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What Do YOU Think?

Reglas de pesca (en Español)

Click HERE for Guide to Fishing and Crabbing

Take our SURVEY about this year's annual review. What do you want to read more about?

Top 5 Things to Know

- > New ideas from industry leaders help guide the future of bass management. Page 2.
- > New to bass fishing? It has never been easier to start with tools to find your spots, see what others are catching, and fish with others who range from beginners to experts. Page 4.
- > Based on 2022 surveys, top picks for bass fishing were: Potomac River, Deep Creek Lake, and Cunningham Falls Reservoir. Page 5.
- > Those who think Florida Bass should be stocked will be surprised to learn that their genetics can already be found in many tidal populations of largemouth bass. Page 10.
- > Possible opportunity for anglers and the general public offered for donating directly to black bass conservation. Page 12.

PLAN YOUR NEXT TRIP

When

Where

How







Fishing Map

TURAL RESOURCES

Crime Stoppers 443-433-4112





AGENCY-INDUSTRY PARTNERS

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) participated in two bass conservation events held by national fishing organizations in 2022. In early March, DNR staff attended the Conservation Director's meeting Bassmaster Classic in Greenville, South Carolina featuring new artificial and natural habitats that improve fishing. Toward the end of the year, the department also attended Major League Fishing's inaugural Fisheries Management Berkeley Labs Virtual Summit. Several key speakers discussed their role in fisheries management and the opportunity for agencies to obtain water depth data and fishing pattern data.

The DNR identified two funding sources during the Conservation Director's meeting, the Reservoir Fish Habitat Partnership and BASS Nation AFTCO programs. The DNR staff worked with Jason Courtney, Director of Appalachian Kayak Anglers Club, to submit requests for funding to add submerged habitat in the Savage River Reservoir. The funding request included differed types of submerged habitat that would create a bass fishing trail for anglers. While the habitat would have benefited opportunities, the work was not selected for funding and a bass fishing trail on Savage River Reservoir remains a dream, for now.

Major League Fishing supports bass conservation with data on fishing patterns from their catch-photo-release fishing tournaments. These data can be summarized to highlight important fish habitat and mapped with submerged grasses and structure. It is expected that Major League Fishing will bring one of their popular events to the tidal waters of Potomac River by 2025.

Find out what other tournaments will be here, or find a club to join by visiting our online listing of permitted 2023 bass tournaments.







Types of artificial structures submerged to attract largemouth bass.



Where anglers catch fish says something about fish habitat. Data from Major League Fishing can be used to study bass fisheries.

SPRING FISHING REGULATIONS

Many anglers jump at the chance to fish for black bass during the spring. And if you are one of them, then you may know that Maryland's nontidal and tidal regulations for black bass differ during the spring (March 1 to June 15). In nontidal waters, like public lakes or ponds, it is illegal to possess either largemouth bass or smallmouth bass between March 1 and June 15th. In contrast, in rivers where there is a tide, it is legal to possess largemouth bass and smallmouth bass between March 1 and June 15, as long as they are at least 15-inches. Same fish – why the difference?

Tidal Waters

Maryland has approximately 87,000 hectares of tidal waters with the potential to support largemouth bass fisheries. These fisheries support charter boat industries, competitive sportfishing, past time fishing opportunities, bait-and-tackle shops, hotels, and restaurants. With the intent to protect the future of these businesses and bass fisheries in the state, the minimum size regulation in tidal water was raised from 12-inches to 15-inches between March 1 and June 15 in 1989. This change kept an estimated 60 percent of male black bass on the nest, though nest failure could still occur when removing males from nests while fishing. After the regulation change in 1990, more juveniles were collected in the Potomac River, the upper Chesapeake Bay, Middle River, Chester River, and Choptank River. At the time, the regulation was considered successful and had minimal effects on many people in the fishery because possession was still allowed; people could harvest fish and tournaments could continue weighing fish. Since then, survey data have shown a general increase in the average size of bass from the Potomac River as well as an increase in anglers' catch rate. However, these results may not just be owed to a change in regulation. Anglers also shifted their opinion toward nearly exclusive catch-andrelease fishing, and the expansion of submerged aquatic vegetation helped to support reproduction. It is difficult to differentiate the effect of the regulation from the changes in angler behavior and habitat.

Largemouth bass released after fishing.



Largemouth bass with black blotchiness below eye. It's a natural, non-lethal condition caused by a type of virus.



Non-Tidal Waters

Bass tournaments and bass fishing are permitted in non-tidal waters that include ponds, lakes, and some rivers and headwater streams. Even though possession of bass is not allowed during spring (March 1 through June 15), catch-photo-release or "paper" tournaments can be fun alternatives to the traditional bass tournament where fish are weighed at a scale at the end of the day. The first

"catch and immediate release" spring season for black bass in Maryland non-tidal waters was established on Deep Creek Lake in 1987. The management objective of the principle regulation was to reduce harvest of larger/older bass during a particularly vulnerable period, thereby increasing survival and improving the size distribution (more big fish to catch). Based on the initial success at Deep Creek Lake, the current March 1 through June 15 catch and release spring season for black bass in all nontidal waters was established in 1990. Although many factors can influence the size distribution of a population (e.g., recruitment variability, growth rates, angler harvest attitudes, natural mortality), the size distribution and catch of big largemouth bass in impoundments and smallmouth bass in the non-tidal Potomac River have increased since the spring catch and release season went into effect.

With new research highlighting the value of big bass reproduction and effects of climate change in aquatic ecosystems, new ways of adapting fishery management to protect bass fisheries such as catch-photo-release tournaments during spring will evolve under the guidance of anglers and agency biologists.

NEW TO BLACK BASS FISHING?

Welcome to the most popular freshwater sportfishing in North America and certainly, the most widely known. Black bass is a generic word that references largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, Florida bass, and lots of other bass species (*NOT* striped bass or black sea bass).

Where are you fishing?

Not sure whether you are fishing tidal or nontidal water? Learn whether you need a nontidal or a tidal (Chesapeake Bay and Coastal) license to fish your favorite spot by visiting the <u>Public Access website</u> or <u>Map of</u> <u>Dividing Lines</u>. More people of Maryland have targeted black bass in tidal and non-tidal freshwater than any other freshwater fish for decades. While there are newcomers like snakeheads, bass still retains the top honors. In 2022 creel surveys from both Virginia and Maryland documented 70% of anglers targeted largemouth bass while less than five percent targeted snakeheads.

Each year Maryland hosts hundreds of black bass tournaments, more than any other competitive sportfishing tournaments in the state.

Watch a tournament (for free) near you!

Buy a fishing license, unless you're exempt online with <u>COMPASS</u>, and learn <u>Fishing</u> Regulations for fishing black bass.

Find a rod with an artificial rubber worm, or borrow one from the <u>Tackle Loaner Program</u> at a library near you. Bass anglers use lots of artificial tackle, from worms to creature baits to spinners. Of all the bait types, rubber worms are probably the cheapest and most common.

Circle hooks help prevent the fish from swallowing the bait, while barbless hooks can be easier to remove. A fish has approximately a 50-50 chance of surviving a gut hook injury. Bass filets taste good; so if one is severely injured, consider eating it.

Peak fishing effort for bass occurs **between April and June, but there is quality fishing year-round**. Search for a **fishing spot** with the <u>Public Access Fishing Map</u>.

Favorite non-tidal fishing spots include St. Mary's Lake, ponds in Calvert and Charles counties, and reservoirs near Baltimore County, like Triadelphia Lake and Liberty Reservoir. Don't have a boat? No problem. Try a small pond or contact our staff for ideas. Need more information? Search the Angler's Log and read the Fishing Report.

MANAGEMENT

Subcommittee Highlights

The <u>Black Bass Advisory Committee</u> is an appointed public stakeholder group that advises the department on management needs for black bass fisheries in the state. In 2022, they:

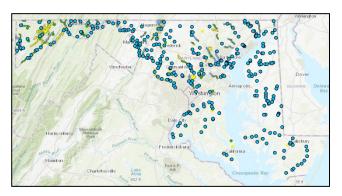
- Provided input and supported Maryland's Fly Fishing Trail, first in the nation and reaches every county of Maryland.
- Supported and established partnerships to successfully establish the Freshwater Bass Conservation Fund, the first of its kind in the state.
- Advised department on topics needed for an upcoming video series that promotes conservation in bass fisheries.
- Advised department to expand conditions of tournament permits to all warm weather bass tournaments in the state to further conservation goals.



All meetings are currently held virtually by webinar. Meeting dates in 2023: April 3; July 10, and October 9; all meetings start at 6:00 pm.

Public Access Fishing Map

Check out the best places to fish for bass in Maryland. Visit our <u>Public Access Fishing</u> <u>Map</u> for details. Fish from one of 326 spots where you can find black bass in the state.

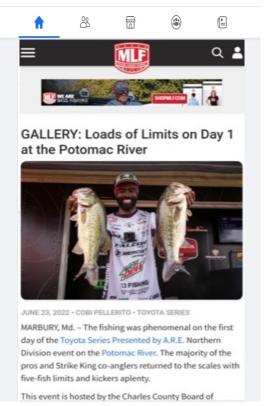


Tidal Bass Fisheries

The <u>Tidal Bass Survey</u> uses boat electrofishing to sample largemouth bass during the fall. Data are used to assess the status of the population. The assessments that follow include results from the Tidal Bass Survey and data reported by tournament directors and anglers.

Potomac River

We caught 483 largemouth bass, including 309 juveniles. Fishery survey metrics generally reflected long-term averages. While the number of tournaments remained low compared to the 1990s, a tournament angler weighed an average creel that was similar to that of the late 2000s – each weighing an average of between three and four bass per fishing day. Of all caught bass, three percent showed signs of mild to moderate disease for either fins or skin. Because of generally average survey statistics, the status of this fishery was designated as Good.



Post from Major League Fishing on fishing Potomac River.

Upper Chesapeake Bay

We caught 227 largemouth bass, including 134 juveniles from Susquehanna River, Northeast River, and the Susquehanna River flats. The fishery survey generated average metrics for catch, size structure, and growth, with better than average reproduction and lower than average annual mortality. Like most previous years, a tournament angler weighed an average of two bass per fishing day. Of all caught bass, seven percent had signs of mild to severe disease, with the vast majority represented by skin lesions and hooking injuries. Because of generally average survey metrics but above average reproduction, the status of this fishery was designated as Good.



Largemouth bass released following a black bass tournament in upper Chesapeake Bay.

Patuxent River

We caught 187 largemouth bass, including 143 juveniles. While reproduction was exceptional for the population, the below average catch of older fish and poor growth rates are surprising. Anglers may find success fishing at Jackson's Landing and north; while lower streams such as Lyons Creek and Mattaponi Creek also support bass, it can take more time to catch one because there are not many. Stock structure remains similar to previous years suggesting average annual survivorship and recruitment. Eight percent of fish had signs of mild to moderate disease, which is also surprising given previously lower levels and low angling pressure. Because of above average reproduction, but fewer collected older fish and lower growth rates, this fishery was designated as Good.

Marshyhope Creek

We caught 42 largemouth bass, including 12 juveniles. Below average catch of juveniles and older fish and indications of poor juvenile survival and low growth rates of older fish continue to suggest a problem for this fishery. A tournament angler weighed between one and two bass per fishing day, on average, but this was the lowest catch reported since 2012. No fish were observed with signs of disease during the survey. Additional work is planned in spring 2023 to stock six to eight inch largemouth bass and help bolster recruitment and catches. Because of concerning survey metrics, the status of this fishery was designated as Rebuilding.



Volunteer releasing young largemouth bass to Mattawoman Creek (Potomac River) as part of a stocking program.

Sassafras River

We caught 14 largemouth bass, including two juveniles. However, this survey was incomplete because salinity was too high to survey many sites. More bass would have been caught had sampling conditions allowed. The sites that were

sampled produced good numbers of bass. Given poor sampling conditions and because this fishery lacks the necessary comparative surveys, an assessment was not possible. Nonetheless, tournament anglers weighed an average of one bass per day, which is consistent with tournament data collected since 2016. No fish were collected during the survey with signs of disease. Because of the limited data set for comparison, the status of this fishery was designated as Unknown.



Staff with Maryland Department of Natural Resources working tidal bass survey.

Wicomico River Status

We caught 56 largemouth bass, including 35 juveniles. The fishery survey statistics were generally similar to long-term averages, with the exception of reproduction indices that indicated better than average distribution of juveniles. Like recent years, tournament anglers reportedly weighed between one and two bass per fishing day; this is about half of those weighed between 2012 and 2015. Some stocking has been done to help bolster catch rates. Only four percent of fish were observed with disease, one had a missing eye and the other had a mild hooking injury. Because of the similarity of metrics to those from previous years, the status of this fishery was designated as Good.

Gunpowder River Status

We caught 57 largemouth bass, including 12 juveniles. Catch slightly increased over the past three years and was much better than estimates from 2013 and 2016. Juveniles were observed at 67 percent of surveyed sites; however,

recruitment has been historically limited. A tournament angler reportedly weighed an average of two bass per fishing day, which is typical for this fishery. No largemouth bass had signs of disease and instead, generally had good body condition. Because of the limited dataset for comparison, the status of this fishery has been designated as Unknown.

Middle River Status

We only caught two largemouth bass. After several similar years of catch (since 2018), average catch in 2022 declined. Also, no juveniles and no fish over 15-inches were collected. This may represent an anomalous year for the survey that will be continued annually until at least 2027. Bass did not have signs of disease. Because of the limited dataset for comparison, the status of this fishery has been designated as Unknown.

Bush River Status

We caught 29 largemouth bass, including four juveniles. Catch has slowly increased since 2018 and was at its highest average in 2022. The average index for juvenile catch was similar to nearby Gunpowder River, but proportionately fewer sites had juveniles. Average growth and body condition were similar to those for the nearby Gunpowder River. No largemouth bass had signs of disease. Because of the limited dataset for comparison, the status of this fishery has been designated as Unknown.

Request Data

Do you want to read the data or analyze the data we collect? Make a data request to:

<u>Tidal Bass Program</u> or <u>Nontidal Fisheries</u>.

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 Johnson's Pond and Tuckahoe Lake. In 2022, anglers sent more reports from impounded waters of southern Maryland (St. Mary's Lake, ponds of Calvert County) and central Maryland (Triadelphia Reservoir, Liberty Reservoir) than other areas. The non-tidal Potomac River (or upper Potomac River) also draws bass anglers and tournaments every year. These fisheries are routinely monitored by Maryland Department of Natural Resources' Freshwater Fisheries Program. Stay current with information of interest to you by visiting the Freshwater Fisheries Program's website.



Submitted by E. Packard. Fishing southern Maryland ponds in February 2022.

Deep Creek Lake

Deep Creek Lake is Maryland's largest impoundment with a surface area of 3900 acres. Smallmouth bass is the most abundant sportfish in Deep Creek Lake. Size structure and growth indices reflect a quality smallmouth bass fishery for anglers. Largemouth bass adults are less abundant, which may be owed to poor recruitment, but grow to impressive sizes. Tournament anglers weighed a greater average catch of black bass in 2022 (three fish per day) than in 2021 (two fish per day), which reflects the high quality fishery that Deep Creek Lake currently offers bass anglers.

Lake Habeeb

Located within Rocky Gap State Park, Lake Habeeb is 242 acres and may reach 74 feet deep. Largemouth bass and smallmouth bass are the most abundant sportfish in Lake Habeeb and of the two, largemouth bass is much more abundant. Monitoring indices reflect a quality black bass fishery for anglers and tournament catch rates are some of the highest reported from Maryland non-tidal waters.

Greenbrier Lake and Broadford Lake

During 2022, the department took management actions to improve two largemouth bass fisheries that were identified as needing action through a statewide population analysis. Greenbrier Lake is characterized by very high recruitment and a high density of small bass, whereas Broadford Lake has a very low density of large bass and limited reproduction. We collected 174 largemouth bass between eight and twelve inches from Greenbrier Lake and stocked them into Broadford Lake in order to reduce competition in the contributing waterbody while providing additional spawning stock to the receiving waterbody; this action should improve bass fishing in both impoundments. Efforts are slated to continue in 2023 and will be assessed through subsequent monitoring efforts and population estimates.

Piney Run Reservoir

In Carroll County, Piney Run Reservoir is a 300 acre impoundment that features largemouth bass as its primary sportfish. Monitoring efforts showed that quality-size fish were abundant and Piney Run Reservoir ranks as one of the best impoundments to pursue large bass.



A. Kraus fishing Loch Raven Reservoir in January 2022.

Cunningham Falls Reservoir

Cunningham Falls Reservoir, a small impoundment (42 acres) in Cunningham Falls State Park, provides a warm water largemouth bass fishery with ample shoreline access, a fishing pier and boat launch access. Monitoring demonstrated a high density of healthy largemouth bass with a balanced size distribution.

Learn MORE!

Learn more about what our freshwater fish biologists are doing by visiting:

Freshwater Fisheries Program.

Wheatley Lake

A small impoundment in Charles County, Wheatley Lake ranks in at only 59 acres but offers diverse amenities for anglers, including a boat ramp, boat rentals, and fishing platforms. Anglers will find numerous fishing opportunities. Largemouth bass is the dominant freshwater sportfish in the lake. Monitoring in 2022 indicated significant declines in catch of largemouth bass and work in 2023 is expected to better identify whether there is a problem that can be addressed by available management tools.

Conowingo Reservoir

Shared by two states, Conowingo Reservoir is a 3998 acre impoundment of Susquehanna River that lies just upstream of Conowingo Dam. A popular access point, Glen Cove also offers some equipment for staging bass tournaments. The reservoir offers angling opportunities for smallmouth bass and largemouth Abundance of smallmouth bass in 2022 was lower than in previous years and fish generally exhibited poor body condition. Skin lesions were observed on three percent of the fish. Likewise, largemouth bass abundance was also relatively low, possibly owed to poor recruitment, though fish were in good condition. These low abundances reflected in reported are tournament catch statistics that averaged between one and two bass weighed per fishing day.

Upper Potomac River

Forming Maryland's southern boundary for over 200 miles, the river offers ready access for anglers and provides a wide diversity of gamefish and sportfish. The premier sportfish for the river, smallmouth bass, has been monitored annually since 1975. Over the past 10 years, annual recruitment has been lower than long-term averages because of high river flows that can destroy nests. More recently, though, yearclass strength has improved. Monitoring in 2021 indicated an average year of juvenile fish had been produced. Supplemental stocking of hatchery produced smallmouth bass, which was

initiated in 2020 to improve juvenile recruitment, will continue in 2023. Anglers can expect a balanced size distribution with good numbers of quality size smallmouth in excellent condition. Bass tournament catch rates increased from two to three bass weighed per fishing day between 2021 and 2022.

Florida Bass Hybrids in Maryland

Florida bass (*Micropterus floridanus*) originated in Florida but is well-known throughout the southeastern United States. Closely related to largemouth bass, it was once cross-bred to create potentially larger and better fighting "hybrid" bass. However, hybridization is one way some introduced species can cause problems.

Hybrids have been stocked by various agencies and anglers to state waters, including in Maryland. In the 1990s, hybrids were released to several rivers by bass fishing clubs hoping to create better bass fisheries. In Maryland and some mid-western states, hybrids experienced poor reproduction.

In the late 1990s, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources discouraged and stopped the stocking of hybrids in an effort to preserve the more well-suited genetics of largemouth bass. A study conducted by the department in 1999 demonstrated that nearly 84 percent of fish surveyed from the Choptank River had genes from Florida bass. Other river populations also had hybrid genes but to a far lesser extent. As a consequence of these results, the department pivoted its stocking program to use only parents from rivers without a high predominance of Florida bass genes.

Thirty years later, genes from Florida bass still persist in populations of largemouth bass from the Chesapeake Bay. Work conducted by Dr. Eric Peatman at Auburn University showed the department that the percentage of bass with those genes has not changed much for several populations.

More fish with hybrid genes were found in the Potomac River than in years past, which may be a result of illegal stocking of hybrids. Unfortunately in recent years, parent fish from the Potomac River have been used to produce offspring for stocking the Gunpowder River and Middle River. The releases of those offspring could partially explain the moderate percentage of those genes in those populations.

But – have these Florida bass genes caused a problem? No, not yet. Both the Potomac River and Gunpowder River fisheries are doing well. And based on last year's survey, the Choptank River bass fishery has been improving.

These persistent hybrid genes, however, add a little more complexity to the population genetics of largemouth bass in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. The department is continuing its work to learn more about the prevalence of hybrid genes by checking additional waters such as the Wicomico River and Nanticoke River. In the winter of 2023, the department will further its work by collaborating with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Office's Lamar Fish Technology Center and Northeast Fishery Center Complex. In partnership with them, the department will be able to answer several questions about the frequency of translocation (or moving bass between rivers), genetic health and diversity, and ultimately improve how it manages these once genetically isolated fish populations.

Percentage of largemouth bass with hybrid genes from Florida bass.

River	In 1990s	In 2020s
Potomac	35%	100%
Susquehanna/Northeast	4%	25%
Choptank	84%	79%
Gunpowder/Middle	NA	48%
Pocomoke	19%	28%
Patuxent	35%	NA
Nanticoke	15%	NA
Wicomico	15%	NA

CONSERVATION CORNER

Alabama Bass - Please help keep them out of Maryland

Please Be Aware

There are widespread and serious concerns with Alabama Bass Introductions.

Introduction of Alabama bass, spotted bass and/or their hybrids has occurred illegally and exclusively by anglers and bass clubs throughout some southeastern states, such as Virginia (including the James River), Georgia, Tennessee and North Carolina. These hybrids are also called "mean mouths" by some. Introductions have sometimes followed state agency habitat enhancement projects for black bass and with angler-led desire to create better bass fisheries.

Alabama Bass or hybrids could:

- Rapidly increase in abundance when introduced;
- Cause an abundance of smaller black bass in the fishery;
- Rapidly hybridize with smallmouth bass, causing loss of relative weights and/or elimination of smallmouth bass from the fishery; and,
- > Depress abundance of largemouth bass.





Alabama bass has a jaw 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).

Read more on the <u>Maryland</u> and <u>Virginia</u> websites. Alabama bass and spotted bass are prohibited from sale or possession in Maryland. Permits are required for stocking any species of bass in Maryland. For questions or to report illegal stocking, please contact the department as soon as possible.



Photos courtesy of Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources. Which is which? Alabama bass to the left; largemouth bass to the right.



Largemouth Bass

Black Bass Conservation Fund

Beginning July 2020, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and its Black Bass Advisory Committee began discussing a voluntary option for the public to donate money in support of black bass conservation via the department's licensing system. Roger Trageser (Maryland Bass Nation, Chair of Black Bass Advisory Committee) took the lead to speak with legislators about sponsoring a bill that would authorize the department to receive such donations. Sponsors were: Delegate Addison, Senator Bailey, and Senator Elfreth, and Senator McCray. Roger and Scott Sewell (Maryland Bass Nation Conservation Director) provided oral testimony, and others of BBAC provided written testimony during legislative herrings in spring 2023.

This option, tentatively called the Black Bass Conservation Fund, would provide an avenue for the department to receive donations to be used in black bass conservation. The money would be used for stocking bass, enhancing aquatic habitat, supporting bass tournaments, and supporting scientific research.

Current stocking projects support the highest quality fisheries but do not produce enough bass to grow or develop lesser fisheries in Maryland's portion of the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Habitat enhancement projects can also support bass fisheries by attracting fish and offering more enjoyable fishing experiences for anglers. Like marine reefs, submerged structures attract structure-oriented species, such as largemouth bass. Other habitat enhancement projects may include trash clean-ups or planting riparian buffers. Funding may also be used to support scientific research related to conservation of the resource. For example, such funding could support incentives for the general public to report tagged largemouth bass caught from Potomac River as part of an Interagency Cooperative Largemouth Bass Monitoring effort on the Potomac River.

Ike Foundation & Bass Conservation

Jocelyn Rhea won an award in 2022 from the department to help support the Ike Foundation fishing tournament in the upper Chesapeake Bay. Funds were used to build a release chute from which bass were released following the tournament weigh-in into the Northeast River. Additionally, some funds were used to purchase a bump tank and mesh bags. These supplies will be used in future youth tournaments to help demonstrate to young anglers how bass conservation is a cornerstone to competitive sportfishing in Maryland and nationwide. Learn more about how you can get money to support bass conservation for your fishing club.

Release chute created from supplies to promote black bass conservation during the Ike Foundation tournament in upper Chesapeake Bay.



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

3/2020 DNR 17—022123-346 dnr.maryland.gov/fisheries