



Blue Catfish Informational Update

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

Marine Fisheries

N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission | Robert Corbett & Charlton Godwin | May 24, 2024



Outline

- Life History
- NCDMF Data
- Chesapeake Bay
 - Biological Research
 - Management
- Federal Regulations

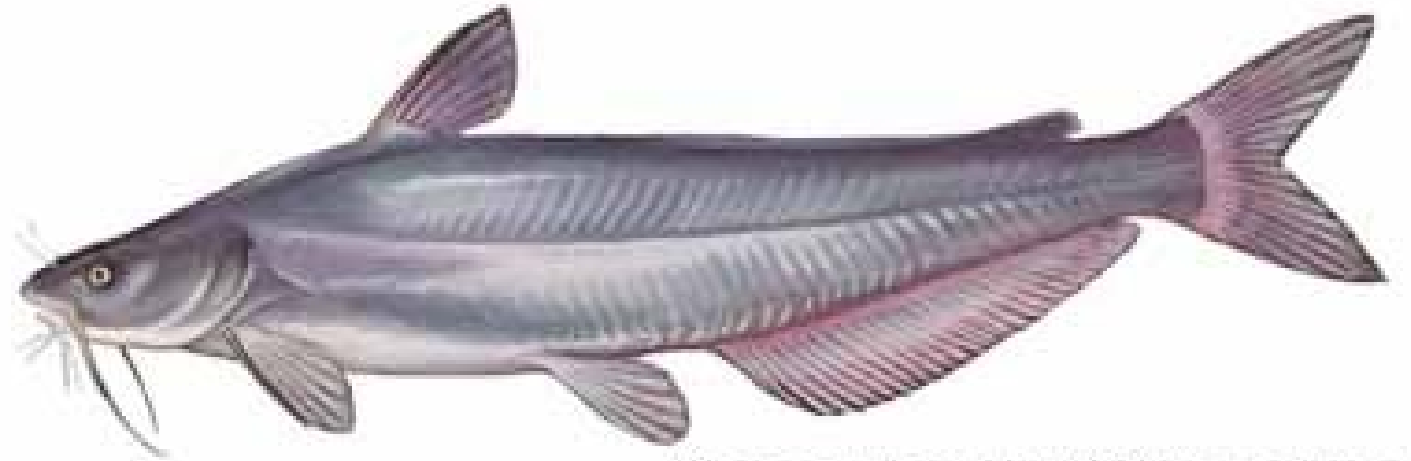


Photo courtesy USFWS/Duane Raver



Life History

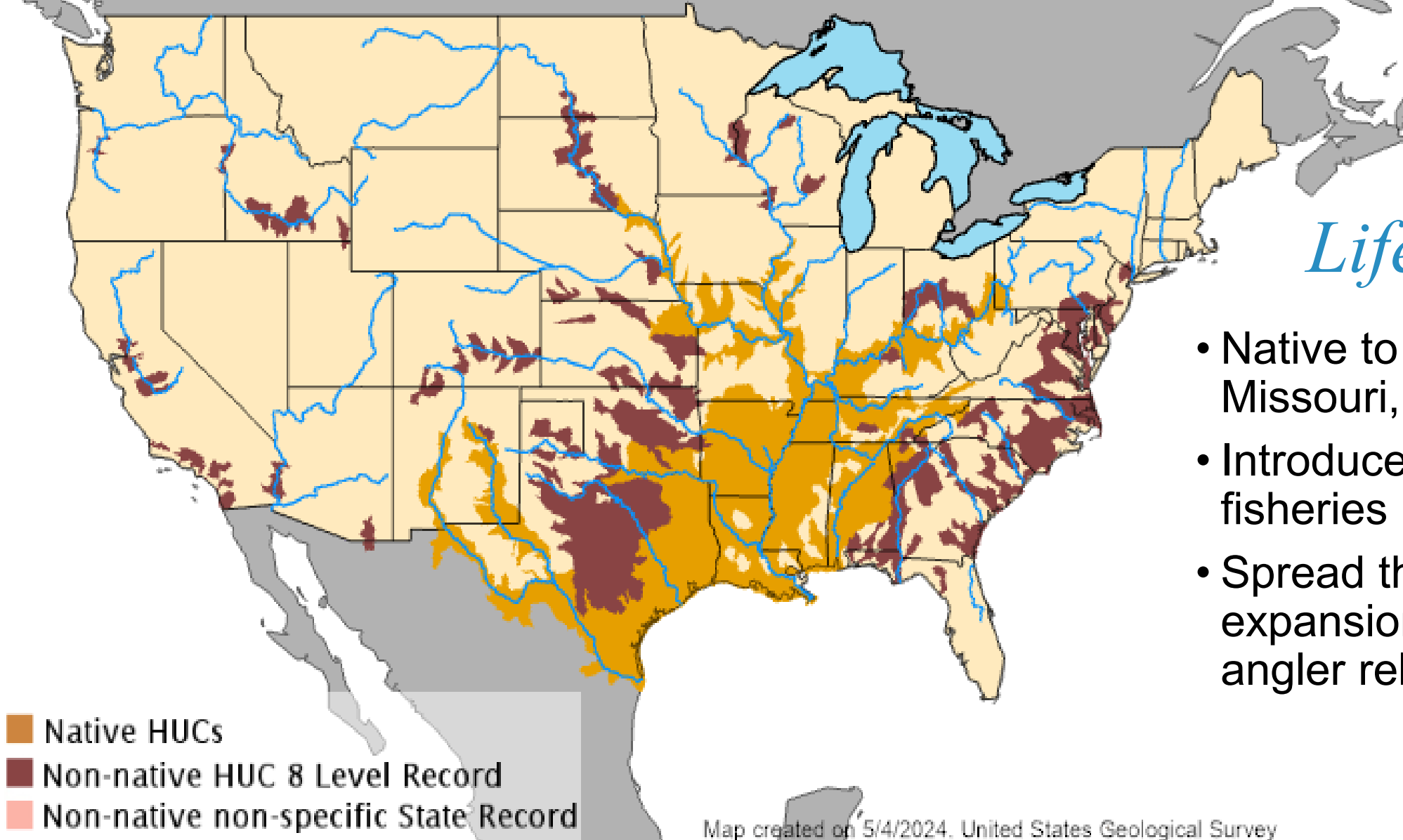


Photo courtesy of Ricky Nixon
of Nixon's Fishery

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



Ictalurus furcatus



Life History

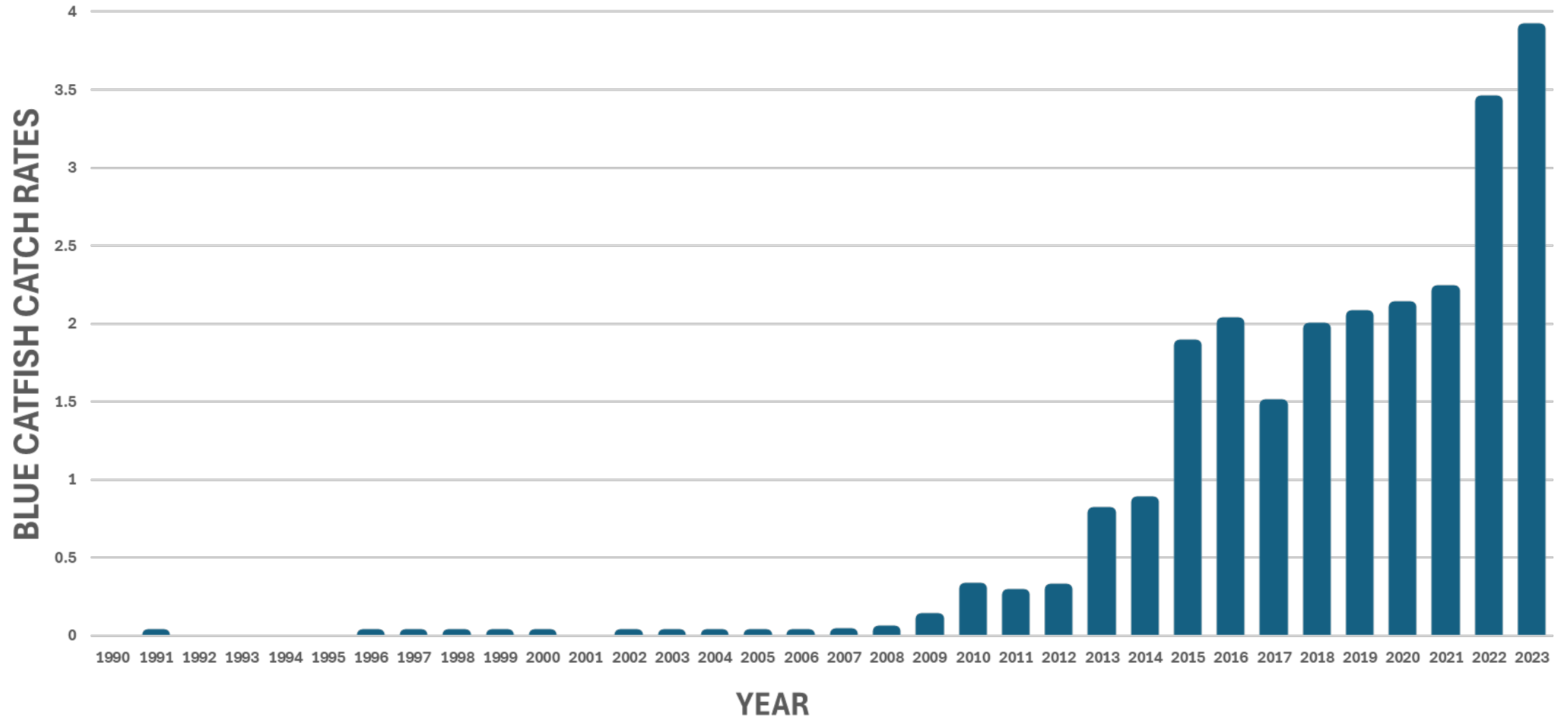
- Native to the Mississippi, Missouri, and Ohio rivers
- Introduced to enhance local fisheries
- Spread through range expansion, stocking, & angler releases

■ Native HUCs
■ Non-native HUC 8 Level Record
■ Non-native non-specific State Record



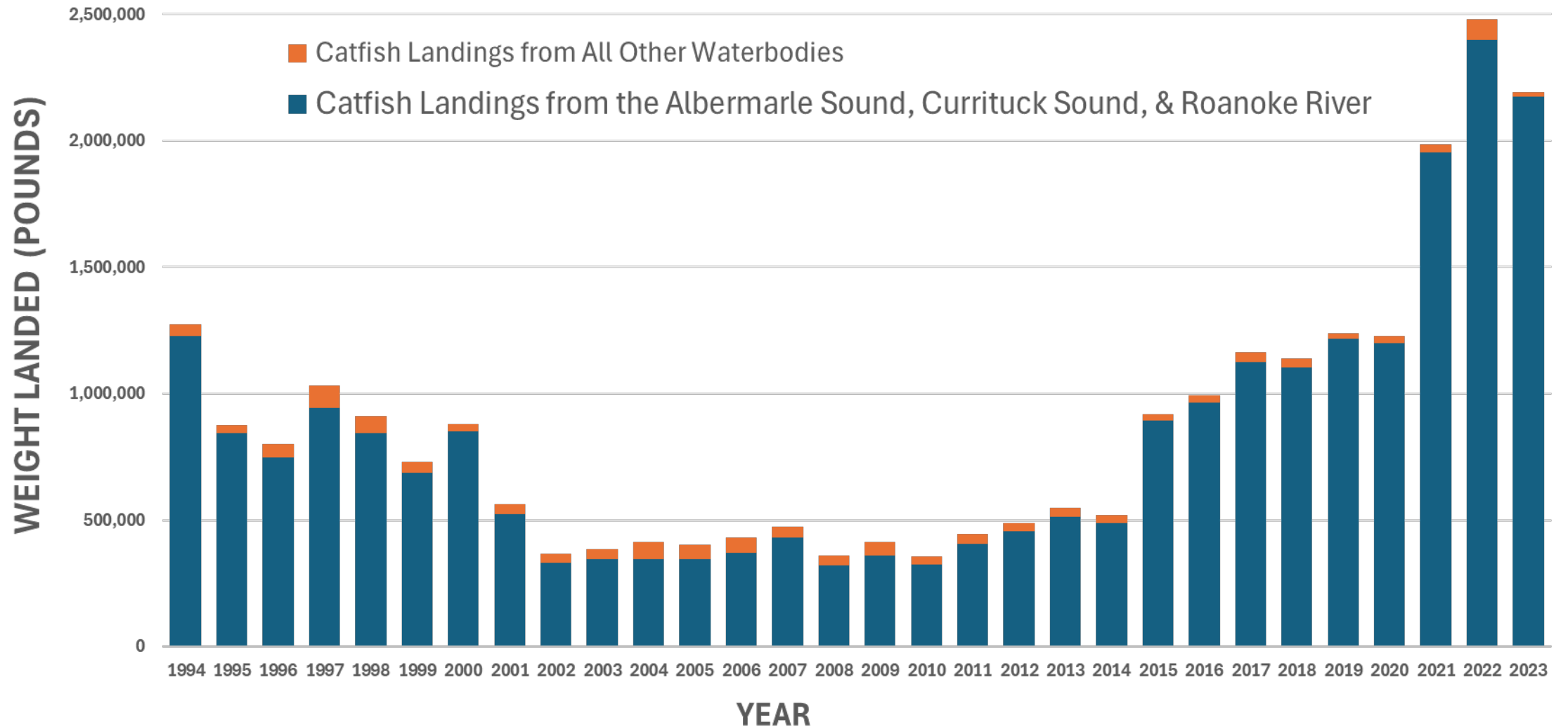
Albemarle Sound Independent Gill Net Survey

Program 135



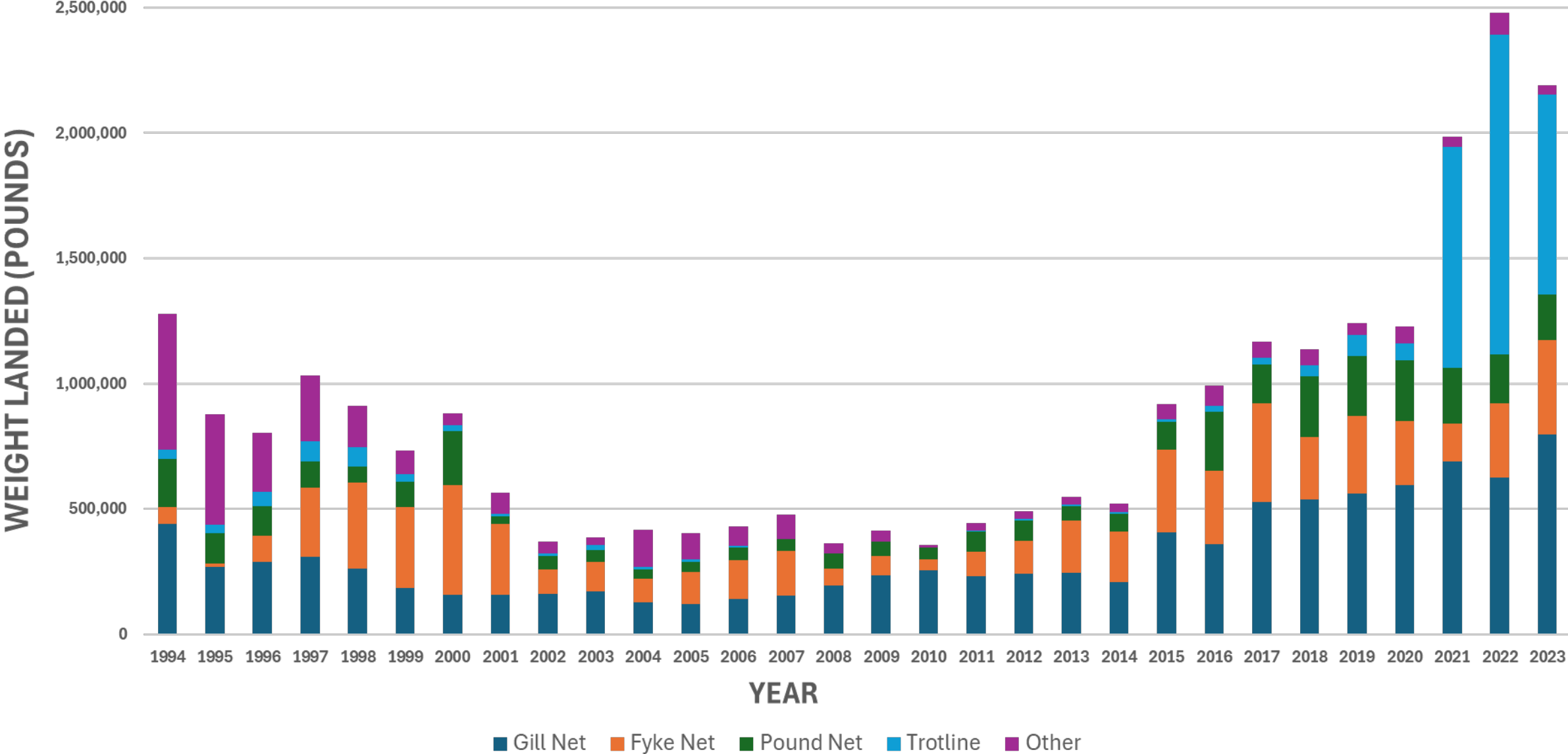
Statewide Commercial Harvest of Catfish

Data provided by: NCTTP



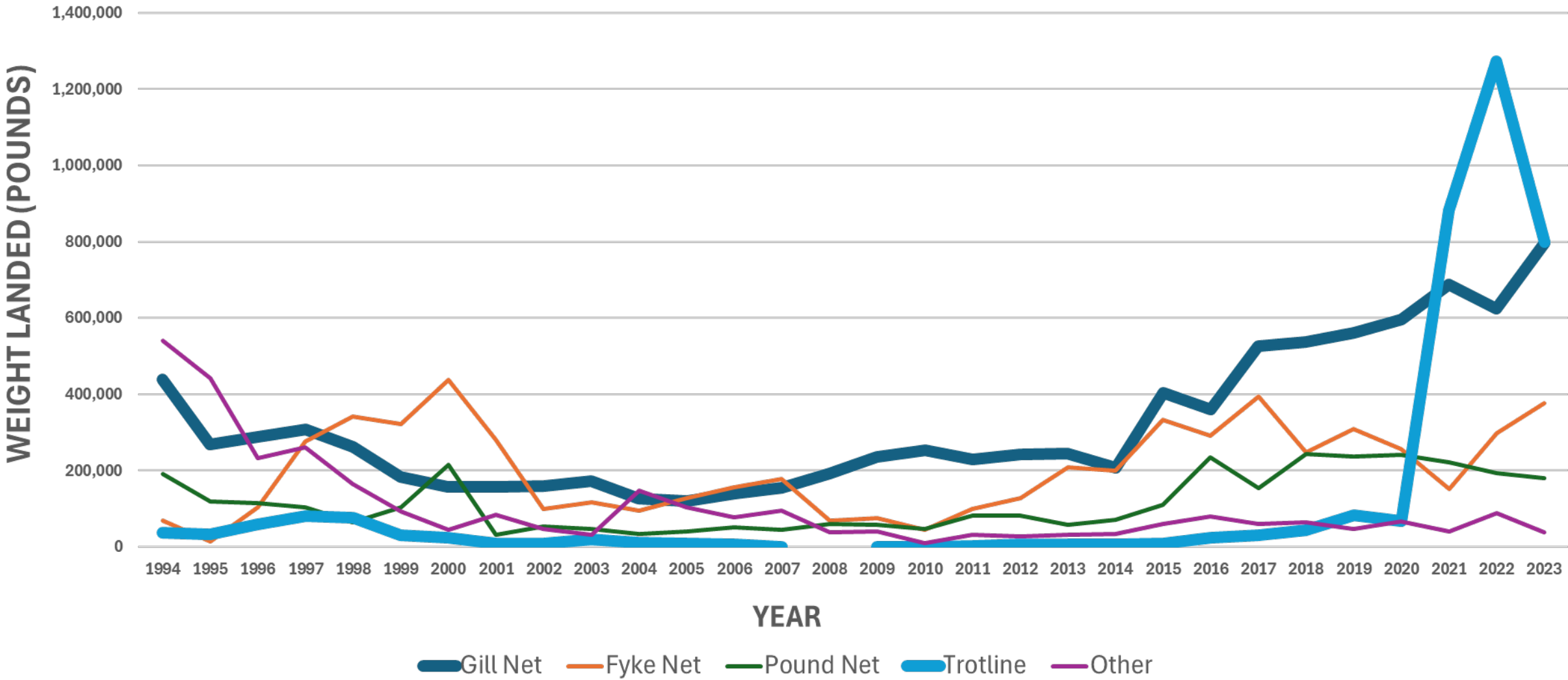
Commercial Gear Used to Harvest Catfish

Data Provided by: NCTTP



Commercial Gear Used to Harvest Catfish

Data Provided by: NCTTP



Recreational

- Participation
 - Sport
 - Subsistence
 - Trophy



Photo courtesy of the Chesapeake Bay Program



Photo courtesy of Chowan River Big Cat Club

- Tournaments
- Charters



Photo courtesy of The Columbus Times



Photo courtesy of NCWRC: Joey Baird; 121 pounds, 9 oz from Lake Gaston on July 5, 2020)

Chesapeake Bay Research: Diet



- Consume 2-5% Bodyweight per Day
- Common Prey
 - Asian Clams (Invasive)
 - White Perch
 - Gizzard Shad
 - Blue Crab
 - American Eel
 - Threadfin Shad



Chesapeake Bay Research: Diet



Photo by The Chesapeake Bay Magazine

- Less Frequent Prey
 - American Shad
 - River Herring
 - Striped Bass
 - Atlantic Sturgeon



Chesapeake Bay Research

- Impacts to Native Species

- White Catfish
- Blue Crab
- American Shad and River Herring

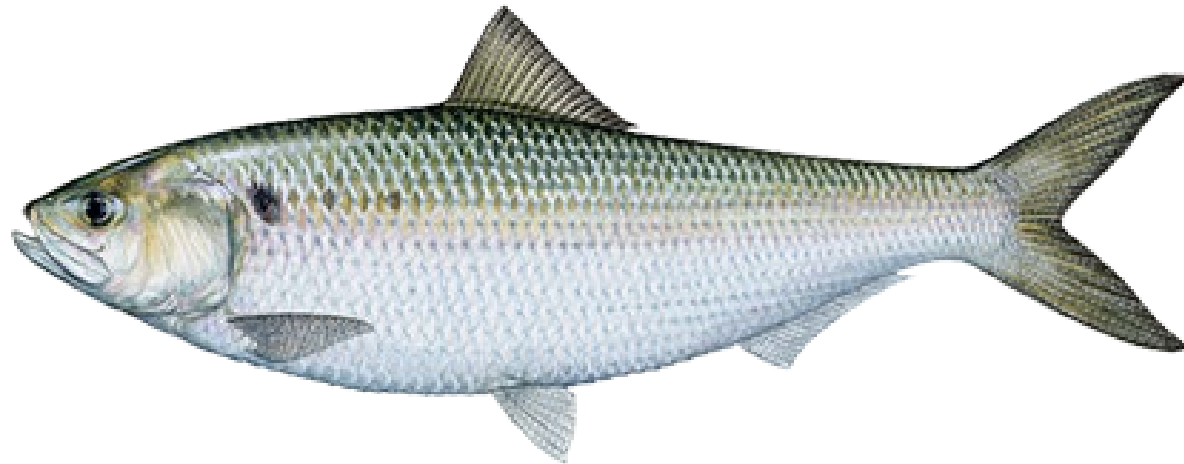


Photo courtesy of Takemefishing.org



Photo courtesy of the Chesapeake Bay Program

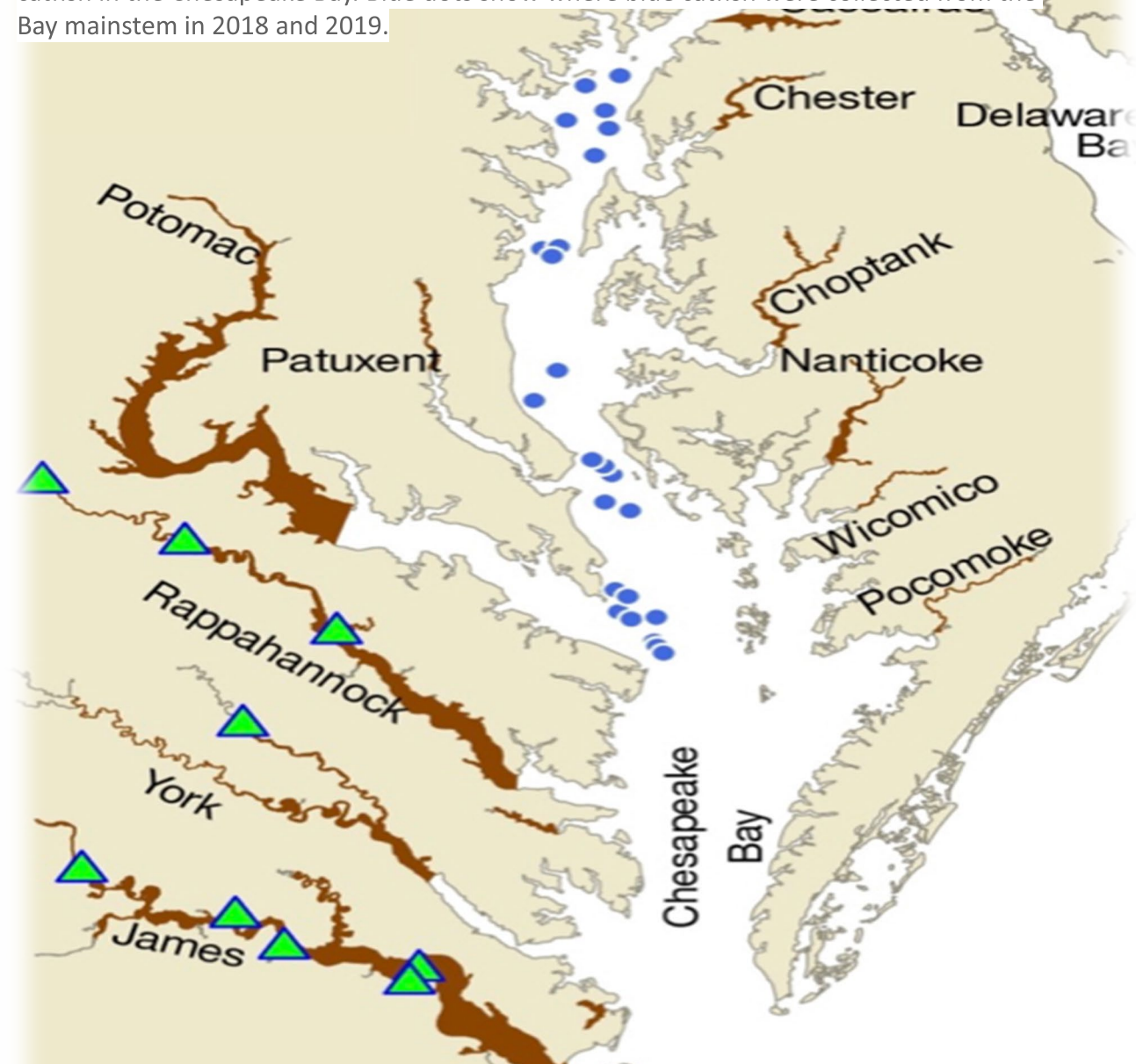


Photo courtesy of A-Z-Animals.com



Photo courtesy of Carolina Sportsman, Inc.

Stocking locations (green triangles) and current distribution (brown) of non-native blue catfish in the Chesapeake Bay. Blue dots show where blue catfish were collected from the Bay mainstem in 2018 and 2019.



Chesapeake Bay Research

- Salinity Tolerance
 - Up to 22 ppt
- Abundance
 - Outweighed all other fish species in the tidal James and Rappahannock Rivers
 - 1.6 million in 7.5-mile study area of James River

Nepal, V. and Fabrizio, M., 2019, *High salinity tolerance of invasive blue catfish suggests potential for further range expansion in the Chesapeake Bay region*. PLoS ONE: 14(11): e0224770.

Management in the Chesapeake Bay

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



Photo courtesy of Ian Vorster/VA Sea Grant



Management in the Chesapeake Bay



Photo courtesy of the Chesapeake Bay Program

- Chesapeake Bay Invasive Catfishes Workgroup Recommendations
 - Consistency of Regulations
 - Angler and Public Education
 - Continued Monitoring
 - Targeted Removals
 - Increase Commercial Harvest
 - Develop New Fisheries



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



Federal Regulations



Photo by The Chesapeake Bay Magazine

- 2008 & 2014 Farm Bills
- Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) Amended the Federal Meat Inspection Act, mandating inspection of all catfishes.
 - Commonly referred to as the “Siluriformes Act”
- Catfishes are the **only** fishes inspected by the USDA



Photo by Larry Chowning



Federal Regulations



Photo by The Wall Street Journal



Photo by The Chesapeake Bay Magazine

- March 1, 2016
 - Required catfish to be inspected by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)
 - Catfish are the only fish inspected by the USDA
 - The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) handles food safety for all other fish species
- Requires in-person inspectors examine the catfish before they go to market



Conclusions

- **Research**
- **Increase Harvest**
- **Outreach & Public Education**



Photo courtesy of Matt Roth/Chesapeake Bay Program



Questions?



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