

Proposed Catfish Rule Changes

The Indiana Catfish Conservation Association (ICCA) petitioned the Natural Resources Commission to amend the rules regarding the take of catfish from Indiana waters as written in the Indiana Administrative Code. The goal of these amendments is to further protect a vulnerable population of fish that is being harvested both commercially and recreationally.

The ICCA proposed three (3) amendments to existing regulations:

- Allow the daily harvest of 1 Blue Catfish over 30", 1 Flathead Catfish over 30", and 1 Channel Catfish over 24".
- Place a daily bag limit of catfish taken from streams or rivers at 10 catfish.
- Ban the travel of live adult catfish across state lines in order to keep an Indiana resource in Indiana.

In response to the petition, the DNR, Division of Fish Wildlife will be discussing the following rule ideas with the Advisory Council:

- Restrict harvest of catfish to 10 per day for recreational anglers for all state waters (rivers and lakes).
- Lower the trophy length limit regulation of "one over" to 30 inches for Flathead and Blue Catfish and 24 inches for Channel Catfish for all anglers, including commercial fishers, for all state waters except the Ohio River and the Wabash River that borders Illinois. The Ohio River and Wabash River border waters with Illinois trophy catfish regulations would remain unchanged (daily bag limit of for one Blue and one Flathead Catfish of 35 inches or larger and daily bag limit of one Channel Catfish of 28 inches or larger).

The proposed changes would impact the three rules listed below:

312 IAC 9-7-3: The first change establishes a bag limit of 10 catfish in aggregate for all rivers and streams, excluding the Ohio River. This change matches the current catfish daily bag limit for lakes and reservoirs and makes the regulation easier to understand.

The rule also states that no more than 1 trophy-sized blue, flathead or channel catfish may be harvested per day. The trophy size was changed from 35" to 30" for blue and flathead catfish and from 28" to 24" for channel catfish on all waters excluding the Wabash and Ohio River boundary waters (IC 14-8-2-27). Although this is considered more of a social regulation change, by limiting the overall number and number of large catfish that can be taken by anglers, catfish may be able to increase recruitment (survival of younger catfish) and ensure continued trophy angling opportunities. Results from the 2021-22 licensed angler survey indicate recreational catfish anglers do consider trophy opportunities important. When asked how important trophy opportunities were, 41% reported that trophy opportunities were at least a moderately important motivator for fishing. In addition, when asked how important trophy opportunities were when selecting where to fish, 54% stated that a fishery with trophy opportunities was at least moderately important.

312 IAC 9-7-16: This change establishes a bag limit of 10 catfish in aggregate for the Ohio River. This change matches the current catfish daily bag limit for lakes and reservoirs and makes the regulation easier to understand. This change will also match the catfish daily bag limit for rivers and streams as proposed in IAC 9-7-3. By limiting the overall number of catfish that can be taken by anglers, catfish will

be able to increase recruitment (survival of younger catfish) and ensure continued trophy angling opportunities.

312 IAC 9-8-2: Reduces the size limit for harvest of larger (trophy) catfish by commercial fishers on all waters excluding the Wabash and Ohio River boundary waters (IC 14-8-2-27). The trophy size was changed from 35" to 30" for blue and flathead catfish and from 28" to 24" for channel catfish. No more than one catfish of each species may be harvested above this minimum size limit per day. Although this is considered more of a social regulation change, by limiting the number of large (trophy) catfish that can be taken by commercial fishers, catfish will be able to increase recruitment (survival of younger catfish) and ensure continued trophy angling opportunities.

Figure 1. Commercially fished rivers in Indiana. The rivers highlighted in red, and blue represent rivers in Indiana with commercial fishing. The red rivers represent the Wabash and Ohio River boundary waters where the proposed trophy regulation will not change. The blue rivers represent portions of the Wabash, White, East Fork of the White, West Fork of the White, and Patoka Rivers where the proposed trophy regulation will change.

