

**Tidal Bass Stockpiling Meeting
Tawes State Office Building
580 Taylor Avenue
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
Room C1C (Lobby Area)
October 27, 2015**

Introductions

An agenda was presented to stakeholders who attended a meeting specifically designed to address the issue of stockpiling following tournaments. The meeting was called to order at 1:00 pm by Tony Prochaska, chairing. Tony reiterated the purpose of the meeting: 1) gauge the level of concern stakeholders have regarding stockpiling following tournaments, and 2) work collectively to identify short and long-term strategies to address the concern(s). Attendees included: Dave Blazer (DNR Director of Fisheries), Gina Hunt (DNR Deputy Director of Fisheries), Tony Prochaska (DNR Manager of Inland Fisheries), Joe Love (DNR Tidal Bass Program Manager), Mary Groves (DNR Southern Region Manager), Capt. Scott Sewell (Conservation Director, Maryland Bass Nation and Guide), Dick Berich (Maryland Bass Nation), Capt. Keith Barker (Guide), Capt. Steve Chaconas (Guide), Steve Weimar (Tournament Director, Chester County Bass Masters).

Current Understanding and Concerns of Stockpiling

Joe Love introduced the topic of stockpiling by reading an excerpt from a paper written by Gene Gilliland in 1998. Stockpiling may or may not lead to increased mortality or to displacement, depending on habitat or angling conditions at the release site, size of the tournament, and disposition of the angler. Joe Love further elaborated the topic by referencing telemetry work conducted in Northeast River and Potomac River approximately 20 - 30 years ago. That work indicated that some fish will leave the release area, but about half may remain for a month or longer. A recent study from North Carolina indicated that well over the majority of fish leave a weigh-in area and the authors concluded that bass from coastal systems may be more apt to leave the area within a shorter period of time than a non-tidal system. The preponderance of data indicate short-term stockpiling can occur within a fishing season, but that some fish will leave a release site. In some areas fish are more quickly to leave than other areas depending on habitat conditions at the release site.

Tony Prochaska then presented comments received from 6 (of the 10 that responded) states that are members of the Northeast Fisheries Administrators Association (NEFAA) with concerns related to stockpiling. The results indicated that Maryland is not the only state with concerns – it is likely a national issue. Maryland DNR has or is currently addressing this problem in similar ways (e.g., redistribution) as these other states. Capt. Chaconas noted two problems related to stockpiling: 1) released bass are susceptible to subsistence angling and 2) repeatedly catching

bass through tournament activities at weigh-in locations increase post-release mortality. Note: DNR has the same concerns and these problems have been documented in the literature (e.g., Technical Report – Post Tournament Release Movements of Black Bass in Lake Champlain – report provided by Phil Hulbert with New York State Department of Environmental Conservation).

2015 Northeast River Study

Joe Love presented data that indicated that catch per hour increased at one of three sites in the upper Northeast River between April and October. The estimated number of fish in the Upper Northeast River also increased, mainly because of increases at a rip rap area, and densities had at best, doubled since April, 2015.

Stakeholder Input

DNR staff polled stakeholders in attendance to gauge the level of concern regarding stockpiling. Concerns were expressed by Capt. Keith Barker, Capt. Scott Sewell, Capt. Steve Chaconas, and Dick Berich. Steve Weimar does not believe that stockpiling creates an issue for the fishery.

Although not present, Capt. Kenny Penrod, Jr. (Guide) provided input via email expressing his concern and presented solutions (including reduced creel limit of 3 and the regulation of tournaments through permits). Brian Barnes, who had prior commitments too, expressed via email that he does not think that stockpiling of bass at any weigh-in site is a problem. However, he does feel that the stacking of big tournaments (75-100 boats) in the same areas weekend after weekend is a problem for the fishery. Brian does support a year round 14" limit and that a 3 fish possession limit would be a help to the fishery in Maryland. **Attachment 1** provides the full set of comments provided by Capt. Kenny Penrod, Jr. and Brian Barnes.

Capt. Barker noted that stockpiling was one of many problems affecting the fishery, a point supported by Capt. Penrod, Jr. and the workgroup. He also acknowledged stockpiling was one problem that could be solved. The general consensus of the workgroup was that stockpiling is an issue that should be addressed.

Evaluation of Proposed and Additional Solutions to Address Stockpiling

The work group discussed potential solutions to the problem of stockpiling. The following solutions should be implemented in 2016.

Identified Solution	DNR Efforts	Other Efforts	Concerns	Timeline
1) Manual Redistribution of Fish.	See PAGE 6 for plans by DNR; COMPASS database may be updated to receive donations from individuals who buy a license.	Donations by tournament directors to pay for manual redistribution of fish.	Redistribution may cause unnecessary stress and harm to fish; Budget issues prevent redistribution projects unless donations are obtained. If a donation or black bass stamp system is developed the money can be used in black bass fishery management. Volunteers are needed; Current State Budget does not allow DNR to increase or generate new fees.	2016.
2) Advocate for use and development of multiple weigh-ins.	Permit modification (Best Management Practice) with reference to website; improve weigh-in areas, such as Rogues Harbor which has a plan that is under review.	Tournament directors (e.g., Steve Weimar) will incorporate other weigh-in locations into their series.	Some locations, such as Elk Neck State Park, are not currently considered safe, but plans for breakwaters at Rogues Harbor may improve that.	Jan 2016 for permit modification and trail changes; Longer timeline for Rogues Harbor development.

Identified Solution	DNR Efforts	Other Efforts	Concerns	Timeline
3) Prevent tournament anglers from fishing weigh-in areas.	Permit modification (Best Management Practice).	Some tournament directors already establish off-limits areas near the weigh-in location during their tournament, and will encourage others to do the same.	If multiple tournaments are staged at a weigh-in location and only a small subset have off-limits areas near the weigh-in location, then the off-limits area may not be effective.	Jan 2016.
4) Require lower creel limits for tournament anglers to lower the number of fish at scale.	Permit modification (Best Management Practice).	Some tournament directors already institute lower creel limits than 5 per angler (Capt. Scott Sewell), which allows more anglers to place during a tournament.	Larger tournament series will not voluntarily change creel limits.	Jan. 2016.
5) Incentives for Tournaments to implement some BMPs or well-established catch-and-release guidelines or institute progressive conservation policy.	SEE Page 6 for information on modifying permit system to track implementation of BMPs; generate a plan of action to publically acknowledge directors who follow BMPs via press, social media, and publications.	Outreach through tournaments to other tournaments to help spread word.	Enforcement for directors to obtain a permit is necessary for including directors in this strategy that encourages use of BMPs and lower stockpiling rates.	2016.

Identified Solution	DNR Efforts	Other Efforts	Concerns	Timeline
6) Anglers could return fish they catch to the spot that they were caught following a weigh-in.	Permit Modification (Best Management Practice).	A small number of anglers do implement this BMP.	There is a work flow problem because boats leave water when fish are weighed, or anglers are tired at the end of the day, or fish are already stressed and may fair well in a live well immediately after a tournament.	Jan. 2016.

Adjourn

The meeting was called to an end at 4:00 pm.

Captain Keith Barker’s Meeting Notes

Captain Barker’s meeting notes are available in **Attachment 2**

The effort to reduce the stockpiling of bass following tournaments will be a joint effort by DNR and our stakeholders. We must work together to ensure that the fishery is utilized in a sustainable manner. If DNR determines that the solutions presented above (particularly 2 – 6) are not being implemented, additional steps may be required during tournaments to ensure that the Fisheries Service mission is accomplished – i.e., protect, conserve and promote the sustainable utilization of the fishery. DNR will evaluate progress periodically in 2016. Below is additional information regarding DNR's effort to address stockpiling.

DNR Effort

Objective: Manual Redistribution of Fish

To help with angler-led efforts to avoid stockpiling and lessen mortality rates (caused by subsistence anglers and repeatedly hooked and weighed fish at weigh-in locations), DNR will redistribute some fish that would otherwise be released to weigh-in areas by attending selected tournament days or as requested at Smallwood State Park and at Anchor Marine (= or > 100 anglers) and take possession of angled fish following a weigh-in, transport fish by tanks, and release fish to: 1) a nearby stream within the same drainage, 2) away from high angling pressure, and 3) good quality habitat chosen by biologists with DNR. There are budget concerns that may need to be addressed with a donation process. At least 2 volunteers are required from a tournament organization to implement this effort. Efforts may be discontinued if the resource is unduly harmed, or if no positive changes to the fishery are identified by anglers and/or DNR.

Objective: Incentives for Tournaments to Implement some BMPs

DNR's permitting website will be modified to include a check list of Best Management Practices (BMP) that directors should consider. Permits requested by tournament directors will be reviewed by DNR prior to approval. When there is no plan to implement a BMP(s), when such a plan is needed, then the tournament director will be contacted to develop a way to meet the BMP standards. Tournament directors will receive a response from DNR within 30 days. No permit will be granted when data have not been reported from a prior tournament event.

From Capt. Barnes, 10/27/15.

Joe,

I hope I am not sending this too late. I will be unable to make the meeting today, work issues, but would like to put my opinion in.

I do not think that stock piling of bass at any weight in site is a problem, nor does anyone that I have spoken to. This includes a lot of MD and DE fisherman, some of these have told me that the issue is a more personal issue with a couple people than a MD Fed. Nation issue as a whole. That really does not matter what matters are the facts and this is what I have seen and believe to be true: There have been no major fish kills at any ramps after tournaments

Many fisherman fish these areas and take fish away on a regular basis

Tournaments bring an economic boost to areas that host the events

Restrictions placed will make it more difficult to run these tournaments and may decrease participation

I do feel that the stacking of big tournaments (75 to 100 boats) in the same area weekend after weekend is a problem to the major fisheries. (Potomac, Upper Bay)

Please feel free to contact me if I can be of any help or you have any questions, I do think that a year around 14" limit and a 3 fish possession limit would be a help to the fisheries of MD.

Thank you,

Brian Barnes Tournament Director of De TBF and USCG Captain guiding for Ken Penrods LOU

From Kenneth Penrod, Jr., 10/26/15.

Unfortunately I have booked for a fishing guide trip on 10/27/15 by Life Outdoors and regret that I can't attend and take advantage of the opportunity of being a part of a solution to this issue. My limited research on the stockpiling issue has revealed that this is a national issue and not an issue limited to Maryland or the Potomac/Chesapeake Bay. The stockpiling issue dovetails with many issues revolving around large bass tournaments and their negative effects on bass. In the end- in my opinion- the stockpiling issue is the same as the delayed mortality, black bass disease, cull wounds, and other issues that revolve around a fish that is being heavily pressured and overfished. The fact that bass tournaments are catch and release does not remove the negative impact and stress on the bass population. It should also be mentioned that catch and release bass tournaments are not mandatory and that bass tournament participants could kill their 5 bass limit each day that they fish. Could you imagine the impact that bass tournaments would have if fish fries were conducted after each day of fishing. Today- although bass tournaments have voluntarily accepted catch and release- catch and release simply delays the measurable negative effect on a fishery. There is no doubt that large and continuous bass tournaments conducted on waters with limited bass habitat have destroyed many fisheries. Consequently, I believe that the answer to the stockpiling issue is to address the current 5 bass creel limit on bass.

I am not naïve and I also know that one can not have and eat their cake too.... The stockpiling issue would certainly be addressed through a reduced black bass creel limit of 3. Then even if tournaments don't voluntarily work to reduce stockpiling- the stockpiling issue would be reduced by nearly half through the reduction of the number of bass being transported to weigh in sites. Also, even with release boats - the continual captivity of bass and their transportation to sites away from the weigh in - may increase delayed mortality. I know that my solution will have a negative impact on the positive economics that FLW, BASS bring to Maryland and consequently be disregarded but no one could argue that it is a solution to stockpiling. However, this solution could help bass tournaments evolve into the 21st century through a better system than "catch- keep- transport- place in plastic bag- stand in line- weigh in- dump fish off dock" system that has such harmful effects on bass.

If the economics of the issue is too great to avoid this obvious solution... then bass tournaments should be regulated through mandatory permits. These permits will be issued with a fee associated to the number of participants and their resources to avoid stockpiling. If they do not have a release plan to avoid stockpiling- then they are charged an additional fee that is associated with the number of participants. Also, all bass tournament permits require the name, address of each participant as well as the number of bass caught, transported, released alive and dead fish. I know that many will say that these tournaments will simply move to Leesylvania but they will anyway with any approach to mandate stockpiling or any other means to regulate tournaments.

I wrote this very fast because I'm pressed on time.. please send me any info on the meeting so that I can continue to educate myself. Thank you for your efforts, Ken Penrod Jr

DNR BASS TOURNAMENT STOCKPILING MEETING 10/27/2015

Attendees: Myself, Tony Prochaska, Scott Wymer (sp?), Steve Chaconas, Someone named Steve on the phone, Scott Sewell, Dick Barrett (sp?) Mary Groves DNR, Gina DNR, Dave DNR & Joe Love DNR.

Narrative: Joe Love opened the meeting stating that tournament stockpiling of released bass is an issue DNR has been aware of for some time. And that some study on the subject has been done that shows that 50%+/- of released bass remain in the vicinity of their release for at least 2 or 3 months. Length of time they remain depends on condition of fish & ability of habitat to provide cover and forage. Joe's studies were all fresh water. A 2014 North Carolina study of fish released after tournaments in tidal water found that the percentage remaining in the release area to be 80%.

The first 20 minutes of the meeting was a discussion on whether or not stockpiling is a problem. Tony Prochaska did a quick and dirty inquiry of 14 states in the NE US to tabulate their take on stockpiling. Eleven states responded, 7 voiced concerns the remainder were either unaware of the problem or not concerned about it.

Joe Love admitted he had marked released fish on sonar in the Northeast River & his reviewed archive info and other evidence "suggests" stockpiling does occur. Steve Wymer asked what percent of the total bass population does stockpiled fish represent. This lead to a discussion of whether or not any negative impact was big enough to worry about. My counter to this position was that there is a perfect storm of very adverse factors (sewerage, loss of habitat, tournament over fishing, comm'l fishing abuse, LMBV, etc.) causing a here and now problem for the fishery that requires a here and now solution. Not one that takes a year or more to implement. I also asked if anyone considered the depletion of bass population from the areas they are caught in. I finished my comment by saying we need to control everything we can as soon as possible and much sooner than some think it can be done if we are to save the fishery.

There was general agreement the problems need to be addressed and everything should be on the table to accomplish that. Chaconas claimed the franchise (big) tournaments are abandoning the Potomac because of a lack of fish. The discussion on this topic focused on the economic impact these tournaments have locally and the desire to keep them from leaving. Not much was said about the state of the bass fishery and its inability to continue to weather the perfect storm. I was the only one who repeated this concern and I emphasized the need to act immediately. In this discussion the topic of requiring tournaments to release fish at scattered locations along the main river came up. Joe Love objected to making this a requirement claiming to do so in windy weather is dangerous given the use of pontoon boats heavily laden with release tanks full of water and fish. The alternative is tanker trucks and DNR has some but no budget to operate them for tournaments.

In the course of this discussion Joe Love admitted the 2009 fish kill following the FLW tournament was the result of improper fish handling and release methods used by the tournament staff.

Steve Wymer says his club has not yet seen a convincing argument indicating tournament stockpiling of released fish was a problem they need to address. All the other stakeholders at the meeting felt otherwise and all agreed that requiring tournaments to use widely scattered release sites was doable now.

KP3rd in comments he gave Joe Love prior to the tournament emphasized the 3 fish creel limit as a way to lessen the impact of stockpiling. There was no DNR support for that, Joe Love is too afraid the franchise tournaments would abandon Maryland waters if we do it. Brian Barns comments as related by Joe Love indicated he didn't think stockpiling was a problem and that he supports a 14" year round size limit.

Bass is planning an August 2016 tournament that will be 4 days and the weigh in for the last two days will be at the Blue Crab Stadium near Waldorf MD. They are concerned about the additional stress transporting fish to & from the remote weigh-in will cause. They've asked Joe Love if he could help them with transportation by making the DNR tanker trucks available to return fish to the river. The distance to Smallwood from the stadium is just over 15 miles as the crow flies. But the way the roads run makes the distance to Smallwood about 20 to 21 miles. Marshall Hall would be a little closer, 16 to 18 miles depending on which route is used. Gina was hot on Joe Love about not having budget to fund this. Joe agreed he'd take funds from some other line item in his budget to make it happen.

This precipitated a big discussion on whether or not DNR could charge for services or accept donations to off set the cost. It boiled down to they cannot charge a fee. Though I don't see why they can't require transport to scattered release locations and charge a fee to transport fish if a tournament cannot do it themselves following guidelines DNR sets. The DNR policy makers finally agreed that they could accept donations. Scott Sewell said he knows the conservation director at BASS and feels confident he can get the donation.

My concern is that Joe does not know the real cost of operating the tank truck. He thinks it would be \$240+/- per day. That number would cover salary for the DNR staff involved. However the following need to be added to the total to re-coop the real cost.

- Staff benefits for paid leave time accrued, employer share of Soc. Sec., Medi-Care, Unemployment premiums, etc. add about 30% to wages paid out.**
- Truck fuel will run in the range of \$50 per day.**
- Truck preparation and cleanup will add about 1 more day of labor for probably 2 people. So two days support becomes 4 days.**
- Some kind of charge for truck maintenance, upkeep & depreciation needs to be charged.**

I don't know what the last two numbers would be but the first three are approaching \$700 a day. The real cost of operating the tanker trucks for DNR is probably closer to \$1,000 per day all in, maybe even a little more. Based on nothing more than my guestimates I recommend a charge of \$1,200 a day per truck for fish transportation.

Summary: Note when I refer to stakeholders I mean anyone attending the meeting that uses the water for business or pleasure. DNR their staff and anyone employed by any branch of government are Regulators.

The meeting pretty much managed to talk the subject to death. The majority of the stakeholder participants agree that the stockpiling of tournament released bass is a problem that needs urgent attention. However, Joe Love's behavior toward the subject leads me to believe that DNR support to solve the problem is unenthusiastic at best. I believe that without Joe Love's enthusiastic support his bosses won't force the matter on him.

Keith Barker, Guide

Ken Penrod's Life Outdoors, Unlimited

10/31/2015

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Joseph W Love -DNR- <joseph.love@maryland.gov>

Minutes from Stockpiling meeting

National Bass <nationalbass@aol.com>

Mon, Nov 2, 2015 at 5:50 PM

To: Gina Hunt -DNR- <gina.hunt@maryland.gov>

Cc: Stephen Chaconas <info@nationalbass.com>, Scott Sewell <NITRO1707@verizon.net>, Joseph W Love -DNR- <joseph.love@maryland.gov>

Thank you Gina.

There is some important information not included with your email. First, from what I understand, VDGIF does not see any issues with the LMB population in the Potomac River.

The immediate concern was the upcoming B.A.S.S. 8/16 tournament with a 2-day remote weigh in site. Transporting the weigh in fish on the 3rd and 4th days would require a truck. This is a point to be discussed between MD DNR and B.A.S.S.

Also, the discussion of tournament bass dispersal led us to believe that a small percentage move out almost immediately and, as long as there is forage and habitat, many fish will remain near the release site.

The issue boiled down to what issue this creates. One conclusion was, if tournament release was stressful and led to delayed mortality, recapture of these fish would likely increase the incident of delayed mortality of the recaptured fish.

Trucking fish to other areas further stresses fish and is not a recommended dispersal strategy. If indeed the goal is to protect the released fish from recapture, there are several options to protect these fish and reduce stockpiling.

Here was where Dr. Joe Love offered several solutions, if any were needed. Each was discussed with feasibility and cost effectiveness. They were also presented in writing. For example making these areas off limits would be a solution. Also encouraging tournament directors to move their events to other areas would diminish the focus on just a few release sites.

In any case, Dr. Love recommended informing the anglers and director of the concern of stockpiling.

I felt this was a very productive meeting and informative. I am copying a few of the attendees. I don't have addresses for everyone. Feel free to share.

I look forward to hearing more on this issue as the word gets out.

Thank you!

Capt. Steve Chaconas
Sent from my iPad

[Quoted text hidden]

<Attachment 1.pdf>

<Attachment 2.pdf>

<MinutesTidalBassStockpilingMeeting2015.docx>