Unwanted Guests: The Problems With Invasive Fishes

Jason Seiders
Regional Fisheries Biologist
Belgrade Lakes Region
IFW Management Regions
Region B – Belgrade Lakes Region

- Almost 4000 square miles.
- 370 Lakes and Ponds.
- Just over 3500 miles of flowing water.
- Second most populated section of 7 regions.
- 3 fulltime fisheries biologists.
Good News and Bad News

• IFW busy dealing with invasives on many fronts.
• Challenges and affected resources vary statewide.
• Spread of invasives continues despite our best efforts.
• Invasive issues dealing with some familiar species and some relatively new ones.
• Information about a huge success story!
What Does “Invasive” Really Mean?

• Any species that is not native to a water can be invasive.

• Fish that are native to Maine can be invasive if moved.

• Invasive fish that are new to Maine are considered “exotic”.

• All invasives impact our native fish.
Why Are Invasives So Bad?

• Generally have no predators.
• Usually very adaptable.
• Prolific – a lot of fish!
• Compete with native species for food and habitat.
• Usually impossible to eliminate.
Northern Pike

• Recent spread of northern pike.

• Robust populations in:
  – St. George River.
  – Kennebec River.
  – Androscoggin River.

• Unconfirmed (but likely) in:
  – Chickawaukie Pond (Rockport)
  – Unity Pond (Unity)

• Pike have caused irreparable damage to Maine waters.
  – Loss of salmon fishery in Belgrade Lakes.
Black Crappie

• Black crappie are everywhere!

• New populations:
  – Savade Pond (Windsor)
  – Togus Pond (Augusta)
  – Lower St. George River watershed
  – Lower Sheepscot River watershed
  – Great Moose Pond (Hartland)

• Impacts
  – Native sunfish species
  – Overall lake productivity
  – Largemouth bass?

• Very popular with anglers.
Popularity Problem

Moosehead

Winter 2017
Total Anglers

• Moosehead – 9,634
• Sabattus – 9,250

Sabattus

75,471 Acres

Sabattus had approximately 2,000 anglers in one day!
Arctic Char

- Maine supports populations of landlocked Arctic char.
  - Only state in lower 48.

- 14 waters, mostly northern Maine.

- Sensitive to invasive fishes.
  - Evolved with simple assemblages.

- Several waters imperiled due to smelt introductions.
Bald Mountain Pond

- Confirmed rainbow smelt in 2014.
- Conducted multiple studies:
  - Radio telemetry
  - Trapnet
  - Gillnet
  - Smelt removal
- Char numbers exceedingly low.
- Reclamation difficult/impossible.
- Developing management plan.
Northern Maine – Big Reed
Big Reed Pond, continued......

- Several years of study and char capture and removal.
  - 14 char taken to private hatchery.
- Pond reclaimed in 2010.
- 5 tons of rotenone.
- Most complex reclamation in the Department’s history.
- Success!
  - No smelt observed since.
  - Pond restocked – several year classes of char present.
Continued Efforts

- Despite best efforts, illegal introductions continue.
- Angler preferences shifting towards invasives in southern and central Maine.
- Social media fuels the invasive fish problem.
- IFW will continue public outreach/education effort.