Concern regarding the impact of catfish on the Pike Lake Chain The following explanation was received from Jeff Scheirer (Fishery Biologist) WDNR In the early outreach to inform a decision on whether to build a nature-like fishway that would reconnect the ecosystems in the South Fork Flambeau River and the Pike Lake Chain, WDNR and U.S. Forest Service staff heard a citizen's concern about the potential impacts of catfish on the more highly regarded sportfish populations in the Chain. A handful of survey records show that channel catfish are already present in the Pike Lake Chain at trace levels of abundance, but we found no useful information to describe catfish population status in the river. So in late July and again in late August 2017, WDNR's Fishery Team fished five hoop-nets baited with soymeal at nine deep-water sites in the South Fork Flambeau between its origin at the Round Lake Dam and the canoe landing on Sugar Bush Road about 20 river miles downstream. Our 37 net-nights of survey effort yielded 19 channel catfish that were 18 – 32 inches long. Not all river pools produced catfish—the two upstream- and downstream-most nets accounted for 95% of the catch. Our low catch rate (0.5 catfish per net-night) indicated low population abundance. By comparison, baited hoop-nets captured on average 18 channel catfish per net-night in 17 Upper Wisconsin River surveys (2005 – 2012) and 1.5 channel catfish per net-night in five St. Croix River surveys (2011 – 2015). In our small sample from the South Fork Flambeau River 63% of the catfish were 24 inches or longer, compared to 13% attaining that size in the Upper Wisconsin River surveys and 15% in the St. Croix River surveys. Fishery publications on catfish diets consistently show that channel catfish are omnivorous and that they did not select or prefer specific foods over others available to them. Based on their low abundance in both the river and the Chain, as well as their habit to eat a broad variety of food, we do not anticipate that channel catfish will adversely affect sportfish populations by direct predation or indirect competition, if a nature-like fishway were to be installed at the Round Lake Dam. Instead, we expect that if a fishway is constructed, channel catfish and other aquatic species will once again move freely in both directions between the Chain and the river to restore the dynamics of the fish, mussel, and wildlife communities that evolved in this system.