



Blue Catfish Informational Update

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

Marine Fisheries

N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission | Janelle Johnson | May. 26, 2022



Outline

- Life History Parameters
- Division Data
- Chesapeake Bay
 - Biological Research
 - Management
 - Virginia's New Commercial Fishery
 - Economic and Social Research

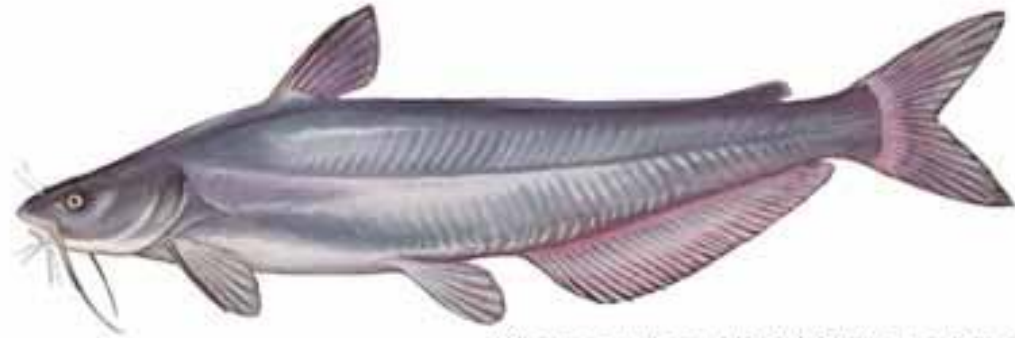


Photo courtesy USFWS/Duane Raver



Life History

- Life Span: 9-10 years
 - Chesapeake Bay and Lake Norman: Up to 25 years
- Maturity: 4-7 years
- Spawning: May-June
- Tolerance
 - Poor Water Quality
 - High Nutrients
 - Salinity
 - Limited Prey

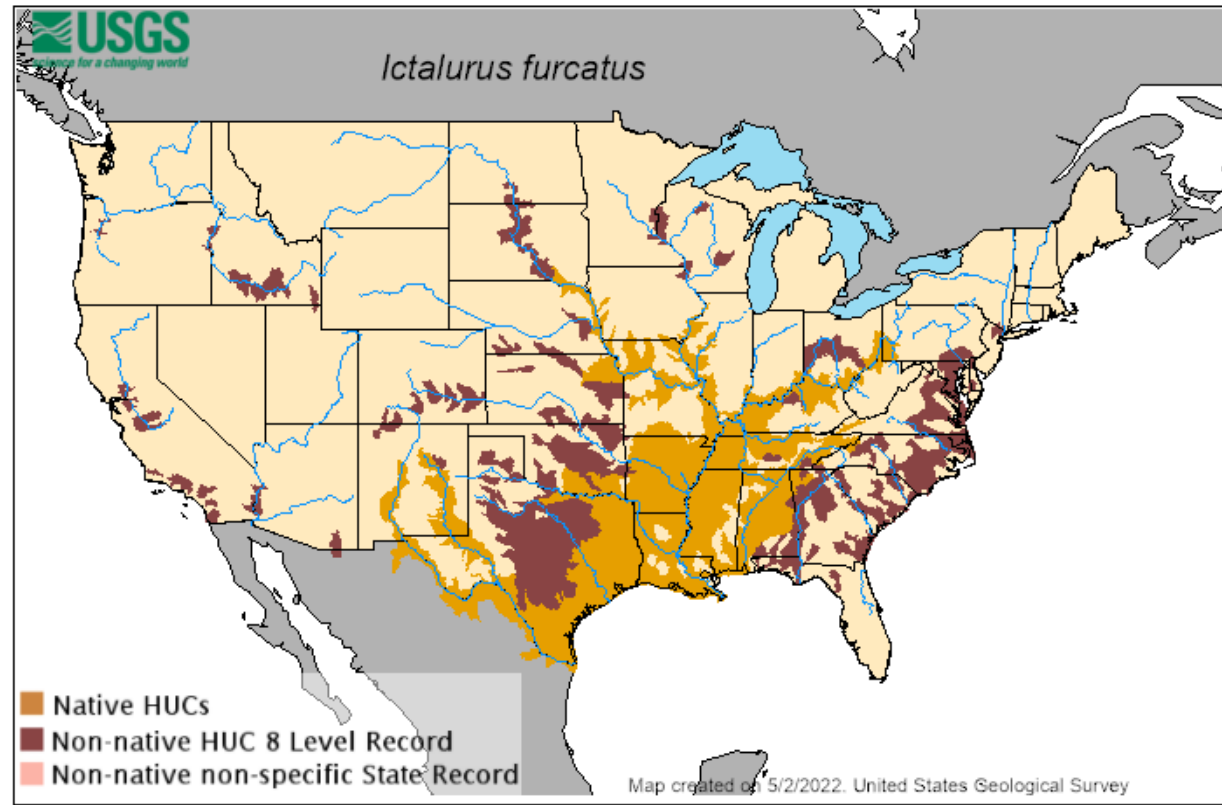


Photo courtesy of Ricky Nixon
of Nixon's Fishery

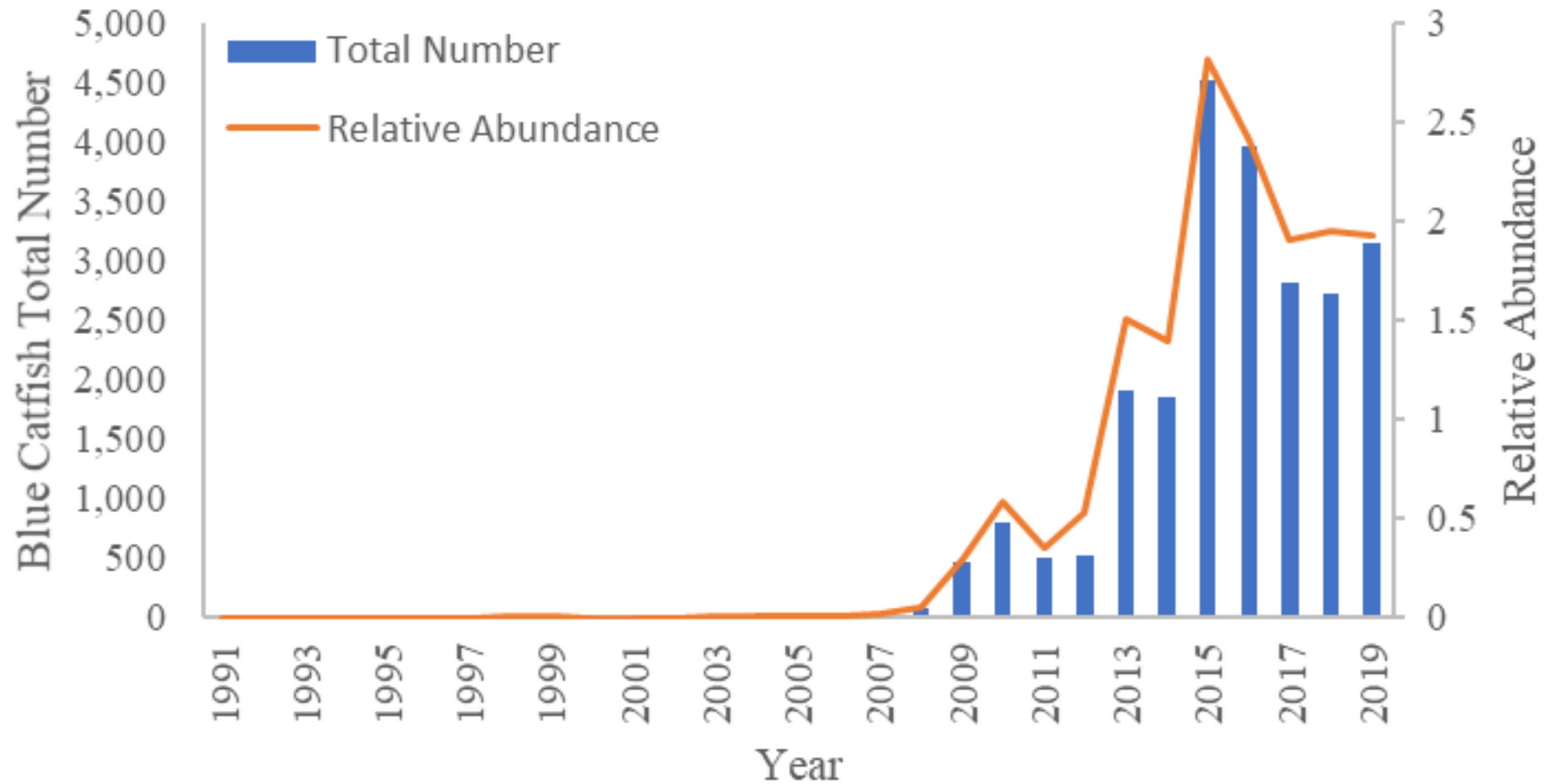


Blue Catfish

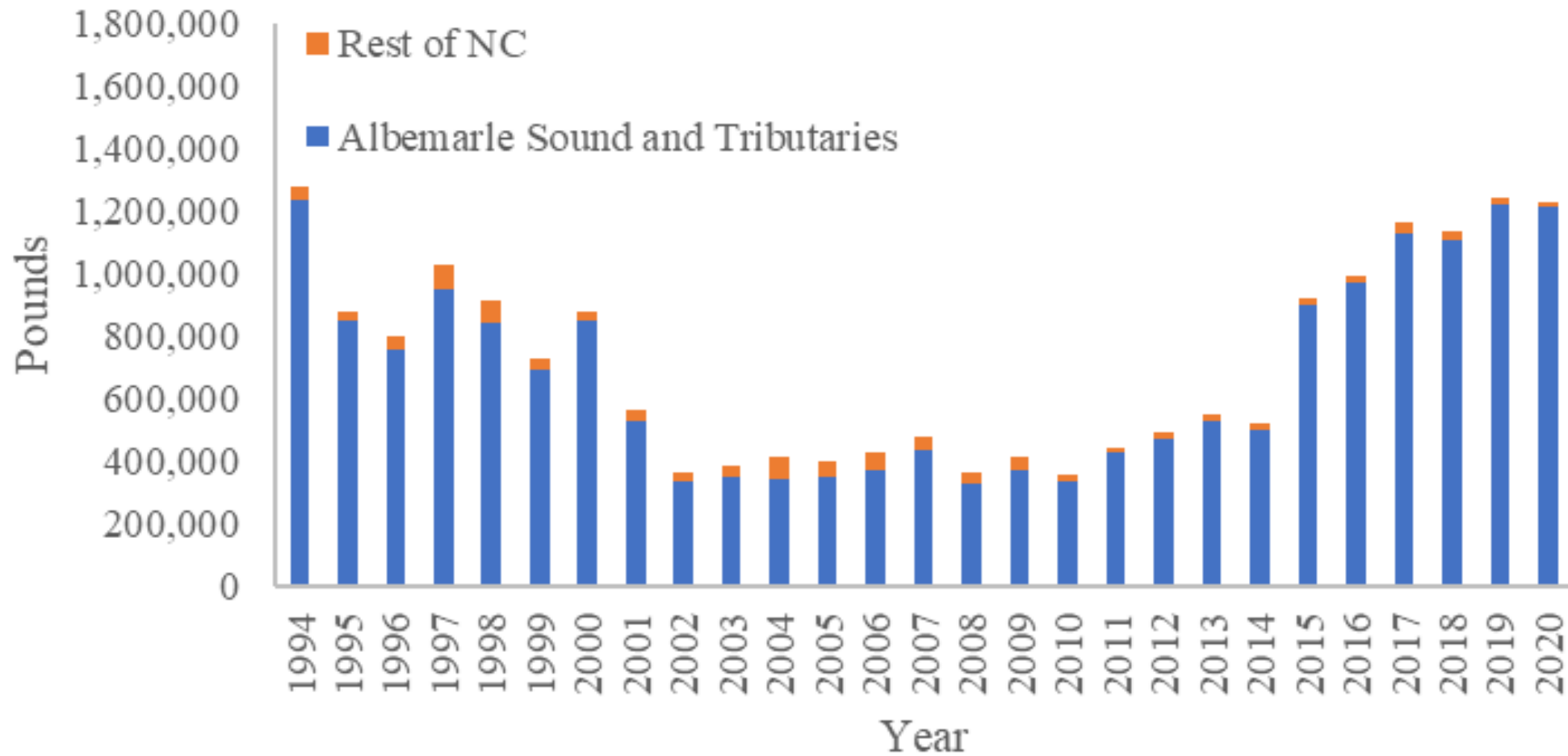
- Native to Ohio, Mississippi, Missouri rivers
- Introduced to enhance local fisheries
- Spread through range expansion and angler releases



Independent Gill Net Survey Spring Sampling



North Carolina Commercial Catfish Landings



Recreational

- Participation
 - Sport
 - Subsistence
 - Trophy
- Tournaments
- Charters



Photo courtesy of Chowan River Big Cat Club

Chesapeake Bay Research: Diet

- 2-5% Bodyweight per Day
- Common Prey
 - Asian Clams (Invasive)
 - White Perch
 - Gizzard Shad
 - Blue Crab
 - American Eel
 - Threadfin Shad
- Less Frequent Prey
 - American Shad
 - River Herring
 - Striped Bass
 - Atlantic Sturgeon



Research in Chesapeake Bay

- Salinity Tolerance
 - Up to 22 ppt
- Abundance
 - Outweighed all other fish species in Tidal James and Rappahannock rivers
 - 1.6 million in 7.5-mile Study Area of James River
- Impacts to Native Species
 - White Catfish
 - Blue Crab
 - American Shad and River Herring



Photo courtesy of NC WRC



Management in Chesapeake Bay

- Competing Objectives
 - Maintain Trophy Fisheries
 - Sustainable Commercial Harvest
 - Eradication/Control
- Maryland
 - No Restrictions
 - New Harvest Opportunities
- Virginia
 - One Fish Over 32"
 - New Commercial Fishery



Photo courtesy of Ian Vorster/VA Sea Grant



Chesapeake Bay Invasive Catfishes Workgroup

- Consistency of Regulations
- Angler and Public Education
- Continued Monitoring
- Targeted Removals
- Increase Commercial Harvest
- Develop New Fisheries



Photo courtesy of the Chesapeake Bay Program



Low-Frequency Electrofishing

- Four-Year Research Project
 - >1 Million Invasive Catfish Removed
- Advantages:
 - High Efficiency
 - No Bycatch
 - Initial Cost Recouped Quickly
- Limitations:
 - 73-86°F
 - 0.05-1.0 ppt
 - Multiple Chase Boats
 - Five Day Recovery Period



Photo courtesy of Smith-Root



Marketing Blue Catfish

- Consumer Awareness
 - Outreach Events
 - Seafood Festivals
 - Derbies (Maryland)
 - Monterey Bay “Best Choice” Chesapeake Catfish
- Supply Chains
 - Whole Foods
 - State-Owned Institutions (Maryland)
 - Correctional Facilities
 - Schools and Universities
 - Hospitals



Photo courtesy of NOAA Fisheries



Sustainable Development of Blue Catfish Fishery

- Economic Viability
- Growth Potential
- Outreach
 - Commercial Fishers
 - Processors
 - Dealers
 - Distributors
 - Consumers



Photo courtesy of NC WRC



Conclusions

- Research
- Increase Harvest
- Outreach & Public Education



Photo courtesy of Matt Roth/Chesapeake Bay Program



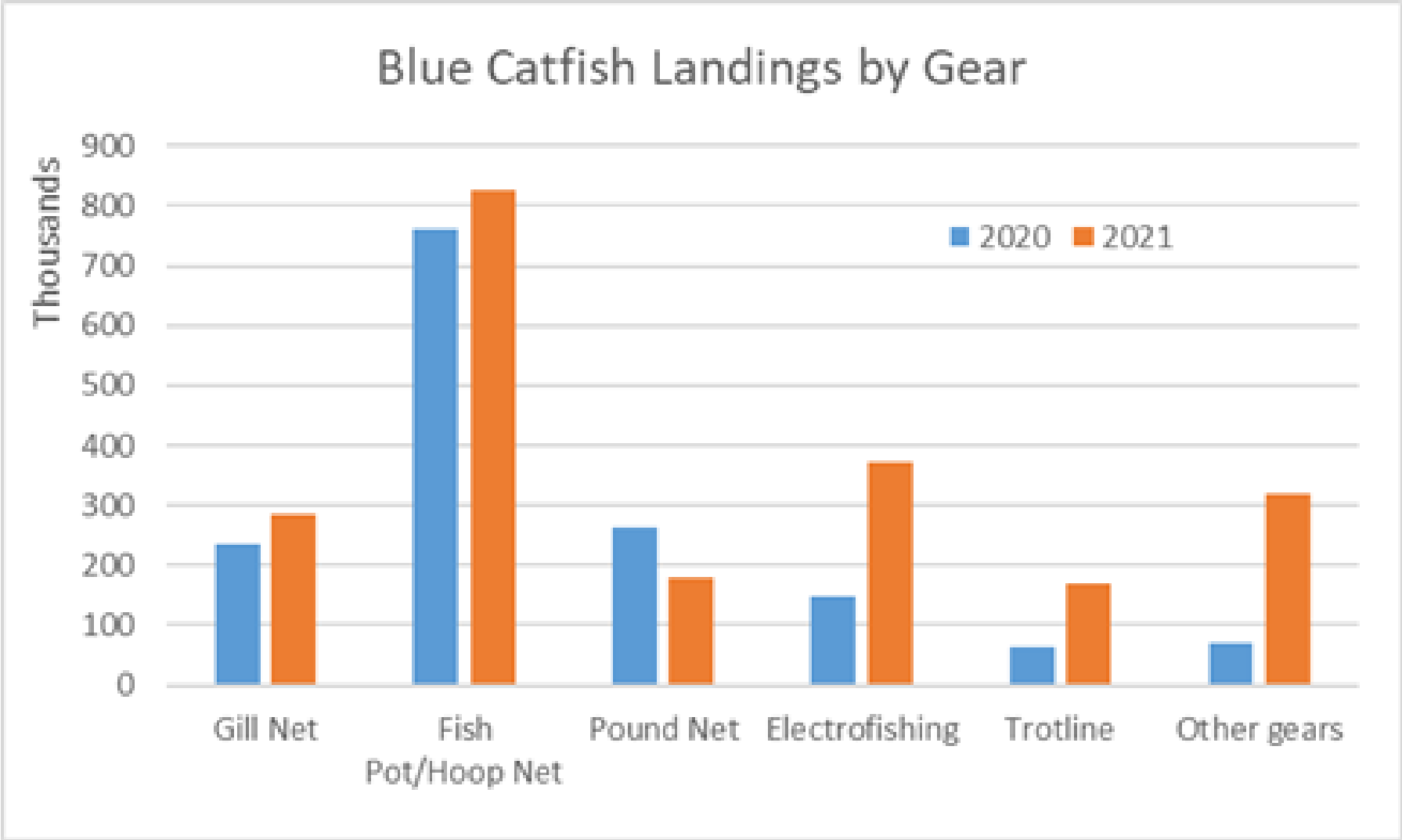
Questions?



2021 Record Blue Catfish Roanoke River



Virginia



LFE: Commercial Fishery Licensing

- Eligibility
 - Valid Commercial License
 - Landed 1,000 lbs of Catfish per Year in 3 of last 10 Years
 - Application
- Continued Eligibility
 - Renew Each Year
 - Harvest at least 100 lbs of Catfish by LFE in Previous Year
- Three Licenses
 - 130 Active Catfish Harvesters
 - 25 Applied
- Cannot Be Sold/Transferred
 - If a fisher loses license, goes back into eligibility pool



LFE: Commercial Fishery Restrictions

- Harvest Only Blue and Flathead Catfish
- Season Closed Oct 16-Apr 30
- Cannot Conduct Within Week Prior to or During DWR Sampling
- Report Planned Location and Time 24 Hours Prior to Fishing
- Maximum Size Limit
- Gear Capped at 15 Hz
- Gear Approved by VMRC
- Closed on Weekends
- Cannot Conduct within 100 yards of:
 - Marked Fishing Gear
 - Public Boat Ramps
 - Fishing Piers
 - People in the Water

