

Tributary Summary: Choptank River

Invasion status

When were blue and flathead catfish introduced?

- Invasive catfish were believed to be illegally stocked in 2008, based on the size of those encountered.

What methods are being used to determine population size and structure? What population data exists?

- No methods are currently being used to determine invasive catfish population size and structure in the Choptank.

What are the specific ecological impacts (i.e. predominant prey species)? Is there any mapping or information on the spatial extent of the species?

- Direct and indirect competition for forage fish with native fish, particularly largemouth bass. Other highly valued species in Maryland such as alewives, herring and shad have been found in blue catfish stomachs. Current diet data shows that blue catfish will feed on whatever is in the river. This indiscriminate feeding can have a detrimental effect on species that enter the Bay and its tributaries on a seasonal basis.

Monitoring and Science

What survey(s) are you using to monitor?

- There are no catfish surveys in the Choptank.

List any active research projects.

- There are no active research projects in the Choptank.

What information exists on the contaminant burdens of fish?

- Consumption advisories for contaminants in fish are issued at the federal and state levels and exist for both commercial and recreational fishing. More specific advisories are recommended for individual species depending on size of the fish and where it was caught in the water body. The main contaminants of concern for fish are Mercury (Hg) and PCBs. In Maryland, there are no specific consumption advisories for blue catfish in the Choptank.

Fishery

Is there an active commercial fishery? Do we have harvest data? What gear is being used to catch the fish?

- No commercial fishery exists in the Choptank for invasive catfish.

Is there recreational fishing? Specifically, what types: charter, subsistence, or both?

- The Choptank supports a recreational fishery and catfish tournaments.

What fishing regulations exist in the tributary?

- [Maryland Department of Natural Resources](#) (MD DNR) does not have a minimum size or creel limit for invasive catfish caught in Maryland waters.

Communications and outreach

Who are the primary contacts and key stakeholders (scientists, managers, fishermen, conservation groups)?

- Maryland DNR, Bay Catfish Advocates, Chesapeake Conservation Association, and a host of small clubs or guiding businesses.

Are there any active public messaging campaigns?

- MD DNR has an aggressive public awareness campaign that includes website bulletins, signage at primary angler access points, newspaper articles, ads in the annual Fishing Guide given to each angler when they purchase a

fishing license and a display panel about invasives included in presentations to the public at the State Fair, Seafood Festival and various fishing shows.

Management strategies (active or proposed)

Are there active management strategies in place for invasive catfish in this tributary?

- MD DNR is continuing its public relations campaign to increase awareness.
- Maryland is also a member of the Chesapeake Bay Program's [Sustainable Fisheries Goal Implementation Team](#) and is working with state, federal and local agencies to draft regionwide strategies to effectively manage invasive catfish in the region

What strategies could be developed or implemented to reduce impacts of invasive catfish?

- One suggested strategy is to continue encouraging the removal of invasive fish by both commercial businesses and local anglers, especially focusing on finding another commercial use for catfish besides consumption. MD DNR has contacted a couple of fairly local companies that do exploit large fish catches, but neither were interested in blue catfish, for various reasons.