

## **Summary: Snapping Turtle Workgroup Meeting November 20, 2008**

**Workgroup Members in Attendance:** Jack Cover, Karen Eisenreich, Mike Johnson, Jimmy Kline, Rick Morin, Rich Seigel, Alex Siess (for Ray Bosmans), Scott Smith

**DNR Fisheries in Attendance:** Tom O'Connell, Harley Speir

**Guests:** Patrick Cain, Brian Droneberger, Scott Farnsworth, Hollice Lowe, George Luongo, Teal Richards, Larry Simms, Rick Simpson

### **Welcome & Introductions**

Following the welcome and introductions, Tom O'Connell addressed the workgroup and thanked the group for its work. Tom explained the Department's interest in sustainable options for the snapping turtle fishery. Tom asked the workgroup to consider new options with consideration to administrative costs of managing the fishery.

### **Review of Goals**

Rick Morin reviewed the established goals of the workgroup. He summarized the results of the past meetings and explained the process for new regulations. Following a scoping meeting, regulations will be submitted to AELR, published in the Maryland Register, and a public hearing will be scheduled.

### **Report of the Scoping Meeting**

Harley Speir reported the results of the scoping meeting. Harley explained that scoping meetings are conducted to present ideas before regulations are fully written for submission. Harley explained that the concerns about limited entry fisheries and the need to consider limited entry in a larger context with other fisheries, required consideration of additional options.

### **Management Alternatives & Options**

Rick Morin presented three options for consideration. Option 1 consisted of a 10.5" minimum CCL limit, 50,000 pound hard total allowable catch (TAC) requiring full accountability, daily call-ins, and possible tagging and a cap on the number of participants in the fishery. Option 2 consisted of an 11" minimum CCL size limit and a cap on permits with no hard TAC. Option 3 consisted of an 11" minimum CCL size limit, with no limited entry and no hard TAC. This option required registration and a permit and re-evaluation of the fishery in future years. An 11" size limit protects 63% of females and approximately 50% of reproductive potential.

A productive discussion of the three options followed. Rich Seigel expressed skepticism of TACs in general for snapping turtles. Rich said high effort could wipe out local populations while still meeting a statewide TAC, and could result in a cascading series of bottlenecks throughout the Bay region. Rich supported limited entry in this fishery due to the life history of the species and its inability to withstand high harvest pressure. Rich strongly recommended that monitoring must be included in this option. Indications of overfishing include reduction in mean size of turtles caught over several years.

There was strong support for option 3. Scott asked for a show of hands and the support was unanimous. Additional concerns were discussed. George Luongo asked if the workgroup could recommend the elimination of crab pots from tributaries because he has seen them kill snapping turtles. Rick Morin explained that crab pots in tributaries are a bigger issue to the terrapin workgroup, and went on to explain the history of crab pots in MD and that they selectively kill juveniles, which have few other sources of mortality. The workgroup recommends that Fisheries Service consider banning crab pots from tributaries.

### **Other considerations**

Jimmy Kline pointed out that he harvests turtles in many states and Maryland is the only one that does not require a float to provide access to air for trapped turtles. The workgroup felt that such a requirement could prevent unnecessarily drowning turtles and other air breathing animals, especially if new fishermen entered the fishery. Larry Simms suggested that a crab pot float could provide the necessary flotation and following some discussion, Harley Speir offered a 4x10" (minimum) crab pot float as a possible solution. Harley indicated that we could also calculate the equivalent volume for other shapes of solid foam flotation. Empty jugs would not be acceptable because they could crack and sink.

Alex Siess asked for consideration of airspaces for fyke nets, citing experience fishing fyke nets successfully with floats. Discussion followed about the difficulty of requirements for daily checking of fykes and the problem of trapping turtles in warm water. Larry Simms and several other watermen were skeptical of floats in fyke nets when they were set in deep water, explaining that raising the cod-end of the fyke would pinch the throat and restrict the fishing ability of the gear. Harley indicated that he would look into bycatch data for the Choptank, Bush and Patuxent, and possibly bring it up before the TFAC. Larry Simms agreed that this would be useful and to discuss the problem with fyke netters. Rich Seigel indicated that the problem of turtles drowning in crab pots is well documented, but the fyke net evidence is more anecdotal and it would be helpful to determine if it is a problem. Rich encourages DNR to investigate the degree of bycatch of turtles and other animals in fyke nets and other gear.

There was agreement that permit registration should have a deadline of April 1. Mike Johnson said permits should be all in by November 1 because there is no harvest in November and December.

### **Regulatory Process Review**

Harley explained that the new recommendations of the workgroup are substantially different from the recommendations presented at the Oct. 30 scoping meeting, and will be added to the scoping meeting of Dec. 4 (6:00 PM at Tawes Cafeteria). The deadline for regulation submission to AELR is Dec 12, with a public hearing in early January 2009 and effective date of Feb. 23, 2009 (if all goes according to plan).

### *Summary & Wrap-Up*

The workgroup recommended the following:

1. 11" CCL minimum size limit
2. Flotation devices inside turtle traps to float 2" above surface. Solid core floats such as crab pot floats (minimum 4" round x 10" long). Snapper permit number to be burned into float
3. Continue monitoring snapping turtle population
4. Consider ban on recreational crab pots in tributaries due to high mortality of turtles and other wildlife
5. Encourage DNR to investigate the bycatch of turtles and other air breathing animals in fyke nets and other gear lacking airspaces
6. Reconvene the workgroup in 2009 to review data

The scoping meeting at which the snapping turtle proposed regulations will be discussed will be December 4, 6:00 pm at the DNR building Tawes Cafeteria.