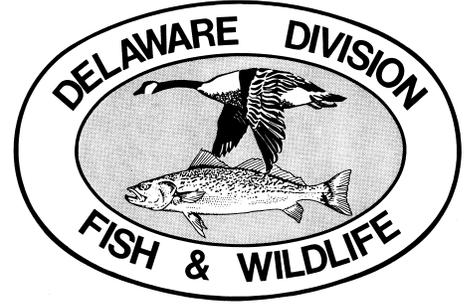


# Tournament News



## Fisheries Section Updates

Issue: Summer 2014

I hope this issue of *Tournament News* finds all of you enjoying a great year of fishing. I can hardly believe 2014 is half way over and summer is well underway! I've dedicated this issue to summaries of 2013 activities which I hope you find informative. As always, call or e-mail me if you have concerns, questions or just want to chat about your latest catch.

Sincerely,  
Edna

### New Contacts

- Angela Dula is now the contact for tournament permits. Permits are required for all tournaments held in public waters in order to ensure safety, inform enforcement staff of the event, and to prevent user conflicts (i.e. multiple clubs holding tournaments on same day on same water body). Many thanks to all of you that submitted tournament reports in 2013. From what I can discern, the reporting rate approached 100%. Let's go for 100% in 2014! A summary of your tournament activities is on page 2.
- Welcome to Greg Reger, who is now working with us as a biological aide. Greg is a graduate of Delaware State University and an avid angler, so you may see him out fishing the ponds or rivers.

We've developed some **short links to the Division's website** to make it easier to report tagged bass, fill out tournament reports, and find other pertinent fishing information. Just click on the link and it will take you to the page:

- Largemouth Bass Tag Returns: <http://de.gov/basstagreturns>
- Fishing Tournament Applications: <http://de.gov/fisheventrpt>
- Fishing Tournament Reports: <http://de.gov/basstournrpt>
- DE boater regulations: <http://www.boat-ed.com/delaware/handbook>
- Public Pond Guide: <http://de.gov/pondbook>
- Boating/Access Areas: <http://de.gov/fishaccess>
- Live Release Reward Program: <http://de.gov/livereleaseprogram>

### Contact Information of Interest

- Tournament reports and tag returns:

Fisheries Biologist:

Edna Stetzar, 302-735-8654 ;  
[Edna.Stetzar@state.de.us](mailto:Edna.Stetzar@state.de.us)

Fisheries Technician:

Rebecca Lynch, 302-735-8661;  
[Rebecca.Lynch@state.de.us](mailto:Rebecca.Lynch@state.de.us)

- Tournament permits:

Angela Dula, 302-739-9913

- Fish & Wildlife Enforcement Agents:

New Castle & Kent Counties:  
302-739-6139

Sussex County: 302-855-1901

- Report Violations:  
302-739-4580 **OR**  
1-800-523-3336

24-hour Enforcement Number:  
1-800-662-8802

Operation Game Theft :  
1-800-292-3030

Page 2:  
2013 Tournament Summary

Page 3:  
2013 Bass Tag Returns  
2013 Pond Sampling

Page 4:  
2013 Nanticoke River Bass Sampling  
Invasive Species to watch for in 2014

## 2013 Tournament Summary

A total of 70 largemouth bass fishing tournament reports were submitted to the Division by event sponsors during 2013 (see Table 1 below). The reports were submitted by 18 fishing clubs: 11 reported on events held in public ponds and seven reported on tidal events (Nanticoke and Broadkill Rivers). Tournaments were held March through November, with the majority occurring in the spring (N=41). The cumulative amount of angling hours (7,298) decreased by 12.9% from 2012. This decrease can be primarily attributed to fewer tournaments held in the Nanticoke River system since the number of tournaments held in non-tidal waters did not change significantly. Despite the decline, the Nanticoke River was still the most popular location for bass tournaments with 13 events and 1,165 angling hours. Millsboro Pond, Haven Lake, Horsey Pond and Wagamons Pond were the most popular non-tidal tournament locations based on angling hours and the number of tournaments. The average weight (lbs) of bass weighed-in during tournaments was highest at Concord Pond (3.82 lbs), Millsboro Pond (2.02 lbs) and Lums Pond (2.01 lbs). The largest bass (7.58 lbs) caught during a tournament was from Killens Pond. Three bass over 5 lbs were caught during tournaments held at Lums Pond.

Table 1. Results from bass fishing tournaments held in Delaware's public water bodies during 2013.

| <b>Tournament Site</b><br><b>(*Golden Rule used at 1 or more events)</b> | <b>Mean Weight (lbs)</b> | <b>No. of Bass</b> | <b>Largest Bass</b> | <b>Number &gt;5 lbs</b> | <b>No. of events</b> |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| *Concord Pond  | 3.82                     | 14                 | 2.32                | 0                       | 3                    |
| Millsboro Pond   | 2.02                     | 293                | 5.47                | 2                       | 9                    |
| Lums Pond  | 2.01                     | 89                 | 5.98                | 3                       | 4                    |
| Wagamons Pond  | 1.99                     | 269                | 4.42                | 0                       | 7                    |
| *Hearns Pond   | 1.80                     | 33                 | 6.0                 | 1                       | 3                    |
| Haven Lake   | 1.77                     | 264                | 5.05                | 1                       | 8                    |
| Trap Pond  | 1.71                     | 185                | 5.92                | 1                       | 6                    |
| Horsey Pond  | 1.70                     | 292                | 5.07                | 1                       | 7                    |
| Killens Pond   | 1.61                     | 227                | 7.58                | 1                       | 6                    |
| *Nanticoke River/Broad Creek   | 1.60                     | 362                | 4.85                | 0                       | 13                   |
| *Blairs Pond   | 0.88                     | 14                 | 2.12                | 0                       | 2                    |
| Garrison Lake  | 1.92                     | 36                 | 4.12                | 0                       | 1                    |
| Broadkill River  | 1.57                     | 40                 | 3.41                | 0                       | 1                    |
| <b>TOTAL</b>   | <b>24.4</b>              | <b>2,118</b>       | <b>-</b>            | <b>10</b>               | <b>70</b>            |

Reported immediate mortality of tournament caught bass was low overall (2.31%). Over 40 percent of the mortality was attributed to live well failures. Five non-tidal events and three tidal events utilized the "Golden Rule" which eliminated the need to hold fish for a central weigh-in process. Four non-tidal tournaments placed a three, five or six fish limit and the majority of tidal events had either a five or six fish limit. These measures can minimize mortality because the fish are subject to shorter holding times and there is less crowding in the live well. This is especially important during periods of high water temperature, such as in the summer, when dissolved oxygen can quickly become depleted in the live well by stressed and overcrowded fish.

The bass tournament reporting program has been active since 1989 and over 50 organizations have contributed data. The data collected from these reports has been useful for identifying areas that receive the most fishing pressure and demonstrate the value of bass populations to tournament anglers. Communication with tournament directors and club contacts also provided a forum for discussing tournament procedures and for relaying timely information important to the management of Delaware's freshwater fisheries. Angling data from tournament reports supplement fisheries-independent data collected by the Division and highlight the need for continued active management of Delaware's ponds and freshwater tidal areas.

## 2013 Bass Tag Reports

During electrofish sampling efforts in the fall of 2013, the Division tagged largemouth bass with yellow T-bar anchor tags in the Broadkill River and the Nanticoke River system. This was part of a long term project to characterize the angling population, allow estimates of mortality, and examine fish movement. Thirty-four (34) bass between 12-20" were tagged in the Broadkill River and 243 bass were tagged in the Nanticoke River/Broad Creek. Four tagged bass from the Broadkill River were reported by anglers in 2013 bringing the total reported since 2002 to 334 tagged bass. Anglers fishing in the Nanticoke River system during 2013 reported 70 catches of tagged fish, ten of which were caught during tournaments. Five tagged bass were caught twice in 2013; one of these had already been recaptured in 2012. All of the tagged fish reported by anglers were released, most near where they were captured. The majority of the 2013 tag returns were from boat anglers (95.8%) with a few anglers fishing from shore (primarily in January).

In the Nanticoke River System, most bass were caught by anglers in the area of the river where the Division caught and tagged them, although movement between sections of the lower and upper portions of Broad Creek were common. One bass tagged in lower Broad Creek during September of 2013 was recaptured in December of 2013 in the upper portion of the Nanticoke River by an angler fishing from shore. This constituted a distance of at least 12.5km (7.8 miles). Another bass tagged in Broad Creek above Bethel was caught by an angler in the mouth of Marshyhope Creek which empties into the Nanticoke River downstream of the State line. Although movement this far downstream is quite conceivable, it is also possible that it was caught during a fishing tournament and released at Sharptown which is just upstream of Marshyhope Creek.

*Please report tagged bass to us!*  
<http://de.gov/basstagreturns>



## 2013 Pond Sampling

The state's public ponds are sampled by the Division of Fish and Wildlife on a 5-yr cycle with 6-8 ponds sampled per year. In 2013, the fish communities of seven public ponds were surveyed by boat electrofisher: Becks Pond, Chipman Pond, Hearn's Pond, Mud Mill Pond, McColley Pond, Moores Lake, and Records Pond. Emphasis was placed on the collection of species most sought after by anglers and that provide a good measure of fish community dynamics; largemouth bass, bluegill and black crappie. Although catch rates declined since the ponds were last sampled, four of the seven ponds (Chipman, Hearn's, Mud Mill and McColley) had moderate densities of largemouth bass indicative of a balanced fish community. Abundance of all fish species in Records Pond declined as expected after the pond was drawn down in 2012; however, signs of reproduction and recovery were observed. An evaluation of the size structure and condition ('plumpness') of the fish community in Moores Lake indicated a population of largemouth bass and black crappie possibly experiencing variable reproduction and recruitment. To guide management actions, additional sampling is being conducted during 2014 to determine if reproduction is limited. Variable growth or overpopulation and stunting of black crappie was suspected in Chipman Pond and Hearn's Pond. Collection of scales from black crappie and analysis of age and growth will be conducted in 2014.

Fish community data collected by boat electrofisher at Becks Pond during the fall of 2013 was compared to long term data collected every year from 1994-2008. The abundance of largemouth bass, bluegill and black crappie has declined compared to long term averages and other factors indicate a potential for poor growth and reproduction. Excessive algae hindered the ability to adequately sample the pond and could have skewed catch results. Water quality has been an on-going issue and is likely a factor limiting improvement of the fish community. Although Northern snakehead (NSH) have become well established since the unauthorized stocking in 2011, data is insufficient at this time to determine if NSH are competing with other fish species for resources and habitat. There are several other variables that could have caused the decline in the abundance of bass observed in 2013 (poor water quality, difficult sampling conditions, less experienced crew, harvesting of bass by anglers, etc.). Additional sampling in 2014 is planned to further assess the fish community. The Becks Pond Working Group, comprised of representatives from state agencies, county government and residents, met in April of 2014 to discuss a path forward to address water quality and other issues impacting the pond.

## 2013 Nanticoke River Sampling

As noted in the last issue of *Tournament News*, the largemouth bass population of the Nanticoke River system was evaluated in the fall of 2013 as part of a long term tidal bass management project. The number of bass captured per hour of the Division's electrofishing efforts decreased compared to the last two years of sampling (Table 1), however, a lower catch rate in 2013 does not necessarily mean the population is on a downward trend. Catch rates can be impacted by tides, water temperature, salinity, turbidity, and precipitation along with human related factors. Trends in long-term abundance have remained relatively stable since 1989 with a few short term declines. The 2013 population estimate of 5,313 bass, although lower than most recent years, is still within the historical range of values (4,375 – 11,905).

In 2013, the catch rate of bass <4" was higher than any previous year of sampling, 1989-2012. This size range is comprised primarily of young produced in 2013 and hopefully in a few years will translate into fair numbers recruited into the fishery. The majority of bass reach legal length (12") by three years of age in the Nanticoke River system, with 100% of bass reaching legal size by age four.

Bass collected during the Division's electrofishing efforts in 2013 ranged in total length from 3"-20". The most abundant size group were fish <4" with a secondary peak of fish between 10-14". The proportion of the population >12" was 60.1% which is well within the historical range of values documented since 1989 and a value considered indicative of a balanced bass population managed for moderate density. The proportion of the stock >15" (16.8%) also met the criteria for a balanced population. Relative weight (Wr) (measure of condition or 'plumpness') was good (above 90) for most size groups with the exception of fish between 18.5-19.3", however, the sample size was small with only four fish in this size group. Wr was also slightly below 90 for fish between 10.6-11.8" which could indicate that fish in this size group are numerous and competing for resources or that forage for this size group is limited. It will be interesting to follow the various size groups as they age in the population. The Division will sample again in 2014 to evaluate the population and compare results with historical trends.

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Table 1. Population characteristics of Nanticoke River largemouth bass from electrofishing data collected during fall 2011-2013.

| Population Measure                               | 2011    | 2012    | *2013   |
|--|---------|---------|---------|
| Number of bass caught per hour of electrofishing | 36      | 52      | 29      |
| <i>Catch per hour by length:</i>                 |         |         |         |
| <4"  | <0.01   | 0.02    | 0.06    |
| Between 4"-8"                                    | 0.15    | 0.15    | 0.06    |
| Between 8"-12"                                   | 0.14    | 0.27    | 0.15    |
| Between 12"-15"                                  | 0.18    | 0.29    | 0.15    |
| >15"   | 0.12    | 0.14    | 0.06    |
| % of population >12"                             | 67.4 ±9 | 60.8±10 | 60.1±10 |
| % of population >15"                             | 25.7±9  | 19.8±8  | 16.8±7  |

\*conductivity in 2012 precluded sampling 5 sections of the lower Nanticoke River

### ACCESS ALERT: MCCOLLEY POND

Public access to the unimproved ramp at McColleys Pond is no longer available. Items were stolen from the property and now the landowner has put up a gate and is not allowing public access.

## Invasive Species to Watch For in 2014

*Didymosphenia geminata*, better known as 'Didymo' or 'Rock Snot' is a microscopic algae that has been documented in surrounding states but not yet in Delaware. It is harmful because it can smother a stream bed with mats as thick as 8 inches!

**Identification:** white, brown, tan, or yellow clumps or strands of what feels like wet cotton (not slimy). Found in clear, flowing water on rocks or plants. It can survive outside of the water for 40 days!

**Prevent the Spread:** If you've been to areas where *Didymo* occurs, be sure to disinfect all of your fishing equipment including waders/boots before entering a new body of water. Individual cells are not visible. Disinfection procedures can be found at:

[http://www.fish.state.pa.us/water/habitat/ans/didymo/faq\\_didymo.htm](http://www.fish.state.pa.us/water/habitat/ans/didymo/faq_didymo.htm)



Photo-Tim Daly-PADEP



You never forget your first big bass! Ruby Passmore caught a 22" bass on a Joe Fly Colorado blade spinner at Craigs Pond on May 18th. She followed this nice catch with another at Racoon Pond.

Find us on Facebook

<http://www.facebook.com/DelawareFishWildlife>