

Northern Snakehead Discussion With Mr. Jonathon McKnight

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Background Information:

Discussion date: 2/18/2021

Discussion time: 3:30 PM to 4:00 PM

Throughout this interview we will discuss information regarding the Northern Snakehead and other invasive species in Maryland waters. Questions surround educational opportunities, government actions, effects of climate change, consumption, and environmental impacts. Our aim is to educate on the prevention of invasive species, and what the impacts of the Northern Snakehead are in Maryland.

Interview:

Q: Are there any educational programs/opportunities for youth to learn more about the impact of invasive species? If so, are there any surrounding the Northern Snakehead?

Mr. McKnight: “I don't know of anything other than stuff online. Although I don't know of any Northern Snakehead training programs, for invasive plants there is a program out there called Statewide Eyes which has a training component. Nothing that I know of for the Northern Snakehead though.”

Q: Do you believe the Blue Catfish is a more prominent problem in local waterways than the Northern Snakehead? (Potomac River, Anacostia River)

Mr. McKnight: “I don't know. That's my favorite answer as a scientist, and anybody that tells you that they do know the answer to that question is blowing smoke, no one knows for sure.”

Q: Will there be any new rules/legislation that surround preventative measures for invasive species in Maryland?

Mr. McKnight: “Probably but what that comes down to is once in a while we will list new species as prohibited, meaning you can't move it around or trade it. Problem with that is we usually do it when it is a little too late and the species becomes established.”

Q: Have you ever caught a Northern Snakehead/Blue Catfish? If so, did you eat it? How was it prepared?

Mr. McKnight: “Nope.”

Q: Are there any informative signs about handling and identifying invasive species around local waterways?

Mr. McKnight: “The major signs that we have for invasive species have to do with microscopic ones, and generally that means it is information for boaters on how to not further spread the species. Particularly it is called the Clean, Drain, and Dry Program. We do not have any signs for the Northern Snakehead that I know of.”

Q: What existing incentives are in place to help keep the population of Snakehead/Blue Catfish in check?

Mr. McKnight: “Once in a while they'll do a contest where you can win a hat or something for a catch and kill Snakehead contest. The truth is it doesn't do very much and in fact the incentives that are out there for the most part actually lead to the spread of Catfish and Snakehead, because it's encouraging fishing. This had backfired because fishing actually caused the further spread of the species.”
“The Virginia department of inland fisheries actually introduced the Blue Catfish purposefully because they believed it would be fun to catch. No one knew any better at the time, everybody believed the carp was a much more distinguished fish and that our fresh water fish weren't as special as carp, so we actually spread carp by train around the country.”

Q: Are any primary food sources for humans affected by the over-predation of native species?

Mr. McKnight: “Yes, our major food crops are under constant threat for developing invasive species, particularly fungi. I would argue that covid 19 is even an invasive species.”

Q: If you could only recommend one action to an everyday person to help limit the Snakehead species' growth, what would it be?

Mr. McKnight: “Don’t buy them. This is the number one cause of invasive species, particularly for plants. Plants are really the issue. You know at the stores when they advertise how well their plants will thrive? They’re selling an invasive species with no natural predators that thrive.”

Q: Are there any opportunities to experience population surveying or tagging events of invasive species around the area?

Mr. McKnight: “Montgomery County, I would check out the parks and see if they have Weed Warriors. You guys have a great park system and a lot of them will be doing that.”

Q: Do you recommend any other resources that we should look into in terms of the Northern Snakehead?

Mr. McKnight: “No, because there is so much out there. You aren't finding people with much knowledge on the Snakeheads due to the fact that they aren't a huge problem in non-tidal waters. You may be able to try the Fish & Wildlife Service. Everyone has a lot of opinions about the Snakehead but it's a lot of unproven stuff, but very little is known about the long-term effects of Snakeheads in Maryland waters. It's going to be bad, but not a lot is known right now.”