

A Survey of Hand Grabbing Catfish Anglers at Ross Barnett Reservoir, Mississippi

Jerry L. Brown, Jr., Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks, Bureau of Fisheries, 1505 Eastover Drive, Jackson, MS 39211

Abstract: Hand grabbing has been practiced in Mississippi for many years and is popular in the Southeastern United States; however, few studies have addressed this fishing technique. Ross Barnett Reservoir (RBR), a 13,360-ha impoundment located in central Mississippi, supports a substantial hand-grabbing fishery. Previous creel surveys on this reservoir did not include hand-grabbing anglers; therefore, no data exist on this fishery. Our objective was to estimate catch, harvest, and effort of hand grabbers on RBR, and to obtain information about the practices and techniques of these anglers. A roving creel survey was conducted during the 2007 and 2008 Mississippi hand grabbing seasons (1 May–15 July). A total of 37 parties were interviewed consisting of 150 anglers. Seventy percent of the parties interviewed targeted flathead catfish (*Pylodictis olivaris*). Ninety-five percent of the parties used a probe, and all parties fished boxes located at depths of 1 to 2 m, with two parties having boxes ≥ 3 m. The mean number of boxes per party was 50 and the average party size was four anglers. Anglers spent an estimated 4,424 h hand grabbing during the 2007 season, harvesting an estimated 3,313 catfish (73% flathead, 23% blue, and 4% channel). During the 2008 season, anglers spent an estimated 5,259 h hand grabbing, harvesting an estimated 2,589 catfish (37% flathead, 51% blue, and 12% channel). Hand grabbing effort is low when compared to the overall hours spent sport fishing on RBR and is practiced by a limited number of anglers. Based on the size structure of harvested catfish, hand-grabbing anglers at RBR do not appear to be size selective. Most anglers were harvest oriented, with catch and release estimates in 2007 and 2008 making up only 12% and 9%, respectively.

Proc. Annu. Conf. Southeast. Assoc. Fish and Wildl. Agencies 64:201