

Inland Fisheries Monthly Report – March 2015

Stock Assessment

Big Laurel Run - Western Region Manager Alan Klotz reviewed the Environmental Protection Agency's proposed news release on the "Big Laurel Run Success Story". This stream in the Casselman River Watershed is one of several streams being treated with alkaline limestone leach beds and limestone sand dumps to remediate pH impairments. Water quality has improved with respect to pH and alkalinity, and we documented increased natural reproduction of brook trout from the baseline study prior to remediation projects. The overall goal of this project is to remove the Casselman River watershed from the EPA's Maryland 303(d) list for pH impairment and restore the population of native brook trout to the affected areas of the watershed.

Central Region biologists Todd Heerd and Adam Eshleman will be conducting a brook trout fry count in the Right Fork of Jabez Branch from the confluence with the Left Fork upstream to the split on the Right Fork.

Habitat and Water Quality

Upper Georges Creek Stream Sealing Project - Inland Fisheries staff Klotz, Heft, and Sell attended a meeting with the MDE Abandoned Mine Land Division (AMLD) regarding a study to assess stream sealing in the upper Georges Creek Watershed. The AMLD would like to perform a geologic and hydrologic assessment of the upper Georges Creek Watershed to determine the extent and amount of stream flow lost to underground mines. After the assessment is completed, plans will be developed to reduce the amount of water loss in Georges Creek and tributary streams to underground mines. This would allow for baseline flows during low flow conditions and improved water quality in the Georges Creek Watershed. Currently, the underground mines funnel water from the Georges Creek Watershed into the Braddock Run and Jennings Run Watersheds via the Hoffman Tunnel and Allegany Ditch. Concerns were raised by Fisheries Service regarding reduced flows into Braddock Run, a unique reproducing brook trout stream, if this stream sealing project significantly reduced flows into Braddock Run. Reduced flows could impact the existing brook trout population by loss of habitat and increased water temperatures. The study proposal will address these concerns and we will be able to make informed decisions regarding the stream sealing projects.

Maryland Marcellus Coalition - Western Region 1 staff collected water quality samples from streams within the Bear Creek, North Branch Potomac River, and Block Run Watersheds. We obtain monthly water quality data on these streams for baseline conditions prior to any potential Marcellus gas drilling.

Western Region staff reviewed the following potential land acquisitions:

- A 90 acre tract adjoining Green Ridge State Forest in the Fifteen Mile Creek Watershed. Inland Fisheries Service supports this potential land acquisition as it will provide water quality protection in the Upper Potomac River Watershed.
- John Mullican continues to work with Land Acquisition and Planning to prepare access easement for Beaver Creek special trout management area.

Environmental Review - Provided comments to the Environmental Review Unit or other agencies regarding:

- Hazardous scrap material removal along the West Virginia bank of the North Branch Potomac River near Pinto, MD. A ballistic plant on the WV side of the river has decades-old scrap deposits in the bank and floodplain area, and will be removing these potentially hazardous materials. Comments were made to use BMPs to eliminate the possibility of any materials or sediment for entering the river as well as protect time of year for spawning black bass.
- NPDES Permit Application for NewPage Corporation for the North Branch Potomac River Use I-P and Savage River Use III-P. Storm water runoff is generated at the Savage River woodyard site, an area now used for vehicle maintenance, parts and scraps storage, other waste storage (indoors), and parking. It is also used for overflow storage of logs. Currently no sediment controls or treatment facilities exist at this site. Suggested that DNR should highly recommend to MDE that the storm water pollution plans and implementation be expedited by the applicant. In addition, the temperature limits on the cooling waters being released into the North Branch Potomac River for outfalls 001 through 006 – the maximum daily temperature limit is 95° F, with outfall 004 allowed to be 114° F, based on a mixing zone of 50 feet. While the North Branch Potomac River (NBPR) is classified by MDE as a Use I-P, in reality it should be treated at least as a Use IV-P. MD DNR manages the NBPR as a recreational trout stream, receiving several thousand adult trout each year since about 1989, and the river is one of Maryland's top trout fishing destinations. We have documented year-round survival of trout in this section of the river as well as wild trout represented by multiple year-classes. DNR should request that Use IV-P temperature standards (75 ° F) be considered for this application.
- Reviewed emergency repairs made by SHA to roadside drainage adjacent to Mt. Harmony Road in Calvert County, MD, an area that drains into a first order stream of a Patuxent River tributary. An engineer of the project was aware of the importance of sediment control to protect the watershed and employed additional measures to minimize impact to area.

Land Reclamation Committee (LRC) - Western Region Manager Alan Klotz attended the monthly meeting of the MDE LRC. The 2014 Reclamation Awards were presented to both TriStar Mining and G&S Mining for their outstanding efforts to reclaim strip mines with vegetation that provides watershed protection as well as wildlife habitat. The

committee then conducted a field review of a proposed 72 acre mine site in the George Creek Watershed, in the Moore's Run sub-basin. The reclamation plan included a forestry restoration plan in the steeper portions of the site and pasture land on the flat area of the property. The committee accepted the re-vegetation plan and applauded the efforts of the landowner to re-forest the steep portion of the property to provide watershed protection. Also, former Inland Fisheries Deputy Director Bob Davis officially announced his "retirement" from his term as a member of the LRC. His knowledge and expertise will be missed!

Savage Reservoir Fish Habitat Improvement Project - Western Region staff Jody Johnson and Kenny Wampler constructed unique fish habitat structures in the Savage River Reservoir using pole timbers cut from under powerlines on the Mt. Nebo Wildlife Management Area. The timbers were manually pounded into the lake bottom by these two muscular fisheries workers in areas where sunfish and bass are known to spawn. In addition they placed about 50 Christmas trees attached to cinder blocks in the upper area of the reservoir to serve for nesting areas, nursery areas for fry, and angler target fishing locations.



Tree post fish habitat structures and spawning nests from last year. Posts are now under water in the Savage Reservoir.

Muddy Creek Liming - Western Region staff worked with a Garrett College student to flush lime into Muddy Creek to improve water quality prior to trout stocking. The limestone pile was frozen like a 12 ton block of concrete due to the severe winter, so we pumped stream water onto the pile to thaw it out to increase the alkalinity in the stream. After the liming, fellow students assisted with trout stocking in Muddy Creek prior to the opening day of trout season.



Garrett College student Devin Baker flushing limestone sand into Muddy Creek.

Conococheague Creek - Letters of appreciation and a summary of the survey results were provided to landowners that gave access to conduct fishery surveys last fall on Conococheague Creek to assess the smallmouth bass fishery. The majority of waters in Western II are on private property and it is imperative that we maintain a good working relationship with landowners for both fishing and monitoring access.

Outreach

Fisheries Technician Kenny Wampler submitted an Angler's Log entry regarding ice fishing on the Savage Reservoir to promote increased angler use of this waterbody. The reservoir fishery has recovered from the 2009 draining and supports a robust population of yellow perch that could withstand increased angler harvest.

Western region Manager Alan Klotz discussed the status and effect of *Didymo* in streams in Western Maryland that appeared in a Cumberland Times newspaper article.

Fisheries Technician Kenny Wampler performed a fish dissection lesson for the Northern High School's Envirothon Club.

Staff responded to angler inquiries on a daily basis mostly dealing with spring Put and Take fishing.

Stocking and Population Management

The Town Creek Delayed Harvest Trout Fishing Area within the Green Ridge State Forest was float-stocked with 3,000 rainbow trout in almost its entirety thanks to the efforts of Bear Creek and West I staff as well as members of the Nemaquin Chapter of Trout Unlimited. This float stocking effort distributes the trout into the more remote, better fish habitat areas of the stream and anglers really seem to appreciate the extra effort to provide good fishing.

The North Branch Potomac River Catch and Return Trout Fishing Area downstream of Bluehole received about 200 beautiful brown trout (1.2/lb) raised at the Cushwa Hatchery. The Western Maryland Fishing Guides Association members assisted with the stocking, as well as maintained the road along the river to allow for stocking and fish sampling access.



A nice Cushwa brown trout being stocked into the NBPR C&R Area by a DNR volunteer.

Western II staff collected walleye brood and conducted a monitoring survey of the Potomac River walleye population. A total of 14 large females and 16 males were provided to Manning Hatchery. Hatchery staff will produce 40,000 OTC marked fingerlings to supplement existing natural reproduction in the 44 mile stretch of the Potomac between Dam 5 and Dam 3. It was disappointing to not collect any 2014 yearclass walleye during the survey, but not unexpected due to the high flows and reduced visibility at the time of the survey. Several spent females were observed and the majority of spawning activity is expected to occur by April 1.

Staff posted appropriate regulation signs along stocked Put and Take trout areas in preparation of opening day.

Two-hundred rainbow trout were stocked into Governor's Bridge Pond for its inaugural stocking. The MNCPP-Commission pond, located in Bowie, MD, was recently added to the locations stocked as part of MD's put-and-take trout program. Muddy conditions after rains and snow melt required the use of creative stocking, and a Polaris Ranger utility vehicle, coupled with a 100-gallon stock tank, and waders were employed. A recent MDNR Angler's Log post indicates at least one angler is happy with this new fishing opportunity in Southern MD.

Staff assisted APH, Bear Creek and Unicorn staff in the stocking of various streams and impoundments to have trout stocked for opening day on March 28th.

Angler Access

The Evitts Creek Ponds Fisheries Management Area's access road was improved thanks to the work of Kenny Wampler, Jody Johnson, and Wildlife Service's Beau Emerson. The crew had about 10 tons of crusher run delivered to the site, and spread out the material to improve the severely degraded access road. Kenny has assumed responsibility of maintaining fishing access to this popular fishing spot near Cumberland, as the NPR who once adopted this site, no longer do so. The guys also conducted trash clean-ups at the McCoole and Gary A. Yoder FMA's on the North Branch Potomac River.

Invasive Species

A National Park Service research permit was submitted and granted for conducting spring surveys of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal to determine the presence/distribution of northern snakehead. The presence of this invasive species in the canal poses a very serious risk of escape into the Potomac River watershed upstream of Great Falls. The surveys are scheduled for May with cooperation with the USFWS and the DC Water Quality Unit (Fisheries).

Southern Region Manager Mary Groves attended the weigh-in of the Cabela's King Kat tournament held at Leesylvania State Park, VA on March 14. She discussed MDNR policies regarding blue catfish and the concerns of Bay Catfish Advocates, an advocacy group for blue catfish in the Chesapeake Bay system. The group's primary concerns were MDNR's labeling of blue catfish as 'invasive', the requirement to kill any invasive fish to be considered for citation or record status, and the lack of protection for 'trophy' catfish.

Southern Region made arrangements to continue providing invasive catfish samples to Maryland Department of Environment (MDE) to update consumption advisories for anglers catching and keeping catfish. A big part of trying to manage the Invasive Catfish problem in the Bay is to encourage anglers to catch and keep any invasive catfish they catch. The current consumption restriction of 30" limits how many fish will be killed and consumed because people are reluctant to kill something they aren't going to eat. It is in our best interest to ensure size limits for fish to be consumed are accurate. The current thought is that if flesh along the lateral line is removed, the upper size limit may be increased. Sampling in 2015 will concentrate on testing this thought.

The Coastal Conservation Association Maryland Central Region (CCA) held a blue catfish tournament on the Potomac River at Smallwood State Park, MD on March 21. The catch-and-kill tournament helped raise awareness of invasive species. Talks were given by MDNR Southern Region, the Potomac River Keepers, and a CCA member. Smaller fish were filleted and prepared by Chad Wells, a chef at Baltimore's Alewife Restaurant. Larger fish were donated to MDNR for diet work and aging studies. The largest fish was just over 31 lbs, and most fish had recently consumed gizzard shad. Interestingly, the majority of fish were males also.



Rewards were distributed to two anglers who reported tagged blue catfish from the Potomac River. The fish were tagged through a cooperative tagging project with the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, MDNR, and other stake holders in 2012 and 2013. MDNR is excited that tag reporting has continued in 2015, and will continue to reward anglers who report fish.

Brook Trout Program

Brook Trout Staff officially launched the new Brook Trout webpage! It can be found under the "Programs" tab at the top of the Fisheries Website (<http://dnr2.maryland.gov/fisheries/Pages/brook-trout/index.aspx>). In conjunction with the launch of the webpage, a brook trout creel diary page was included. Staff worked with Linda Barker to develop a diary designed to get at some basic trip, catch and harvest data for brook trout state-wide.



<http://dnr2.maryland.gov/fisheries/Pages/brook-trout/index.aspx>

Brook Trout Staff met with MBSS staff as part of a cooperative effort with Savage River State Forest staff to monitor water quality and fish and invertebrate populations in Staub Run and Winebrenner run long term. Both these streams support native brook trout populations, which are downstream of the new St. John's Rock/SRSF off road trail. A field visit was conducted to both streams to delineate monitoring stations.

Brook Trout Staff participated in the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) planning meeting held at Greenbrier State Park. This plan is required by the Federal Government

for State Wildlife Grant (SWG) funding money to be used by each state. The plan is required to be updated by each state every ten years, and Maryland's new plan is scheduled to be completed in the fall of 2015. Since 2004 staff have received 9 SWG grants for research, monitoring, and restoration projects for our native brook trout!

Brook Trout Staff assisted the western Maryland MBSS crew with flow data collection from various tributaries at Rocky Gap State Park. The data will be used to develop a water balance for the lake and more fully understand the hydrology of the watershed. A native brook trout population exists in Rocky Gap Run downstream of the dam.

Brook Trout Staff attended a meeting with county officials, private contractors, and the MDE Bureau of Mines to discuss the development of investigations into streambed lining restoration projects in the upper George's Creek watershed. The intention is to determine areas of water loss from George's Creek and its tributaries through macropores created by the subsidence of abandoned deep mines in the area. Once areas are identified as 'losing' water stretches, work may be done to seal the pores and maintain more stable flows into George's Creek. When combined with local weather data, researchers hope to model the amount of surface flow being lost to the Hoffman Tunnel and subsequently Braddock Run. Fisheries has concerns that reductions in flow to Braddock Run may result in the loss of ~6.5 miles of brook trout waters and possibly the best fishery for large brook trout in the state. BOM staff were made aware of our concerns and agreed that Fisheries would be contacted and involved if plans are discussed for any stream lining projects. Brook Trout staff agreed to assist in the investigations for water temperature and quality monitoring.

Brook Trout Staff met with Central Region staff in order to collect the last GIS data necessary to update the Brook Trout GIS database. Once the data is included in the database, it will contain brook trout sampling data from a variety of sources, dating as far back as 1980! The next step will be to investigate the possibility of using ArcGIS Online to have a user-friendly database available to resource managers from anywhere they have an internet connection.

Brook Trout Staff completed one manuscript and made substantial progress on the companion paper for both components of the circle hook research project conducted in the spring of 2014. Both papers will be submitted to the North American Journal of Fisheries Management for publication. We expect a publication date late in 2015 or early 2016.

Brook Trout staff participated in the quarterly Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture (EBTJV) steering committee meeting.

Brook Trout staff provided comments to the EBTJV coordinator for the draft of the Management Strategy for the Brook Trout Outcome from the 2014 Chesapeake Bay agreement. The draft document is now out for public comment.

Brook trout staff provided information on the background and status of the Upper Savage River no harvest/no bait management area as requested by upper level management pursuant to a request from a local legislator.

Brook Trout Staff participated in roving angling surveys on Deep Creek Lake in order to collect angler preference data on potential changes to Northern Pike regulations in the lake. Thus far of the nearly 75 surveys conducted there has been virtually unanimous support for a regulation change. Surveys have also been distributed to four prominent tackle shops in the Western Maryland area in hopes of getting more local participation. Finally, a press release was sent out and shared on social media in an attempt to gain information from anglers outside of western Maryland. The survey period is set to end on April 30, when western regional staff will assess the results and determine whether a regulation change has public support.

Other

John Mullican and Mark Toms attended the Association of Mid-Atlantic Aquatic Biologists (AMAAB) conference held at Cacapon State Park in West Virginia. Several presentations covered the health issues and decline in abundance of the smallmouth bass population in the Susquehanna and lower Juniata Rivers. Although the Potomac River smallmouth bass have not had issues with disease related mortality of young of year, many of the issues affecting the PA rivers exist in other Mid-Atlantic rivers, including the Potomac.

Eastern Region and Unicorn Hatchery staff deployed over 30 fish habitat structures into Unicorn and Wye Mills Lakes. The structures are made from recycled Christmas trees and sunk in a variety of areas for the benefit of fish and anglers.

Eastern Region and Unicorn Hatchery staff continued working on a large fiberglass fish hauling tank and its trailer. The tank has been completed; work on the trailer is still ongoing.

NRP cadet Caciae Kline interned with Western Region II staff for the month of March. Caciae formatted seining data, assisted with Potomac River walleye survey, trout stocking, and sign posting.

Western Region II staff is working with officer Boback to address illegal dumping activity at Urbana Lake FMA