

## *Fisheries Committee*



## *Meeting Summary*

**March 6, 2012 8:30 AM  
Centennial Campus, Raleigh**

### **Meeting Attendees:**

Wes Seegars – Chair	Hayden Rogers	Norman Young	Cindy Carr
Ray White – Vice-Chair	David Hoyle, Jr.	Bob Curry	Todd Ewing
Berkley Skinner III	Steve Windham	Christian Waters	David Cobb
Mitch St. Clair	Durwood Laughinghouse	Kyle Briggs	Fred Harris
Dalton Ruffin	Tom Berry	David Deaton	Curt Schmidt
Joe Barker	Gordon Myers	Doug Besler	Dale Caveny
John Coley	Mallory Martin	Brian McRae	Jodie Owen
Mark Craig	Chris Dillon	Chad Thomas	

### ***Hatchery Production Update***

- David Deaton, Fish Production Supervisor, provided an overview of the Commission's six hatchery facilities and a summary of production by species. He also shared information on the Marion Technology Center and Marion Conservation Aquaculture Center.
- Commissioners expressed an interest in nongame fish and mussel production, and there was an extended discussion.
- David presented future needs associated with hatcheries, specifically the need for increased trout production capacity. The trout program and its economic impact were discussed.
- Current capacity to produce catchable trout has been reached at approximately 900,000 fish.
  - ✓ Renovation to the lower raceways at the Armstrong State Fish Hatchery is expected to add approximately 100,000 trout.
  - ✓ Options for a new hatchery facility are being explored.
- Director Myers expressed the importance of fully evaluating future production needs and analyzing the cost-benefit of constructing a new facility and the associated capital and operational costs.
- Commissioner Hoyle ended the hatchery discussion by recommending that Commissioners visit our hatcheries. ***He suggested that site visits could be set up to accommodate 4-5 Commissioners at a time and asked staff to develop a list of possible dates.***

### ***ESA Listing updates (sturgeon, eel, & herring)***

- Chad Thomas provided an update on the listing Atlantic sturgeon under the Endangered Species Act.
  - ✓ In April 2012 following a lengthy status review, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) will formally list Atlantic sturgeon as endangered.

- ✓ The Commission submitted comments during the review period and expressed opposition to the listing given new research with NC State University and ongoing collaborative sampling efforts with NC Division of Marine Fisheries (NCDMF) initiated over the past few years.
- ✓ The impacts of the listing are expected to be minimal for the Commission's fisheries management activities, but more significant for NCDMF's fisheries and research programs. Director Myers indicated that there could be a significant fiscal impact to NCDMF with observer coverage requiring additional employees.
- Chad also provided an update on the proposal to list American eel and river herring.
  - ✓ At this point, Commission staff has only provided additional data for the ongoing status review. Once NMFS makes its recommendation on listing, there will be an opportunity to provide formal comments.
  - ✓ The listing of river herring has the potential to significantly impact the Commission's fisheries management activities.

#### ***Roanoke River striped bass update***

- Chad presented an update on the status of striped bass in the Roanoke River.
  - ✓ The recently completed NC Estuarine Striped Bass Management Plan only considered data through 2008. However, recent analysis of the 2009-2011 data indicated a decline in the population. Data collected this spring will be critical for further analyses.
  - ✓ Commission staff meets routinely with NCDMF staff to share and compare data, and the stock assessment model will be updated this summer.

#### ***Genetics projects overview – River Herring Stocking Project***

- Chad provided an overview of a blueback herring stocking project recently initiated.
  - ✓ The stocking effort will focus on two tributaries of the Chowan River, and the fry will be raised at the Edenton National Fish Hatchery.
  - ✓ Genetic markers will be used to evaluate the contribution of stocked fry, and the Commission has contracted with Duke University to verify the markers.
  - ✓ The project will last for at least 10 years with stocking conducted for 5 years followed by evaluation. Field sampling will be conducted in collaboration with NCDMF.

#### ***Lake Norman striped bass update***

- Brian McRae presented an overview of striped bass management at Lake Norman.
  - ✓ Since 2004, the reservoir has experienced periodic striped bass kills in late summer. Striped bass inhabit deep areas of the reservoir, and as the reservoir stratifies they become trapped and die because of a lack of dissolved oxygen.
  - ✓ One option under consideration for addressing these kills is to stock hybrid striped bass under the assumption they will use alternate habitats and survive better than striped bass.
  - ✓ A major concern expressed by the SC Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) regarding hybrid striped bass is that if they escape downstream into the Santee-Cooper system, they could compromise the genetic integrity of the naturally reproducing striped bass population. SCDNR staff is currently analyzing the genetics of all striped bass collected during their routine sampling downstream of Lake Norman to evaluate the current level of escapement. Results from this analysis are expected in approximately two months.
  - ✓ There was extended discussion regarding the future management of striped bass at Lake Norman and the associated cost-benefit of stocking. ***Commissioner Hoyle emphasized the need for additional educational efforts.***

#### ***Rules Update***

- Bob Curry provided the key dates for the 2013-2014 regulations cycle.
- Bob provided a summary of several rule-related topics:
  - ✓ There are number of proposals being considered for trout including the reclassification of a 2.8-mile section of Big Snowbird Creek (Graham Co.) from hatchery-supported to delayed-harvest,

reclassification of Fires Creek (Clay Co.) from hatchery-supported to delayed-harvest, designation of South Fork New River (Ashe Co.) as delayed-harvest, and the designation of Big Elkin Creek (Surry Co.) and South Fork New River (Watauga Co.) as hatchery-supported. All of these proposals are based on collaboration with local partners.

- ✓ On the Cape Fear River, a reduction in the daily creel limit for American shad will be necessary in combination with reductions in commercial harvest. North Carolina's Sustainable Fisheries Plan was not approved by ASMFC. Staff is currently coordinating with NCDMF on data analysis.
- ✓ Several proposals from the public have been considered including a prohibition on the release of captured walleye at Lake Fontana, a reduction in the minimum size limit for muskellunge from 42 to 36 inches, an increase in the minimum size limit and a reduction in the daily creel limit for striped bass at Lake Tillery, and a request by the Martin County Commissioners to allow the limited harvest of river herring.
- ✓ A modification to the Cashie River Joint-Coastal Boundary was recommended in the NC Estuarine Striped Bass Management Plan. NCDMF attempted to make this change effective for this spring through proclamation. However, a new boundary cannot be established by proclamation and must be accomplished through normal rule-making.
- ✓ Staff has received a number of inquiries regarding the Alabama rig. Its use in North Carolina is legal with the exception of on the Roanoke River during the single-barbless hook restriction and certain Public Mountain Trout Waters. There are no plans at this time to restrict the use of umbrella-type rigs, including the Alabama rig.

Committee meeting adjourned at 10:00 am.