

MO Smallmouth Alliance Forms Blue Ribbon Advisory Panel *Group Aims to Create World-Class Smallmouth Fishing in Ozarks*

The Missouri Smallmouth Alliance (MSA), a conservation-based angling organization formed here in Missouri in 1992, is concerned with improving the quality of the state's Smallmouth Bass fishing, particularly within its Ozark stream fisheries. To this end, the MSA has recently formed a Blue Ribbon Advisory Panel (BRAP) comprised of approximately 20 seasoned Smallmouth anglers including individuals from its general membership, fishing guides, canoe outfitters and outdoor writers as well as others concerned with the future of stream Bronzeback fishing in the state.

Since its inception, the MSA and its membership have been advocates of the voluntary catch-and-release of Smallmouth Bass, as well as strong supporters of quality-based fisheries regulations focused on producing more and larger Bronzebucks. Unfortunately, stream habitat degradation, naturally higher fish mortality and relatively low annual growth rates of Smallmouth Bass in our Ozark creeks and rivers combine to make these wild fisheries extremely vulnerable to angler over-harvest. Average fish sizes and the overall number of Smallmouth Bass available for anglers to pursue both suffer greatly when stream fisheries are not appropriately managed through regulations reflective of these conditions.

Undoubtedly, Missourians are blessed with a multitude of outstandingly beautiful creeks and streams which support healthy, self-sustaining populations of Smallmouth Bass under current fisheries management practices. However, the Missouri Smallmouth Alliance is concerned that the state's stream fisheries are not being managed with regulations that are necessarily conducive to producing significant numbers of quality (15- to 18-inch) and/or trophy (fish measuring 20 inches or above) Smallmouth Bass. Certainly, in those areas with suitable habitat there exist an adequate number of fish in our streams, but their average sizes are severely lacking due to a variety of factors including outmoded fisheries management practices, in the view of the MSA. The group plans to address this situation and to offer potential solutions designed to increase the opportunity for anglers to catch more and larger Smallmouth Bass in Missouri's waterways.

In its work, the Blue Ribbon panel will explore numerous fisheries management issues including Missouri's statewide regulations for stream Smallmouth Bass, including the minimum length (12 inches) and creel limit (6 black bass) – both regulations have been in place for greater than 30 years. The group will also examine the status of the various Special Smallmouth Bass Management Areas, which the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) has successfully established on twelve Ozark streams and, importantly, it will explore the prospect for the program's expansion and/or modification going forward. Other fisheries management topics will also be discussed including poaching and law enforcement, illegal giggering of sport fish, the need for additional angler education, etc.

The advisory panel will engage in an ongoing dialog with the MDC on these and other topics with a plan of proposing various fisheries management regulations changes for the Conservation Department to consider in the future. The Blue Ribbon group's ultimate goal is to "Help Create World-Class Smallmouth Bass Fishing" here in Missouri similar to the outstanding Bronzeback angling enjoyed in many other states. MSA believes that Missouri's stream fisheries are indeed capable of producing a far greater number of larger Smallmouth Bass. It is MSA's hope to see their vision become reality here in the Ozarks.

For more information on The Missouri Smallmouth Alliance or on the Blue Ribbon Advisory Panel, contact its organizer, Dan Kreher at dankreher@yahoo.com.

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The Missouri Smallmouth Alliance (MSA) is a non-profit organization comprised of approximately 250 concerned anglers who recognize the outstanding sporting characteristics of Missouri's native Smallmouth Bass. Founded in the St. Louis area in 1992, MSA is focused on fisheries habitat, conservation and angling issues. For more information, please visit its website at www.smallmouth.org and click on the Missouri Smallmouth Alliance link.