

Fisheries Research Summary

Division of Inland Fisheries

N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission



Potential Value of Neuse River Recreational Fishery Tops \$4,000,000 a Year

Results from a recently completed survey suggest the potential value of recreational fishing over a 12-month period on the Neuse River could exceed \$4,000,000.

During the survey, which was conducted by fisheries biologists with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, nearly 1,400 anglers were interviewed between July 1, 2002 and June 30, 2003. The goal of the study was to expand the information from these interviews to estimate the total amount of time spent fishing on the Neuse. Commission staff also wanted to determine how many and what types of fish were caught and harvested.

The Neuse River was a popular destination for anglers during the study period, as more than 292,000 hours were spent in pursuit of 23 different types of fish. The most popular gamefish on the Neuse was the largemouth bass, with 27 percent of all anglers targeting this species, followed by sunfish (19 percent), striped bass (16 percent), American and hickory shad (10 percent), catfish (5 percent), salt-water species (3 percent) and crappie (1 percent). The remaining 19 percent of anglers fished for a combination of species, or said they were fishing for "anything that bites."

As would be expected, fishing effort for migratory species like striped bass and shad peaked in the upper stretches of the Neuse during the spring as adults moved inland to spawn. However, biologists also observed a significant fishery for striped bass in the lower Neuse River from November through March.

Nearly 234,000 fish were caught during the 12-month study period, with 93,400 of these fish harvested (or kept) by anglers. Sunfish (bluegill, pumpkinseed, redear, etc.) accounted for 52 percent of the total catch and 54 percent of the total harvest, followed by hickory shad, which made up 12 percent of the total catch and 15 percent of the total harvest. Although anglers spent more time actually fishing for largemouth bass than any other species, largemouth bass catch ranked third behind sunfish and hickory shad. Catch-and-release fishing was popular among largemouth bass anglers. Biologists estimated that 26,000 largemouth bass were caught on the Neuse, with only 2,200 bass (8 percent) removed from the river. On average, largemouth bass anglers caught one bass for every three hours spent fishing, with the best catches reported during the month of May.

Results from this study, coupled with other fish sampling programs, are helping Commission staff examine the effectiveness of current fishing regulations and fine-tune management to better serve anglers fishing the Neuse River. The Neuse River supports an important recreational fishery, not only to anglers, but to local business owners as well.

Biologists plan to repeat the survey within the next 10 years to look for changes in fishing practices. In the meantime, effective management and protection of the water quality and habitat in the Neuse River Basin are critical to the future of this fisheries resource.

