



*Fisheries Committee Meeting Summary
May 16, 2013 at 9:00 am
NC Aquarium at Pine Knoll Shores*

Meeting Attendees

• **Committee Members:**

Wes Seegars, Chair

Ray White, Vice Chair

Berkley Skinner

Mitch St. Clair

Joe Barker

Mark Craig

• **Commissioners:**

David Hoyle, Jr.

Ray Clifton

Dell Murphy

Tom Berry

Jim Cogdell

• **Staff:**

Mallory Martin

Bob Curry

Kyle Briggs

Christian Waters

Brian McRae

Isaac Harrold

Kate Pipkin

Jodie Owen

Dale Caveny

Betsy Haywood

Norman Young

Tommy Clark

Erica Garner

Jacob Rash

Doug Besler

Chad Thomas

• **Guest:**

Fred Harris, NC Wildlife Federation

Commissioner Wes Seegars called the meeting to order at 9:00 am in Soundside Hall at the North Carolina Aquarium at Pine Knoll Shores.

Coastal Fisheries Update

- **NC Estuarine Striped Bass Fisheries Management Plan**

Chad Thomas, Coastal Fisheries Supervisor, provided an overview of the North Carolina Estuarine Striped Bass Fisheries Management Plan that was adopted in draft form by the WRC on November 10, 2011. He reviewed Exhibit G which will be considered at the WRC meeting on May 17. Exhibit G is a request for action by the WRC to approve the final draft of Amendment 1 to the NC Estuarine Striped Bass Fisheries Management Plan that was adopted by the NC Marine Fisheries Commission at its meeting on February 28, 2013.

Action Item: Fisheries Committee unanimously passed a motion to recommend that the full Commission adopt Amendment 1 to the NC Estuarine Striped Bass Management Plan, which includes language to “remain vigilant in collecting catch and harvest data necessary to evaluate the effects of the Oregon Inlet Area fishery on the Albemarle Sound-Roanoke River striped bass stock.”

- **Striped Bass Stock Assessment**

Chad Thomas updated the Committee on the stock assessment for striped bass. A low harvest of 25,000 pounds on the Roanoke River resulted in a decision to let the season expire. DMF reported that 5,000 pounds were caught in Albemarle Sound, the lowest harvest ever, with few juvenile fish in the population. In 2009 the Roanoke Rapids Dam was released for flood conditions and the heavy flow resulted in an imperfect spawn as larval fish may have been washed out of the spawning areas. The low stock assessment may result in a change in seasons for spring of 2014.

Thomas reported that Commissioner Mitch St. Clair participated in electrofishing on the Roanoke River on May 1, 2013 and netted a tagged striped bass. The tag, attached in 2012, has allowed the fish to be tracked on its journey north to New Jersey and Long Island last October, to Virginia Beach on New Years’ Day, and to Pirates Cove on the Outer Banks on April 2, 2013. Since the fish was tagged in 2012 it has gained seven pounds and has grown one inch. Bob Curry presented Commissioner St. Clair with a framed photo of him holding the fish.

- **River Herring Fisheries Management Plan**

Thomas provided an update on work with the Division of Marine Fisheries on the River Herring Fisheries Management Plan. There will be no harvest of river herring in the near future. *Any* harvest of river herring in the state would be too high and for that reason drift netting is not allowed. Thomas noted that the Santee River is the only place in the Eastern US that allows any harvest of river herring. The WRC is stocking herring with genetic markers. However, these stockings are not included in the management plan.

- **Cape Fear River Action Plan**

Thomas updated the Committee on the rock arch that has been placed by the US Army Corps of Engineers at Lock and Dam #1 in Bladen County. The rock arch is intended to allow shad, striped bass and other anadromous fishes to swim upstream to spawn. On May 30 there will be a ribbon cutting and dedication of the rock arch. The WRC has built a 90-foot fishing pier at the dam, which will provide public fishing access just downstream of the rock arch fishway.

Piedmont Fisheries Update

- **Lake Norman Striped Bass Hybrids**

Brian McRae, Piedmont Fisheries Supervisor, updated the Committee on striped bass populations in Lake Norman. The WRC stocks 162,000 striped bass per year in Lake Norman since the fish do not reproduce there. The fish are in poor condition due to low oxygen levels in the lake in late summer. Summer fish kills of striped bass began in 2004 and have continued almost annually.. A management option includes the introduction of hybrid striped bass, which are more tolerant of the low oxygen conditions.. The WRC will continue to monitor the hybrids for a successful program. Criteria for success include better condition of the fish, minimal summer mortality, and negligible downstream escapement.

- **Invasive Aquatic Vegetation – Hydrilla**

McRae provided an update about the rapid spread of hydrilla, aquatic vegetation that first appeared in 1980 in Wake County and now is present in 21 river systems in NC. McRae stated that anglers believe that hydrilla is good for bass populations so there is a need to balance the management of hydrilla with angler desires and expectations. Technical advisory groups have been established for good decision making. Grass carp are effective for the management of hydrilla, but may also impact native aquatic vegetation.

McRae mentioned the growth of hydrilla on Lake Waccamaw and the unique problems it has created there. In 2012 hydrilla covered 600 acres of Lake Waccamaw. It is estimated that by 2017 the entire lake will be covered so solutions are being sought to protect the many listed fish species in Lake Waccamaw. Grass carp are not desirable for Lake Waccamaw because once the hydrilla is gone they will eat native vegetation beneficial to the listed fish species.. The WRC is investigating the use of herbicides to control the hydrilla problem on Lake Waccamaw. The Division of Water Resources and the county are paying for the herbicide.

McRae said that a technical advisory group is working on management of hydrilla in the Eno River to protect the redbreast sunfish population there.

Mountain Fisheries Update

- **Trout Management Plan**

Jake Rash, Mountain Region Fisheries Biologist, provided an overview of the process for revising the Trout Management Plan that was first adopted in 1989. An advisory committee has been formed. Science-based decision making will be used. Management partners consisting of internal staff, state and federal agencies, and constituents will be involved to identify key issues. Program areas will include special emphasis on management of brook trout populations, maximize the potential of stocked trout resources, minimize the impacts of invasive species, and to improve habitat. Research efforts will include biological surveys for trout stocking practices and wild trout management and evaluation of alternative trout management practices. Permanent public fishing access continues to be sought along with improving access for anglers with special needs. Education and communication efforts will be directed to increase awareness of opportunities to enjoy trout fishing, enhance education about trout fishing, and involve constituents in outreach efforts.

- **Mountain Heritage Trout Waters Program**

Doug Besler, Mountain Fisheries Region Supervisor, gave an update about the Mountain Heritage Trout Waters Program enacted by the NC Legislature in 2008. Three-day licenses for \$5.00 are offered in waters that run through or are adjacent to cities designated as Mountain Heritage Trout Waters. Locations are added to the program through MOAs with cities. Eighty-four percent of these licenses are non-NC residents with purchases from 48 states. Besler explained that research about Mountain Heritage Trout Waters angler licenses showed that 52 percent of buyers had previous license history and 24 percent bought additional unnecessary licenses, especially among non-resident purchasers. Of first time MHTW license purchases, only three percent became future agency license holders. Administrative costs of this program for the Wildlife Resources Commission are \$37,539. Besler stated that a program evaluation will be completed and the results presented to the WRC.

- **Hatchery Production Update**

Kyle Briggs, Fisheries Management Coordinator, reported on trout stocking for the current trout season. Capital improvement projects are ongoing, with 65 percent of the design completed at the Armstrong Fish Hatchery. New harvest kettles are being placed at McKinney Lake Fish Hatchery. Briggs reported that two hatcheries in the mountains were damaged by flooding, but no fish were lost.

Commissioner Garry Spence requested a map showing encroachment of development upon trout streams.

- **Rulemaking for Administrative Changes to 15A NCAC 10C .0305**

Christian Waters, Fisheries Management Coordinator, updated the Committee on Exhibits H-1 and H-2 that will be considered by the Commission on May 17. Waters said that the game fish rule in the NC Administrative Code, 15A NCAC 10C .0305, is cumbersome and large. Staff has been working in consultation with the Rules Review Commission to divide this rule into 15 rules – one for each game fish, with the exception of flounder, spotted sea trout and red drum, which will be grouped into one rule.

Exhibit H- 1 is the Notice of Text for rulemaking and represents administrative changes only. Waters reviewed Exhibit H-2, which is the fiscal note analysis that has just been approved by the Office of State Budget and Management. The Committee adopted a motion for the entire Commission to approve Exhibits H-1 and H-2 at the Commission Meeting on May 17, 2013.

The Inland Fisheries Committee meeting was adjourned by Chairman Wes Seegars at 10:50 am.