



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release December 10, 1984

Mike Smith (202) 343-5634
Lee Ischinger (303) 226-9390

SPORT FISH FOUND IN MOST U.S. WATERS, SURVEY FINDS

In a national assessment of sport fisheries and water quality just released by the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Environmental Protection Agency, more than 70% of the 1,300 rivers and impoundments surveyed were judged capable of supporting sport fish populations. Twenty-one percent of the surveyed areas contain no fish at all, but most of these are dry part of the year.

The study, the 1982 National Fisheries Survey, also found that the ability of these waters to support sport fish -- such as largemouth bass and rainbow trout -- has not changed appreciably during the past five years, despite increases in population and development pressures.

Robert Jantzen, FWS Director, said, "These results present an encouraging picture, overall. But the study also points up the continued need to manage our fisheries wisely and conserve valuable fish habitats."

The study is the first designed to relate the quality of the nation's waters to the health and viability of the fish communities dependent on those waters. The results provide baseline biological information against which future studies can be compared. The survey sought information on 1300 river and stream "reaches" from State fishery biologists -- each of whom averaged nine years experience on these waters. The reaches in the survey included flowing waters as well as main stem impoundments but excluded the Great Lakes, estuaries, coastal waters and wetland areas. The 1300 reaches were selected to represent the broadest range of U.S. stream types.

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According to survey respondents, the 1300 reaches provide habitat for an estimated 450 species of fishes. The two most prevalent sport fish are largemouth bass and rainbow trout which, together, occur in nearly half the surveyed waters. Both these species are considered intolerant of poor water quality. Their current widespread distribution may be a result of intensive stocking programs undertaken in the past to expand their ranges to enhance sport fishing opportunities.

The two most common non-sport fish were the common carp, an introduced species, and the native creek chub.

While the presence of sport fish populations indicates generally good water quality, the study also showed that water quality factors such as point source pollution from industrial and municipal discharges, and nonpoint source pollution such as runoff from agricultural areas and cities, adversely affect the fish populations in half the surveyed waters.

Copies of the three-volume survey are available from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Western Energy and Land Use Team, 2527 Redwing Road, Creekside One Building, Fort Collins, Colorado 80526, or from the Monitoring and Data Support Division (WH-553), Office of Water, Environmental Protection Agency, 401 "M" Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20460.

