



GEORGIA

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

WILDLIFE RESOURCES DIVISION

MARK WILLIAMS
COMMISSIONER

RUSTY GARRISON
DIRECTOR

Gulf and South Atlantic Regional Panel Update (GSARP) for Georgia October 30 & 31 (San Antonio, TX)

Satilla River Flathead Catfish Removal Project:

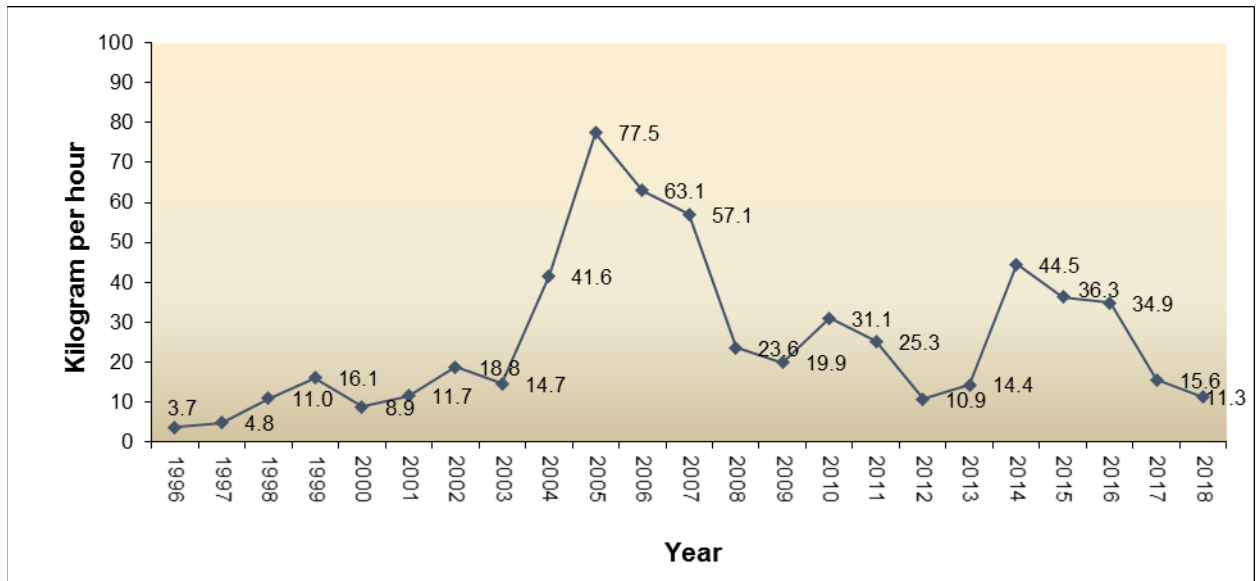
Overview

- The Satilla River is one of the premier sunfish fisheries in the state of Georgia, with redbreast sunfish (*Lepomis auritus*) being one of the most sought after species.
- Flathead catfish (*Pylodictis ovilvaris*) were illegally introduced and first observed in the Satilla River in 1996.
- During the mid-2000's, standardized sampling and creel surveys revealed declines in abundances of redbreast sunfish and bullhead catfishes (*Ameiurus* spp.) coincided with significant increases in the abundance of flathead catfish.
- In an effort to reverse the impacts of flathead catfish on native fish populations, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GADNR), Wildlife Resources Division (WRD) – Fisheries Management Section (FM) began removing flathead catfish from the Satilla River as time permitted. Despite these efforts, the number and size of flathead catfish per hour of electrofishing continued to increase. In 2006, FM instituted the Flathead Catfish Removal Project in Georgia using legislatively appropriated funding. These ongoing efforts continue into 2018.

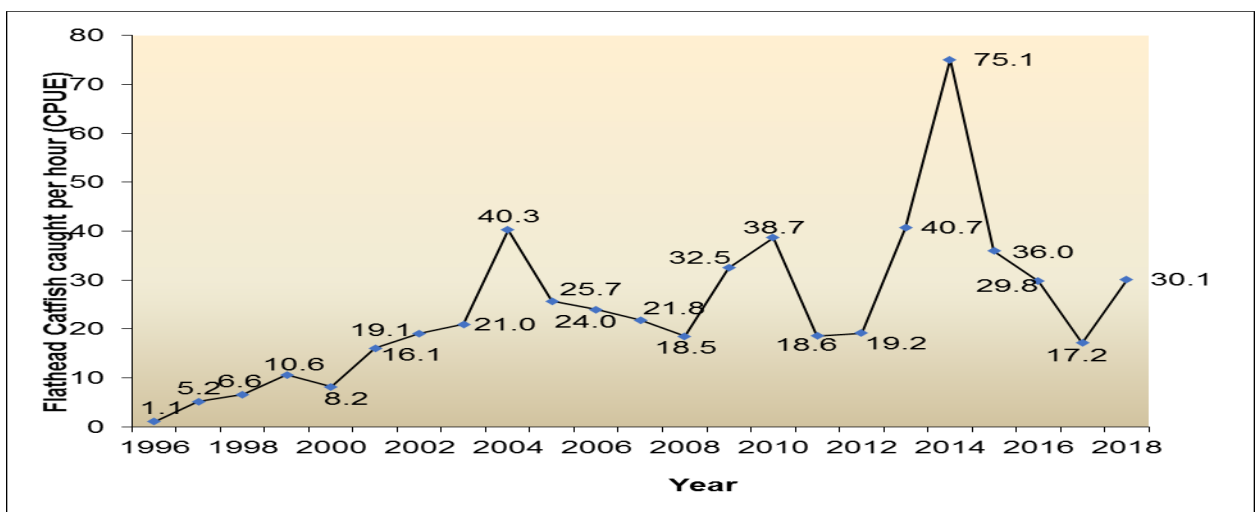
Removal Results

- During the current 2018 sampling season (May-October) 4,124 (3,412 pounds) flathead catfish have thus far been removed. Since 2007, more than 71,862 (142,268 pounds) of the flathead catfish have been removed.
- The size structure of the populations has declined with the average size fish removed progressively dropping from 5.8 pounds in 2007 down to 0.8 in 2013, but has increased some to 1.3 pounds in 2014, 2.2 pounds in 2015, and 2.6 pounds in 2016. Average size fish captured has declined in 2017 to 2 pounds and 0.8 pounds in 2018.

- The average length fish removed has declined from 512 mm TL in 2007 to 240 mm TL in 2013, but increased to 307 mm TL in 2014, and 375 mm TL in 2015. For the past 2 years, average length has declined from 365 mm TL in 2016 and 310 mm TL in 2017. Average length in 2018 is 238 mm TL.
- Biomass per effort also has been declining from a high of 77.5/kg/hr but was down to 15.7 kg/hr in 2017. (pictured below). Biomass per effort in 2018 was 11.3 kilograms.



- Catch per effort (CPE) has fluctuated between 17 and 40 fish per hour since 2004 but steadily increased to 75.1 fish per hour in 2014, but has declined in subsequent years, except it did increase to 30.1 fish per hour in 2018.



- Suppression of the flathead catfish population in the Satilla River has been demonstrated through measured changes in biomass, size and age-structure. However, higher recruitment and earlier maturation is being witnessed. Ongoing intensive harvest will be required to prevent the flathead population from rebuilding. It appears that a high-water period from the fall of 2012 until the spring of 2014, helped the flathead population rebound, but continued removal efforts have since resulted in reduced CPE, TL and biomass caught. In 2018, the river has remained flooded and now the CPE has increased.

Recent Findings

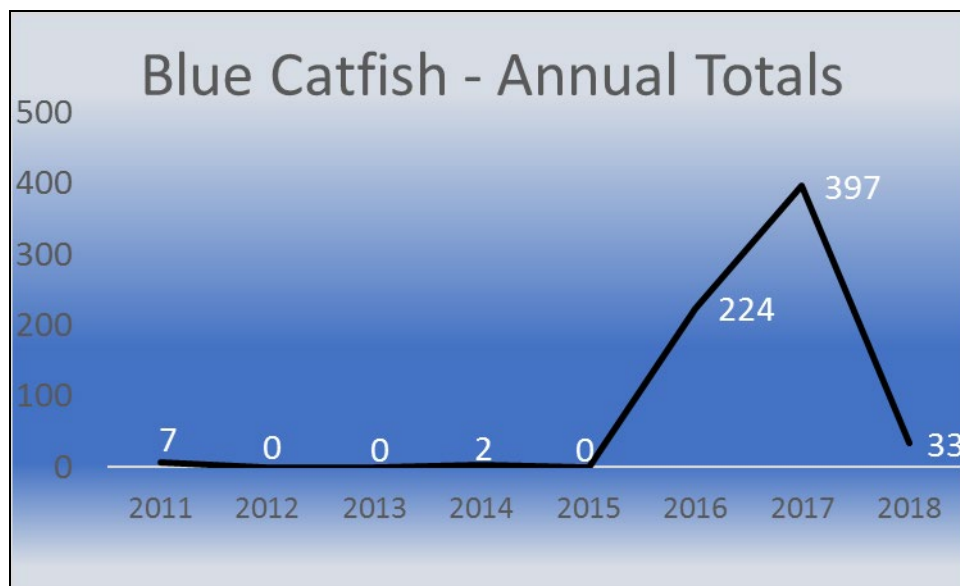
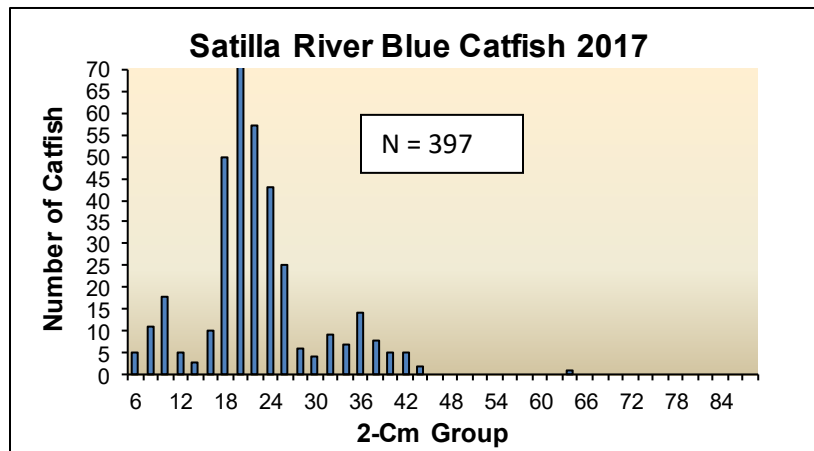
Brown Haplo (*Hoplosternum littorale*)

- Charlton County Angler caught the Brown Haplo in the St. Mary's River near Folkston on 9/24/2018.
- Unknown angler; his friend FB messaged a DNR/CRD associate about the fish but was unwilling to provide contact info for the angler to Fisheries Biologist Jim Page.
- Unfortunately, the 9 to 11-inch fish was released back into the river.
- Positive ID of photo verified by Fisheries Biologist Tim Bonvechio



Blue Catfish (*Ictalurus furcatus*) in the Satilla River

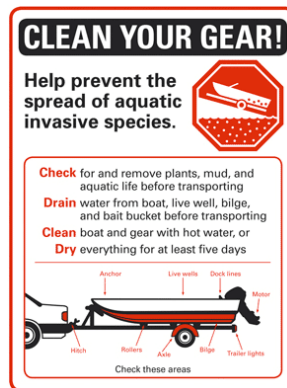
- Range expansion
- 7 individuals in 2011 in sampling,
- 2 individuals in creel in 2014
- Explosion in recruitment 2016, 225 individuals were harvested.
- 1=15lb gravid female harvested (840 mm TL).
- In 2017, 379 individuals were caught.
- Due to the high water, only (N=33) blue catfish have been picked up in 2018.
- The obvious increase in numbers observed blue catfish concerns resource managers, and thus continued monitoring and removal of this species will occur in concert with flathead removal efforts.



Giant Salvinia (*Salvinia molesta*)

- On February 20th, a different occurrence of Giant Salvinia was positively identified by Richmond Hill hatchery personnel via microscope and visual eye after a concerned citizen brought it in. This citizen reported it coming from a Tattanal county pond but refused to reveal location out of fear of property owner retaliation.
- The WRD ANS coordinator contacted LE division and met over several occasions in March, April and May.
- A total of 32 ponds were checked in Tattanal and Toombs County.
- To this date, the problem pond has not been located.

- **Clean, Drain and Dry Educational signs to be placed at several Georgia boat ramps:**



Traveling Trunk Usage!

- **Blackshear Elementary 4H day on November 16, 2017**
- Reached around 250, 5th graders and 20 adults from 3 Pierce County
- Talked about not moving aquatic hitchhikers, “Clean, Drain and Dry!”, etc.
- The Python skin was a big hit.
- Handed out Asian Carp watch cards, etc.

Contact:

Tim Bonvechio

Senior Fisheries Biologist

AFS Certified Fisheries Professional

[Wildlife Resources Division](#)

(912) 285-6484 (Office)

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Proxying for Tim Bonvechio:

Jim Page

Fisheries Biologist

[Wildlife Resources Division](#)

(912) 285-6485 (Office)

[Facebook](#) • [Twitter](#) • [Instagram](#)

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