



Ohio River Fisheries Management Plan 2005-2009

Background: Proper management of the aquatic resources of the Ohio River is extremely important to the State of West Virginia because of both recreational and economic values. The river supports a diverse recreational fishery comprised of both pool and tailwater fisheries. In a survey conducted in 1992 of Ohio River pool anglers, 51% of anglers interviewed were fishing for multi-species, 19% were fishing for black bass, 12% for catfish, 10% for hybrid striped bass, and 7% for sauger and walleye. In a recent survey of Ohio River tailwater anglers, 51% of anglers interviewed were fishing for multi-species, 1% were fishing for black bass, 5% for catfish, 15% for hybrid striped bass, and 27% for sauger and walleye. Consequently, the management of the Ohio River fisheries is multi-facet and one of extreme complexity.

To aid in the management of this important resource, the WVDNR-Wildlife Resources Section initiated a planning process in July 2004 following a 5-year period of information-gathering activities. The resultant plan was released in December 2004. The goal of this plan is to provide enhanced fishing opportunities to all Ohio River anglers using sound-biological information and economically-responsible methodology. The plan addresses the needs of all fisheries using a combination of fish stocking, habitat improvements, and angling regulations. It was and must still be understood that these three techniques and actions are linked and that the success of this plan is directly associated with the implementation of all three of these techniques and actions. Failure to implement any of these techniques or actions would likely jeopardize the success of the plan and consequently the enhancement of angling opportunities on the Ohio River.

The Ohio River Fishery Management Plan was provided to the public for comment via focused news articles, radio shows, and via the WVDNR web site. Comments were solicited via both public meetings and open comment periods. Public meetings of an open-forum format were held at Parkersburg, Glendale, and Huntington. A total of 140 individuals registered at these meetings and 122 completed surveys were received. At these meetings, six WVDNR fishery staff were available for discussion and a survey was provided to each attendee. Attendees were encouraged to review material (posters and handouts) provided by WVDNR, individually discuss their concerns with WVDNR staff, and complete an opinion survey. The public comment period was open until February 4, 2005; and 27 comments were received via e-mail (17), regular mail (4), telephone (5), and in-person (1).

Once compiled, WVDNR staff reviewed all public comments and attempted to resolve any conflicts based on the best biological approach that still met the plan's stated goals. If use conflicts were evident, WVDNR staff attempted to resolve these conflicts with the action that had the least constraints on the angling public.

Originally Proposed Tasks

Proposed Angler Surveys Tasks:

Angler Use and Economic Survey: Angler use and economic information will be ascertained in 2005 via a survey contracted to a nationally-recognized vendor.

Tailwater Angler Survey: Surveys will be conducted at two tailwaters during the sauger fishing period in 2007-2008.

Proposed Fish Stocking Tasks:

Largemouth Bass: A maximum of 38,400 largemouth bass will be stocked into the Willow Island Pool in 2005 at two life stages. Subsequent years' stocking will be dependent on daily mean river stage (feet) for the period May 1-June 30. Fish reared, but not stocked in a given year because of adequate river levels, will be released into small lakes to promote community angling activities.

Smallmouth Bass: A maximum of 38,250 fingerling smallmouth bass will be stocked during 2005, 2006, and 2007 into the Hannibal Pool. Slower growth rates and a dependency on in-river spawning is the main reason for three years of dedicated stocking. Initiating in 2008, stocking of smallmouth bass will be dependent on daily mean river stage (feet) for the period May 1-June 30. Fish reared, but not stocked in a given year because of adequate river levels, will be stocked into rivers that currently have extremely low densities of smallmouth bass because of past habitat degradation (i.e. Tug Fork, Guyandotte).

Hybrid Striped Bass: The WVDNR is responsible for stocking the Ohio River upstream and inclusive of the Willow Island Pool. This requires the stocking of 97,500 fingerling (30-day old) hybrid striped bass.

Paddlefish: A maximum of 6,800 paddlefish will be stocked throughout the West Virginia reach of the Ohio River excluding the R.C. Byrd and Greenup pools.

Blue Catfish: Blue catfish restoration will be focused on the Ohio River reach inclusive and downstream of the Belleville Pool. A maximum of 26,800 individuals will be stocked annually.

Walleye: WVDNR biologists have identified a unique genetic population of walleye inhabiting the Ohio River of West Virginia. A maximum of 65,500 walleye fingerlings of will be stocked annually into the Hannibal and Pike Island pools.

Proposed Habitat-Related Tasks:

Habitat Inventory: Depth and major substrate type will be determined in selected embayments of the Ohio River.

Habitat Enhancement: Spawning and nursery habitat for nest spawning species will be constructed in selected embayments of the Belleville Pool in 2005 and extended throughout the river in ensuing years. In river habitat structures will be constructed where appropriate following the planning and permitting process.

Proposed Angling Regulations: (Implement January 2006)

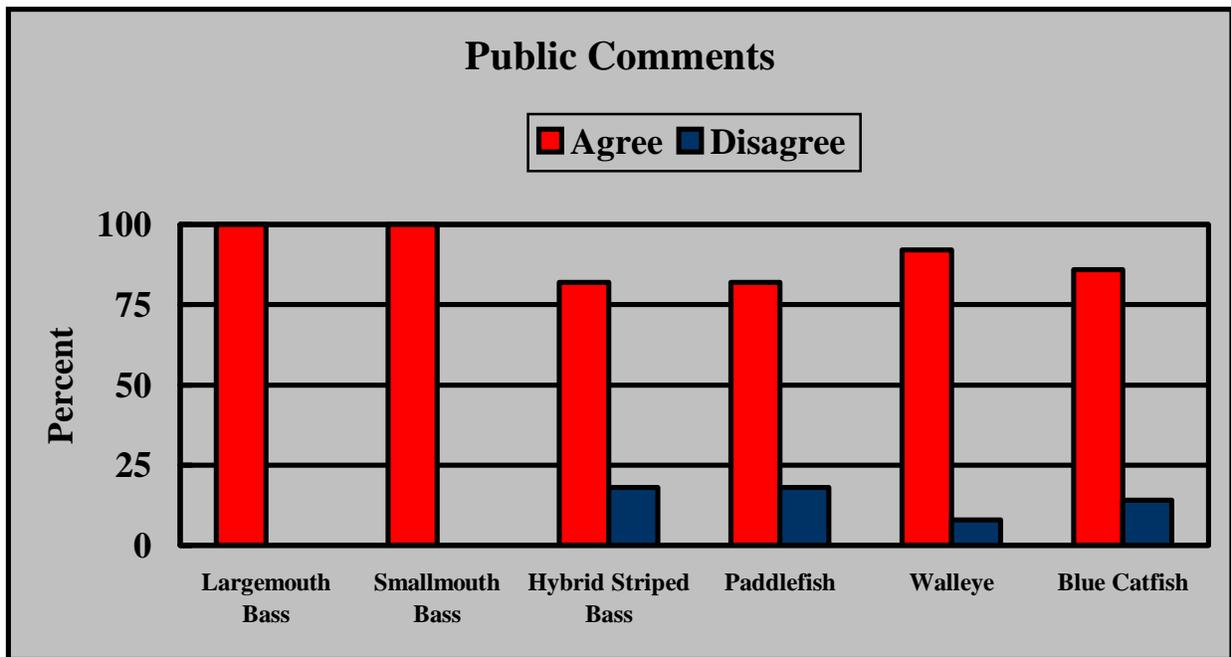
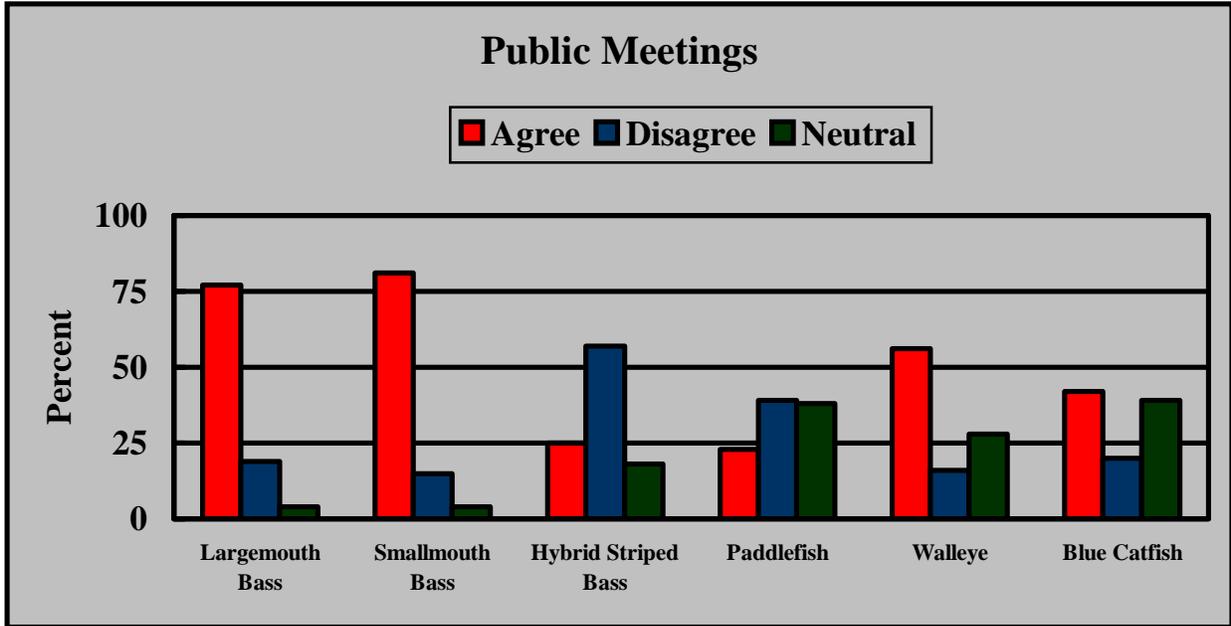
Black Bass: Seasonal Catch and Release: November 1-June 30

Walleye: Bag Limit: 2/day; Minimum Size: 18 inches

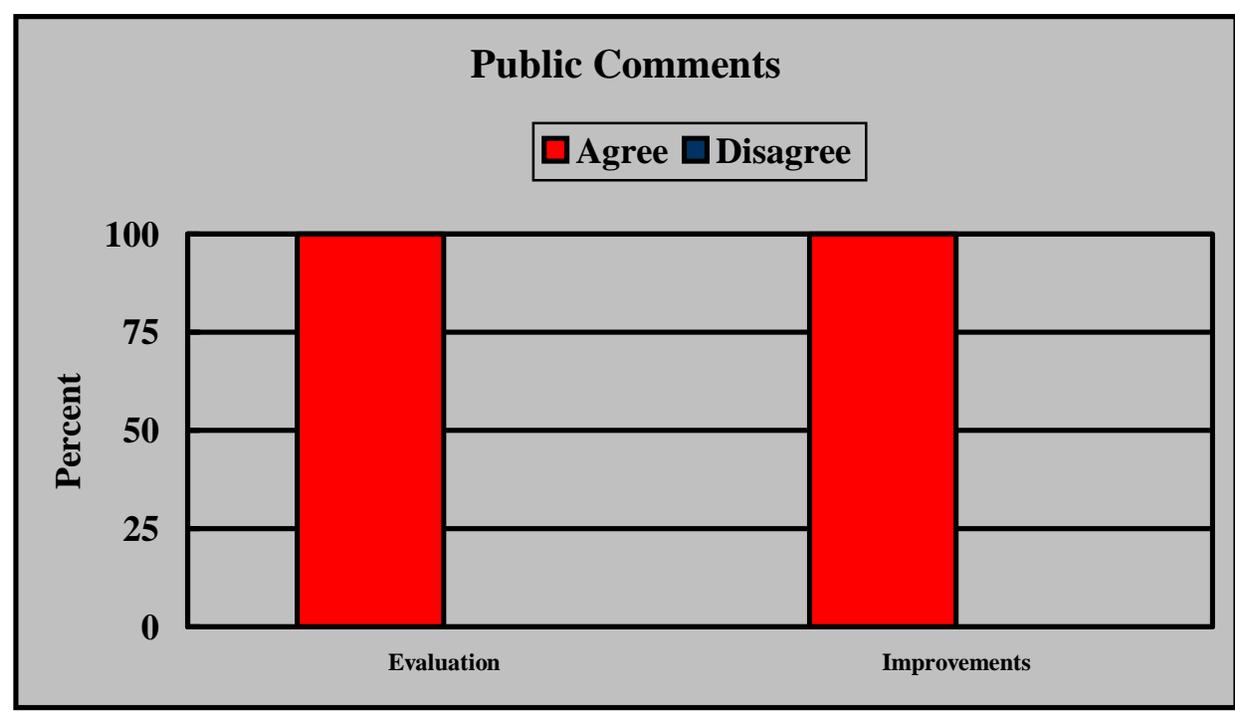
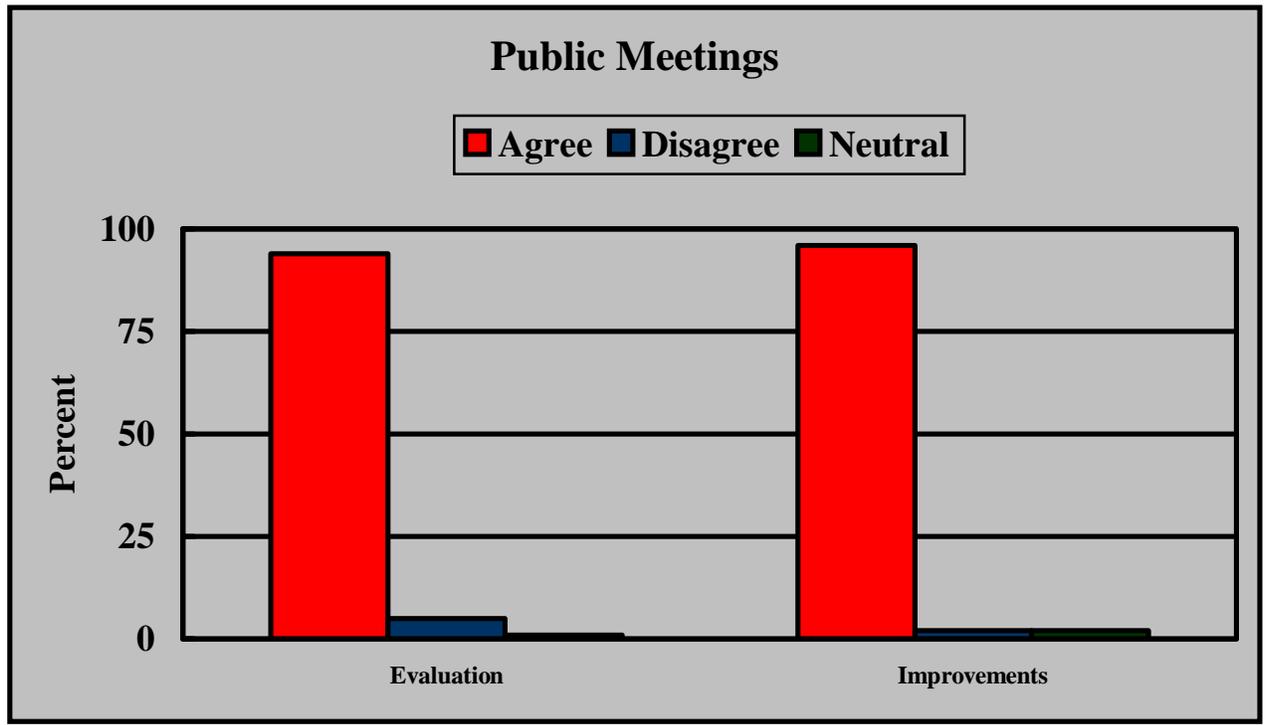
Blue Catfish: Bag Limit 2/day; Minimum Size Limit: 24 inches

Sauger/Saugeye: Regulations will remain as 10 fish per day with no size limit.

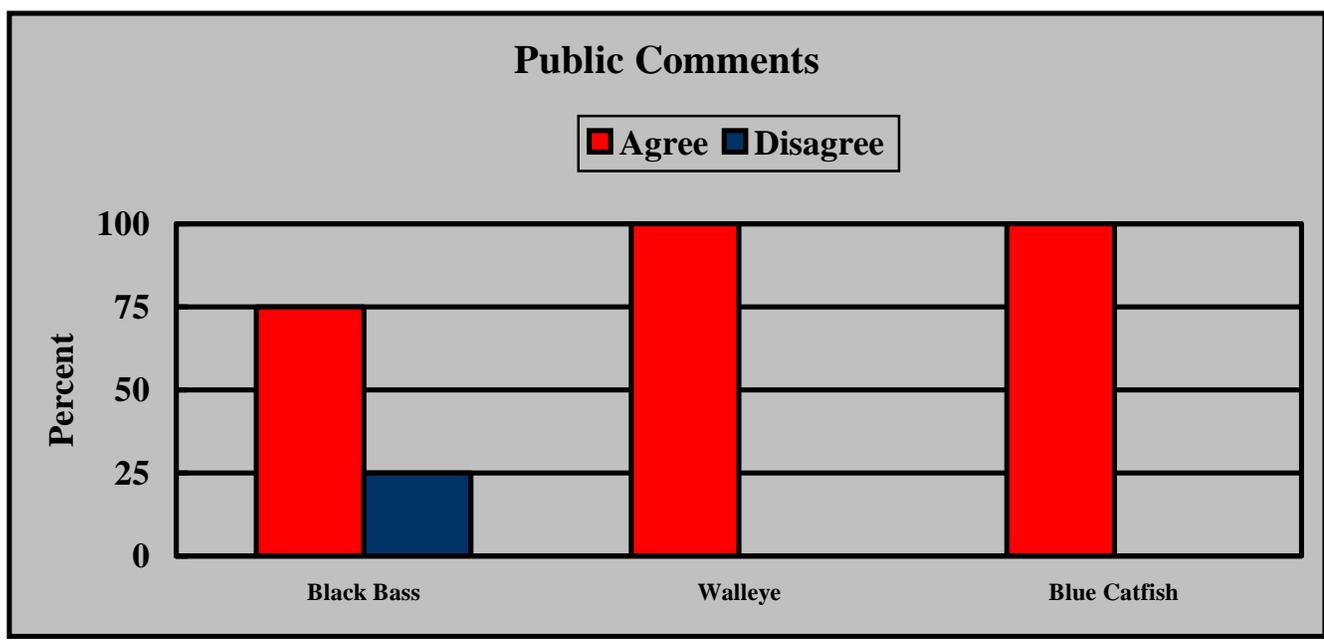
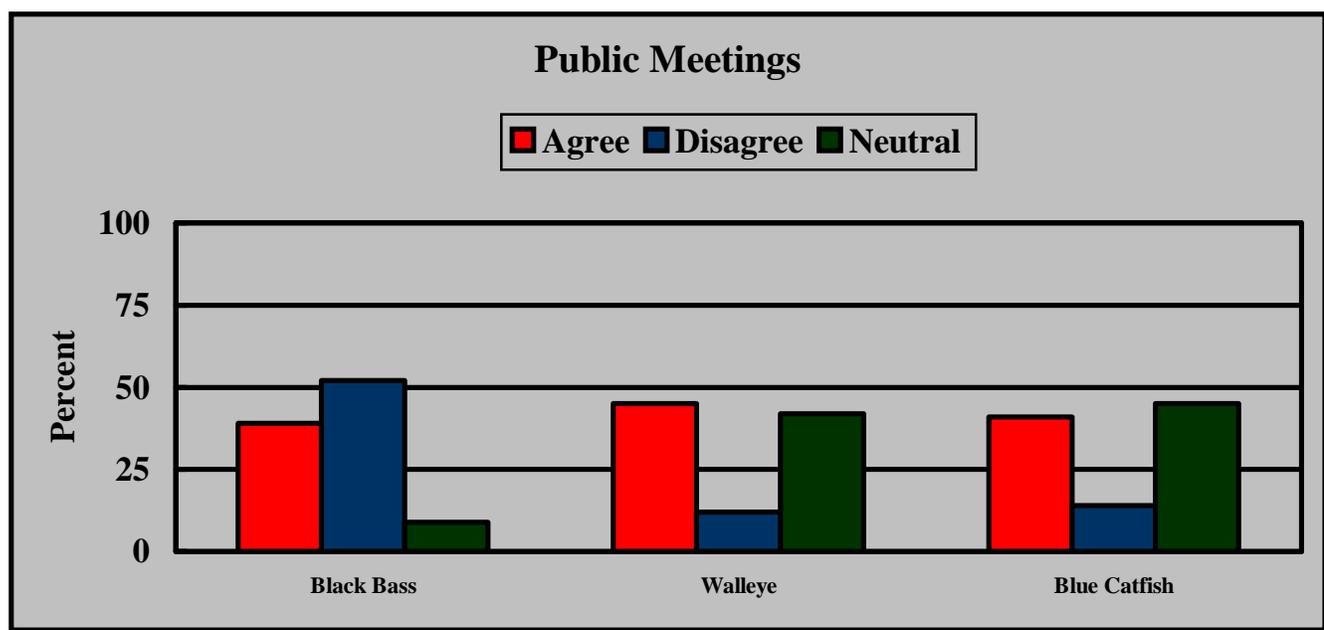
Public Opinion Fish Stocking Related Tasks



Public Opinion Habitat Related Tasks



Public Opinion Regulations Related Tasks



Revised Ohio River Fishery Management Plan

Proposed Angler Surveys Tasks:

Angler Use and Economic Survey: Angler use and economic information will be ascertained in 2005 via a survey contracted to a nationally-recognized vendor.

Tailwater Angler Survey: Angler surveys will be conducted at two tailwaters during the late-fall and winter fishing period in 2007-2008.

Angler Pool Survey: Pool anglers will be surveyed in 2007 and continue through 2009.

Proposed Fish Stocking Tasks:

Largemouth Bass:

Willow Island Pool: A maximum of 38,250 largemouth bass will be stocked into the Willow Island Pool in 2005 at two life stages. Subsequent years' stocking will be dependent on daily mean river stage (feet) for the period May 1-June 30 following the design employed in 2005. Fish reared, but not stocked in a given year because of stable river levels, will be released into small lakes to promote community-angling activities.

Belleville Pool: A maximum of 22,450 largemouth bass (25/acre or 50/acre) will be stocked into selected embayments, tributaries and island back channels of the Belleville Pool in 2005. If habitat enhancements are completed in 2005, an additional 28,050 largemouth bass (25/acre or 75/acre) will be stocked into selected embayments, tributaries, and island back channels of the Belleville Pool in 2006.

Other Ohio River Pools: Largemouth bass will be stocked into selected embayments that have undergone habitat enhancements. Largemouth bass will be stocked into these embayments at a rate of 50/acre the first year following habitat enhancements and 75/acre the second year. Tributaries and island back channels will be stocked at a rate of 25/acre in both years.

Smallmouth Bass

Hannibal Pool: A maximum of 38,750 fingerling smallmouth bass will be stocked into the Hannibal Pool in 2005 and 2006 at two life stages. Initiating in 2007, stocking of smallmouth bass will be dependent on daily mean river stage (feet) for the period May 1-June 30 following the design employed in 2005. Fish reared, but not stocked in a given year because of stable river levels, will be stocked into rivers that currently have extremely low densities of smallmouth bass because of past habitat degradation.

Belleville Pool: In 2005 and 2006, excess fingerling smallmouth bass reared in the WVDNR hatchery system for Ohio River allotment and not stocked into the Hannibal Pool will be stocked in the Belleville Pool.

Hybrid Striped Bass:

Ohio River: The WVDNR is responsible for stocking the Ohio River upstream and inclusive of the Willow Island Pool. This requires the stocking of 97,500 fingerling (30-day old) hybrid striped bass. This is a 50% reduction in stocking rate compared to previous years.

Paddlefish:

Ohio River: A maximum of 6,740 paddlefish will be stocked throughout the West Virginia reach of the Ohio River excluding the R.C. Byrd and Greenup pools. This is part of an ongoing restoration program with a goal of providing recreational angling opportunities.

Revised Ohio River Fishery Management Plan: (continued)

Blue Catfish:

Ohio River: Blue catfish restoration will be focused on the Ohio River reach inclusive and downstream of the Belleville Pool. A maximum of 26,800 individuals will be stocked annually.

Walleye:

Ohio River: WVDNR staff will focus on the restoration of a unique strain of walleye inhabiting the Ohio River of West Virginia. A maximum of 65,500 fingerlings will be stocked annually in the Hannibal and Pike Island pools.

Proposed Habitat-Related Tasks:

Habitat Inventory: Depth and major substrate type will be determined in selected embayments of the Ohio River.

Habitat Enhancement: Spawning and nursery habitat for nest spawning species will be constructed in selected embayments of the Belleville, Racine, and R.C. Byrd pools in 2005-2006 and extended throughout the river in ensuing years. In-river habitat structures will be constructed where appropriate following the planning and permitting process. Removal of silt at the mouths of selected embayments will also be conducted.

Proposed Angling Regulations: Regulations will be re-evaluated after 7 years.

<u>Black Bass:</u>	Seasonal Catch and Release: April 1- May 31
<u>Walleye:</u>	Bag Limit: 2/day; Minimum Size: 18 inches
<u>Blue Catfish:</u>	Bag Limit 2/day; Minimum Size Limit: 24 inches
<u>Sauger/Saugeye:</u>	Regulations will remain as 10 fish/day with no size limit.

Summary of Revisions

Angler Surveys:

- Additional surveys of Ohio River pool anglers

Fish Stocking:

- Greater linkage with stocking to habitat improvements, as well as spawning and nesting period river stage. This will result in more pools being stocked and a reduction of dedicated stockings of smallmouth bass.
- Include dedicated largemouth bass stocking in 2005 to the Belleville Pool. This was warranted because of January 2005 drawdown.
- Increase stocking of largemouth bass into embayments that have undergone habitat improvements. These stockings will be for the two years following the habitat improvements.
- Potentially stock smallmouth bass during 2005 and 2006 into the Belleville Pool if numbers of reared fish are available. This was warranted because of January 2005 drawdown.
- Reduce stocking of hybrid striped bass from previous years.

Habitat Evaluations and Improvements:

- Increase importance on habitat improvements concerned with spawning and nursery activities.
- Increase activity in the removal of silt from selected embayment mouths.

Regulations:

- Inclusion of a 7-year period for all regulations, at which time these regulations will be re-evaluated.
- Reduce catch and release period on black bass from November-June to April to May