

ALABAMA'S WILD BAITFISH REGULATION FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



WHAT IS SPECIFIED IN THE CURRENT WILD BAITFISH REGULATION?

220-2-.162 Wild Baitfish Regulation: Within the jurisdiction of the Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries, it shall be unlawful to transport any live baitfish, having been caught or harvested from streams, rivers, public lakes or reservoirs in Alabama, away from the waters in which they are caught. Further, it is unlawful to import any live baitfish, having been caught or harvested from streams, rivers, public lakes, or reservoirs from any area outside the State of Alabama. For the purposes of this regulation, baitfish are defined as any species of fish or crayfish (Superfamily Astacoidea) that are legal to use as bait for recreational or commercial fishing in Alabama.

This regulation does not prohibit the possession or the use of live baitfish on or within the waters from which they have been caught or harvested. Nor does it prohibit the possession, importation, or use of live baitfish acquired from commercial producers and bait shops located within or outside the State of Alabama, provided the origin of these fish was not from a wild caught source.

WHY DID THE ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES (ADCNR) ENACT THE WILD BAITFISH REGULATION?

ADCNR implemented the current Wild Baitfish Regulation to assist in the fight against invasive species, particularly Asian carp. Since an angler using live baitfish could unknowingly capture young Asian carp from areas where they are currently established and transport them to water bodies where they do not currently exist, ADCNR chose to be proactive and enact a regulatory change that will reduce this threat and assist with protecting our valuable aquatic resources.

WHAT ARE ASIAN CARP AND HOW DID THEY ARRIVE IN THE UNITED STATES?

Asian carp refers to several different species of fish which are native to Asia. Currently, four Asian carp species are known to exist in the United States: Grass Carp, Bighead Carp, Silver Carp, and Black Carp. Asian carp were brought to the United States in the 1970's through the aquaculture indus-

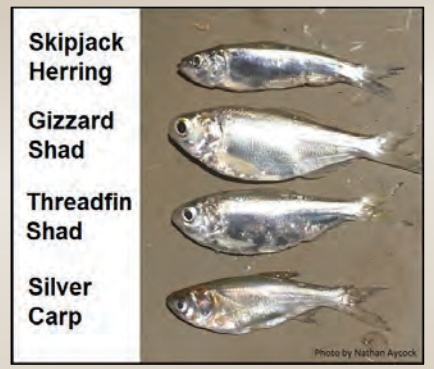
try as a tool to control water quality issues and aquatic vegetation. Unfortunately, when the stocked aquaculture ponds became flooded due to heavy rainfall, Asian carp escaped into public water bodies, such as the Mississippi River.

WHY ARE ASIAN CARP SUCH A THREAT?

Since Asian carp are non-native, all four species have the potential to create various problems with our native aquatic environments. The species of utmost concern currently in Alabama is the Silver Carp. This species has already negatively impacted recreation and tourism to public water bodies in nearby states, such as Tennessee and Kentucky, and poses a significant threat to recreational boaters and anglers in Alabama. Silver Carp are well known for their jumping ability when frightened. This behavior has been documented to cause bodily injury to unsuspecting boaters struck by the flying fish. Another key concern is their ability to grow quickly and populate at a rapid rate. Silver carp are filter feeders and can consume large quantities of plankton, which is the base of the food chain. This behavior can devastate water bodies and negatively impact sport fisheries. Since Silver Carp have recently increased their range into the Tennessee River region in North Alabama, ADCNR is very concerned about their potential expansion to other areas.

WHY CAN'T ANGLERS TRANSPORT LIVE BAITFISH SPECIES LIKE HERRING AND SHAD TO OTHER WATER BODIES, SINCE THEY ARE NOT A THREAT TO SPORT FISH POPULATIONS?

Young Asian carp closely resemble other baitfish species such as herring and shad (Figure 1). Due to this likeness, most anglers either would not be able to differentiate these species, especially at smaller sizes, or would not take the time for proper identification. This error could result in the transport and establishment of species, like Silver Carp, to water bodies where they do not currently exist, increasing the potential for further damage to sport fish populations in Alabama.



This photo depicts the comparative similarities among common baitfish species in Alabama and young Silver Carp.

WHY WERE LIVE BAITFISH SPECIES THAT DO NOT RESEMBLE ASIAN CARP INCLUDED IN THIS REGULATION?

Since many aquatic species in Alabama occur naturally only in certain tributaries or river basins, transporting them outside of their native range and introducing them into a new environment has the potential to be biologically harmful.

ARE ANGLERS ALLOWED TO TRANSPORT LIVE BAITFISH PURCHASED FROM A COMMERCIAL PRODUCER OR BAIT SHOP FOR USE WHEN ANGLING IN ALABAMA?

Anglers are only allowed to transport and use live baitfish in Alabama purchased from commercial producers or bait shops (in-state or out-of-state) if the origin of these fish was not from a wild caught source. Even if wild caught baitfish are acquired indirectly from a commercial producer, bait shop, etc., they are still illegal for transport and use in Alabama.

ARE LIVE BLUEBACK HERRING NOW LEGAL TO POSSESS AND USE AS LIVE BAIT IN ALABAMA?

ADCNR recently removed the possession restriction on live Blueback Herring from Regulation 220-2-.26. As with other wild baitfish, this species can only be used as live bait on water bodies in Alabama where they were caught or harvested. Blueback Herring cannot be legally transported from one water body to another per Regulation 220-2-.162.