

POSSIBLE CHANGES TO REGULATIONS FOR FISH REFUGES

The department would like to remove the designation of Gumtree Cove, located in Nanjemoy River, as a fish refuge. Removing the designation will increase fishing access and opportunities in Nanjemoy River. This idea is supported by the Black Bass Advisory Subcommittee.

There was a time when Gumtree Cove was considered a valuable place for spawning by largemouth bass because of the atypical development of a temporary bed of submerged aquatic vegetation. A fish refuge was established at Gumtree Cove in Nanjemoy River to protect largemouth bass during the spawning season (March 1 — June 15). The intended outcome was to create a more productive black bass fishery in the area. When an area is designated as a fish refuge, a person may not enter, remain in, or catch or attempt to catch fish in that area. Each year, a portion of Gumtree Cove (~0.34 km²) is marked with buoys by the department to ensure that everyone knows that the area is closed.

As the bed of submerged aquatic vegetation naturally declined in size, the use of the cove by largemouth bass also declined. Unfortunately, after many surveys by the department, no largemouth bass have been collected during the spring spawning season in that area. Attempts have been made to improve the refuge by using artificial structures, but have not resulted in increased use of Gumtree Cove. Therefore, retaining Gumtree Cove as a refuge for largemouth bass is no longer meaningful as a means of creating or sustaining a more productive black bass fishery. Currently the principal fishes collected from the cove include gizzard shad and longnose gar.

This idea has been presented to stakeholders at various black bass roundtables and most recently, the Black Bass Advisory Subcommittee. In a series of meetings during 2016-2017, the subcommittee considered the value of such refuges and the majority opinion was that evidence does not convincingly warrant use of such areas in tidal waters.

Because the fish refuge (a) is an expense to the state due to the staff time and department resources required to maintain the marking of the refuge, (b) reduces access by the general public, and (c) does not act as a refuge for largemouth bass, the department is considering the removal of Gumtree Cove as a fish refuge.

Additional Information: Code of Maryland Regulations [08.02.17.01](#)