



North Carolina Chapter of the American Fisheries Society

29 March 2019

NC Wildlife Resources Commission
1701 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-1701

RE: Comments on Draft Catfish Management Plan

Dear NC Wildlife Resources Commission:

The North Carolina Chapter of the American Fisheries Society (NCAFS) is writing to provide comments on the Draft Catfish Management Plan. Our organization represents more than 170 fisheries professionals in North Carolina, with members from academia, non-governmental organizations, private industry, and natural resources management agencies. Here, we highlight the portions of the plan that we consider important for maintaining and improving North Carolina's native fisheries and aquatic resources.

First, we commend the NCWRC for making efforts to update the existing 2007 catfish management plan. We are especially supportive of the plan's statements and Commission's commitment to "science-based management of aquatic wildlife resources" and to "protect and enhance native catfish" species. We also commend the plan's recognition that the spread of and management for non-native, invasive catfish species has been a detriment to native fish species and the recreational opportunities they provide for anglers. The plan also appropriately recognizes the importance of North Carolina residents who are non-consumptive users of fisheries resources, and who value protection and restoration of ecosystems.

We are in full support of the plan's intention of a thorough evaluation of trophy regulations for the invasive Blue Catfish to determine whether they are effective, and a willingness to rescind them if sound-science findings determine such regulations are not warranted (lines 243-247). Further, we are encouraged that native fishes are a priority by the statement on lines 253-255, and we implore the Commission to ensure the final plan includes the same verbiage: "To limit the expansion and abundance of Blue and Flathead Catfish, harvest will be encouraged, and harvest restrictions on these species will not be considered."

Finally, we hope the Commission recognizes that the guidelines set forth in this plan support the goals of the recently drafted conservation plans for rare and imperiled aquatic species (Robust Redhorse, Five Species in the Tar and Neuse River Basin, and the Brook Floater Conservation Plans), all of which discussed invasive catfish species as threats to native aquatic fauna. Following this plan closely and committing to science-based decisions will support the recreation and conservation values of the majority of North Carolina residents.

Please contact the NCAFS if you have questions regarding these comments (Past President: tblack@rkk.com or Environmental Concerns Committee Chair: jennifer.m.archambault@gmail.com).

Respectfully,

Tyler Black, NCAFS Past President