

FLATHEAD CATFISH - *Pylodictis olivaris*

Range – Originally known from large rivers of Mississippi, Missouri and Ohio basins and south into Mexico. Native to New Mexico east of the Continental Divide; introduced widely in Arizona and now found throughout the United States. Flatheads are found mainly in large rivers and their major tributaries. They prefer long, slow-flowing, moderately-turbid streams. Adult flatheads are solitary and spend most of their time in deep water near cover such as log jams or fallen trees.

Food Habits - Flatheads are predatory fish and will consume bass, bream, shad, crayfish and often feed on other catfish. The young rely more extensively on aquatic insects and crayfish than do the adults. Large flatheads sometime congregate where food is plentiful such as near tailraces of dams. They often feed at the surface or in shallow water at night, returning to their residence in a hole or brush pile to rest during the day. They rarely eat dead or decaying matter.

Life History - Spawning occurs in late spring when water temperatures reach 70 to 80 degrees. One or both parents excavate the nest that is usually made in a natural cavity or near a large submerged object. Females lay a golden-yellow mass of up to 100,000 eggs. The nest is guarded and the eggs are agitated by the male to keep them clean and aerated. The young remain in a school near the nest for several days after hatching, but soon disperse.

Life Span - Although flatheads have been aged by biologists to 19 years, the species is probably capable, based on its maximum size of about 56 inches, of living much longer. They grow faster than any other catfish except blue.

Sporting Qualities - Extremely strong fighters. Their solitary lifestyle, however, makes them more difficult to catch than other catfish. They bite best at night while in shallow water looking for food. To catch flatheads, anglers typically fish on the bottom using heavy tackle with live or freshly cut fish. Trotlines are effective in catching this species. The species is highly regarded as a food fish when taken from clean water. The meat is white, firm, and flaky, with an excellent taste.

Threats – Pollution and habitat loss.