

**STATE OF NEVADA
BOARD OF WILDLIFE COMMISSIONERS**

Commission Policy Number 33

Number: **P-33**
Title: Fisheries Management Program
Reference: NRS 501.105,
501.181
Effective Date: July 24, 1999
Reviewed Date: 2002

PURPOSE

The Board of Wildlife Commissioners is charged in Nevada Revised Statute to provide broad level policy guidance to programs of the Department of Wildlife. This policy is designed to provide that broad policy for programs and projects of the Fisheries Bureau.

JUSTIFICATION

Nevada Revised Statute (NRS) 501.105 states that “the commission shall establish policies and adopt regulations necessary to the preservation, protection, management and restoration of wildlife and its habitat.” NRS 501.181 further defines commission duties to “establish broad policies” for the “protection, propagation, restoration, transplanting, introduction and management of wildlife in this state.” In addition, the commission shall “establish policies for areas of interest including...the management of...game fish, and protected and unprotected...fish...and amphibians”, including “the introduction, transplanting or exporting of wildlife.”

BACKGROUND

Fish are important to the State of Nevada. They play a vital role in the economic stability of the State. Approximately, 200,000 people fish in Nevada, expending about two million angler days of effort each year. National surveys show each fisherman spends approximately \$776 each year to pursue their sport. A Department study in 1996 indicated that over \$211,000,000 is spent each year in Nevada by fishermen.

Fishermen are typically happy folks. A popular bumper ticker reminds us that “A bad day fishing is better than a good day at work!” The value of fishing as a psychological and sociological therapy has been documented in numerous studies, and the simple perusal of a group of anglers at a reservoir or a solitary fly fisherman on a quiet river will validate this assumption.

Fish in a desert environment are also a valuable indicator of ecological health. Their presence or absence portends the existing condition of aquatic resources as well as the long term trend. The Nevada landscape is home to 23 Endangered Species Act threatened and endangered fishes, more than any other state. Climatic changes as well

as human environmental impacts are seen in the extirpation of indigenous species, as the plight of Nevada's endemic fishes documents. The Commission supports programs to manage all fishes with the ultimate goals of species perpetuation, improvements in status leading to eventual delisting of federally protected species, and the prevention of future listing of species through proactive management strategies.

The management of Nevada's fishery resources, therefore, is a valuable endeavor, important to the State. This policy direction will help guide that undertaking.

POLICIES

Aquaculture

The propagation, cultivation, and harvest of aquatic organisms for commercial or private use is considered a legitimate and valuable use of Nevada's water. However, the paucity of water in the State limits the distribution of aquacultural pursuits, and quite often forces them to compete directly with native fauna and flora.

- Aquacultural activities will not be permitted where they will adversely affect native fauna and flora or nonnative fisheries of significant public value.
- Prohibited species and species of potential adverse impact will be permitted only in closed water systems.
- All aquaculture pursuits will conform to Commission fish disease policy.

Amphibians

There are approximately 19 species of amphibians distributed throughout Nevada (Nevada Natural Heritage Program, Feb. 1999). Amphibians are typically found associated with the aquatic resources of the State, and are considered important indicators of ecological health in those areas where they would normally be expected to occur. Bullfrogs are classified as a game amphibian with regulated harvest.

- The persistence of viable native amphibian populations will be considered in all aquatic resource management prescriptions and decisions.
- Commercial exploitation of amphibians shall be closely regulated, and only allowed when species viability, persistence, and maintenance of historic distribution are assured.

Angler Access

Even though approximately 87 percent of Nevada is public land, access to many, if not most, of the fishable waters of the State is controlled by private land. In addition many of the publicly assessable fishing waters of the State are in need of access facilities. To perpetuate the recreational, educational and aesthetic value of Nevada's water resources, a proactive program to guarantee access and improve access facilities is desirable.

- Angler access, including land acquisitions, easements, conservation pools, and access agreements will be sought from willing providers using Sport Fish Restoration, wildlife and special funds when appropriate.
- Angler access facilities will be developed at appropriate locations where public access is already assured when such facilities will enhance angler use and encourage the use of fishery resources. Locations owned or controlled by the State of Nevada will receive priority consideration for facility development and funding.
- Access to fishery resources will be actively publicized through signing, maps, the Internet, angler guides, and other Department outreach programs.
- All management prescriptions for fisheries controlled by private interests will be acceptable to affected landowners, maintaining a cooperative relationship as prescriptions are developed and implemented.

Biological Control of Aquatic Vegetation

The use of the triploid form of the grass carp, *Ctenopharyngodon idella*, also known as the white amur, as a biological method to control aquatic vegetation in specific, closed aquatic environments is a tested and proven technique. Other less prevalent methods of biological control of aquatic vegetation also deserve diligent scrutiny relative to potential impacts to the State's aquatic and fishery resources.

- Certified triploid grass carp may be approved for stocking only into waters where appropriate containment measures have been taken to prevent escapement or unauthorized removal and transfer of grass carp.
- Requests for importation or application of any aquatic vegetation control organisms will be allowed only when they will not harm existing aquatic or fishery resources.

Boating Access

The Sport Fish Restoration Program of Federal Aid requires the expenditure of at least 15 percent of the annual appropriation on boating access related facility development. The opportunities afforded by this program are great, if not challenging, due primarily to the limited water-based recreational opportunities in the state.

- Fifteen percent of the annual Sport Fish Restoration appropriation will be obligated and expended for development, maintenance, and repair of motorboat access facilities within the state.
- Close cooperation with the National Park Service at Lake Mead National Recreation Area and the Division of State Parks will be maintained to provide direct project support for development, repair and maintenance of boating facilities under their immediate administration.
- Department owned or administered boating access facilities will receive primary consideration for use of annual appropriations.

Fish Disease

Fish diseases, and the pathogens which cause them, have the potential to cause significant harm to the State's fishery resources. Many diseases, particularly those of viral origin, are untreatable. As the knowledge of the impact of diseases on indigenous fishes is insufficient, a conservative approach will be taken in protecting existing fisheries from disease impacts.

- Operational decisions made by the Department to preclude the introduction and spread of fish disease in the State will be guided by Program and Procedure relative to fish disease.
- The introduction or spread of fish disease pathogens which have been documented as having caused disastrous losses among cultured and/or wild fish populations, for which there is no known effective means of treatment, and which have never been, or are not currently, diagnosed as occurring in Nevada, will be prevented in the waters of the State of Nevada.

Fisheries Management Planning

Fisheries and Species Management Plans are a primary vehicle to make management prescriptions for Nevada's waters. Plans can present a logical and scientific argument for specific management direction, as well as serve as an informational document for the public.

- Management plans will be developed for major fisheries in the state, and species management plans will be developed for important sport fish species when disjunct populations can be managed collectively. Species management plans will also be developed for all threatened and endangered species.
- All planning processes and management prescriptions for waters of the State will give due consideration to the immediate and residual effects on resident native and endemic fishes, with special attention for protected species.
- Draft fisheries and species management plans will be subjected to extensive public review prior to being adopted, as outlined in the Fisheries Management Planning Program and Procedure.

Fishery Rehabilitation

The use of fish toxicants to control fish populations is a valid fisheries management tool to control an overabundance of undesirable fish, to remove exotic fish species, to reestablish displaced native fish species into historic habitat, and similar management needs. Nevada Revised Statutes prohibit anyone other than the Department of Wildlife from conducting fish eradication projects on waters of the State. Environmental concerns are addressable through adequate project planning and public information.

- An evaluation of environmental consequence which includes public scoping, will be completed for any proposed fishery rehabilitation project.

- Potential impacts to native aquatic species will be evaluated, justified and/or mitigated prior to any fishery rehabilitation project.
- Prior to a fishery rehabilitation project, the harvest of desirable fish species may be encouraged through liberalization of regulations.
- In compliance with NRS 445A.615, and as a public service, supervisory and technical assistance will be provided private and public entities desiring to complete fishery rehabilitation projects, however, project cost and regulatory compliance will remain the responsibility of the initiating party.

Fishing Regulations

A primary tool in fisheries management is the development of site specific regulations. Regulatory authority of the Board of Wildlife Commissioners extends to setting regular and special fishing seasons, daily and possession limits, manner and means of take, emergency closing or extending of a season, emergency reductions or increases of bag or possession limits, and area closures (NRS 501.181).

- Fishing regulation recommendations will be developed to meet specific goals and objectives for various management programs and will be closely coordinated with county advisory boards to manage wildlife.

Fish Stocking

Coldwater Game Fish: Most of the easily accessible fishable waters in Nevada have either insufficient or non-existent natural reproduction of trout to support current levels of angler use. Therefore, in order to maintain an acceptable fishing experience for the angling public as defined by the fisheries management planning process, the stocking of trout into many waters is a necessity.

- The stocking of coldwater game fish will be guided by the management objectives outlined in an approved management plan, as well as an evaluation of the most appropriate and beneficial use of hatchery trout.
- Hatchery trout will be stocked only in those waters where they will contribute to fishing by the general public. The stocking of private waters from state facilities may occur provided public access is allowed.
- The private stocking of trout into public waters may be authorized when the Department has determined that the release will be in the best public interest.
- Waters or reaches of waters managed as “wild” or “native” will not be stocked with hatchery trout.
- Stocking will not be conducted in waters which do not meet minimum habitat requirements for fish survival for at least as long as the stocked fish are expected to persist before anticipated angler harvest.

Warmwater Game Fish: About half of the fishing in Nevada is for warmwater species. Naturally reproducing populations, for the most part, support this demand. There are occasions, however, when the stocking of warmwater species is called for, including

introduction of a new species, augmentation of a declining population, reestablishment of a population after its loss, or maintenance of urban fishing programs.

- The stocking of warmwater game fish will be guided by the management objectives outlined in an approved management plan.
- Warmwater game fish may be introduced into waters where other game fish populations have not supported a viable fishery, or where a two-story fishery could be expected to develop.
- Warmwater game fish such as channel catfish may be stocked in selected waters to meet management objectives for urban fishery programs.
- Special liberal regulations, or other control measures, may be utilized to control expanding warmwater fish populations.
- Warmwater fish, especially more predaceous species such as black bass, may be used as a biological control in situations where excessive nongame fish populations are providing undue competition to primary game fish stocks. In this circumstance, special, more restrictive regulations to protect predatory fishes may be enacted.

Management of Native Nongame Fishes

Nevada's native fishes and other native aquatic organisms are important indicators of ecological health and are integral components of properly functioning aquatic ecosystems. They have also been severely impacted over time by modifications to and abuse of aquatic systems. NAC 503.065 and 503.067, CGR 1(8) and 3, and Commission Policy 19 recognize the need for special management emphasis for protected fish species. These management programs often require special funding sources, making their persistence tenuous at times.

- Program will be emphasized which assure the security of protected native fishes and preclude further listings.
- Native fish management plans will be developed for major drainage basins, species complexes, or individual species as appropriate.
- All planning processes and management prescriptions for waters of the State will insure the survival of resident native and endemic fishes, especially protected species.
- Due consideration will be given to the persistence of native crustaceans and mollusk in the development of management prescriptions for native and sport fish.

Native Trout Management

Six species of trout or char are native inhabitants of the State of Nevada: Bonneville cutthroat trout, bull trout, Lahontan cutthroat trout, mountain whitefish, redband trout and Yellowstone cutthroat trout. With the exception of Lahontan cutthroat trout, each has only a limited distribution in Nevada, but all are unique, and deserving of special management. In addition, most of these native species have received some degree of

attention from the Endangered Species Act of 1973 as amended. Threatened and endangered species need active long term species management programs implemented in accordance with the Comprehensive Management System.

- Native trout survival will receive priority in management prescriptions for any waters within historic distributions.
- Waters in historic ranges which support native trout populations, or have potential for reintroduction of native trout, should be designated and managed as “wild” or “native” fisheries.
- Waters or reaches or waters managed as “wild” or “native” will not be stocked with hatchery trout.
- The Commission may consider special regulatory protections such as harvest or gear restrictions for waters managed for native trout, if biological information indicates such actions would assure species viability.
- Species management planning and interagency cooperation will focus on proactive management strategies. The Commission supports programs to manage all native game fishes, with the ultimate goal of species perpetuation, improvements in status and eventual delisting of federally protected species, and the prevention of future listing of species through proactive management strategies.

Nuisance Aquatic Species

The introduction of undesirable, nuisance aquatic species has had a substantial negative impact on both sport fisheries and native fishes in Nevada. Additional invasive species introduced to North America, such as the zebra mussel, pose and continuing threat to Nevada’s fishes and aquatic ecosystems. The Commission supports programs to identify threats and to develop proactive strategies which will preclude introduction, or limit the impact of undesirable aquatic nuisance species.

- Potential nuisance aquatic species will be evaluated as they are identified and incorporated into existing prohibited or regulated species regulations.
- Local and regional strategies for prevention of nuisance aquatic species introductions, focusing on awareness and education for anglers, recreational boaters, and pet trade and aquaculture will be developed and implemented.
- The evaluation of live aquatic species importation requests for aquaculture and private pond stocking will incorporate consideration of potential nuisance aquatic species introductions.

EVALUATION

The Department of Wildlife Comprehensive Management System includes an ongoing process of evaluation as well as a final program evaluation of the attainment of goals and objectives. The Fisheries Program will be evaluated for attainment of program goals and objectives each year as the next year’s activities are charted. AT the culmination of the four-year planning cycle, a complete program review will be

accomplished in concert with revision of the Comprehensive Strategic Plan (1997) and the Fisheries Bureau Program Plan (1998).

This policy shall remain in effect until amended, repealed, or superseded by the Board of Wildlife Commissioners.

BY ORDER OF THE BOARD OF WILDLIFE COMMISSIONERS IN REGULAR SESSION, JULY 24, 1999.

Bill Bradley, Chairman
Board of Wildlife Commissioners