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STATUS OF HICKORY SHAD STOCKS IN VIRGINIA

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Status of Hickory Shad Stocks in Virginia

Reported landings of hickory shad in the past four decades have declined from 223,000 lb in 1950 to 1,000 lb in 1979 (Table 1). Landings of hickory shad for 20 years prior to 1976 averaged 38,000 lb. Data for the 1980 season are unavailable at the present time; however, comments from fishermen interviewed recently indicate varied success.

Commercial and sports fishermen on the James River concluded that the hickory shad continued to decline since around 1975 when the average catch by stake gill net fishermen was 100 fish per season. The average estimated catch in 1980 by these fishermen was 10 to 12 fish.

Commercial fishermen on the York River reported similar declines in landings for 1980. Pound nets set in shallow water (< 20 ft deep) averaged 1,000 lb of hickory shad for the fishing season as opposed to 1,500 lb in 1979. Pound nets set in deep water (> 25 ft deep) traditionally catch very few (10-12 per season) hickory shad. Most of the hickory shad caught in both shallow and deep pound nets are spent (down-run) fish caught in May and June.

Stake gill net fishermen on the York River have declined since 1973-74.

Gill net (stake and drift) fishermen reported landing only 10% of the number of hickory shad in 1980 that they landed five to six years previously.

Pound net fishermen on the Rappahannock River reported no catches of gravid hickory shad in 1980 as well as for the past several years, yet 20 to 30 sport fish per day are landed in late spring-early summer. Stake gill net fishermen, however, reported seasonal catches of 1,000 lb per fisherman in 1980, an increase compared to the past several years, due to implementation of 3½" to 4" mesh set primarily for striped bass.

Sport fishermen on the Rappahannock River and its tributaries reported little or no change in abundance of hickory shad. A fishing contest for hickory shad held annually in Tappahannock, Virginia reported approximately the same number of entries in 1980 as in other years.

Most fishermen on all river systems attribute the decline either directly or indirectly to several factors. As noted above pound nets land few hickory shad. In recent years this may be partially attributed to net location in the river (shallow vs. deep) and also to the time of year the nets are set. Severe ice conditions during the winters of 1977-1980 destroyed existing stands and prevented reestablishment of these stands until late March or early April and thus possibly missing some of the early run fish. Since most (80-90%) of the hickory shad captured in pound nets are spent they invariably are sold as scrap or directly to a reduction plant, thus are never recorded as hickory shad.

Gill netters agree that mesh sizes (4 7/8"-5 1/4") used in the present American shad fishery are too large to effectively capture hickory shad. Most fishermen cited 3 1/2" to 4 1/2" mesh as the most effective sizes for hickory shad.

There is a general agreement among all fishermen that stocks are low but presently there is no directed fishery for hickory shad in Virginia, save a limited sports fishery on each river system.

As noted in the report on the status of American shad in Virginia (Va. Mar. Res. Rept. No. 80-4) there is presently no need of additional or emergency regulations in Virginia, but the status of hickory shad does require close attention through a comprehensive monitoring program.

Table 1. Hickory Shad Landings (in lb) in Virginia
from 1942 through 1979.*

1942	49,200	1961	54,000
1943	(data not available)	1962	44,000
1944	103,500	1963	26,000
1945	79,300	1964	58,000
1946	82,400	1965	35,000
1947	112,500	1966	41,000
1948	77,800	1967	28,000
1949	209,600	1968	14,000
1950	223,000	1969	107,000
1951	156,900	1970	24,000
1952	163,200	1971	11,000
1953	151,000	1972	27,000
1954	180,000	1973	55,000
1955	131,000	1974	41,000
1956	50,000	1975	31,000
1957	46,000	1976	3,620
1958	27,000	1977	1,386
1959	19,000	1978	1,622
1960	29,000	1979	1,000

*Data sources:

Fishery Statistics of the United States, Statistics Digests
1942-1975.

Virginia Landings, 1976-1979.