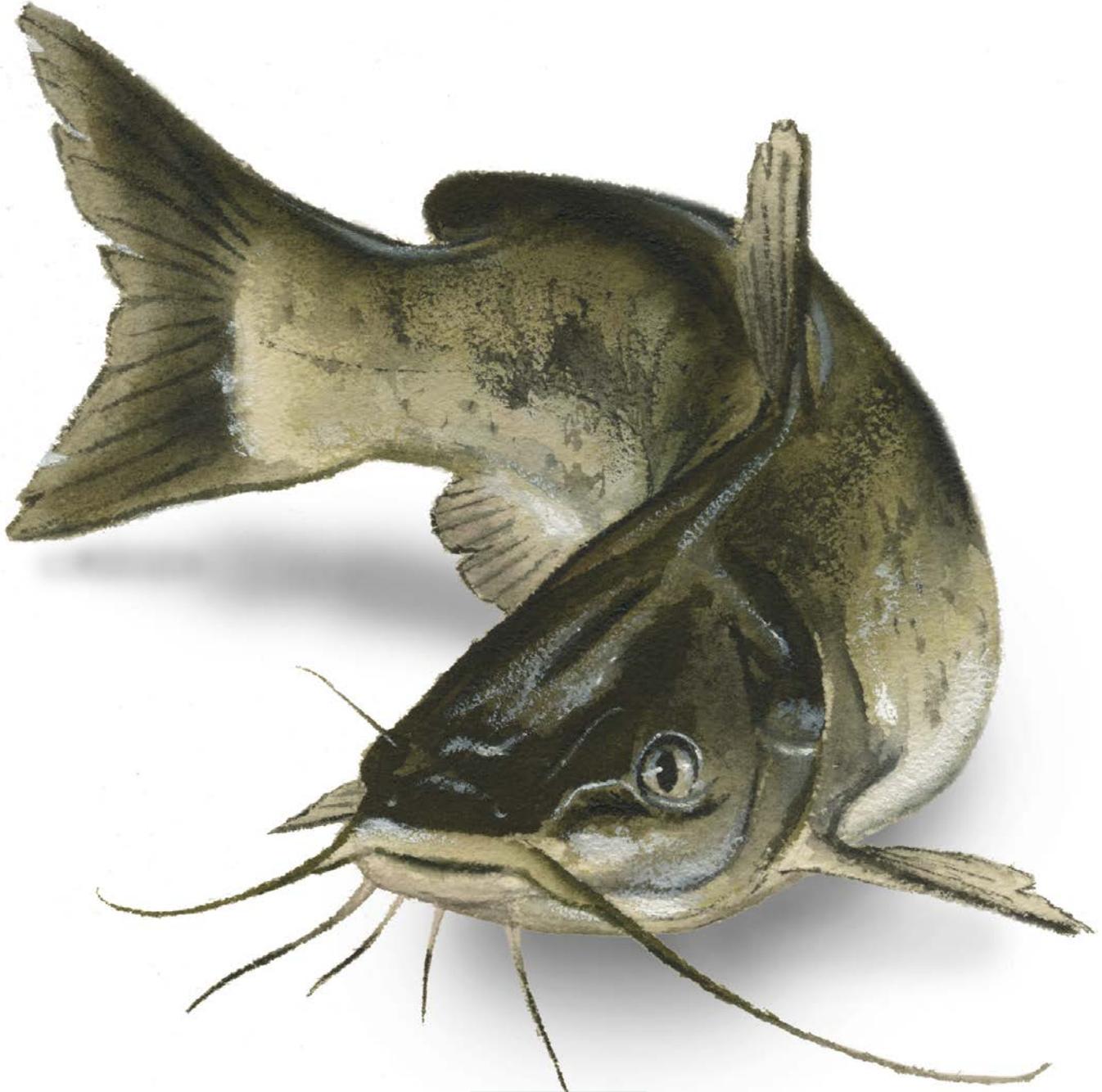


A Vision for Catfish in Texas

TPWD CATFISH MANAGEMENT PLAN



A Vision for Catfish in Texas

A lifetime passion for fishing and love for the outdoors can begin with a tug of a catfish on the end of a fishing line. You may remember a time when a mess of fresh-caught catfish provided a feast for family or friends, or perhaps quiet moments sitting on the bank of a river or lake, waiting for “old whiskers” to bite. These experiences and memories make catfish the second-most popular fish among Texas anglers. In fact, Texas has some of the best catfish angling in the world. Fishing for catfish is a time-honored tradition to be embraced, maintained, and shared with others.

At Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD) we believe our public waters have great potential for providing these opportunities for generations to come. We have the fisheries management experience and expertise to maintain and expand our high-quality catfish fisheries. However, success will require broad-based public support including partnerships with anglers, private industry, civic organizations, and local governments.

The following pages outline a strategic vision, formed by angler opinions, needs, and desires, to make catfishing better in Texas. We want to increase catfishing opportunities and access for anglers and future anglers, while maintaining and building quality catfish populations. As you thumb through these pages, we hope your individual catfishing interests come to light. We hope you will work with us to put these plans into action. We also hope you will become an advocate for the wise use and expansion of these fishing opportunities across Texas. Together, we can accomplish goals that will improve quality of life for current and future generations of Texans.



Photo provided by catfish angler, Cody Mullennix



Background

By 2050 the population of Texas is expected to double to 50 million people. As the state's population grows, the demands on water and fish will increase. Most population growth will occur in urban areas where most Texans live. Today, 85% of our population lives in four metropolitan areas (Houston, Dallas-Fort Worth, San Antonio, and Austin). Without proper planning, further urbanization is likely to reduce water quality and fish habitats, and decrease public access to fishing and outdoor recreation. Because our research shows that most anglers don't want to travel far to fish, it is clear that new angling opportunities need to be in urban areas and close to home. These opportunities must also meet the needs of Texas' changing demographics.

Why Catfish?



Catfishes live in rivers, reservoirs, streams, and ponds all over Texas. Compared to other species, catfishes are resilient to changing environmental conditions including drought and degraded water quality. They are easy and fun to catch and provide a tasty meal, making them a great choice for introducing kids

to fishing. Most importantly, catfish can be managed to meet the many needs and desires of Texas anglers. The variety of catfish species and their adaptability allow fisheries managers to provide tailored fishing opportunities that can offer more fish to take home and eat, a better chance to catch lots of fish, or the opportunity to catch a trophy. For these reasons, catfish may become our most important fishing opportunity, and now is the time to plan for the future. We have already been moving forward, implementing a Neighborhood Fishin' Program directed at youth and families in urban areas, which has been successful at providing good fishing close to home. We have identified additional strategies to increase catfishing opportunities statewide.

Catfish Facts

Catfish were extremely important to Native Americans as a food source and as a supply of materials for implements and tools.

In 1895, Texas created its initial state natural resource agency, then known as the Fish and Oyster Commission.

Current legal means of take include rod and reel, cane pole, juglines, trotlines, limb lines, and handfishing.

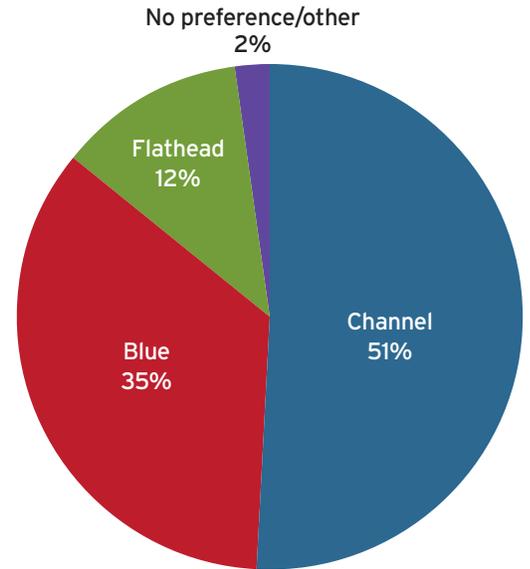
Channel Catfish is the most commonly stocked catfish species in Texas.

Channel and Blue Catfish are often found under cormorant roosts.

Flathead Catfish prefer live bait.

Species of Catfish in Texas

Texas is home to at least 10 species of catfish. Three provide important fishing opportunities to anglers: Channel, Blue, and Flathead Catfish. These species are very different in the habitats they live in, what they eat, how fast they grow and how big they get. These unique characteristics give us the opportunity to create even more diverse fishing for Texas anglers. All three species spawn in late spring to early summer, creating nests in cavities under banks, logs, and rocks. Catfishes eat insects, mollusks, crustaceans, and fish, with fish being more important to Blue and Flathead catfishes. In Texas, catfishes mature in 2-5 years and can live 20-30 years. In most waters, they naturally produce enough young to sustain populations. Exceptions include ponds or small reservoirs that are heavily fished, lack habitat, or have a high abundance of predators.



Species of catfish preferred by anglers in Texas



Channel Catfish (also known as Fiddler, Spotted, Willow and Lady Cat)

Identification - Distinguished by numerous small black spots and deeply forked tail, coloration olive-brown to slate blue. Anal fin rays 29 or less.

Size - Can grow to over 30 pounds, but most are less than 5 pounds. The state record, caught in 2003, weighed just over 37 pounds.

Location - The most abundant and widespread catfish species in Texas, thriving in a multitude of environments from small creeks and urban ponds to large rivers and impoundments.



Blue Catfish (also known as Humpback Blue, Chucklehead, Silver Cat)

Identification - Characterized by forked tail, color typically silvery blue to slate grey. Anal fin rays 30 or more.

Size - Largest catfish species in Texas. In many waters, fish of 20-50 pounds are not uncommon, and 2-10 pound fish are abundant.

Location - Commonly found in main channels and tributaries of large rivers and reservoirs.



Flathead Catfish (also known as Yellow, Opelousa, Mississippi, Mud, Pied, Ops, Shovelhead Cat)

Identification - Characterized by a broad, flat head and squared tail with a slight notch. Coloration varies but is typically yellow or brown and mottled with black and brown.

Size - Can grow to large sizes, with 20-50 pound fish caught in some waters.

Location - Typically occur in deeper pools of creeks, rivers, and reservoirs.

Illustrations:
Joseph R. Tomelleri
americanfishes.com

Texas Catfish Anglers

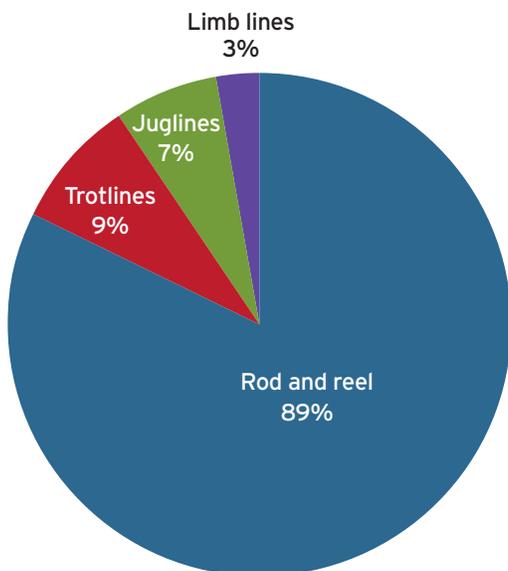
Catfish were important long before Texas became a state. Native Americans depended on catfish for food and as a source of materials for tools. As Texas was settled, catfishes continued to provide an important food source. Over time commercial and recreational fisheries developed. These fisheries persist today, providing food and recreation to nearly half a million Texans and supporting many local economies.



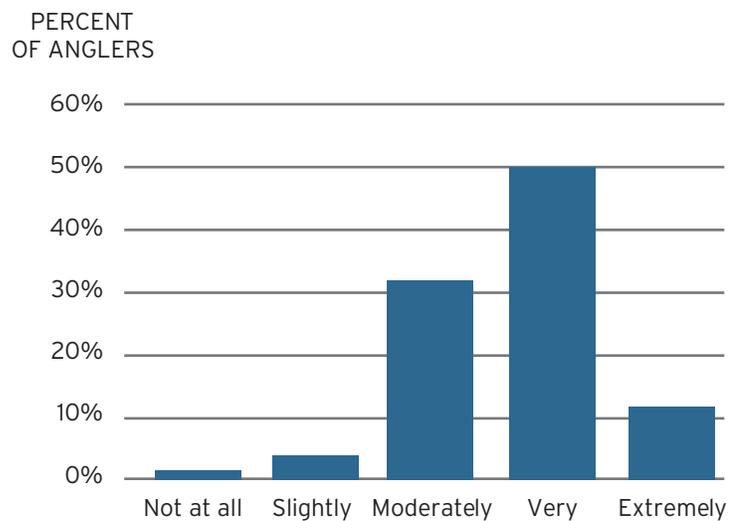
Recent surveys found that catfish is the preferred target of more than a third of freshwater anglers in Texas. These anglers are a diverse group, with many different views on what catfishing means to them. Although many catfish anglers fish from a boat, more than a third fish from shore. Most harvest a portion of their catch, but many favor catch-and-release or more restrictive regulations to increase numbers of large fish. Catfish anglers also use a variety of gears including rod and reel, juglines, trotlines and handfishing.



Overall, Texas catfish anglers are satisfied with their fishing experience. Data from these surveys can help fisheries managers further improve catfishing opportunities. Although Texas catfish anglers are diverse, there are areas where we can focus efforts to improve fishing. Surveys show that the numbers of catfish caught, average size of catfish caught, the opportunity to harvest some fish and the availability of good fisheries close to home are important to most catfish anglers. For example, anglers were 4.5 times as likely to fish for catfish if the water body was less than 10 miles away as compared to traveling more than 100 miles for the same opportunity.



Gear used by catfish anglers in Texas



Level of satisfaction with fishing

State of the Resource and the Science



Early scientific studies of catfishes revealed many details about their reproduction, diet and fish health issues. By the mid-20th century, Americans were consuming more than 470 million pounds of hatchery-produced catfish annually. In the 1990s, more anglers became interested in recreational catfishing. Tournament trails developed and angler desires broadened. This interest inspired biologists to investigate survival, mortality and growth of wild populations, as well as catfish ecology and the attitudes and opinions of catfish anglers. Using these data, fisheries managers began manipulating catfish populations through regulation, habitat enhancement and stocking.

Today, TPWD has a much better understanding of catfish biology, ecology and management. Catfish populations are being surveyed and efforts are underway to manage these species for specific fishery goals in response to our angler surveys. In general, catfish populations in Texas are in good shape. Most Texans have the opportunity to catch enough catfish to get children interested in fishing or harvest a few for a cookout. There are also opportunities to catch the fish of a lifetime close to home. While this is good news, the future poses many challenges. We believe that catfishing in Texas can be even better and we are optimistic that quality catfish populations will be sustainable into the future.

Texas Catfish Milestones

- 1941 *First stocking of Channel Catfish*
- 1965 *First stocking of Blue Catfish*
- 1978 *9" minimum length for Blue and Channel Catfish*
- 1992 *18" minimum/5 per day limit for Flathead Catfish*
- 1993 *Commercial nets banned from public water*
Numerous small lakes targeted for catfish stocking and special regulations; later to be called "Community Fishing Lakes"
- 1998 *Catfishes designated "Game Fish" in Texas*
- 2001 *Legislature names Lake Tawakoni the "Catfish Capital of Texas"*
- 2003 *TPWD begins a pilot "put-and-take" catfish stocking program at eight small urban lakes. This program evolved into Neighborhood Fishin'.*
- 2004 *Splash, a 121.5-pound Blue Catfish from Lake Texoma, broke the world record and became a star attraction at Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center*
- 2006 *Bow fishing for catfish became legal, but was discontinued 2 years later*
- 2009 *TPWD implements first "trophy" regulation (a slot limit) on three reservoirs*
- 2010 *TPWD conducts Statewide Survey of Texas Catfish Anglers to determine needs, desires, characteristics, and motivations*
- 2011 *Texas Legislature legalizes handfishing for catfish, also called "noodling" or "grabbling"*
- 2014 *Neighborhood Fishin' expands to 16 lakes, reaching almost 100,000 anglers per year in 10 major metropolitan areas*
- 2015 *Statewide catfish management plan finalized and delivered to the public*

Our Vision and Goals for the Future

Our vision is to provide a diversity of high-quality catfish angling opportunities by creating, expanding or maintaining fisheries for Channel, Blue and Flathead catfishes in waters across the state ranging from large river-reservoir systems to small streams, impoundments and intensively managed neighborhood ponds. Two goals will guide our efforts to realize this vision.



Goal 1: Increase fishing opportunities and access for catfish anglers.

1. Expand our Neighborhood Fishin' Program which brings year-round fishing opportunities close to home for non-traditional anglers, youth and families in large metropolitan areas.
2. Create and improve catfishing opportunities statewide, with special emphasis on urban waters.
3. Create and improve catfishing opportunities at State Parks and Wildlife Management Areas.
4. Partner with local governments and other interested groups to increase shoreline access, boat/kayak access, fishing piers and related amenities, with special emphasis on urban waters.
5. Increase shoreline and boat access to Texas rivers.
6. Educate and inform current and potential anglers about catfishing opportunities.
7. Manage for a diversity of fishing opportunities for catfish anglers, including harvest, high-catch, and trophy fishing experiences.
8. Maintain opportunities to use a variety of catfishing methods.



Goal 2: Develop and implement best practices to manage catfish populations statewide.

1. Develop harvest regulations that create diverse fishing opportunities (harvest, high catch rates, and/or big fish) and meet the needs and desires of catfish anglers.
2. Refine catfish stocking strategies to meet diverse fisheries management goals.
3. Refine catfish sampling techniques to maximize efficiency and to gather high quality data.
4. Evaluate management actions to ensure objectives are met and fisheries are sustainable.
5. Use feedback from anglers to develop, evaluate, and refine fisheries management objectives.
6. Increase stocking of 12-inch or larger catfish in priority high-use waters or at fishing events.
7. Work with controlling authorities to improve fish habitat, water quality, and water quantity (lake levels or river flow), to ensure healthy and fishable populations of catfish.

As we move forward with implementing this plan, we urge you, the angler, to take advantage of the new and improved opportunities provided. As you do so, let us know how we are doing. Contact your local fisheries management biologist, or email: inld@tpwd.texas.gov

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