

THE STATUS OF GIGGING AND SNAGGING  
IN KENTUCKY

by

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Abstract

In 1950 Kentucky held its first legalized open season for the gigging and snagging of rough fishes. The legalization of this type of fishing was the result of an experimental study made in the spring of 1949 on Stoner Creek, Bourbon County, Kentucky. This study showed that rough fish made up 95.9 per cent of the total harvest in pounds.

During the open seasons of 1951, 1952, and 1953 a general statewide creel census has been taken. This census has substantiated the experimental study. A total of 9278 fishermen were contacted. These fishermen took a total of 29,203.6 pounds of fish, the average weight of which was 1.09 pounds. Of this total poundage the average per cent of total weight of the rough fish for the three years of census was 98.9. At no time did the game and pan fishes combined have a total weight of more than 4.1 per cent of the total harvest.

It has been found necessary to close some streams in the State to gigging and snagging. These streams have very high game fish populations. The small harvest of rough fish in these areas will not compensate for the intentional or unintentional killing of game fishes.

Many of Kentucky's streams contain relatively high populations of rough fish. <sup>1</sup>There is very little fishing pressure exerted on these fishes, but there is an ever increasing pressure being exerted upon the game and pan fishes within the same streams. Kentucky law prohibits commercial harvesting of rough fish by the use of traps, nets, and seines in any streams that are not under lock and dam. The usual commercial gear can therefore be used only in the Ohio, Mississippi, Kentucky, and the lower parts of the Barren, Green, and Cumberland Rivers.

With the above in mind, it was decided in the spring of 1949 to investigate the possibilities of having an open season for gigging and snagging. Gigging in this case may be defined as using a spear of any type regardless of size or shape. Snagging is a method of fishing in which pole and line is used. To the end of the line is attached any number of hooks regardless of size or shape, and a lead weight. The line is cast across a stream and retrieved literally snagging any fish which might be in its path. Snagging is usually done in swift water during spawning runs or shoaling periods. At times this method of fishing is very effective.

The stream selected as the study stream was Stoner Creek near Paris, Kentucky. This stream is considered a good bass stream, but it was known that a considerable portion of the stream's population was made up of suckers and other rough fishes. This stream was selected because it was believed necessary to determine what proportion of game fish would be taken in comparison to rough fish in a stream where a relatively high number of game fish were known to be present.

Note: <sup>1</sup>All fishes except members of the families Centrarchidae, Percidae, Serranidae, and Esocidae are classified as rough fishes in this paper.

A ten mile section of Stoner Creek was designated as the study area and gigging was allowed in this section from March 15 to May 10, 1949. All species of game, pan and rough fish could be taken regardless of existing regulations, and any person with a fishing license could participate in the experiment. All fish taken were to be registered at the checking stations. Table I shows that of the total 862.4 pounds of fish gigged, 827.0 pounds of rough fish and 35.4 pounds of game and pan fish were taken. Rough fish, therefore, made up a total of 95.9 per cent of the total harvest by weight.

As a result of this study, an open season for legalized gigging and snagging was authorized. The season was to begin in March and end in May of each year. The exact dates are regulated according to general water temperatures and other information furnished by the field staff. An attempt is made to close the season just prior to the beginning of the bass spawning season.

The first legalized gigging and snagging season was held in the spring of 1950. During that season no census was made. In 1951, a statewide gigging census was initiated and was continued through the spring of 1953 when sufficient information was thought to have been accumulated to justify discontinuance. The census was taken by conservation officers in the field. Each officer was assigned a designated number of forms to be filled out. On the whole, response by the officers was excellent. Naturally water conditions and other seasonal variations affect the fishing success in each watershed, and therefore, the number of contacts the census takers can make during the open season.

Table I shows that the number of fishermen contacted in 1951 was greater than in 1952. This was entirely due to high water conditions during the 1952 season. This smaller sample did not, however, change the various other items of information to any degree of significance. Water conditions were somewhat better in 1953 as is indicated by the increased catch per man. The reason contacts did not increase to somewhere near the 1950 figure is that the number of forms issued the field men were less.

Gigging and snagging, although not nearly as efficient a management tool for the harvest of rough fish as some of the standard commercial methods, is one way in which a limited amount of pressure can be exerted on the rough fishes. It has been proved to our satisfaction that in most cases gigging and snagging are not harmful to our game and pan fish populations, Table II, however, in specific areas, gigging and snagging can be harmful. These streams are closed to gigging and snagging because of the very high populations of game fish present. In areas such as these, it is unlikely that gigging and snagging would be helpful or desirable. Public sentiment also has been especially strong against open seasons in these streams.

All streams were open to gigging and snagging in 1951 with the exception of Dix River where the white bass from Herrington Lake have their tremendous annual runs. In 1952 six additional streams and their tributaries were added to the list of waters which were closed to gigging and snagging. Tygart Creek, Kinniconick Creek, Tripplett Creek, Red River and their tributaries, which are the best muskie streams in the State, were closed. Elkhorn Creek, one of the State's best smallmouth bass streams and Harrod's Creek, located near metropolitan Louisville, were also closed.

TABLE I

Summary of information for 1949 experimental study and 1951, 1952, 1953 open seasons.

Item	1949	1951	1952	1953
Fishermen checked				
Gigging	169	3422	2117	2285
Snagging	-	535	361	558
Total number of fish	878	11,686	6788	8544
Total pounds of fish	862.4	12,280.2	7638.4	9285.0
Average weight	0.98	1.05	1.13	1.09
Total number by gigging	878	10,152	5725	7160
Total number by snagging	-	1534	1063	1384
Average fish per hour				
Gigging	2.1	1.1	1.0	1.3
Snagging	-	0.5	0.4	0.5
Average fish per man at time checked				
Gigging	5.2	3.0	2.7	3.1
Snagging	-	2.9	2.9	2.5
Average time fished when checked (hrs.)				
Gigging	2.4	2.7	2.7	2.5
Snagging	-	5.5	6.7	5.3
Pounds of fish				
Rough fish	827.0	12,178.2	7574.8	9131.7
Game and pan fish	35.4	102.0	63.6	153.3
Number of fish				
Rough fish	786	11,335	6507	8103
Game and pan fish	92	351	281	441
Percentage of weight				
Rough fish	95.9	99.2	95.9	98.4
Game and pan fish	4.1	0.8	4.1	1.6

TABLE II

## SUCCESS OF FISHING METHODS IN RELATION TO TOTAL STREAM PRODUCTION

		HARVEST EXPRESSED IN PERCENTAGE BY WEIGHT	
		GAME AND PAN FISH	ROUGH FISH
GIGGING AND SNAGGING		1.1	98.9
ANGLING USING BOTH ARTIFICIAL AND LIVE BAITS		HARVEST EXPRESSED IN PERCENTAGE BY WEIGHT	
		GAME AND PAN FISH	ROUGH FISH
		75.9	24.1
STREAMS		PRODUCTION EXPRESSED IN PERCENTAGE BY WEIGHT	
		GAME AND PAN FISH	ROUGH FISH
FLEMING CREEK	(1953)	28.1	71.9
DRAKES CREEK	(1953)	6.7	93.3
WHIPPOORWILL CREEK	(1952)	15.5	84.5
NORTH FORK CREEK	(1952)	17.3	82.7
FISHING CREEK	(1950)	38.8	61.2
BEAVER CREEK	(1950)	18.5	81.5
SLATE CREEK	(1949)	11.0	89.0
COMBINED AVERAGE FOR ALL SEVEN STREAMS		19.4	80.6

Gigging as practiced in Kentucky is desirable because: (1) it exerts a certain amount of pressure on the rough fish populations in our streams that heretofore has not been present, (2) it furnishes additional recreation that was not before available, and (3) it supplies additional food for the table that was not previously obtainable.

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