

Black Bass

Annual Review

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MARYLAND



MARYLAND
DEPARTMENT OF
NATURAL RESOURCES

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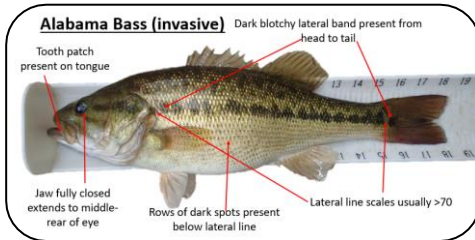
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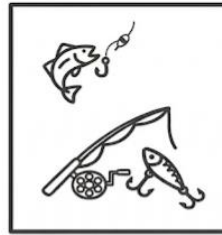
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Reglas de Pesca (en Español)

Fishing and Boating Services | 580 Taylor Ave B-2 | Annapolis, MD 21401

In Maryland: 410-260-8257 | Out of state: 877-620-8367
TTY Users call via the Maryland relay.

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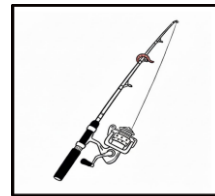
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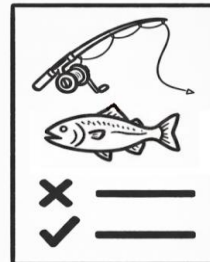
Fishing Report



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Fishing Guide and Regulations



Karon Hickman with a nice Largemouth Bass from the Patapsco River

Protecting Maryland Waters: The Threat of Invasive Alabama Bass

Maryland’s aquatic ecosystems face a possible threat from the Alabama bass (*Micropterus henshalli*), an invasive species that has been illegally introduced into several lakes and rivers throughout the southeastern U.S., including neighboring Virginia. Although these fish are native to Georgia and Alabama, they have spread to various Virginia waters, including Lake Gaston, the James River, and the Chickahominy River, likely through unauthorized introductions by anglers. Fortunately, Alabama bass has not yet been detected in Maryland, and the Department of Natural Resources is working diligently to ensure the state remains free of this invasive species.



Alabama bass has an upper jaw mandible that extends to the rear middle of the eye and a blotchy, dark band along their side. Largemouth bass has a jaw that extends past the rear edge of the eye. Images courtesy of iNaturalist and Duane Raver (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service).

The introduction of Alabama bass poses a serious risk to Maryland’s fisheries. A 20-year study of Lake Norman, North Carolina, found significant impacts after the introduction of Alabama bass on established largemouth bass populations. Following their discovery in 2000, Alabama bass rapidly expanded throughout the reservoir’s main channel, leading to a dramatic decline in largemouth bass abundance. While

largemouth bass remained more prevalent in creek and cove habitats, they were effectively outcompeted in the main channel, where their population was predicted to reach near-zero levels in certain zones. This research serves as a cautionary example of how non-native species can permanently alter the composition and equilibrium of native fisheries.

Examples like Lake Norman are being observed in other locations across the southeast. Alabama bass are altering existing largemouth and smallmouth bass populations by outcompeting them for resources or hybridizing, often reducing the number or size of fish. To protect our fisheries, it is strictly illegal to purchase or possess Alabama bass in Maryland, and stocking any fish into public waters without a state permit remains a prohibited offense in both Maryland and Virginia.

Identifying Alabama bass is critical for early detection, though they closely resemble largemouth bass. Key physical indicators include a jaw that lines up with the middle rear of the eye, whereas a largemouth bass’s jaw extends past the eye. Additionally, Alabama bass feature a dark, blotchy lateral band from head to tail accompanied by well-defined rows of spots below that band, markings that are typically less distinct in largemouth bass.



Three sizes of Alabama bass as evidenced by the distinct blotchy, dark bands along their sides and jaws that extend to rear middle of their eyes

Anglers play a vital role in protecting Maryland’s waters by remaining vigilant and reporting suspicious catches. If you believe you have caught an Alabama bass, please take a clear photo and report it to Maryland’s Invasive Species Tracker or contact Ryan Gary at 410-260-8911. For further questions, or to report wildlife crimes, you may reach the Tidal Bass Program at ryan.gary@maryland.gov or call the Wildlife Crime Stoppers at 443-433-4112.

Live-imaging Sonar Research from MLF’s Bass Pro Tour

As part of a collaborative effort between the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and Major League Fishing (MLF), researchers recently investigated the influence of live-imaging Sonar (LIS) on tournament angling. This technology allows anglers to view fish and underwater structures in real-time, possibly allowing for competitive advantages during bass fishing events.

During MLF’s Bass Pro Tour events in 2025, professional anglers were limited to using LIS for one of the three fishing periods throughout the day. This allowed researchers to compare periods when LIS technology was used to periods when it was not. The study focused on whether anglers were catching more and larger fish during these periods, and what habitats LIS was most likely to be successful in. The goal of this research was to determine if LIS increased catch rates by anglers.

Results showed that LIS increased catch rates, sometimes substantially, in some fisheries but had no effect on others. Additionally, seven of the eight events studied saw no change in the size of fish caught, suggesting that between professional anglers LIS does not offer an advantage to catching larger fish. When

looking at habitat, fish caught using LIS were more likely to be in deeper, more open water versus shallow, complex structures like vegetation or docks. These results suggest that fisheries that are deeper with less structure may be more conducive to increased angler success using LIS, while shallower fisheries with more cover may mitigate the advantage of the technology.



A screenshot of the display screen from live-imaging sonar showing a school of fish on submerged timber.

This collaborative study between Maryland DNR and MLF provides a baseline understanding how LIS may affect the success of anglers across different fisheries. The findings emphasize that while LIS can provide an advantage to anglers, its long-term effects on fish populations require ongoing monitoring. These insights will help fishery managers develop adaptive regulations that balance technological innovation with the need to maintain sustainable and productive fisheries in Maryland and the rest of the country.

If you’re interested in learning more about this study, contact Ryan Gary at ryan.gary@maryland.gov or tune in to a recent podcast interview of this study with Ryan on the [Serious Angler Podcast](#).

What Do YOU Think?

What do you want to read more about? [Click here to fill out our online survey](#). You can also email ryan.gary@maryland.gov or call 410-260-8911.

Maryland's Tidal Bass Stocking Program

Since the early 1980s, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources has stocked more than six million fish to bolster tidal bass fisheries throughout the state. This initiative aims to supplement established populations and enhance opportunities for Maryland anglers. The process begins each April with the collection of broodstock, followed by the release of young fish into tidal rivers from May through early November.

Each spring, as water temperatures rise, fisheries biologists collect largemouth bass from the Potomac River to spawn at the Joseph Manning Hatchery at Cedarville State Forest. Typically following a ratio of two to three males for each female, approximately 20 to 30 bass are collected. These broodstock are moved into hatchery ponds where they spawn and the young are in a predator-free environment. Once the young bass have consumed their yolk sacs, the built-in nutrient source they are born with, the adult broodstock are removed from the ponds and returned to their original collection sites on the Potomac River.



A hatchery pond that has not yet been filled. The wooden structures are spawning boxes that are filled with gravel substrate for the females to build nests and lay their eggs.

Oftentimes, conditions outside the hatchery's control determine the number of fry (newly hatched bass typically less than an inch long) produced. Success depends on variables like temperature, the timing of the

spawn, and the quantity of zooplankton available for the fry to eat. In years like 2025, when conditions are near perfect, the Manning Hatchery ponds can produce substantially more fry than can be raised to larger target sizes. The extra fry are the first fish to be stocked during the year, sent to specific areas of Maryland's tidal waters with the best juvenile habitat to support their survival. By stocking large amounts of young fish in prime habitats, we can efficiently supplement black bass populations in areas where they are most likely to thrive. In 2025, prime habitat areas in the Potomac and Patuxent rivers were stocked with 40,000 fry.



Bass that were raised in hatchery ponds in the two-to-four-inch range being stocked in quality habitat in Marshyhope Creek.

Fish that are not stocked in May either remain in hatchery ponds or are moved to large indoor tanks, depending on the targeted stocking size. Fish raised in hatchery ponds are typically grown to an average size of two to four inches. These fish have an increased probability of survival compared to fry but still require stocking in locations with quality habitat. They are typically released in June when they reach their target size and aquatic vegetation in tidal fisheries is more abundant. In 2025, over 26,000 fish of this size were stocked into the Nanticoke, Choptank, Potomac, Wicomico, and Patapsco rivers, as well as Marshyhope Creek.

Fish moved to indoor tanks have a target size of four inches or greater and are typically released in October or early

November because of the additional time and feeding required to reach these larger sizes. These fish are raised with the help of a bead filter, which maintains water quality and allows a high density of fish to grow in tanks that are significantly smaller than the hatchery ponds. These larger fish have the highest chance of survival and can be stocked in fisheries that may lack high-quality juvenile habitat but can support quality fisheries due to abundant forage and adult habitat. In 2025, 4,375 of these fish were stocked in the Middle, Choptank, and Patapsco rivers, as well as Marshyhope and Tuckahoe creeks.



A net full of fish that were raised in the Fall in the indoor tanks to a target size 4+ inches. These fish were stocked in the Choptank River.

As the target size for stocking increases, the time and food required to reach that goal also increases. This results in a trade-off between the number of fish and the size of fish that can be stocked. The decision on where, when, and what size to stock is determined by available habitat and results from the Tidal Bass Survey, the department's survey monitoring the long-term health and trends of our tidal bass fisheries. Choosing the stocking locations and the size of fish to be stocked by habitat ensures that stocked fish have the highest chance of survival to be caught by anglers. Additionally, prioritizing fisheries that may be in most need for stocking according to the results from the Tidal Bass Survey also ensures that fisheries that most need supplemental stocking receive fish, ensuring that Maryland anglers fishing for bass in our tidal rivers get the most bang for their buck.

MANAGEMENT

Black Bass Advisory Committee

The [Black Bass Advisory Committee](#) is an appointed public stakeholder group that advises the department on management needs for black bass fisheries in the state. In 2025, they:

- Discussed and suggested improvements to several infrastructure projects of key fishing access for black bass anglers.
- Worked with the department to develop a black bass tournament survey to gather data on the strategies and permit requirements tournament organizations are using during hot weather months when bass mortality is generally higher.
- Members and guests provided several presentations including those on the pros and cons of Catch-Weigh-Release tournaments as well as the status of tidal and non-tidal black bass fisheries in the state.



Spanky Vinson with one of the many smallmouth bass he caught on a fishing trip to the Upper Potomac River



All meetings are currently held virtually by webinar. Meeting dates in 2026: April 13; July 6, and October 5; all meetings start at 6:00 pm. Click the calendar for more information.

Black Bass Fishery Assessments

The Tidal Bass Survey uses boat electrofishing to sample largemouth bass during the fall. Data are used to assess the status of the population in the Chesapeake Bay’s tidal rivers.

Location	Bass Collected	Juveniles Collected	Fishery Status
Potomac River	454	268	Stable
Upper Bay	150	82	Stable
Middle River	13	4	Unknown
Choptank River	59	11	Stable
Gunpowder River	30	3	Rebuilding
Bush River	23	4	Unknown

Potomac River

A total of 454 largemouth bass, including 268 juveniles, were collected. Forty-three of these fish (or 5.6 percent) showed signs of hooking injury or disease. Relative abundance or catch indices were normal. Anglers weighed between three and four bass per tournament fishing day (on average), which was the highest recorded since 2012. Reproduction was good and juveniles were caught at 80 percent of prime habitats, which was above average. Growth indices were normal for the population and annual mortality tended to be lower than average, suggesting good recruitment and survivorship. Because of generally average statistics, the status of this fishery was designated as Stable.

Upper Chesapeake Bay

A total of 150 largemouth bass, including 82 juveniles, were collected. Twenty of these fish (or 13.3 percent) showed signs of injury and/or disease. Relative abundance or catch indices were below the reference target for

the fishery. Eighty percent of high-quality habitats had juveniles and the total catch of juveniles was within the long-term average. Growth rate indices also tended to be lower than normal. As has been typical for the fishery, anglers weighed about two bass per tournament fishing day. Department biologists will continue to monitor the decrease in overall catch to identify any trends. Although overall catch was down, juvenile statistics indicate good reproduction and tournament reports indicate typical angler success, for that status of this fishery was designated as Stable.



Brody Matthew bidding farewell to largemouth bass he caught fishing from the bank on the Middle River

Middle River

A total of thirteen largemouth bass, including four juveniles, were collected. No fish collected showed signs of injury and/or disease. While low levels of catch for this population make it difficult for a robust assessment, this was the highest abundance metric recorded in the last eight years of sampling. This may be attributed to efforts led by Scott Sewell (Conservation Director, Maryland Bass Nation). Middle River has benefited from significant releases of department-approved, purchased and hatchery-reared bass. This river will likely remain a focus for supplemental stocking. Additionally, the average size of fish was larger than years past. Because a reference

dataset for comparison is on-going and not yet completed, the status of this fishery has been designated as Unknown.

Choptank River

A total of 59 largemouth bass, including 11 juveniles, were collected. Seven fish collected (or 5 percent) showed signs of injury and/or disease. Anglers weighed on average 1.75 bass per tournament fishing day, which is above average for the fishery. Relative abundance or catch indices were normal. Reproduction was average, and juveniles were caught at 23 percent of all high-quality habitats. Growth rate indices tended to be lower than average and size structure has shifted to an increased abundance of younger fish, likely a result of substantial stocking efforts in 2024 and 2025. Because of the average survey and angler catch statistics, as well average reproduction the fishery has been designated Stable.



Chase Evans caught his personal best largemouth bass fishing a local pond in Southern Maryland

Gunpowder River

A total of 30 largemouth bass, including 3 juveniles, were collected. Nine of these fish (or 30 percent) showed signs of injury and/or disease, the largest proportion observed in the 2025 survey. Catch indices were slightly above average, likely owing to significant stocking, while juveniles were only found at 16 percent of sites and had below average abundance. Anglers caught about 1.4 bass

per tournament fishing day, slightly below previous years. Growth rates tended to be average for the population. Because of above average catch statistics, likely owed to stocking, but below average growth and reproduction, the status of this fishery was designated as Rebuilding.

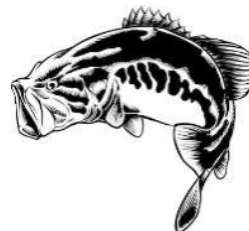


James Williams caught this bass fishing from the bank at Patapsco Valley State Park

Bush River

A total of 23 largemouth bass, including four juveniles, were collected. No fish collected showed signs of injury and/or disease. Catch indices had increased substantially in 2023 and 2024, but returned to average abundances in 2025. Juveniles were only found at 15 percent of sites in this survey; however, the abundance of juveniles was the highest observed since sampling began in 2018. Growth rates were similar to those observed for fish from Gunpowder River. Because a reference dataset for comparison is on-going and not yet completed, the status of this fishery has been designated as Unknown.

Black Bass Stocking



For more information about when and where black bass are stocked in Maryland visit the [stocking page on our website.](#)

Non-Tidal Bass Fisheries

Non-tidal black bass fisheries in Maryland stretch from Deep Creek Lake and Youghiogheny River in western Maryland to eastern shore farm ponds and impounded waters, such as Johnsons Pond and Tuckahoe Lake. In 2025, anglers sent more reports from impounded waters of southern Maryland and central Maryland than other areas. Additionally, the non-tidal Potomac River (or upper Potomac River) and Conowingo Reservoir boast the best smallmouth bass fisheries in Maryland.

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources' Freshwater Fisheries and Hatcheries Division follows a standardized operating protocol for surveying non-tidal waters. These procedures and the indices they generate help guide managers to take various actions that improve fishing for anglers. Learn more by visiting our [Division Webpage](#) at:

dnr.maryland.gov/fisheries/pages/inland.aspx



Cayla Beam with a largemouth bass she caught out of Marshyhope Creek

Conowingo Reservoir

Conowingo Reservoir is a robust bass fishery, as highlighted by survey results conducted in 2025. Smallmouth bass are the most abundant species and were captured at every sampling site. Abundance is high, and the population exhibits a well distributed size range. Their relative weights, which is a metric used to describe their weight-to-length ratio, were slightly below the desirable range. This was attributed to typical post-spawn conditions rather than poor health. largemouth bass also

showed improvement, reaching higher abundance levels than in previous years, though they remain about 50 percent less abundant than smallmouth bass. Additionally, collected largemouth bass showed optimal relative weights across all size classes. However, abundance is likely linked to challenges from inconsistent recruitment. High spring turbidity and a lack of submerged aquatic grasses, crucial habitat for juveniles, are likely to limit their survival. Across both species, external signs of disease remained low at 3–6 percent, although a notable portion of the population (14–19 percent) showed signs of hooking injuries.

Johnsons Pond

As one of the largest impoundments on the eastern shore, Johnsons Pond is also a productive largemouth bass fishery as evidenced by the most recent surveys. The population is characterized by high abundances, with suitable catch rates for all sizes of bass that have been increasing since surveys in 2017 and 2020. The size structure is particularly weighted toward larger fish, with a healthy percentage of the population exceeding 15 inches. The condition of fish was found to be optimal, reflecting an abundant forage base composed of shad and various sunfish species. Johnsons Pond has been managed under Trophy Bass Regulations since 1990. This allows for the possession of up to five bass per day, including one fish over 15 inches in length, while prohibiting the possession of fish within a 11-to-15-inch slot.

NEW TO BLACK BASS FISHING?

Unless you are exempt, **buy a fishing license**, online with [Maryland Outdoors](#), and learn [Fishing Regulations](#) for fishing black bass.

Find a rod with an artificial rubber worm, or borrow one from the [Tackle Loaner Program](#) at a library near you. Bass anglers use lots of artificial tackle and of all the bait types, rubber worms are probably the cheapest and most common.

Want to Watch or Fish a Bass Tournament?
[Click Here for the 2026 tournament schedule!](#)

Blairs Valley Lake

Blairs Valley Lake is a 24-acre impoundment located within Indian Springs Wildlife Management Area near Clear Spring, Maryland. Survey results in 2025 showed robust and healthy largemouth bass and sunfish populations. Catch rates for largemouth bass showed increased abundance across size classes from the prior survey in 2019. Additionally, 58 percent of the fish were greater than 300 millimeters in total length, showing an increase in larger fish as well. While the abundance increased from previous surveys, fish were found to be in optimal quality reflecting an adequate forage base of sunfish. Blairs Valley Lake currently provides desirable largemouth bass fishing opportunities with a variety of catchable size classes present.



Larry Tresslar caught this smallmouth bass on the Monocacy River during a cold winter day.

Prettyboy Reservoir

The most recent survey of Prettyboy Reservoir showed a high-quality black bass fishery where largemouth and smallmouth bass serve as co-dominant predators. Both species exhibit balanced size distributions, ensuring a healthy mix of fish sizes for anglers. Largemouth bass abundance increased from previous years, with multiple distinct age groups and a strong

presence of fish in the 11-to-14-inch range. While smallmouth bass are also abundant, particularly for larger size classes, recruitment of young smallmouth bass has been lower than previous years. Overall, with both species maintaining desirable size structures, Prettyboy Reservoir remains a great destination for black bass anglers in Maryland.



Eric Packard with a healthy largemouth bass he caught while fishing St. Mary's Lake in Southern Maryland.

Seneca Lake

Little Seneca Lake, also known as Black Hills Lake, is a 504-acre impoundment on Little Seneca Creek located within Black Hill Regional Park near Boyds, Maryland. Recent survey data show a high-quality population, with 25 percent of observed fish exceeding 12 inches, surpassing the statewide average. Additionally, the abundance of fish over 15 inches has reached its highest recorded level in 20 years. These larger bass exhibit optimal body condition, indicating a forage base that can sustain the population. Little Seneca Lake is managed under Trophy Bass Regulations, which prohibit the possession of fish within an 11-to-15-inch "slot" while allowing a daily limit of five bass, only one of which may exceed 15 inches.

2025 BLACK BASS SYMPOSIUM: SHAPING THE FUTURE OF NORTH AMERICA’S PREMIER GAMEFISH

For the third time in 75 years, fishery managers, researchers, industry leaders, and anglers gathered in San Antonio, Texas, for the Black Bass Symposium. Last held in St. Louis, Missouri, in August of 2000, the symposium serves as a forum for those invested in the management of one of North America’s most economically and recreationally important species. The four-day event focused on the present and future needs of black bass, with a primary emphasis on ecology, conservation, and management.

The first two days centered on technical research presentations delivered by fisheries biologists. These sessions were organized by themes, covering topics such as Trophy Bass Management, Bass Habitat Management, Black Bass Catch-and-Release, and Economic and Participatory Trends in Bass Fishing. Researchers from more than 20 states and several Canadian provinces shared a wide range of regional data and expertise. These presentations included research from Maryland Department of Natural Resource’s Tidal Bass Program and Major League Fishing regarding the use of live-imaging sonar in tournaments (detailed on page 2).

The third day was highlighted by keynote speakers ranging from accomplished researchers and professional anglers to executives from leading tackle companies. These speakers drew on their experiences to discuss the current state and future trajectory of black bass angling. Key topics included emerging and persistent threats to the species, the benefits and

drawbacks of advancing technology, and shifting cultural and economic drivers. These presentations were followed by panel discussions, allowing the attendees to contribute their thoughts in an open discussion designed to improve communication and understanding among all parties present.

The final day featured the Black Bass Summit, a unique addition to this third symposium. This summit brought participants together in small working groups to brainstorm solutions for the challenges identified during the previous three days. In the afternoon, these groups presented their ideas to the full assembly for a collaborative review and selection process. Unlike typical conferences that stop at discussion, the Black Bass Summit is where the rubber meets the road. Using registration fees and donations, the most promising projects received seed funding to jumpstart their implementation. Examples of these initiatives included a social media project to bridge the communication gap between managers and anglers and a fishing academy to introduce new and young anglers to the sport.

While the next Black Bass Symposium is not slated until 2050, at which time the landscape of the fishery will undoubtedly have evolved, attendees largely agreed that this year’s event was a success. For those interested in learning more about the symposium agenda or scientific presentations, please reach out to Ryan Gary at ryan.gary@maryland.gov. Additionally, look for the *American Journal of Fisheries Management’s* Special Collection of research from the symposium, which is scheduled for publication in 2026.

Black Bass Resources

Head over to the black bass [customer resources page](#) for the information on the surveys listed above, bass fishing tournaments, licensed guides, and more.