

Freshwater Fisheries Monthly Report – November 2020

Stock Assessment

North Branch Potomac River - Conducted fry counts on the North Branch Potomac River to confirm natural reproduction of rainbow trout in the special zero creel limit management area. Counts were conducted at four locations within the management area - no trout fry were observed.

Upper Potomac River - The annual fall electrofishing boat surveys for gamefish were completed on the upper Potomac River. Unfortunately, adult smallmouth bass densities were below average levels. Poor juvenile recruitment in recent consecutive years is a major factor behind these results. Juvenile smallmouth stocking efforts for the middle and lower sections of the river are planned for next year. Walleye and muskellunge were also collected in the surveys. Invasive flathead catfish were found at multiple sites downstream from Dam 5, with the largest measuring 35 inches.

Triadelphia Reservoir - Completed the biennial fall electrofishing survey of Triadelphia Reservoir (Howard and Montgomery counties) with assistance from the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC) staff. The survey was conducted on consecutive nights in early November. Large densities of juvenile and early-adult largemouth bass were collected. Additional species observed included northern pike, tiger muskellunge, and smallmouth bass.

Federal Aid Reports - Completed final editing of reports for Youghiogheny River Trout Population Monitoring Study; Hoyes Run Trout Population Monitoring Study; and Savage River Tailwater Trout Population Study. Staff also compiled and summarized coldwater data for Zippin depletion and quantitative surveys.

Habitat and Water Quality

Environmental Review - Provided aquatic resource information for the following environmental review projects:

- Time of year waiver request for a culvert cleaning project at the location of Borden Yard Road in Mount Savage, MD. The culvert is in a critical state and could possibly collapse resulting in cut off access to a residence, possible destruction of water lines, and potential sediment load to this small tributary to Jennings Run.
- Recommendations on an application submitted by the town of Lonaconing for installation of two new water line mains. Installation processes are to be done with traditional methods and with the use of horizontal directional drilling. Comments were provided to ensure habitat in the stream is protected and to see that proper mitigation is used after the completion of the project.
- An application submitted by Silver Tree Marine was reviewed for the installation of a new private boat ramp on Deep Creek Lake that is to be located on Deep Creek Drive. Recommendations were given for time of year closures as well as proper sediment control and mitigation practices.
- An application submitted by Columbia Gas of Maryland for the installation of a new utility line to be installed under the Little Youghiogheny River in the town of Lock Lynn. The use of horizontal directional drilling will be used for the installation; comments were given for time of year restrictions during drilling along with equipment recommendations and mitigation.
- Time of year waiver request for the replacement of two culverts located on MD Rt. 495. The culverts were in a state of emergency due to the culvert ends failing, thus resulting

in the road starting to sink. Given that this project was located in the headwaters of Monroe Run, a waiver was granted that outlined strict sediment control practices to protect the robust brook trout population in this stream.

- Time of year waiver requests for two State Highway Administration roadside ditch cleaning projects. While both projects were deemed not to affect any Use-III coldwater stream, recommendations were made to hydro-seed the exposed soil at the completion of the project.
- Supportive comments were made to the Western Maryland Land Stewardship Committee regarding a proposed conservation easement along the upper Savage River. The conservation easement will protect the riparian zone from development and provide for long-term stream habitat and water quality protection in Maryland's premier brook trout fishery.
- Conducted a site visit to review a proposed stream restoration project on Piney Run in Baltimore County.
- Conducted a site visit to review a stream mitigation/restoration project on Jones Falls in Baltimore County
- Bridge repair work over Tuscarora Creek in Frederick County. Strict adherence to the sediment and erosion control plan and the October 1 - April 30 in-stream construction time of year restriction were recommended.

Reef Ball Habitat - With the assistance of Captain Matt O'Neal from the department's Hydrographic Operations, and multiple staff members from Rocky Gap State Park, staff placed fifty-three reef balls in Lake Habeeb. Multiple discussions and meetings were held in order to properly plan and stage the deployment of reef ball habitat in the lake. After delivery, all staff involved were given their specific jobs for the deployment process to ensure the health and safety for all staff members involved. Deployment day went smoothly with reef balls placed at eight different locations throughout the lake.



Placing a reef ball into Lake Habeeb.

Muddy Creek - Western Region I staff organized a ten-ton load of limestone sand to be placed in Muddy Creek in order to neutralize the stream's acidic water during the spring months due to acid deposition. With a little coordination, a truck and driver were graciously volunteered by the Garrett County roads department for the transport of lime from the quarry to the dump site. The

lime load cost was covered by the Youghiogheny Chapter of Trout Unlimited. During the late winter months, staff will periodically spray the lime pile with water to wash it into the creek.

Mitigation Project - Participated in several virtual meetings about a large mitigation project on Back Branch, a tributary to Western Branch in the Patuxent River watershed. Several species of concern have been identified by the department including; glassy darter, stripeback darter and American brook lamprey. The mitigation project involved substantial instream work that could have been detrimental to these species. Ultimately, the project was rejected because the project goals, bank stabilization and reduction of sediment, could not be supported long term and did not offset the disruption of habitat important to rare, threatened, and endangered species (RTE). The Western Branch watershed contains highly erodible soils that could be addressed with shoreline stabilization projects. However, proposed projects should be designed with a lighter touch to prevent disturbance of RTE habitat and species.

Stocking and Population Management

Rainbow Trout – The following areas were stocked with surplus rainbow trout by Albert Powell Hatchery staff. Trout stocked were approximately 3.5 fish per pound.

- Lake Habeeb - 2,000
- Casselman River - 1,500
- Youghiogheny River catch and release - 1,500

Outreach

Customer Service - Provided customer service information for inquiries regarding:

- Tips for fishing Deep Creek Lake.
- Fishing the Casselman River and Town Creek Delayed Harvest areas.
- Fishing the Youghiogheny River Lake, current conditions of water levels, and access.
- Fall trout stocking that was completed this season.
- Weekly fishing report on current fishing conditions within the region.
- Information regarding dock removal and boat ramp closure for Deep Creek Lake State Park operations.
- Fishing Broadford Lake and information on the park rules and regulations.
- Status of smallmouth bass populations in the North Branch Potomac River.
- Brown trout resources in Bee Tree Run and Little Falls.
- Muskie fishing conditions on the nontidal Potomac River
- Pond maintenance information with links to the local Soil Conservation District, pond management consultants, and pond management catalog companies. This information was provided to a Baltimore County pond owner dealing with a 50+ year old pond with the common issues for a pond of that age.

Coldwater Resources Presentation - Freshwater Fisheries staff provided a virtual presentation on coldwater resources in Frederick County to members of the Potomac Valley Fly Fishers Club. The slide presentation outlined trout, coldwater benthic macroinvertebrate, and temperature monitoring efforts in the county. Threats to these unique habitats and efforts to identify and protect existing coldwater aquatic communities were discussed.

Angler Access

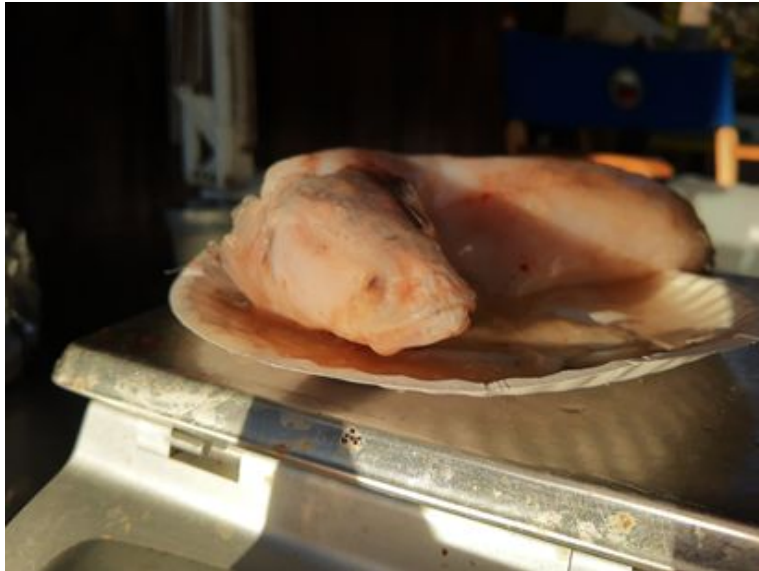
Fishery Management Areas (FMA) - Black Oak, Evitts Creek Ponds, and McCoole management areas continue to be mowed and cleared of trash to make these areas

presentable for anglers and recreational boaters. Staff is currently in the process of refurbishing picnic tables from Evitts Creek FMA. Staff removed six tables that were in need of repair and spent several days disassembling the rusted and broken tables. The tables will soon be given a face lift with new wood and paint and will be placed back at the Evitts Creek FMA at a later date.

Traveled to special fishing management areas to maintain regulations signs so users are informed of proper fishing regulations while angling in different management areas.

Invasive Species

Blue Catfish Diet Study - Work continued on examining diet samples from blue catfish collected from the tidal freshwater Patuxent River (Anne Arundel, Charles, Prince George's counties). The work is being completed as a portion of a larger collaborative project with Maryland Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey, and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. The group aims to determine potential ecological effects of the establishment and expansion of the invasive fish within the Chesapeake Bay watershed. During fall 2020, notable food items recovered from fish included American eels and northern snakehead, among other items such as blue crabs, sunfish species, and white perch.



A Northern snakehead found in a blue catfish stomach.

Blue Catfish Tagging Study - Staff tagged and released 38 blue catfish into the tidal freshwater Patuxent River. The fish were tagged with a combination radio and acoustic tag, and their movements will be monitored via passive and active tracking methods. The project is in collaboration with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Geological Survey, and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. Fish ranged from 22.8 to 36.4 inches in length, and 5 to 25.9 pounds in weight. Social media and signs posted at boat ramps and fishing piers were used to notify anglers and request they report and release tagged fish.

Attention Anglers



Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Fishing and Boating Services, is conducting a Blue Catfish Tagging Study in the Patuxent River.

If you catch a tagged Blue Catfish please note the numbers and release immediately. Please do not cut tag or antennae.

The orange tag has a phone number and tag number on it. If you catch a tagged fish please call the number and let us know the location it was caught. This will help us greatly on the study. Thank you!



L to R: A blue catfish with both radio and acoustic tags; sign posted at boat ramps

Brook Trout Program

Participated in a fish passage mitigation meeting aimed at building a framework for fish passage mitigation funds to be distributed in the future.

Participated in planning for an angler creel survey on the North Branch of the Potomac River tailwater trout fishery. The goals are to better understand angler use and demographics on the popular trout fishery.

Completed a series of handouts explaining the benefits of forested riparian buffers to brook trout. These handouts will be used by the Maryland Forest Service as a tool to reach landowners interested in forest conservation on their properties.

Responded to customer service inquiries about brook trout and carp angling opportunities statewide.

Tidal Bass Program

Based on feedback from the Black Bass Advisory Committee, permits for tournaments were revised to include a requirement for boaters to use their livewells effectively when bass are in them. Special conditions for handling bass during stressful warm weather are added to permits issued between June 1 and September 30, which is another revision based on feedback from the committee. Originally, the range of dates were June 15 and October 31. Finally, new conditions were added to permits issued outside of the June 1 and September 30 window. These included requirements to transport bass overland within two minutes between water exchanges and transporting bass in water filled bags while traveling overland.

With field season concluding, staff has been vigorously entering tidal bass data into the database.