

STATE OF NEVADA BOARD OF WILDLIFE COMMISSIONERS

Commission Policy Number 33

Number: P-33

Title: Fisheries Management Program

References: NRS 501.105, 501.181

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PURPOSE

The Board of Wildlife Commissioners (the Commission) is charged in Nevada Revised Statute (NRS) 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 Division.

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. As of 2016, approximately 120,000 people fish in Nevada, expending about 1.4 million angler days of effort each year. The 2011 National survey found that each Nevada angler spends approximately \$99 per day to pursue their sport for an economic impact to the State of about \$138 million per year.

The value of fishing as a psychological and sociological therapy extends far beyond its economic benefits and has been documented in numerous studies. Fishing is a quality-of-life issue for many Nevadans in rural and urban communities alike. Fish in a desert environment are also a valuable indicator of ecological health and the persistence of native aquatic species across our arid landscape is an important part of Nevada’s natural heritage. Their presence or absence portends the existing condition of aquatic resources as well as the long-term trend. The Nevada landscape is home to 26 Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed threatened and endangered fishes, more than any other state. Climatic changes as well as human environmental impacts are seen in the extirpation of native species, as the plight of Nevada’s endemic fishes documents. The Commission supports programs to manage all fishes and aquatic wildlife with the ultimate goals of species perpetuation, improvements in status leading to eventual delisting of federally protected species, and the prevention of future Federal listing of species through proactive management strategies.

The management of Nevada's fishery resources is a valuable endeavor and of great importance 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 are considered legitimate and valuable uses of Nevada's water resources. However, the paucity of water in the State limits the distribution of aquaculture pursuits, and often forces them to compete directly with native fauna and flora.

- Aquaculture activities and the commercial collection of unprotected fish and aquatic wildlife will not be permitted where they will adversely affect native fauna and flora or nonnative fisheries of significant public value.
- The possession of prohibited species and species of potential adverse impact will be permitted only in closed water systems.
- All aquaculture pursuits will conform to regulatory requirements for fish disease certification, inspection and permitting including NAC 503.560 – 503.565.

Angler Access

Even though approximately 87 percent of Nevada is comprised of 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 accessible 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 other funding sources as 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 signage, maps, the Internet, social media, angler guides, and other Department outreach programs.
- New access facilities and improvements to existing facilities will incorporate ADA compliant access provisions to the extent practical.
- The identification and development of new urban ponds and fisheries will be actively pursued to increase angler opportunity and reduce barriers to participation
- All management prescriptions for fisheries controlled by private interests will be developed cooperatively with affected landowners.

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 require

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.
- Approval for the importation and possession of any aquatic vegetation control organism will be given only where it can be demonstrated that they pose no harm to existing public 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 but challenging, due 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 Nevada 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.

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 to provide guidance and direction for the management of major fisheries in the state, and species management plans may be developed for important sport fish species when their populations can be managed collectively.
- 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 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 an important fisheries management tool to control and remove undesirable nonnative fish species, for the conservation and recovery of native fish species including native sportfish, and similar management needs. Nevada Revised Statutes prohibit entities 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.

- All fishery rehabilitation projects will comply with appropriate regulatory requirements and scoping including the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) as appropriate.
- 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 and/or salvage of desirable fish species may be encouraged through liberalization of regulations.
- Supervisory and technical assistance may be provided to private and public entities desiring to complete fishery rehabilitation projects if such projects benefit public purposes, 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 general and site-specific regulations. The 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.

The simplification of fishing regulations is encouraged where effective implementation can still be insured, to reduce confusion, increase compliance by existing anglers, and reduce barriers to participation by new anglers.

Management of Native Nongame Aquatic Species

Nevada's native fishes and other native aquatic organisms are important indicators of ecological health and are integral components of properly functioning aquatic ecosystems. Many of these species have also been severely impacted over time by modifications to and abuse of aquatic systems. The Nevada Wildlife Action Plan (2012) identifies numerous native nongame aquatic species as Species of Conservation Priority while NAC 503.065 and 503.075, and 503.076 recognize the need for special management emphasis for threatened, endangered, and protected fish, amphibian, and mollusk species. Proactive conservation of all native aquatic wildlife including fishes, amphibians, mollusks, and crustaceans ensures the preservation of Nevada's biodiversity and is a necessary tool to preclude future species listings under the ESA.

- Programs will be emphasized which assure the security of protected native aquatic species and preclude further ESA listings.
- The use of proactive, collaborative conservation approaches such as multi-party Conservation Agreements and Strategies is encouraged to insure effective, broad-based conservation of native aquatic species.
- Native fish management plans may be developed for major drainage basins, species complexes, or individual species as needed to supplement existing Recovery Plans and other management guidance.
- All planning processes and management prescriptions for waters of the State will insure the persistence of resident native and endemic fishes and amphibians.
- Commercial exploitation of amphibians shall be closely regulated and only allowed when species viability, persistence, and maintenance of historic distribution are assured.
- Due consideration will be given to the persistence of native crustaceans and mollusks in the development of management prescriptions for native and sport fish.

Native Trout Management

Six species of salmonids 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. Given the level of environmental and anthropogenic threats, these species need active long term species management programs implemented in coordination with Federal recovery plans, rangewide conservation agreements, the Nevada Wildlife Action Plan and other conservation planning guidance.

- Native trout persistence will receive priority in management prescriptions for appropriate waters within historic distributions.
- Waters in historic ranges which support native trout populations 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 use of sterile (triploid) Rainbow Trout and / or Tiger Trout is encouraged for stocking in historic and potential native trout waters that are currently unoccupied by native trout species.
- Special regulatory protections such as harvest or gear restrictions may be considered for waters managed for native trout if biological information indicates such actions would assure species viability and contribute to conservation or recovery.
- Species management planning and interagency cooperation will focus on species perpetuation, improvements in status, and eventual delisting of federally protected species, and the prevention of future listing of other native trout species through proactive management strategies.

Aquatic Invasive Species

Aquatic invasive species are aquatic species which are exotic and not native to Nevada and which the Commission has determined to be detrimental to aquatic life, water resources, or infrastructure for providing water in the State. Injurious aquatic species are aquatic species which the Commission has determined to be a threat to sensitive, threatened, or endangered aquatic species or game fish or to the habitat of sensitive, threatened, or endangered aquatic species or game fish. Aquatic invasive species may be introduced or spread into waterbodies by activities such as boating, fishing, hatchery releases, and the liberation of aquarium pets.

The Commission supports programs to identify the introduction pathways and threats of aquatic invasive species and to develop strategies which will preclude or limit the introduction, impact, and spread of aquatic invasive species, including:

- Establishment and operation of watercraft inspection and decontamination stations;
- Implementation of hatchery fish release vehicle decontamination and hatchery inspections for aquatic invasive species;
- Promotion of Clean, Drain and Dry methodologies for watercraft, fishing gear, and other conveyance vectors, including the development of appropriate regulations as needed to implement those methodologies;
- Development of strategies to prevent the introduction and dumping of aquarium aquatic invasive species;
- New potential aquatic invasive species will be evaluated and incorporated into existing prohibited aquatic invasive species and/or injurious aquatic invasive species regulations;

- Evaluation of all live aquatic species importation requests will incorporate consideration of aquatic invasive species; and
- Development of strategies to provide public education to prevent the introduction and spread of aquaticinvasive species.

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 REGULARSESSION, MARCH 26, 2022.

Tiffany East, Chairwoman
Nevada Board of Wildlife Commissioners