since 2012. Reproduction was above reference points for 3 of the last 4 years, though at values less than long-term averages. Steve Chaconas noted the differences between spring and fall sampling, underscoring potential difficulty in capturing fish during fall when submerged vegetation has become more thick. Also, composition of submerged vegetation has changed with Hydrilla dominating now whereas milfoil was once more common. Kenny Penrod noted that he did not see a lot of Valisneria in the upper tidal Potomac River. Brett Coakley emphasized the value of native Valisneria because of the way it grows. Mary Groves noted that a spring survey was considered in the past, but there would be negative impacts on spawning bass. Also, she noted that the fall surveys are not really encumbered by thick Hydrilla beds.

The upper Chesapeake Bay fishery had catch indices that were lower than reference points for the last 2 years. As a precaution, Joe Love suggested management actions taken with Potomac River should also be applied to the upper Chesapeake Bay. Steve Chaconas mentioned that there was lots of grass in the upper Bay, but most of it is Hydrilla.

Joe Love noted the management actions taken as indicated by the Fishery Management Plan: a possible catch-and-return area regulation; best management practices for permitting; outreach to minimize handling stress on bass during catch-and-release fishing; stocking, and habitat enhancement.

A discussion of additional management actions ensued. These actions concerned possession. Limited or no possession was suggested for some months: March, April, June, July. Kenny Penrod asked why a mandatory 3 bass limit or year-long 15-inch minimum size limit was not required. Joe Love noted negative economic consequences if some tournaments stop fishing because of creel limit or size limit changes. He then expressed concern about biological impacts of bringing in lots of big fish without protecting some of the largest fish. Steve Chaconas noted that a 15-inch minimum size limit would discourage tournaments. He added that the best idea is to get directors to voluntarily limit themselves. Scott Sewell suggested that in some rivers, especially Pocomoke River, a 15-inch minimum limit would be impractical because very few fish are 15 inches or larger.

Denis Schanberger noted that in the 1990's fish stressed during the spawning season during 90 degree heat resulted in large fish dying. Joe Love added that such mortality could negatively affect the number of large fish in a population. However, he added that the data are not available to determine whether a 3-fish creel or 15-inch year-round size limit would improve the fishery. The effects of those regulation changes, he added, would depend on the number of anglers fishing in a tournament. Joe Love noted that average creel limits were about 2 bass per bag currently. A lower creel limit could allot more tournament anglers the potential to win a tournament. A lower creel during some months, such as July and August, may also lower the number of fish that die during warm temperatures. Roger Trageser asked if a creel limit change would affect the BASS tournament scheduled for August in Potomac River. Joe Love noted that the creel limit for the boat is already lowered for that tournament to 5 fish per boat; also, that the Department has discretion on creel and size limit stipulations per permit request.

Nick Kuttner added that management actions should be taken to benefit the fishery now and that causes didn't need to be researched. Gina Hunt noted that based on the process to modify regulations, the Department cannot take immediate action to the issues. She encouraged the Roundtable to take this opportunity to provide recommendations to the Department, particularly for the permit review criteria for application review. Nick Kuttner suggested that if

tournament directors follow a certain number of best management practices, then they may be permitted. Steve Chaconas added that if they follow a certain number of best management practices, then they be allowed to keep fish rather than a 3 fish creel. Denis Schanberger emphasized that Education goes a long way. Roger Trageser ended by saying he would encourage all clubs to limit creel, but also that he sees very little mortality at the weigh-in. Joe Love agreed that these efforts are best if led by the tournament organizers. Roger Trageser expressed some concern that there are small tournaments with bad weigh-in practices and that there is some potential for no possession tournaments, particularly if each boat has its own scale.

Denis Schanberger asked whether others had been catching more young fish. Steve Chaconas said that he had was catching more 6 - 8 inch bass than in recent past. Nick Kuttner asked how long it would take before those fish entered the 12-inch to 15-inch size range. Joe Love answered about 3 - 4 years.

Kenny Penrod emphasized the current problem with the Potomac River fishery and that there was little sacrifice from tournament directors to fix the problems. Steve Weimer noted that their club is very invested in fish conservation and tools to help prevent fish mortality. He added that there are other sources that affect the fishery besides tournament anglers.

Middle River

Scott Sewell led the conversation regarding Middle River. He described a kill of 200,000 fish on the river, which requires restocking to re-establish the bass fishery. He expressed concern for forage fish as well and suggested stocking forage species. Joe Love suggested surveying for forage fish during spring with Mark Staley and Central Region crews. Scott Sewell volunteered to work with Mark and Joe on the survey. Mary Groves noted that forage fish should re-populate the area naturally and fairly quickly. Scott Sewell suggested that if the fish kill resulted from a glycol spill from a chemical company near the river, then that company should be held accountable. He also noted that he is hoping to raise \$25,000 for fish re-introduction. Joe Love allocated \$6,000 from the Department's budget to restock bass in the fall. He asked the roundtable whether 4-inch or 6-inch fish should be stocked, knowing that 6-inch fish would cost more. The roundtable expressed that larger fish is better.

Possum Point

Dominion Power has been permitted to dispose of coal ash waste to Quantico Creek and Potomac River, but are required to control the concentration of some chemicals entering the water. Keith Barker described the problems with coal ash pollution to Quantico Creek and the mainstem of Potomac River. Keith Barker mentioned that a Virginia Senator has introduced SB537 to require coal ash disposal in a landfill, but that bill has not yet passed. Keith Barker noted that the permit has been modified to cap in place, according to EPA regulations, but the pond has no clay on its sides and is leaking. He mentioned that declines in the bass population in that region may be partially linked to chemical pollution. The Potomac Riverkeepers have filed an injunction to delay the permitted activity. Keith Barker asked whether the State of Maryland would write a letter of support of the injunction. Tony Prochaska asked whether the Sport Fish Advisory Commission was drafting a letter to Secretary Belton about the possible discharge of pollution to Quantico Creek from Dominion Power. Roger Trageser answered that he would check on that.

Broad Creek

Matt Lawrence discussed the Broad Creek pumping station upgrades that were planned and the problems with pollution to Broad Creek. It was suspected that massive sewage spills to Broad Creek has altered its ecosystem. Pollution from Broad Creek could affect the bass fishery and explain the dominance of filamentous algae in some reaches of Broad Creek over recent years. The treatment plant has been repeatedly fined for the sewage spills. Fisheries Service agreed to collaborate with enforcement agencies to address the problem. Keith Barker emphasized continued collaboration

with other State agencies. Steve Chaconas asked about the Broad Creek Strategy. Joe Love was not sure because the permitting agency, Maryland Department of Environment, is already aware of the problem and is levying fines against the plant. Matt Lawrence noted that once the permit is approved by the National Park Service, then WSSC indicated that within 30 months, the plant upgrades will be completed.

DNR Transporting Fish at Anchor Marina

Joe Love provided a drafted policy statement regarding the redistribution of bass following tournaments. The policy statement was generated by Inland Fisheries. He asked that comments be directed to him.

Improving Information on Handling Bass for Anglers

Steve Chaconas underscored a problem with insufficient information on reducing stress on bass when handled by anglers. He noted that while guides such as himself and Kenny Penrod may show anglers how to handle bass, many anglers may not be aware of some important methods. He noted that rubber nets, wet gloves, and proper hook removal were all important handling strategies that should be incorporated into Department information. Keith Barker inquired whether anyone had studied if hydrogen peroxide is a good treatment for healing bleeding of hook-injured fish. In a follow up email, Brian Richardson indicated that hydrogen peroxide is not approved to be used for treating a fish that will be released to the water and could be later eaten. In another follow up email, Steve Weimer noted that carbonation and increased levels of carbon dioxide in the blood help to stop bleeding - but that this is an emerging science and nothing is known about long-term consequences of exposing fish to this treatment. Steve Chaconas suggested some ethic practices, such as not landing fish onto the boat carpet, should be added to the Fishing Guide. The recycling of soft plastic baits should be encouraged. Keith Barker noted the danger of piercing culling devices and suggested that information be circulated to black bass anglers. Joe Love indicated that these good suggestions can be included in new editions of the Fishing Guide and can be circulated to anglers who obtain a fishing license on-line through Compass, indicate that they fish for black bass, and agree to receive information from the Department.