



VIRGINIA CHAPTER *of the* AMERICAN FISHERIES SOCIETY

President: Steve Reeser
President-Elect: John Odenkirk
Immediate Past President: Mark Hudy

Treasurer: Mike Odom
Secretary: Shelly Miller

President's Message

The Virginia Chapter AFS held a successful annual meeting March 18-19th in Lexington, Virginia. This was the first time in several years that the meeting was not co-hosted with another AFS chapter. However, 67 attendees enjoyed a diversity of technical presentations and professional



Students and professionals mingle at the poster session of the VA-AFS

interaction. It was great to see a high proportion of students attending and presenting at this year's meeting. The Virginia Chapter has always had excellent student participation, but I would like the Chapter to strive to get more students on the graduate and undergraduate level involved.

In 2005 the Virginia Chapter will be co-hosting the SDAFS Spring meeting with the Tidewater Chapter. The meeting will be held February 9-13 at the Virginia Beach Resort Hotel and Conference Center in Virginia Beach. The SDAFS Spring meeting usually attracts 350+ students and fisheries professionals, requiring considerable preparation by the host group. Planning for the meeting is currently underway. This meeting becomes more successful every year so the Chapter needs to rise to the challenge and host a

memorable meeting. I would encourage all Chapter members to get involved! This could be by moderating a session, helping with a social, obtaining a donation or raffle item, etc. If you are interested in helping with the meeting here are the individuals that are chairing 2005 SDAFS meeting committees: Steve Reeser/John Odenkirk (Oversight); Vic DiCenzo (Program); Mike Odom (Finance/Registration); Bob Graham (Donations); Scott Smith (Workshops); Chip Long (Local Arrangements); Bob Greenlee (Socials). We will not be having a separate Chapter meeting in 2005. The Virginia Chapter business meeting will be held one day at the SDAFS meeting. We will present our awards at the business meeting.

The heart and soul of the Chapter lies in the standing committees. I would like to thank all those members who have been active in Chapter committees. I encourage new members (and old) to become active in a committee. With the current e-mail technology, committees can be very productive not having to meet in person very often. I have appointed the following individuals to chair Chapter committees from now until Feb. 2005: Arrangements (Bob Greenlee); Advocacy (Steve Reeser); Awards (Mark Hudy); Communications (Shelly Miller); Continuing Ed. (Scott Smith); Environmental Affairs (George Devlin); Membership (Paul Bugas); Nominating (Dan Michaelson); Outreach (Paul Bugas); Program (John Odenkirk).

I look forward to serving as Chapter President for the next year, and please feel free to contact me regarding any Virginia Chapter issues.

Steve Reeser, VA-AFS Chapter President
reesers@dgif.state.va.us; 540-248-9360

Annual meeting in brief

The 2004 VA-AFS Chapter Annual meeting was held in Lexington, VA, March 18th and 19th. Sixty-three people attended the meeting. Eighteen oral presentations and 7 posters were given covering a wide variety of topics including fish habitat, angler surveys, volunteer monitoring, conservation, and genetics.

Four student awards for presentations and posters are awarded every year. This year's winners included Eric Fitzpatrick of Virginia Tech (best paper by an undergraduate), Seth Coffman of James Madison University (best paper by a graduate), Peder Brakke of James Madison University (best poster by an undergraduate), and Keith Whalen of James Madison University (best poster by a graduate).

The chapter business meeting was held following the first day of presentations. At this meeting, the new officers were installed. Steve Reeser of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) was installed as President, and John Odenkirk, also of VDGIF, was installed as President-Elect. Mark Hudy, USFS, will now serve as Past President.

Scholarships and awards were also distributed at the business meeting. Judy Okay of the Virginia Department of Forestry was awarded the Natural Resource Conservationist award. Dawn Kirk, aquatic biologist with the USFS, was given the Eugene W. Surber Professional Fisheries Biologist award. Greg Murphy of Virginia Tech was awarded the Robert Ross graduate scholarship, and Lauren Grimmer of Randolph-Macon College was awarded the Robert E. Jenkins undergraduate scholarship. Congratulations to all winners!

A large portion of the business meeting centered around planning of the Southern Division spring meeting which will be co-hosted by the Virginia and Tidewater chapters in 2005. An oversight committee has been formed, and plans are well underway. The meeting will be held in Virginia Beach, February 9-13.



Steve Reeser, right, presents Mark Hudy with the Past President's award for his service over the last year

The social on the first night was punctuated by a raffle. Proceeds from the raffle benefit the student scholarship program. The meeting was a success, and the Chapter is looking forward to meeting the challenges ahead!

Virginia Chapter to co-host Southern Division Spring Meeting

Steve Reeser, VA-AFS President

The Virginia and Tidewater Chapters are co-hosting the 2005 SDAFS Spring Meeting in Virginia Beach, Virginia February 9-13. The meeting will be held at the Virginia Beach Resort Hotel and Conference Center.

Planning for the meeting is currently underway. A fish fry is scheduled for the Friday night social and the Saturday night social will be held at the Virginia Marine Science Museum. We are in the process of determining topics for continuing education workshops, and soliciting donations and raffle/silent auction items.

I would encourage all Virginia Chapter members to contribute in some way to make this meeting a success. To help with meeting planning, contact the following committee chairs:

Steve Reeser and John Odenkirk (oversight)
 Vic DiCenzo (Program)
 Chip Long (Local arrangements;
 Bob Graham (Donations)
 Scott Smith (workshops)
 Bob Greenlee (A.V.)
 Bob Greenlee and John Odenkirk (Socials)

Also, please "beat the bushes" in your local area for donations or raffle items. There is a form letter from the Chapter available. More detailed information will be updated on the

website as it becomes available. Visit the Southern Division website for more information about the division and its activities; www.sdafs.org

Breach it, and they will come!

Alan Weaver, VDGIF Fish Passage coordinator, Tidewater Chapter member

On February 23, 2004 the Embrey Dam on the Rappahannock River in Fredericksburg was breached to allow migratory fishes such as American shad access to the upper watershed. The dam is 770 feet long and



Thar' she blows! Embrey Dam breached.

the initial breach is 130' wide. The actual demolition was done by the 544th Army Ranger Dive Unit out of Fort Eustis and the 555th Air Force Redhorse Squadron out of Nevada under the purview of the Norfolk District of the Army Corps of Engineers. Complete removal of both the Embrey Dam and the 1854 crib dam (50' upstream of Embrey) will be completed over the next two years using heavy machinery. A large section of the crib dam was removed prior to the blast during the sediment dredging operation. The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) has been pursuing fish passage at Embrey since the 1980s. In the early 1990's the VDGIF conducted sediment and historical studies that lead to a state funded feasibility study in 1997 that recommended complete removal as the best fish passage option. When the City of Fredericksburg, owner of the dam, announced that the dam would no longer be needed as a water supply the removal option became viable. Also in 1997, Senator John Warner became very interested in the project and began seeking an avenue to apply federal money to the project. In 1998, the Corps became

involved and led a feasibility study co-sponsored by Virginia, Fredericksburg and Stafford County. Warner was successful in securing the funding to conduct the actual project phase at full federal expense. This removal project reopens 106 miles of the Rappahannock and Rapidan rivers that has been inaccessible for over 150 years. The target population for shad is 71,000 based on the amount of upstream habitat that should support spawning and rearing activity. The VDGIF and the USFWS are stocking American shad fry in the upper river to enhance the recovery process.

A monitoring program has already begun. The VDGIF will monitor the river above and below the dam to evaluate the restoration effort. Fish Passage Technicians, Robert (Chip) Augustine and Andrew Skelton, conducted boat electrofishing sampling about a half-mile upstream of the recently breached Embrey Dam on Friday, April 9, 2004 in the middle of what used to be the Embrey pool (just below I-95). This area is now a nice series of reaches, runs and riffles



Chip Augustine, VDGIF, proudly displays a hickory shad collected above the breach.

- and very challenging to sample. Hickory shad, *Alosa mediocris*, were collected in good numbers (catch per effort = 10 fish/min) marking the first official documentation of target anadromous species using the breached section of Embrey Dam. Anadromous fishes have been denied access to this area for over 150 years! Hickory shad are a member of the anadromous "alosiine group" along with American shad, blueback herring and alewife. Hickories are a significant target species for passage at Embrey Dam. This find documents the first stages of success of this removal project. American shad are not

as abundant, yet, on the Rappahannock but we will be conducting sampling at additional locations upstream of the dam to further monitor shad and herring migrations.

For more information contact Alan Weaver at 804-367-6795; aweaver@dgif.state.va.us

Some upcoming meetings

AFS 134th Annual Meeting
Madison, WI
August 22-26

For more information visit this website: <http://www.afs2004madison.org/>

58th Annual Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Conference
Hilton Head, South Carolina
October 30 – November 3, 2004

2004 meeting of the American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists
Norman, Oklahoma 26-31 May 2004
<http://www.asih.org/meetings/meetings.html>

NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM WETLANDS 2004:
PROTECTING WETLANDS OF INTERNATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE
October 19-20, 2004. Hilton Kansas City Airport, Kansas City, Missouri
<http://www.aswm.org/calendar/wetlands2004/agenda2004.htm>



Richmond fish-market sting results in 14 arrests

*from Richmond Times-Dispatch,
Lawrence Latane III; Apr 6, 2004*

When Virginia Marine Policeman John Croft posed as a sports angler with illegally caught striped bass to sell, he was either shown the door of Richmond-area seafood markets or invited to come in through the back. Thus, "Operation Back Door," born two years ago, announced yesterday that it had arrested 14 people at 13 neighborhood fish markets and restaurants for buying illegally harvested seafood.

"Many of these places were all too ready to buy from us even though we let them know we didn't have the proper permits and licenses," said Croft, who leads the Virginia Marine Resources Commission's investigative unit.

The unit made most of its arrests on misdemeanor violations involving the

unlawful purchase of untagged striped bass from unregistered fishermen. Most of the businesses also lacked a free, but mandatory, VMRC permit to buy and sell striped bass.

Striped bass, also called rockfish, has been one of the most carefully regulated commercial fish species in Virginia since 1993, when the VMRC limited the harvest for conservation reasons to 500 licensed commercial watermen.

The Richmond investigation was modeled after a similar sting operation in the Hampton Roads region a couple of years ago. That operation generated about 30 arrests and dampened the local black market for striped bass, Croft said.

Juvenile Atlantic sturgeon found in James River

From the Associated Press © March 29, 2004

RICHMOND — A 6-inch fish pulled from the James River by schoolchildren has revived hope that an ancient and rare species is still reproducing in Virginia waters.

Moody Middle School students on a Chesapeake Bay Foundation field trip netted the leathery, plate-covered Atlantic sturgeon about 20 miles downstream of Richmond on Wednesday. The sturgeon was snagged as the students pulled a trawl net behind their boat near Westover Plantation to learn about the fish that inhabit the river.

It was truly the hit of the whole trip," bay foundation spokesman Chuck Epes said. "The kids were saying we are going to be famous."

Albert Spells, Virginia fisheries coordinator



Acipenser oxyrinchus desotoi (photo from The Native Fish Conservancy)

for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife, said after examining the baby sturgeon, "I'm 99.9 percent sure" that reproduction is occurring." He added, "That's significant."

Spells said biologists long have assumed that a remnant population of sturgeon still venture from the ocean each spring to mix their eggs and sperm in select gravel-covered depths of the freshwater tidal James. But until Wednesday's discovery, a young-enough fish had never been found to confirm reproductive success. "Does it mean that there is an abundance of spawners?" asked Spells. "No. But, it does mean there is at least one male and one female" old enough to be sexually mature.

Sturgeon can exceed 12 feet in length and weigh hundreds of pounds. The record is a specimen from Canada that measured 14 feet and weighed more than 800 pounds, Spells said.

Spells said the 6-inch sturgeon is the smallest documented in recent times from the bay. Judging by the fish's size, Spells said it was probably spawned last spring.

Sturgeon are so migratory that only the discovery of the tiniest could betray spawning activity, said Lewis Gillingham, a fishery management specialist with the Virginia Marine Resources Commission.

"When you get one that's two or two and a half feet long, it could as likely be from Maine or South Carolina or Florida," Gillingham said. "They just wander over and over."

Of the 300 sturgeon caught by Virginia watermen during a study in the late 1990s, all but 30 came from the James, Spells said.

Sturgeon were once abundant in bay rivers but were overfished because of the market in their meat and eggs in the 19th century. Today they confront nets set for other species and endure pollution that has damaged water quality on their spawning grounds, Gillingham said.

Sturgeon need clean gravel river bottoms on which to deposit their eggs. Sediment from upstream road building, construction, farming and other human activities are making such areas hard to find, Spells said.

The fish also take years — 15 to 18 in the case of females — to reach sexual maturity. That means that many probably die before ever getting a chance to spawn. "If I had to design something to go extinct, it would be a sturgeon," Gillingham said.

New pollution limits offer hope that will never happen, said Chris Conner of the Environmental Protection Agency's Chesapeake Bay Program. Virginia and its bay state neighbors have agreed to combat nutrient pollution and sedimentation with new standards beginning in the next couple of years.



ANNOUNCEMENT: The Chapter is still searching for a webmaster. The Executive Committee is extending its search to include professional web developers and service providers. If you know of any individual who may wish to take on this role or of a qualified and reasonable professional, please contact John Odenkirk, odenkirkj@dgif.state.va.us

VA-AFS Officer contact information:

President: Steve Reeser, reesers@dgif.state.va.us, 540-248-9360

President-elect: John Odenkirk, odenkirkj@dgif.state.va.us, 540-899-4169

Treasurer: Mike Odom, amshad@erols.com, 804-829-5322

Secretary: Shelly Miller, millers@dgif.state.va.us, 804-367-0909

Immediate Past President: Mark Hudy, hudymx@jmu.edu, 540-568-2704

If you received this newsletter by snail mail and would like to receive it electronically, please contact Shelly Miller with your e-mail address. Thanks!