



Fishing for American and Hickory Shad

By DNR Biologist, Dale Weinrich

[American and hickory shad](#) are members of the clupeid or herring family of fishes. Life history characteristics of both species are similar in most respects but some differences exist between the two. Each is anadromous, spending most of their lives at sea and only returning to freshwater to spawn as mature adults. Spawning migrations for both species are triggered by changes in water temperature and photoperiod. Hickory shad

generally precede their larger cousins to Maryland waters, arriving by late February or early March. Although their runs generally peak by mid to late April spawning may continue into mid-May. American shad arrive in state waters by mid-March with numbers peaking by mid-May. Spawning, however, may extend into June. Both species are broadcast spawners, a female being followed by several males who fertilize the eggs as they are released into the water column. It is during their spawning migrations that Maryland anglers have a chance to catch these hard fighting individuals.

A moratorium on the possession of both American and hickory shad is currently in place for all portions of Maryland's Chesapeake Bay. However catch and release fishing is permitted and recent restoration efforts in several of the state's river systems are providing excellent angling opportunities. On the eastern shore, the Choptank River at Red Bridges (off Md route 313) is providing good action for hickory shad with an occasional American shad thrown in. Downstream, anglers can fish the Choptank in Greensboro either from shore or they can utilize the boat ramp to find more solitude. [Tuckahoe Creek](#), a tributary to the Choptank, provides shad angling opportunities as it flows through Tuckahoe State Park at Crouse Mill dam and downstream to Hillsboro. A boat ramp in Hillsboro provides additional access to small craft on this slow moving but productive eastern shore stream. Shad anglers visiting the eastern shore may want to try Marshyhope Creek. Access is good at Federalsburg for both bank and boat anglers and recent stockings of larval shad over the past few years should provide good numbers of returning adults. Over on the western shore, anglers may want to check out the stretch of the Patuxent River from Route 4 at [Wayson's Corner](#) upstream to [Queen Anne's Bridge](#) off Route 214. Hickory shad predominate angler catches in this southern Maryland system but American shad numbers are increasing. Although not under Maryland jurisdiction the Potomac River at Fletcher's Boat House in Washington, DC provides excellent opportunities to catch both American and hickory shad. Located off Canal Road this popular area can be fished from shore or boats can be rented from the nearby concession. Remember, this area is under DC control so Maryland regulations do not apply. Hickory shad enthusiasts should give the Gunpowder River a definite look see. The area from US Route 40 north to the fall line has proven to be excellent for this species during the past few seasons. Access through Gunpowder State Park at the Jones Road parking lot puts anglers within a short walking distance of this productive river. The Susquehanna River was historically one of the most important American and hickory shad river systems on the east coast. Ongoing restoration and conservation efforts are proving very successful as noted in recent angler success for both species. The tailrace section immediately below [Conowingo Dam](#) may provide the best angling for both American and hickory shad along the entire east coast. Shore access to the tailrace area is provided at the Exelon Corporation's Fisherman's Park located just off US Route 1. This area can be quite crowded but for those anglers willing to put up with other fishermen, the rewards can be quite substantial. Recent catches of 100 shad per day are not uncommon. If less crowded conditions are more suitable to your angling tastes, try walking downstream from Fisherman's Park along the scenic trail or upstream from [Susquehanna State Park](#). The overhanging trees make casting more difficult in this area, but for those willing to fight the vegetation the rewards can be worth the aggravation. And check out the mouth of [Deer Creek](#) especially for early season hickory shad. The boat ramp at the Lapidum section of the Susquehanna

State Park is a modern facility that offers excellent access to those wishing to fish, historically, some very productive "shad holes" only accessible by boat. Deer Creek is a major tributary to the lower Susquehanna River. From its confluence with the river upstream through Susquehanna State Park anglers have the opportunity to fish for hickory shad in one of Maryland's most scenic streams. Access is good as Deer Creek flows through the park and crowds can be diminished for those anglers willing to walk upstream.

These are only some of the angling opportunities available for American and hickory shad. As the Fisheries Service expands its hatchery restoration efforts and natural reproduction and recolonization continues stocks for both species in other systems throughout the state will increase, providing additional angling opportunities for these two outstanding species.