

This report is dedicated to the nongame fish, whose interrelationships in the aquatic ecosystem are generally not well documented or appreciated.

PREFACE

Little attention has been given to nongame fish species which comprise over 75% of the 150 fish species in Wisconsin waters. Yet many of those species play a major role in maintenance of sport fish populations so vital to recreational and economic interests in the state. In essentially disregarding these species, their right to exist and their role in maintaining community stability through species diversity have been overlooked. The nongame fish not only make up the majority of fish species in Wisconsin but are also more abundant than sport fish species in both total number and total biomass.

Further attention by either research or management to nongame fish species must be preceded by an inventory of what we have and where we have it. In 1974 the Bureau of Research of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), with inputs from field fish management personnel, began a statewide assessment of the distribution and relative abundance of fish species, emphasizing but not limited to nongame species. This assessment was begun using a basin approach to delineate location of sampling stations on the over 7,200 lakes (over 350,000 ha) and 11,200 streams (over 68,000 km) within the state. The 3 major basins (Mississippi River, Lake Michigan, and Lake Superior) were further divided into 30 minor basins.

The last report on the distribution of fish species throughout the state was made by C. W. Greene (1935) for the 1900-31 period. He covered about 1,400 sampling stations. Since then, other collectors, notably Dr. George Becker (1959, 1964a, 1964b, 1966, 1983), Professor Marlin Johnson (Johnson and Becker 1970), and the students at the University of Wisconsin at Madison (including McNaught 1963) and Stevens Point, have added appreciably to knowledge of regional distribution of Wisconsin fishes.

The need to update our knowledge of statewide fish distribution is most clearly evident from the dearth of information available on nongame species in most watersheds for preparing environmental impact assessments and reports and department master plans. In addition, both federal and state law now require the establishment of an endangered and threatened species list. Furthermore, the Wisconsin DNR has been directed to "conduct research on endangered and threatened species of this state and shall implement programs directed at conserving, protecting, restoring, and propagating selected state endangered and threatened species to the maximum extent practicable" (Chap. 29.415, Wis. Statutes).

Field collecting under the research study initiated in 1974 was essentially terminated in 1980 due to reduced funding, with only limited sampling after that time. Of the 30 river basins in the state, sampling has now been completed in 17 and nearly completed in 1. Only scattered samples were taken in the other 12 basins. These samples inventoried about 45% of the state.

The results of the work so far completed on fish distribution are being published in a series of separate bulletins dealing with one or more minor basins. The following reports are now available: Greater Rock River basin (Fago 1982), Black, Trempealeau, and Buffalo river basins (Fago 1983), Red Cedar River basin (Fago 1984a), Root, Milwaukee, Des Plaines, and Fox river basins (Fago 1984c), Grant & Platte, Coon & Bad Axe, and La Crosse river basins (Fago 1985a), and Sheboygan, Manitowoc, and Twin river basins (Fago 1985b). The bulk of the data presented refers primarily to collections made during the Bureau of Research study. However, other fishery biologists and managers have made numerous collections over the years, and their published and unpublished records,

when available to us, are included. Therefore, data from as early as 1900 are available for some basins, permitting comparisons between historical and current records.

This series of reports, however, constitutes only an overview of a voluminous mass of data now permanently stored in computer files. For the field manager or investigator, the greatest value of this study lies in the availability of fish data on specific waters or on waters in close proximity to those of immediate concern. Data now in computer files (over 17,000 collections) have already, in over 300 cases, proven to be very useful to DNR personnel in several bureaus and to other state and federal agencies, environmental consultants, and students. They have used the data for various purposes; e.g., to make assessments on past as well as potential changes in the aquatic environment, indicate water quality through fish species composition, and determine ranges in Wisconsin for particular fish species.

Sufficient data were collected during the research study to recommend the revision of Wisconsin's endangered and threatened fish species lists in 1979 and again in 1982. The first revision added 15 species to both lists and removed 3 from the endangered list. The second revision added 2 to the endangered list, and removed 1 from the endangered and 3 from the threatened list.

The bulk of the preserved fish collections are curated at the Milwaukee Public Museum, further enhancing the value and significance of this study. There they are used by scientists and educators interested in taxonomy, systematics, and natural history. They also are serving as a baseline collection from which to determine changes in fish community structure and environmental loads of pollutants and toxicants.

This report deals with the St. Croix River basin.