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I. Introduction

Harrison Lake National Fish Hatchery (NFH) is a Service-owned warm-water aquaculture facility located in Charles City County, Virginia, approximately 25 miles southeast of the City of Richmond. The hatchery was authorized in 1930 via the White Act (46 Stat. 371). Initial land purchases for the facility were made in 1934 and 1935 under the provisions of the Federal Emergency Administration of the Public Works Act of 1934, and the facility became operational by 1937. Additional land was acquired in 1970 to yield its current footprint of 444 acres. The hatchery property includes a 90-acre impoundment (Harrison Lake) that supplies surface water for hatchery operations. Herring Creek (drainage area of 24.9 square miles) discharges from Harrison Lake and flows generally from north to south through the hatchery property for approximately 1.5 stream miles.


The southern portion of the station contains a grid of 20+ earthen rearing ponds, three production buildings, three small office buildings, a visitor center, and several additional structures to support operations. The station’s current production activities are focused on the culture of anadromous fishes and freshwater mussels in support of population restoration and recovery actions. Surface water used for hatchery operations comes from Harrison Lake via an open canal and pipelines, and outfalls from the culture ponds and production buildings discharge into Herring Creek.

Public recreational no-fee fishing has been permitted in Harrison Lake and Herring Creek since the station opened in 1937, regulated for the most part by statewide fishing regulations. The only restrictions imposed by the Service in addition to state regulations have been: 1) hours of access have been limited to daylight only, 2) the use of gasoline motors on watercraft in Harrison Lake has been restricted to 5 horsepower or less, and 3) a prohibition of the use of nets to capture fish in Herring Creek. Service-owned improvements to facilitate recreational fishing at Harrison Lake include a boat ramp, parking areas, a paved walkway along the dam, foot bridges, fishing piers, a picnic area overlooking the lake, a portable toilet, and trash receptacles. Maintained foot trails and bridges along Herring Creek facilitate angler access to the stream. Present use of the facility by anglers is 3,000 angler visits per year.
The culture ponds have always been closed to public fishing with the exception of two ponds (no longer used for production) that have been utilized since 2001 for special fishing events controlled by hatchery staff and Special Use Permits (e.g. youth fishing events). The stocking and special use of these ponds has been conducted in cooperation with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) and other partners.

Harrison Lake contains a suite of warm-water fishes typical for lakes in eastern Virginia, including but not limited to the following species of recreational importance: largemouth bass, black crappie, chain pickerel, bowfin, yellow perch, bluegill, and a mix of other sunfish species. Herring Creek contains smaller numbers of the same species as Harrison Lake, as well as seasonal abundance of hickory shad, alewife, blueback herring, and common carp that use the stream for spawning in the spring months.

The current management of the fishery resources in Harrison Lake is limited to statewide fishing regulations. The VDGIF conducts periodic fish population surveys via boat electrofishing but has found no need to recommend any regulations beyond current statewide harvest restrictions. Currently, there is no active stocking program in the lake; the replenishment of fishery resources is via natural reproduction.

Similarly, the management of fishery resources in Herring Creek is limited to periodic fisheries surveys by the VDGIF and statewide harvest regulations. There are no current stocking activities in the stream. In recent years, a statewide moratorium on the harvest of river herring (a collective term for alewife and blueback herring) has been in place to protect remnant stocks.

The purpose of this document is to support bringing Harrison Lake NFH into compliance by formally opening the station to public fishing opportunities.

II. Statement of Objectives

The objectives of a recreational fishing program on Harrison Lake NFH are to provide:

- The public with a wildlife-related recreational experience on more Service lands and increase opportunities for anglers, especially for youth/families/etc.

- Fish and wildlife dependent public recreation as mandated by and according to Service law and policy.

- Educate the public and neighboring landowners about fishing and aquatic conservation.
III. Description of Recreational Fishing Program

A. Areas to be Opened to Fishing (Figure 1)

1) Harrison Lake – Recreational fishing by the public for all species of fish will be permitted in Harrison Lake. The use will be conducted along the banks of the dam, from existing fishing piers, and from boats which may be launched at the boat ramp. Anglers will use existing access points, parking lots, trails, and signage to access fishing locations. Non-motorized watercraft and boats powered by electric trolling motors and gasoline engines of 5 horsepower or less will be permitted. Larger gasoline engines will be permitted to be attached to boats but their use will be prohibited.

2) Herring Creek – Recreational fishing for all species of fish will be permitted on the entire length of Herring Creek within the hatchery grounds. The use will be conducted along the banks of the stream or by wading. Anglers will use existing access points, parking lots, trails, and signage to access fishing locations.

3) Special Event Ponds – Two former hatchery production ponds (Ponds B2 and C2) will be utilized for special fishing events regulated by hatchery personnel via special use permits. The use will be conducted along the banks of the ponds. Anglers will use existing access points, parking lots, trails, and signage to access fishing locations.
Figure 1. Waters on Harrison Lake National Fish Hatchery to be used for recreational fishing.
B. Species to be Taken, Fishing Seasons, Fishing Access

1) **Harrison Lake and Herring Creek** – These water bodies support self-sustaining populations of warm-water fishes typical of eastern Virginia including but not limited to: largemouth bass, black crappie, chain pickerel, bowfin, yellow perch, bluegill, various other sunfish species, hickory shad, alewife, blueback herring, and common carp. Public fishing and boating on these waters will be conducted according to laws and regulations established and published by the Commonwealth of Virginia, including licensing requirements, season dates, fishing methods, and harvest. In addition, the following additional restrictions will be in place on the hatchery property:

a) We only allow fishing from ½-hour before legal sunrise until ½-hour after legal sunset.

b) We prohibited the use of nets for the capture of fish in Herring Creek.

c) We prohibit the use of gasoline motors greater than 5-horsepower on watercraft.

Access to Harrison Lake will be provided by a ½-mile gravel road from the Main Office to the boat ramp and associated parking areas. Herring Creek may be accessed on foot utilizing existing trails, with vehicle parking in existing parking lots at the lake and the station’s visitor center.

2) **Special Use Ponds** – These two ponds will be utilized for special events, only (e.g. youth fishing events), and regulated directly by hatchery personnel (e.g. special use permits). The use will be conducted along the banks of the ponds. Anglers will use the existing access point, parking lots trail, and signage adjacent to the visitor center to access these ponds. The stocking of warm-water fishes and special use of these ponds will be conducted in cooperation with the VDGIF and other partners.

C. Fishing Permit Requirements (if applicable)

1) **Harrison Lake and Herring Creek** – No Service permit or fee will be required for public use of these water bodies. Anglers will be required to abide by Virginia recreational fishing licensing requirements.

2) **Special Use Ponds** – A special use permit will be issued for use of these ponds for special fishing events. No fee will be charged for the special use permits. Anglers will be required to abide by Virginia recreational fishing licensing requirements.
D. Consultation and Coordination with the State

National fish hatcheries conduct fishing programs within the framework of state and federal regulations. All authorized fishing is regulated by the Commonwealth of Virginia, but the hatchery may elect to be more restrictive to support management goals. This recreational fishing plan and an associated environmental assessment (EA) have been reviewed and are supported by the VDGIF. Harrison Lake NFH will continue to consult and coordinate with the VDGIF annually to ensure this plan is consistent with the VDGIF regulations; as well as, to monitor populations of sport fish species and set harvest goals. The hatchery will strive to maintain consistent regulations with the VDGIF whenever applicable.

E. Law Enforcement

State law enforcement officers will be periodically checking anglers on the hatchery.

The following methods are used to control and enforce fishing regulations:

- Hatchery and fishing area boundaries will be clearly posted.
- The hatchery will provide a brochure that shows fishing areas.
- Law enforcement officers will randomly check anglers for compliance with Federal and State Laws.

F. Funding and Staffing Requirements

The costs of administering the fishing program comes out of the hatchery’s annual budget. Expenses include program management, staff resources, boundary posting, signage, brochures, facility maintenance, and other fishing specific activities. The mean annual cost to run the hatchery fishing program is approximately $5,250. It is anticipated that funding would continue to be sufficient to continue the fishing program at Harrison Lake NFH in the future.

IV. Conduct of the Fishing Program

A. Angler Permit Application, Selection, and/or Registration Procedures (if applicable)

1) Harrison Lake and Herring Creek - Other than fishing licenses required by Virginia law, anglers will not need a permit to access these waters. There is no fee or check-in required.

2) Special Use Ponds – Fishing in these ponds will be restricted to special fishing events overseen by hatchery staff and will require a special use permit issued by
hatchery personnel, at no cost. In addition, anglers fishing in the Special Use Ponds must abide by Virginia fishing license requirements.

B. Hatchery-Specific Fishing Regulations

In addition to published Virginia fishing regulations, visitors fishing on the hatchery must abide by the following fishing regulations specific to Harrison Lake NFH:

1) We only allow fishing from ½-hour before legal sunrise until ½-hour after legal sunset.

2) We prohibit the use of nets for the capture of fish in Herring Creek.

3) We prohibit the use of gasoline motors greater than 5-horsepower on watercraft.

C. Relevant State Regulations

Recreational fishing at Harrison Lake NFH will be conducted according to published Virginia state fishing regulations except as noted in hatchery-specific regulations (described above).

D. Other Rules and Regulations for Fishing

None.

V. Public Engagement

A. Outreach for Announcing and Publicizing the Fishing Program

To inform the public of the fishing program and any updates, a news release will be submitted to local newspapers. Notices will also be posted at the hatchery office and on the hatchery website. Any outreach is intended to:

- Educate the public of the changes/updates to the fishing program; and
- Tell the public where to get information regarding the program.

The hatchery will also address public comments received and review them for incorporation into the fishing plan.

B. Anticipated Public Reaction to the Fishing Program

It is estimated that about 8,000 people visit Harrison Lake NFH annually, of which 3,000 participate in recreational fishing. Visitors currently use the hatchery to enjoy wildlife-dependent activities such as birdwatching, photography, hiking, wildlife observation, and
fishing. Visitors engaged in these activities have historically co-existed without conflicts. We anticipate that this will not change as a result of this administrative action.

C. How Anglers Will Be Informed of Relevant Rules and Regulations

Information regarding statewide freshwater fishing regulations are available from the VDGIF’s website and in their annual freshwater fishing digest distributed widely throughout the state. Additional information regarding rules and regulations specific to Harrison Lake is provided by the VDGIF on their website listing public fishing lakes throughout the Commonwealth.

The hatchery will provide hatchery-specific rules and regulations as well as fishing opportunities on the station via the hatchery website, signage, kiosks, and direct contact with the public visiting or calling the hatchery.

VI. Compatibility Determination

Fishing and all associated activities proposed in this plan are compatible with the purpose of the hatchery. Recreational fishing, as outlined in this plan, “is not detrimental to the propagation and distribution of fish or other aquatic animal life” (50 CFR 71) at Harrison Lake NFH.