

# Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife Warmwater Fish Program Annual Program Report: 2016-17



*Bill Evans holding a record-breaking largemouth bass he caught in 2016.*

## Introduction

Sportfishing for warmwater species, such as largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, walleye, catfish, panfish and tiger muskie, is a popular recreational activity in Washington and generates significant economic value to the state. A 2008 economic analysis estimated that 300,000 warmwater anglers in Washington produced \$83.9 million in net economic value through the sales of fishing gear, boats, motors, gas, food and lodging. That is nearly double the net economic value generated by recreational saltwater salmon fisheries in Washington and 18% of the total net economic value from recreational fishing.

The Warmwater Fish Program within the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) was created in 1996 by legislation that provided dedicated funding

to support the enhancement of warmwater fishing opportunities in Washington. The warmwater program actively manages over a dozen species of fish for recreational angling opportunities. Although warmwater fish are not native to Washington, these species provide popular fishing opportunities in thousands of waters statewide.

The primary functions and priorities of the Warmwater Program are to collect and analyze field data in order to optimize management of warmwater fish resources. The program also provides public education and outreach by highlighting and promoting warmwater-fishing opportunities. This report details some of the program's activities for 2016-17.

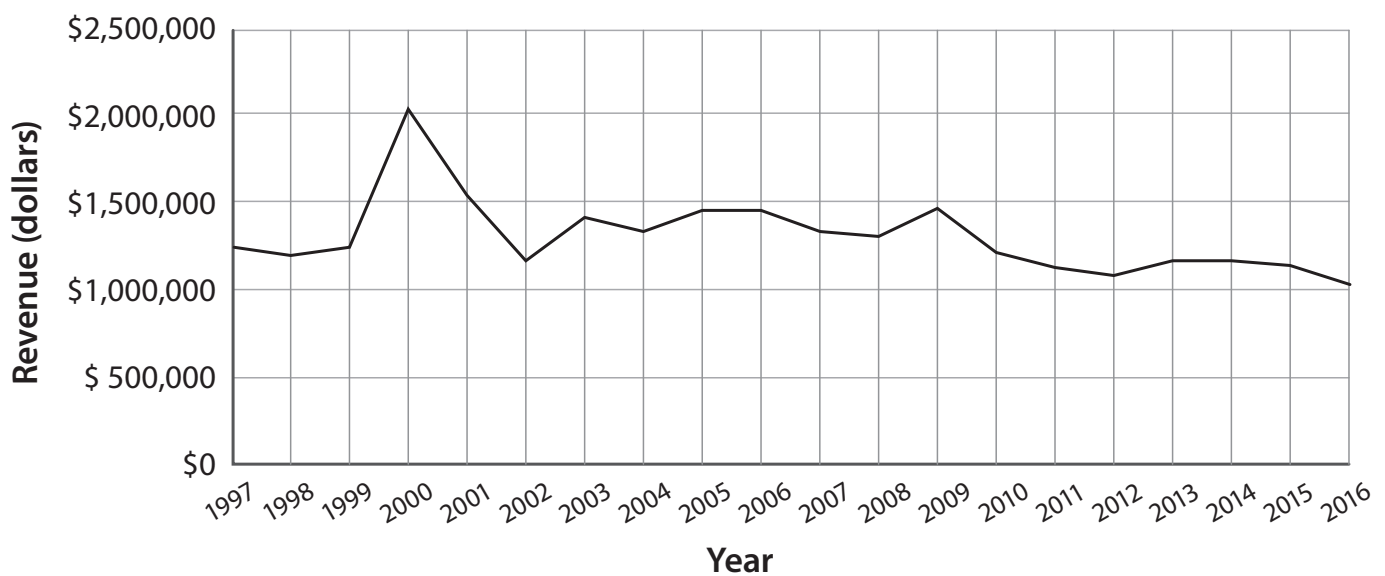
## Management Challenges

- **Lake Washington** – There is growing concern about interactions between other species and native salmon in Lake Washington. The Warmwater Program manages warmwater resources in the state for sport angling opportunity, while at the same time, helping to reduce negative impacts to native fish species. The Warmwater Program leads WDFW’s effort to assess potential interactions in the main lake, the ship canal and Lake Union.
- **Northern Pike** pose an enormous environmental and economic threat to Washington. The distribution of northern pike is currently limited to the Spokane River, Pend Oreille River, the upper section of Lake Roosevelt and Lake Washington. However, they will likely continue their downstream movement in the Columbia River, where some stocks of salmon and steelhead are listed under the Endangered Species Act. The

Warmwater Program collaborates with other agencies, tribes and WDFW programs to monitor northern pike abundance and distribution.

- **Funding** – All funds for the warmwater program come from a “dedicated” portion of each freshwater and combination fishing license sale. Because license sales have remained relatively level over the last 20 years, the account revenue for the program has also been flat while inflation has eroded “buying power.” Without a change to how the program is funded, significant reductions in the program will be necessary during the 2019-21 biennium.

### Warmwater Fish Program Revenue by Year



## Program Highlights from 2016-17

- **Fall Walleye Index Netting surveys:** These surveys show continued abundant walleye populations in five of the state’s most important walleye fisheries. The 2008 economic analysis values the Washington sport walleye fishery at \$3 million annually.
- **Water access development grants:** Program staff secured over \$1 million in state grant funds for water access improvement projects for fishing and boating on Lake Lawrence in Thurston County and Roses Lake in Chelan County.



# Ongoing Warmwater Fish Management

**Warmwater fish production:** The Ringold-Meseberg Hatchery is located about 15 miles up the Columbia River from Richland, in Franklin County. This is the only WDFW hatchery that raises warmwater fish. The hatchery produces about 6,000 tiger muskies per year which are stocked into seven lakes across the state to provide a unique and popular trophy-fishing opportunity.

**Scientific surveys:** As in other fisheries, scientific research has long played an essential role in managing the warmwater resources in Washington. Field data from surveys provides the foundation for both sportfish management and the protection of native species. This includes:

- **Northern pike monitoring:** Unchecked, northern pike can decimate both native and warmwater fish populations. Warmwater Program staff monitored the relative abundance of Northern Pike in Box Canyon Reservoir (Pend Oreille County), measuring the success of suppression activities. Suppression is intended to keep the pike population in check and maintain healthy, fishable populations of both native and warmwater sport fish.
- **Common carp suppression feasibility surveys:** Warmwater fish populations can be severely impacted by carp. Carp outcompete desirable species for food and space, and they stir up silt and muddy the water, blocking sunlight to aquatic vegetation, and impacting plankton, aquatic invertebrates, waterbirds, and native fish. Program staff contracted with Avista Corporation to provide boat electrofishing and gill netting services for two weeks in May 2017 in support of a project to determine the feasibility of manually removing common carp from Long Lake (Spokane County). Removing carp may improve the ecosystem for both native and warmwater sport fish in Long Lake.
- **Standardized surveys:** These surveys collect data on lakes that have not previously been surveyed or they analyze changes in the fish communities since the last survey. Program biologists use this information to optimize management of those fish communities as well as public outreach to promote

recreational fishing opportunities. An explanation of standardized surveys can be found online at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/conservation/fisheries/warmwater/surveys.html>.

- **Fishery monitoring surveys:** “Creel” surveyors conduct angler interviews both onshore and on the water to determine the popularity, angling success and which species are targeted on different waters around the state. In 2016-17, staff collected creel data from Lakes St. Clair and Lawrence in Thurston County and Lake Tapps in Pierce County. Most anglers targeted trout in the two Thurston County lakes. The two main fisheries in Tapps are tiger muskies and smallmouth bass. Anglers experienced very good success with both species.

**Other Projects:** Program staff routinely participate in a variety of special projects. Examples from last year include:

- **Translocation of fish:** Staff captured and transported warmwater fish to accommodate requests from business partners, like Bass Pro Shops, for public display at in-store, live-fish displays. Staff also provided fish for several kids’ fishing events.
- **Fishing contests:** The Warmwater Program manages the Fishing Contest Permit Program for WDFW. In the last year, there were 248 sportfishing contests targeting seven different species.



WDFW staff Danny Garrett holding a tiger muskie.

## Education and Outreach

The Warmwater Fish Program participates in a variety of education and outreach efforts, which provide a direct nexus between the program and the public. Some of those efforts from last year include:

- **Youth events:** An important component of the program's outreach effort includes helping and inspiring young anglers to join the sport. Staff participate in youth events to teach kids how to fish and show them how much fun it can be. Staff participated in 10 events across the state, at which nearly 4,000 kids participated.
- **Fishing club meetings:** Maintaining a good working relationship with the large variety of fishing clubs across the state helps keep communication between WDFW and its constituents open and clear. It also provides an opportunity for anglers to hear directly from a representative of WDFW. Staff gave presentations to 20 fishing clubs in the past year.
- **Sportsman shows:** Sportsman shows are a good venue to contact a large number of hunters and anglers, mostly local to the location of the show, and present information about local, as well as statewide opportunities and resources. Staff participated in seven shows.
- **Outreach to military service members at Joint Base Lewis McChord (JBLM):** There are approximately 35,000 active-duty military service members stationed at JBLM with up to 1,000 rotating to or from the base each month. Approximately 100,000 civilians, retired military, and family members live and work on JBLM

every day. Anecdotal surveys indicate that at least 50 percent of active duty military members hunt or fish. Last year's events, along with ongoing outreach programs at JBLM, include:

- Monthly "Newcomer's Orientation" for newly transferred service members.
  - Educational seminars on a variety of fishing topics.
  - Armed Forces Day, on-post event.
  - Northwest Adventure Center Open House, on-post event.
  - Free Fishing Weekend, on-post event.
  - Hands-on field events to teach service members how to fish.
- **Outreach to minority groups and women:** Program staff assisted with two events that reached out to under-served immigrant communities, including a Team Naturaleza event in Wenatchee, teaching natural resource appreciation and skills to Hispanics. The other event was a basic "how-to-fish" clinic for Burmese and Bhutanese immigrants at Lake Fenwick in Kent. Staff also participated in the Washington Outdoor Women's Teaching Workshop in North Bend, helping teach outdoor skills, including fishing to women.
  - **Other outreach:** Program staff also participated in several community events and presented program information and data to multiple scientific groups.

## New initiatives for 2018

- **Recruitment, Retention, and Reactivation (R3)**  
**Plan:** These activities seek to recruit new participants or increase continued participation rates of current or lapsed anglers. Reversing the widespread declining trend in angler participation is the overall goal of most R3 efforts. The Warmwater Program is leading the way in the Fish Program to develop a cohesive plan to direct its R3 activities.
- **Urban Fishing Program:** This campaign identifies and promote fishing in urban locations that provide sustainable opportunities and attempts to recruit and maintain youth and female anglers in urban areas.
- **Shoreline access:** Access to fishing opportunities has historically been cited as a barrier to recruiting and maintaining anglers. Shoreline access in particular has been an acute problem for many anglers who do not own a boat. This effort provides information about specific shore fishing locations, including maps and related information, on the WDFW website. Maps and other handouts will also be available at license vendors and other public locations.

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