



Fisheries Research Fact Sheet

Engaging North Carolina's Trout Anglers and Other Stakeholders to Help Conserve Eastern Hellbenders

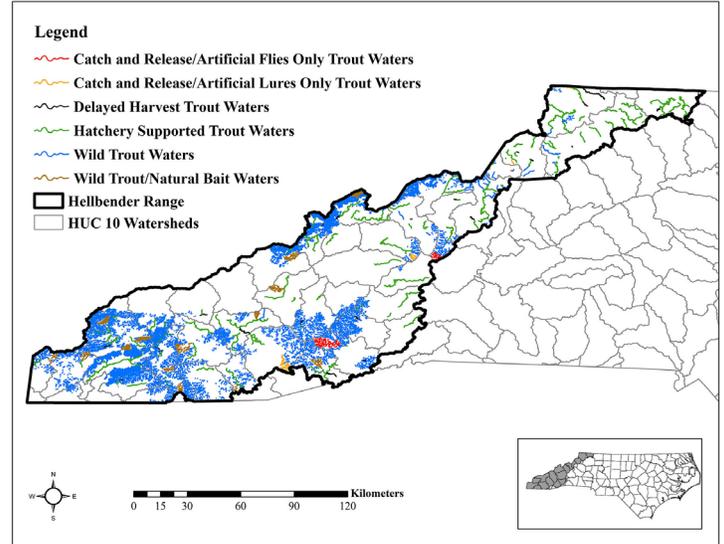
March 2019



The [eastern hellbender salamander](#) (*Cryptobranchus alleganiensis alleganiensis*) is large, aquatic salamander that has experienced historic declines across its entire range. As a result, it is a protected species of concern in North Carolina. Although the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC) and partners have worked to improve understanding of hellbender status in the state, not all hellbender populations have been accounted for. However, the hellbender's dependence upon clean, cold, well-oxygenated water restricts its distribution to North Carolina's mountains, overlapping much of the state's trout fisheries ([NCWRC Public Mountain Trout Waters](#)). This overlap presented an opportunity for the NCWRC to reach out to trout anglers about hellbender conservation, while also offering a chance to increase understanding about the distribution of hellbenders thanks to anglers' help.

Methods:

- In 2013, an advertisement within the Public Mountain Trout Waters' portion of the North Carolina Inland Fishing, Hunting and Trapping Regulations Digest initiated direct outreach on hellbender conservation needs to trout anglers
- Other NCWRC outreach efforts also occurred from summer 2007–summer 2017 with a variety of stakeholders (anglers, recreationists, and landowners)
 - * This included posters, streamside signage, in-person programming and information tables, popular articles, and a nine-minute online documentary



Map depicting overlap of Public Mountain Trout Waters and Eastern Hellbenders

ATTENTION TROUT ANGLERS



Did you know Eastern Hellbenders (aka "water dogs") are harmless, non-venomous, giant, crayfish-eating, aquatic salamanders that are indicators of good water quality and healthy streams? Did you know that thriving, diverse fish populations and healthy hellbender populations go hand in hand?

The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission wants to conserve this amazing creature and needs your help. **If you accidentally**

catch a hellbender on hook and line, please immediately release the animal at the spot of capture by carefully removing the hook or cutting the line as close as possible to the hook.

Water dogs need your help!

Find a hellbender? Let us know!
Call 919-707-0050 so we can map their distribution.
THANKS!

Advertisement in North Carolina Inland Fishing, Hunting and Trapping Regulations Digest since 2013.



Results:

- 207 hellbender encounter reports from stakeholders, with 127 directly from anglers
- Data represent observations in 56 streams across 17 counties
- Seven reports from waters that lacked previous knowledge of hellbender occurrence!
- Reports originated both from private (n = 117) and public land (n = 90)

Much work remains relative to hellbender conservation, but this project demonstrated the value in exploring resource overlaps and ways to engage a diverse group of stakeholders to promote conservation messages that benefit a multitude of species. For more information on this topic please visit the March 2019 full-length article in the [Journal of the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies](#).

Anglers, please continue to keep an eye out for hellbenders when you are on the stream and share your observations with the NCWRC. Thank you for all of your help thus far, and remember when it comes to habitat, what helps hellbenders...helps trout (and vice versa)!

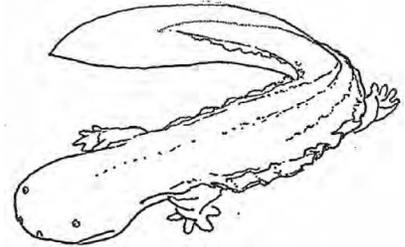
For more information:

Lori Williams, Wildlife Diversity Biologist
(828) 712-9117, lori.williams@ncwildlife.org

Jacob Rash, Coldwater Research Coordinator
(828) 803-6033, jacob.rash@ncwildlife.org

ATTENTION ANGLERS

Please help us monitor Eastern Hellbenders ("water dogs")



These harmless, nonvenomous, giant salamanders, are indicators of good water quality, and as a state **Special Concern Species**, are **protected**.

If you spot a hellbender:

- Please report sightings at 1-828-712-9117

If you catch a hellbender on hook and line:

- Please immediately release the animal at the spot of capture by
 - carefully removing the hook if possible or
 - cutting the line as close as possible

Report violations at 1-800-662-7137

Visit the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission at www.ncwildlife.org for more information



Hellbender in net (Photo: Taylor Stanley)

