

Mississippi's Freshwater Commercial Fishery in 2008 and 2009

Garry Lucas, *Mississippi Department of Wildlife Fisheries and Parks, 1505 Eastover Dr., Jackson, MS 39211*

Abstract: In 2008 the Mississippi Legislature enacted a law that commercial fishing license holders must report their harvest and activities. Over 2.5 million pounds of non-game gross fish and non-native fish were estimated as being harvested in 2008 by persons with commercial fishing licenses. A refinement in computing the harvest estimate by stratifying fishers by years of participation in the fishery gave an estimate for 2009 of 1.9 million pounds. Buffalo fish led the harvest at 1.5 million pounds in 2008 and at 850,000 pounds in 2009. Commercial fishers in 2008 harvested 636,000 pounds of blue and channel catfish, and 153,000 pounds of flathead catfish. For 2009 there were 121,000 pounds less blue and channel catfish, but 85,000 more flatheads. Carp were prominent in the 2008 harvest with 210,000 pounds of common carp and 240,000 pounds of Asian carp, but the estimates were 87,000 and 105,000 pounds, respectively, for 2009. Also harvested were 38,700–42,000 pounds of gar, 33,000–38,700 pounds of freshwater drum, eel, bowfin, shad, bullheads and minnows. Thirty-six percent of the commercial fishers used hoop nets, while 31% fished trotlines. Gill nets and trammel nets were fished by 20% of the commercial fishers, while 8% fished slat boxes. A substantial portion of the licensed participants did not rely on fishing as a significant source of income and 53% did not seek any monetary compensation. The leading reason fishers stated why commercial fishing was important to them was enjoyment, to get food for family and friends, income, and a way of life. The fishery is dynamic as recently there has been 50% turnover in participation, yet new participants in the commercial fishery have kept annual participation between 660–720 people.

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