

FOR FISHING STUDY...

MSU Focuses on the Lost Art of Grabbling

By Karen Brasher

Mississippi State University scientists are researching why some fishing enthusiasts risk personal injury reaching into a dark, underwater hole to grab a fish instead of using the traditional hook-and-line method.

Grabbling, or noodling, is a form of angling often referred to as a lost art. The tradition is handed down through the generations, and only a handful of individuals participate each year. Wading in water close to the bank, grabblers place their hands into holes in search of fish that will bite their hands. Grabblers are expecting large catfish, but they may find turtles, snakes or some other water-loving creatures inhabiting the hole and clamping down on their hands.

These people do not necessarily love pain or the thrill of facing the unknown. They are simply in search of a trophy catfish — the size that can leave scars.

“Grabblers are definitely a unique breed of anglers,” said Kevin Hunt, associate professor in MSU’s Forest and Wildlife Research Center. “Grabbling does not require a special license in the state of Mississippi, other than a sport-fishing license, so little is known about this group of anglers.”

To understand the attitudes of grabblers, compared with hook-and-line anglers, a new MSU study is looking for these individuals to determine their characteristics. The study will conclude around the end of December.

“We are hoping to find grabblers to participate in the study to identify why they hand grabble for various catfishes, how often they do so, their attitudes toward fishing and fisheries management, and how they differ from traditional hook-and-line recreational anglers,” said Susan Baker, a wildlife and fisheries graduate student conducting the study.

Few studies have been conducted on grabblers in the United States and how they differ from traditional hook-and-line anglers, especially since only 11 states allow the sport, Baker added.

Mississippi is one of the few states that does not restrict the number of fish caught or place a limit on the size of fish when hand grabbling. The season runs from May 1 to July 15, when catfish are spawning.

Finding grabblers can be a challenge. Grabblers interested in taking part in the study can contact Baker at (662) 325-4153 or sfb48@msstate.edu. Those interested also can provide contact information through the Web site <https://hdclcl.org/grabbler/grabbler.asp>.

“The information gained through this study will provide fishery managers with a better understanding of the social aspects of hand grabbling,” Baker said. “Grabblers interested in the study also are encouraged to find others to participate.”

The study is completely voluntary, and information will be kept confidential. Participants will be provided with an executive summary of study results upon completion.



Jim Lytle