

# Freshwater Drum Reintroductions in the French Broad River

by Dr. Luke Etchison

Biologists with the Western Region of the Aquatic Wildlife Diversity Program started a reintroduction project aimed at restoring Freshwater Drum populations in the upper French Broad River. Freshwater Drum are one of many fish species that are found in the lower French Broad River that are currently unable to occupy their former native range further upstream. A combination of past water quality issues and three dams on the mainstem French Broad, all of which are located downstream of Asheville, has prevented the fish from returning to large portions of the watershed that they once inhabited.

Reintroduction of species like the Freshwater Drum into its historical range will improve mussel populations by establishing

an important host fish for many imperiled mussel species. For example, Freshwater Drum are the only known fish host for the



*Freshwater Drum from the French Broad River near Marshall, NC (Dr. Luke Etchison)*

recently discovered Pink Heelsplitter. The Pink Heelsplitter is a rare freshwater mussel species and is proposed as Special Concern in North Carolina. The Pink Heelsplitter is only found where Freshwater Drum occur and they have a limited distribution in the Madison County portion of the French Broad River.

This spring, 109 Freshwater Drum were collected by Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency in the French Broad River and Nolichucky River sections of Douglas Reservoir in Tennessee and were translocated to the upper French Broad River near Etowah, NC. Each Freshwater Drum translocated to the upper French Broad was implanted with Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) tags to evaluate survival and growth of recaptured individuals. PIT tags will also help evaluate the use of restored slough habitats near Mud Creek. The sloughs are outfitted with PIT tag antennas and will detect the tagged Freshwater Drum if they enter the habitat. Biologists will begin long-term monitoring this summer to evaluate survival and establishment of this reintroduced species.



*Freshwater Drum collected at Douglas Reservoir, TN (Dr. Luke Etchison)*



*Pink Heelsplitter from the French Broad River near Hot Springs, NC. (Dr. Luke Etchison)*