



NORTHERN SNAKEHEAD

National Invasive Species Awareness Week 2016



Northern Snakehead, a native fish of China and Russia, were brought to the U.S. for the live food fish market. Unfortunately these exotic invaders escaped or were illegally stocked and now occur in at least eleven states where they potentially threaten native fish and wildlife resources. The Northern

Snakehead has since been designated as 'injurious wildlife' which makes importation and interstate transport illegal under the Federal Lacey Act. These top predators feed on a variety of invertebrates, fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds and even small mammals! They can be identified by their long cylindrical shape, long dorsal and anal fins, and dark, irregular patches on their sides; but are probably best known for their large mouth with many sharp teeth. Because of the ability to utilize atmospheric oxygen they can survive in stagnant shallow waters which gives them an advantage over many native species. Despite inspiring the movies 'Frankenfish' and "Snakehead Terror" they are incapable of walking over land, but are very protective of their young and will bite if threatened while protecting their nest.

In Delaware, Northern Snakehead have invaded several major river systems and their tributaries including Red Lion Creek, Christina River and the Nanticoke River. In December of 2015, a juvenile Northern Snakehead was captured in an intake canal of a refinery in Delaware City, the first occurrence reported this far downstream in the Delaware River. They have also invaded non-tidal areas of the state and have been documented in four stormwater facilities, three private ponds and in Becks Pond which is one of the most popular public fishing ponds in Delaware. Unauthorized stocking of this fish has contributed to its spread within New Castle County. A regulation passed in 2013 prohibits the transport, purchase, sale, and possession of live snakeheads in Delaware, so hopefully this will curtail illegal stocking. Unfortunately once established this hardy fish has proven difficult to eradicate, making preventative measures even more crucial. The Division of Fish and Wildlife is closely documenting the occurrence of this species in an effort to gain a better understanding of the potential impact this species could have on Delaware's freshwater ecosystems. Anyone who catches a snakehead in Delaware is encouraged to kill it and notify the Division of Fish & Wildlife at (302) 735-8654 or 739-9914 or Edna.Stetzar@state.de.us. —
Delaware Invasive Species Council, Inc.

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