

Fisheries Research Summary

Division of Inland Fisheries

N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission



Cape Fear River a Haven for Catfish Anglers

The Cape Fear River has long been known as one of the state's most popular catfish angling destinations and a recently completed study proves it. A creel survey conducted by fisheries biologists with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission targeted recreational anglers fishing the river from July 1, 2003 to June 30, 2004.

Results from the 12-month study revealed catfish were the most popular game fish sought after, receiving 32 percent or 43,540 hours of the total fishing effort expended by Cape Fear River anglers during the survey period. For the year, anglers fished a total of 134,976 hours for 22 different species. On average, Cape Fear River anglers caught one catfish for every three hours they spent fishing.

Creel survey objectives

The objectives of the creel survey were to characterize the major components of the recreational fishery on the Cape Fear River by estimating fishing effort, the number and types of fish caught, and how many fish were harvested.

A total of 715 anglers were interviewed during the year long study with approximately a third of them targeting catfish during their fishing trips.

Anglers also fished for largemouth bass (16 percent), sunfish (12 percent), striped bass (4 percent), American shad (2 percent), and crappie (<1.0 percent).

The remaining 31 percent of anglers fished for a combination of species, or said they were fishing for "anything that bites." Most of the effort for striped bass and American shad occurred seasonally, in the spring of the year when the fish were in the river to spawn.

We estimated 78,284 fish were caught from the Cape Fear River during the twelve-month survey period with 31,272 of these fish being "kept" or harvested by anglers. Although more fishing effort was directed for catfish than any other targeted species during the creel period, estimates of catfish catch and harvest ranked second among species caught by Cape Fear River anglers. Sunfish accounted for 60 percent of the total catch and 59 percent of the total harvest followed by catfish, which accounted for 17 percent of the total catch and 31 percent of the total harvest.



Brian Newberger holds the state record flathead catfish, a 78-pounder from the Cape Fear River on Sept. 17, 2005.

Channel catfish



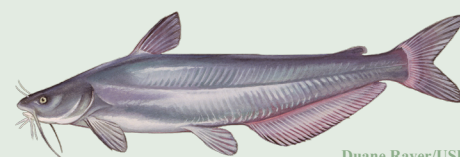
Duane Raver/USFWS

Flathead catfish



Duane Raver/USFWS

Blue catfish



Duane Raver/USFWS



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Creel survey respondents

Of the 715 Cape Fear River anglers responding to interview questions during the creel period, 93 percent resided in the local counties of Bladen, Brunswick, Columbus, Cumberland, Harnett, Pender, Robeson and New Hanover. Regional anglers comprised an additional six percent of the remaining anglers and were from Duplin, Edgecombe, Greene, Hoke, Moore, Onslow, Orange, Sampson and Wake counties. Out-of-state anglers accounted for the remaining 1 percent of all anglers interviewed and consisted of six anglers from Horry County, S.C.

In order to determine a dollar value associated with this recreational fishery, anglers were asked how much money they spent per trip on things such as bait, food, gas and lodging. Anglers who fished the Cape Fear River during the year long creel survey spent an average of \$20.84 per trip. When this number was expanded over the 12-month study period, we estimated that these expenses exceeded \$392,000. This figure does not include the cost of boats, motors, vehicles and other major accessories.



Conducting a creel survey

Anglers were also asked how much more money they would be “willing to pay” to experience a trip of equal or greater satisfaction on the river. Anglers responded they would be willing to pay on average an additional \$30 per trip, or more than \$635,000 annually.

The total estimated economic value associated with angling on the Cape Fear River from July 1, 2003 through June 30, 2004 was approximately \$1,027,909.

Fishing practices on the Cape Fear River are different in some ways than what we have observed on the Chowan River and Neuse River. In an attempt to improve angling on the Cape Fear River, special management strategies are being implemented.

For example, the striped bass stock in the Cape Fear is currently considered significantly diminished. A Fisheries Management Plan has been developed to identify critical issues affecting stock expansion and to provide strategies for stock recovery.



Young angler holds a channel catfish

More information is needed to determine the locations and intensity of striped bass spawning within the Cape Fear River in order to protect and improve spawning habitats. To help boost the migratory striped bass populations in the Cape Fear River, the Wildlife Resources Commission stocks striped bass each year at various locations. We are currently evaluating the contribution of these stockings.

We plan to repeat the angler creel survey within the next 10 years to look for changes in fishing practices on the Cape Fear River.

