

# MSU: Better accounting needed for freshwater fish

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(Photo: Janet Jensen , AP )

*East Lansing* — In a world whose ocean fish are being steadily depleted by over-harvesting, too little attention is being paid to the ability of fresh water bodies to provide fish for human consumption, Michigan State University scientists said.

So-Jung Youn, a graduate student in Michigan State's Center for Systems Integration and Sustainability, led a study of how governments around the world account for fresh water fishing as part of their analysis of food production.

Youn says there is little effort to account for the results of commercial and recreational fishing on inland waters. That's in contrast to ocean fishing, where authorities have much better record-keeping and monitoring.

"All over the world there are people catching fish to feed themselves and their families," said Youn. "Individually it may not seem like much, but it adds up to a significant amount of food, and it's a perspective people too often forget."

The scientists report on their finding in this month's edition of the journal *Global Food Security*.

Worldwide, only 156 of the 230-plus countries and territories reported their inland capture fisheries production to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in 2010, the study found. It found that those that did report have "inaccurate and grossly underestimated data," according to Michigan State.

When accurately assessed, the amount of freshwater fish caught could equal the current amount of marine fish caught, the researchers found.

One result of this under-accounting for fresh water fishing is that planning for projects such as dams and river diversions don't adequately account for the effects they might have on food security, the researchers said.

"It's not a question of whether we should stop using water for other purposes, but we need to consider what harms are being created, and if they can be mitigated," Youn said. "People are losing jobs and important sources of food because fish habitats are being degraded, greatly reducing fish production in these waters."

Michigan State fisheries professor William Taylor said the lesson is that people who fish or eat fish from inland waters need to be considered when water projects are planned.

"Right now, society looks at water and rarely sees or values the fish within," Taylor said. "As such, society often unwittingly uses the water and the land in ways that negatively impact fish habitat, ultimately affecting fish production and distribution."

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