

Talking Points for Jim Tate
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At the Potomac River Northern Snakehead Roundup

Friday, July 30, 2004

- **Why are we here today?** Is it because of what I have heard—“that a bad day fishing is better than a good day at work?”
- **Maybe.** I can tell you that there are several reasons I am here: and another chance to fish is **only one** of them.
- The **foremost** reason I am pleased to be here today is to commend all the partners who put this event together.
 - **And,** I am here to commend all of the partners who have been at the Department of Interior’s side since the first snakehead crisis in the Potomac watershed two years ago.
 - **And,** this is a chance to promote Secretary Norton’s “4Cs” philosophy – communication, cooperation, and consultation, all in the service of conservation. We are in this together folks!
- **Second,** I am here because this event is a great opportunity for increasing awareness about invasive fishes, and about what we can all accomplish when we work together.
 - I read yesterday that an Atlantic salmon was caught near Thorne Bay in Alaska on Monday. It is speculated that it may be one of the nearly 3,000 Atlantic salmon that escaped from an offshore fish farm to the south. Nearly 600 Atlantic salmon have been encountered in Alaska in recent months. We can only speculate about the effects these non-native fish and their parasites may have on the wonderful Pacific salmon runs. Alaska Fish and Game is asking fishermen to help them in documenting further cases of Atlantic salmon in AK waters- just like you are doing here today with the snakehead.
 - The Fish and Wildlife Service just held a Carp Corral/Goby Roundup in the streams of the western suburbs of Chicago. Just as we are doing, many people cooperated in the Carp Corral/Goby Roundup. Frankly we couldn’t do it without your help.
- **Third,** being here gives me a chance to talk about the difference between invasive species and non-native species.
 - To me an “**invasive species**” is not native to an established biological community, **and if it is** introduced, it is likely to cause economic or environmental harm, or harm to human health.
 - Not all non-native species are invasive. Many non-native species are important sources of food, fiber and recreation- crops, flowers and landscaping plants, pets, and even microbes [yeast in beer for example].

- Sometimes purposeful introductions start off well, and then become a problem...take for example the silver carp that escaped from aquaculture into the Mississippi River System recently. The silver carp biomass now exceeds the biomass of all other fish in some parts of the watershed, and the silver carp is becoming famous for jumping out of the water and smacking fisherman in the head when they drive their boats on the water.
- Despite what you read and hear in the media, we don't know for sure if the Northern snakehead will become invasive and cause great harm. But we can measure risk and probability.
- Walter Courtenay and Jim Williams, scientists at Interior's USGS, have analyzed the risk of invasiveness for 26 members of the genus *Channa* [the genus of the Northern snakehead].
- They report that the probability of a species of *Channa* coming to a stream near you, surviving, colonizing and reproducing, and causing economic dislocations is **HIGH – VERY CERTAIN**. And the likelihood of a colonizing group spreading beyond the colonized area is **HIGH – REASONABLY CERTAIN**.
- Clearly introducing the Northern Snakehead into the Potomac River watershed or into a watershed near Philadelphia as was discovered this week, crosses the "invasive" line and will almost certainly hurt the whole watershed and other species present in it.
- **And finally**, being here gives me a chance to point out that in the modern world there are many ways to introduce new species- this is not a hunt for the guilty, it is a plea for education, understanding and cooperation.
 - In fact, the Northern snakehead is a respected food source in its native range, it is even sought after by International Sport Fishermen and women, and it may sometimes be kept as an ornamental fish in aquaria.
 - I think it is great to have the flavors of the world available for our diets and our other senses, but we must still safeguard native environments. Just because something lives well and harmlessly in one place, does not mean it will be an innocent abroad.

But enough of this! My sport fishing friends tell me the best time to catch Northern snakeheads is a couple of hours ago. Let's go fishing!