

Fall 2021

Issue 65

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Dakota Chapter American Fisheries Society Newsletter



President's Message: BJ Schall

Happy fall to everyone in the Dakota Chapter! I am writing this just as we are heading into the holiday season. I hope everyone is able to take a bit of time to get outside and enjoy the fall weather. It won't be too long before our lakes are frozen over, so get that last-minute, open-water angling in soon! Also, I hope you all get to spend some quality time with family over the next month and a half.



Chapter President Schall Chasing Flathead Catfish on the James River. Photo courtesy of the Mitchell Daily Republic.

We are quickly approaching the winter conference season and that means a return to in-person meetings for the Dakota Chapter! With the pandemic in full swing in the Dakotas during last winter's meeting, our past-president Scott Gangl and past-vice-president Joe Nett did a great job of providing a virtual outlet for members of the Dakota Chapter to share updates. However, after another year filled with a seemingly endless stream of virtual meetings and conferences, I am sure we all share the same excitement to meet in person, engage during the socials, and feel a bit closer to the old normal.

I am sure I am not alone in feeling that the changes brought on by the pandemic have changed the expectations and tempo of our work environments. Not only did we fully resume our field activities in 2021, but we also continued to see a continuous stream of requests for virtual meetings and conferences. It is often easy to let these requests overwhelm us and make it feel like we don't have time to stop and think, but it's also important to recognize the benefits these changes have afforded us. The improved tools for communicating across great distances have allowed us to stay more connected with our coworkers in other offices, more easily share our findings to groups within and outside our states, and even work seamlessly from remote locations. These advancements have been game changers in our ability to share information with our peers. I hope that you all have time to reflect on this during the winter season and can find some additional positive outcomes from the changes we experienced over the last year and a half.

I wish you all a happy holiday season, and I look forward to seeing you in Sioux Falls this February!

Nominate Someone for a Chapter Award!

The Dakota Chapter membership is comprised of many individuals who work tirelessly for the benefit of the fisheries resource in North and South Dakota. The Dakota Chapter proudly supports the following awards to individuals or groups in recognition of their efforts. If you know someone who stands out and deserves recognition, please submit a nomination for one of the awards below.



Robert L. Hanten Distinguished Professional Service Award - may be presented annually to no more than two individuals who have made an outstanding contribution within the field of fisheries. These contributions must have noteworthy significance within the two-state region and go beyond the requirements of a job description. Preferably all nominees should have been both Chapter and Society members for at least eight years during their respective careers.

Aquatic Resource Conservation Award - may be presented annually to one individual or group that has made an outstanding effort in ensuring the future welfare of the Dakota's waters and/or fisheries. These efforts include but are not limited to: information, education, providing monetary or voluntary assistance, and legislative initiatives.

David W. Willis Outstanding Young Professional Award - may be presented annually to up to two individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the fisheries profession during the start of their fisheries careers. Nominees must not have completed five years of full-time fisheries employment. Contributions must be substantial and go beyond that required by their position. Nominees will have become established as contributors to the improvement of aquatic resources in North or South Dakota.

Letters of nomination can be sent to the Awards and Nominations Committee Chair, Scott Gangl at sgangl@nd.gov

Student Scholarship Opportunities

The Dakota Chapter offers several scholarships for students to support their education or travel to the annual meeting. Interested students should visit the Chapter website for scholarship criteria and application instructions:

<https://dakota.fisheries.org/awards-and-scholarships/>

The **Dr. James C. Schmulbach Memorial Scholarship** was established in 2006 to recognize the important contributions that “Doc Schmulbach” made to fisheries science. The scholarship recognizes an outstanding undergraduate student (junior or senior) who is studying fisheries science, or related field at an accredited college or university in North or South Dakota.

The **Dr. Robert A. Klumb Memorial Scholarship** was established in 2014 in memory of “Rob” Klumb, former Project Leader for the US Fish and Wildlife Service in Pierre, SD. The scholarship recognizes outstanding student(s) in fisheries science, and provides travel support up to \$250 to attend the annual Chapter meeting.

The **SDSU Student Subunit Sauger Scholarship** was established to assist South Dakota students attending the Annual Dakota Chapter meeting. Eligible students may be enrolled at any College or University in South Dakota. The number of scholarships to be awarded each year and the dollar amount of scholarships is annually decided by the SDSU Subunit Executive Committee. Sauger Scholarships are paid for by the SDSU Subunit from proceeds generated from the raffle conducted at the annual Dakota Chapter meeting.

The **VCSU Student Subunit Northern Pike Scholarship** was established to assist North Dakota students in attending the Annual Dakota Chapter meeting. Eligible students may be enrolled at any College or University in North Dakota. The number of scholarships to be awarded each year and the dollar amount of scholarships is annually decided by the VCSU Subunit Executive Committee. Northern Pike Scholarships are paid for by the VCSU Subunit from proceeds generated from the raffle conducted at the annual Dakota Chapter meeting.



***“Ask Not What Your Chapter Can Do For You,
Ask What You Can Do For Your Chapter!”***

- John F. Kennedy (sort of)



The Awards and Nominations Committee is seeking members willing to serve on the Dakota Chapter Executive Committee for the coming year(s). The Chapter functions solely on the willingness of members to step up and serve. If you have questions about the role or duties of any of these offices, feel free to contact current EXCOM members for feedback.

Positions that will be up for election at the 2022 annual meeting include:

- Chapter President-elect – a South Dakota member. The president-elect will assume office in the Fall of 2022 and serves as the Newsletter editor until transitioning to the office of President in 2023. They will preside over the Annual Meeting in 2024 in South Dakota.
- Chapter Vice-President – a North Dakota member. The incoming vice president will assume office in the Fall of 2022, and will assist the Chapter President with meeting arrangements for the 2023 Annual Meeting to be held in North Dakota.
- Chapter Secretary-Treasurer – a South Dakota member. This is a two-year term, set to begin in the Fall of 2022.

If you are interested in running for office or would like to nominate someone for one of the offices above, please contact the Awards and Nominations Chair Scott Gangl at sgangl@nd.gov

Environmental Concerns Committee

-Mike Johnson

Blue Green Algae Blooms

As expected, during a drought year, several reports of harmful algal blooms (HABs) are brought to our attention by the angling public. In North Dakota, the Department of Environmental Quality's Watershed Management section does a great job in sampling, analyzing, and informing the public regarding observed blooms and inquiries. A couple years ago, DEQ initiated an interactive mapping program on their website ([MAP](#)) which provides up to date information regarding the status and intensity of HABs at each location. This program is driven largely by public input in which water users such as anglers can snap a photo on their phone and enter information into an online reporting form ([FORM](#)). Forms are quickly reviewed by DEQ staff and a site visit and sample are collected. If microcystin levels are such to require a public advisory or warning, then the location, with data, is added to the online map and signage put up on site. This year, 59 HAB reports have been sampled which is up from 2020 (56) and 2019 (31). Perhaps with easy to use programs such as this, public awareness of HABs will increase. In parallel, hopefully public desire to take action to reduce and remediate HABs through good land use practices will also increase!



Riparian Buffers

North Dakota Game and Fish Department's Save Our Lakes (SOL) Program is currently working with landowners and producers along the Souris River (north central ND) and the Wild Rice River (southeast ND) to establish and improve riparian buffers. These efforts are directed towards cultivated and grazed land providing buffers up to 1,300 feet from the water's edge. Incentives to landowners include the provision of fencing supplies, livestock watering systems, native grass seed mix, or trees from the local Soil Conservation District. Acreage in the program is signed up in an agreement which spans 10 to 30 years. This riparian buffer project is a collaborative effort in which financial aid from other partners and agencies are involved. Partners include the NDGF's Conservation Division, the NDGF's Private Lands Division, and the National Wild Turkey Federation.

South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks Update -John Lott, Section Chief

SDGFP Staff Changes

South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks experienced some significant staffing changes since publication of the Spring 2021 Dakota AFS newsletter. Geno Adams resigned as the program administrator for fisheries management in July to accept a position with the SD Department of Health. Jake Davis, who had been the area fisheries supervisor for the Black Hills and western SD, was hired as the program administrator for fisheries management in September. Jake will continue to work out of the Rapid City office, even though his job responsibilities are statewide. Jake's prior area fisheries supervisor position is currently vacant and will hopefully be filled by January 2022.

Kyle Potter was hired as an aquatic habitat and access biologist in Ft. Pierre in October. This is a new position in central South Dakota made possible by reallocating an existing fisheries program position. Kyle's promotion created a vacancy for a resource biologist in Ft. Pierre, which should be filled by the end of 2021.



South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks Update

-John Lott, Section Chief

Changes in SDGFP Aquatics Program Priorities

Because the only constant is change, natural resources management agencies must continually evolve to address change and meet the needs of the public we serve. With that in mind, the Aquatics Section of GFP has modified its work priorities. Aquatic habitat and access, improving hatchery infrastructure, and more consistently meeting fish stocking needs, are top priorities for the Aquatics Section.

Increased Aquatic Habitat and Access Emphasis:

Beginning in July 2020, the purchase of a habitat stamp became a prerequisite for purchase of most hunting and fishing licenses. Revenue generated for aquatic habitat and access will potentially be between \$2.5 and \$3 million annually. These funds can be used to develop or improve habitat and access but cannot be used for maintenance or salaries. GFP now has four aquatic habitat and access biologists supervised by Jason Jungwirth, our statewide aquatic habitat and access program coordinator. Staff in our five fisheries management areas will be spending more time on maintenance and development of aquatic habitat and access to support this priority.

Evolution of the Fish Production Program

South Dakota has excellent hatchery staff who are completely dedicated to producing fish to increase angler use and satisfaction. However, existing hatchery infrastructure is aging and expensive to maintain. There is also a need to increase consistency in meeting stocking needs, especially for warm-water and cool-water species. The development of recirculating aquaculture systems (RAS) at Cleghorn Hatchery to increase fish rearing capacity, and development of RAS in central and eastern South Dakota, is being pursued to address these issues. As rearing capacity and fish production increase, stocking duties for area fisheries staff will likely increase along with changes in hatchery staff work duties.

What will Change Look Like?

Changes will be gradual. As the identified workload for aquatic habitat and access, and fish production and stocking, increase for management area staff, there will be a corresponding reduction in other types of work. Changes to work duties for habitat and access will begin by Spring of 2022, while changes for fish production and stocking will occur as increased rearing capacity is developed. Effort spent on surveys and research must decrease. Section staff will be prioritizing surveys at the area level and doing fewer low-priority surveys. Our research approach will be changing also, with GFP staff more focused on projects that directly impact angler use and satisfaction, such as evaluations of habitat and access improvements and fish stocking strategies.

North Dakota Game and Fish Department

-Greg Power, Division Chief

Last month was the fifth wettest October on record here in Bismarck. And just two years ago, North Dakota experienced its wettest fall since statehood. But the two year period sandwiched in between was one of the driest times also on record. Such is living on the Dakota prairie and as fisheries managers, we've come to expect and adjust (at least if you're a bit of a veteran biologist) to these extremes.

Perhaps the story of fishing in 2021 was again the extremes, this time the relentless summer heat, causing a noticeable decline in fishing participation. I found it interesting when visiting boat ramps at peak fishing times, the relative lack of resident trucks and trailers but normal to perhaps above normal non-resident volume. It seemed our resident anglers went home by noon leaving our out-of-state visitors, who appeared to be more tolerant of the heat, to fish.

Despite there were few fish/fishery highlights in 2021, there were a couple noteworthy (good, bad, or otherwise) events -

Drought

Staff biologists continue to be concerned about the prolonged drought period. We know all too well what the lack of water means to our profession. The good news was although we expected some serious die offs this past summer, it never materialized. But if we have a serious winter, especially one that includes an early, significant snowfall event and then prolonged cold into February, North Dakota could easily lose 20-40 of its current 430 fishable water bodies due to winterkill. As always, time will tell.

Development

A perfect storm is brewing when it comes to addressing (or perhaps better said, not addressing!) numerous development matters (e.g., boat ramps). Years of program growth in North Dakota has resulted in a record number of infrastructure facilities (ramps, docks, piers, toilets, etc.). For example, there were about 600 facilities in 1990 compared close to 3500 today. The aging and simple maintenance needs of this infrastructure has now become burdensome, especially as our rural North Dakota cooperative partners age. In many cases, this has left the Department to solely address many of these needs. Further, of serious concern is if severe drought conditions continue into 2022, many ramps will need additional attention from the Departments very limited staff. Funding, coordination and permitting could be overwhelming.



North Dakota Game and Fish Department -Greg Power, Division Chief

Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS)

Department staff continue to address various aspects of ANS monitoring, prevention, and control. ANS staff inspected a record number of watercraft as well as sampled a record number of waters in 2021. Unfortunately, for the third year in a row, new waters (2) were found to be infested with zebra mussels.

Walleye lakes

Compared to 25 years ago, today there are 72 more prairie lakes (greater than 200 acres) with fishable walleye populations scattered across North Dakota's landscape. These new waters now total more than 82,000 acres. Beyond the traditional and dependable Missouri River System and Devils Lake, we now have ample walleye fishing opportunities, especially for ice angling, in most North Dakota's counties. Beyond mother nature providing a wet landscape the past 25 years, fisheries staff should be credited for creating a successful formula to develop these new walleye fisheries through 1) coordinated efforts to survey new lakes (i.e., netting and water quality), 2) securing public access agreements to these waters, 3) stocking the needed fish, 4) assessing the growing walleye populations, and 5) developing some access.

It should be a matter of only days for some ice fishing to commence. I for one look forward every year to the hard water season. With abundant opportunity, make it a priority and get out and wet a line. Good luck and enjoy.



From the Field

Comparing Contribution of Two Sizes of Walleyes Fingerlings Stocked into a South Dakota Small Impoundment – Nathan Loecker

Sioux Falls Game, Fish and Parks fisheries staff spent time this fall sampling age-0 Walleye in order to evaluate the effectiveness of stocking small versus medium-size fingerling Walleye into small impoundments. Lake Carthage, a 203-acre impoundment located near De Smet, South Dakota, was selected for an initial stocking comparison as natural reproduction is rare. Lake Carthage is currently managed for Walleye, Yellow Perch, and Black Crappie, but also provides quality fishing for species such as Channel Catfish and Bluegill. Walleye fingerlings were all reared at the Blue Dog State Fish Hatchery (see Table 1 for production information). All Walleyes were raised in ponds fed by lake water and fertilized with soybean and alfalfa meal.

Table 1. Information for Walleye fingerlings reared at Blue Dog State Fish Hatchery in 2021.

Product	Fish size at time of pond stocking	Fish size at pond harvest (number/lb)	Pond stocking density (number/acre)
June fingerlings	Fry	1,500	≤ 250,000
July fingerlings	1,500/lb	220	12,000

On June 10, 2021, 16,100 oxytetracycline (OTC) marked June fingerling walleyes (70/acre) were stocked, and on July 7, 2,200 unmarked July fingerlings (10/acre) were stocked into Lake Carthage. A fall electrofishing catch rate of 213 age-0 Walleye per hour indicated the presence of a strong year class. The crew pulled otoliths from a sample of 100 fish to examine for OTC marks. With the help of the OTC guru, Dave Lucchesi, staff determined that 86 percent of the Walleye sampled were the June fingerlings while 14 percent were the July fingerlings. These numbers closely reflected the proportions of fish stocked by number (88 percent June fingerling vs. 12 percent July fingerling). It appears the June fingerling stocking may have provided more benefit in terms of year class contribution this time around. This work, along with other evaluations, will help shape future Walleye stocking strategies for the state.

