

Freshwater Fisheries Monthly Report – October 2024

Freshwater Fisheries - Stock Assessment

Deep Creek Lake - Western Region I staff collected crappie from Deep Creek Lake (DCL) for age, growth, and mortality information. The crappie fishery in DCL is attractive to anglers and has a reputation for producing very large fish. Understanding their life history will allow us to more effectively manage the fishery.

Upper Potomac River - Freshwater Fisheries staff started the annual fall electrofishing survey on the upper Potomac River. Low flow conditions have limited safe access to some sections of the river. Smallmouth bass densities look good with multiple age classes of fish present. The largest smallmouth bass collected so far measured 19.5 inches and 3.8 pounds. Several muskellunge ranging up to 39 inches were collected. Invasive flathead catfish continue to increase in abundance and distribution. For the first time, a flathead catfish was collected above Dam 5 in a department survey. Anglers are encouraged to harvest any flathead catfish that they catch.



34-inch flathead catfish from upper Potomac River

Impoundment Surveys - Central Region staff conducted night electrofishing surveys on Prettyboy Reservoir and Little Seneca Lake. Eleven sites were sampled in Little Seneca Lake and 14 sites in Prettyboy Reservoir. Initial results indicate that the bass populations in both lakes are healthy. Multiple bass over four pounds were observed in both impoundments.



A 16-inch crappie collected in Little Seneca Lake.



A 13 pound Chesapeake channa (also known as northern snakehead) collected during the electrofishing survey of Little Seneca Lake

Freshwater Fisheries - Habitat and Water Quality

Environmental Review - Provided aquatic resource information for the following environmental review projects:

- The Green Ridge State Forest Annual Work Plan for 2026. No comments were provided from West I staff.
- A culvert installation project for a home access project at Deep Creek Lake. Comments were provided to optimize working conditions, sediment and erosion control measures, best management practices for waterway pump around, time of

year restrictions, wetland disturbance, minimal disturbance and provide site reclamation following the completion of the project.

- A culvert replacement project to take place on Lake Forest Drive near Deep Creek Lake. Comments were provided to optimize working conditions, sediment and erosion control measures, minimal disturbance, and site reclamation following the completion of the project.
- Six applications for stone revetments located at Deep Creek Lake. Comments were made to maintain and enhance fish habitat and protect existing shoreline vegetation.
- Commented on the “Marie Miller Property”, Allegany County, for Project Open Space.

Side Scan Sonar - Recorded five side scan sonar transects at St. Mary's Lake as a way to describe both depth contours and structures within the impoundment. The data were sent to Western Region staff to stitch together the images onto an aerial view of the lake using specialized georeferencing software.

Temperature Loggers - Collected Hobo temperature loggers from the North Branch Potomac River and replaced the remaining coldwater loggers. Temperature data will be analyzed for the critical monitoring period of June 1 through August 31.

Hoyes Run - A concerned homeowner on Hoyes Run notified regional staff about construction happening in and along the stream. Staff made a site visit where they observed two large pieces of excavating equipment streamside causing a disturbance. Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) was notified of the situation, made a site visit and was able to talk to the operators and guide them on the proper procedures for doing in-stream and streamside work and that in-stream work should stop immediately.

Muddy Creek Liming Project – Staff, with assistance from the Garrett County Roads Department and Trout Unlimited, had ten tons of high calcium lime delivered to Muddy Creek where it will be placed in the creek later this winter. The purpose of the liming project is to buffer the stream pH during spring melt/runoff events to prevent fish kills from acidification.

Mill Run - Staff notified MDE about drain pipes leading from a house located in the headwaters of Mill Run. MDE made a site visit and determined the pipes were of no harm to the stream.

Freshwater Fisheries - Stocking and Population Management

Fall Trout Stocking - Regional management staff assisted with fall trout stocking. A total of 15,000 rainbow, golden rainbow, and brown trout averaging more than a pound apiece were stocked at 27 locations throughout the state.

Pond Stocking Permits: Eight received, seven approved, one awaiting approval.

Freshwater Fisheries - Outreach

Customer Service - Provided customer service information for inquiries regarding:

- Fall trout fishing information
- Obtaining a Maryland fishing license
- Fishing Deep Creek Lake
- West Virginia license holders' ability to fish the North Branch Potomac River
- Water levels at Piney (Frostburg) Reservoir
- Youghiogheny River Lake water levels
- Rainbow trout reproduction and naturalized populations
- Casselman River stocking and fishing
- Determination of fall trout stocking locations

Staff participated in the annual North Branch of the Potomac River Advisory Committee where they presented on the recent work Freshwater Fisheries has been doing in the river.

Attended the Inaugural Outdoor Recreation Summit at Rocky Gap Lodge. This Summit was a three-day event that brought together outdoor enthusiasts to network and learn about the importance of outdoor recreation to Maryland's environment, workforce, quality of life and economy. Staff provided a presentation on 30 years of Maryland Becoming an Outdoors-Woman and was part of a speaker's panel for the session "Breaking down Barriers for Women in the Outdoors".

Staff provided a boat for a Mallows Bay kayaking event with Governor Wes Moore. The group of six persons preferring to ride in the skiff were treated to side scan sonar imaging to see the ghost fleet of ships below the waterline. Maryland agency leadership and Charles County executives were present for the event.

A request for Prince George's County stocking data was received via the online Freshwater Fisheries Data Request; staff summarized the data and sent it to the constituent requesting the information.

Freshwater Fisheries - Angler Access

Fishery Management Area (FMA) - Western Region I staff continues to perform routine checks and maintenance at the McCoole, Black Oak, and Evitts Creek FMAs, including the removal of a large sleeper sofa that was dropped in the parking lot.

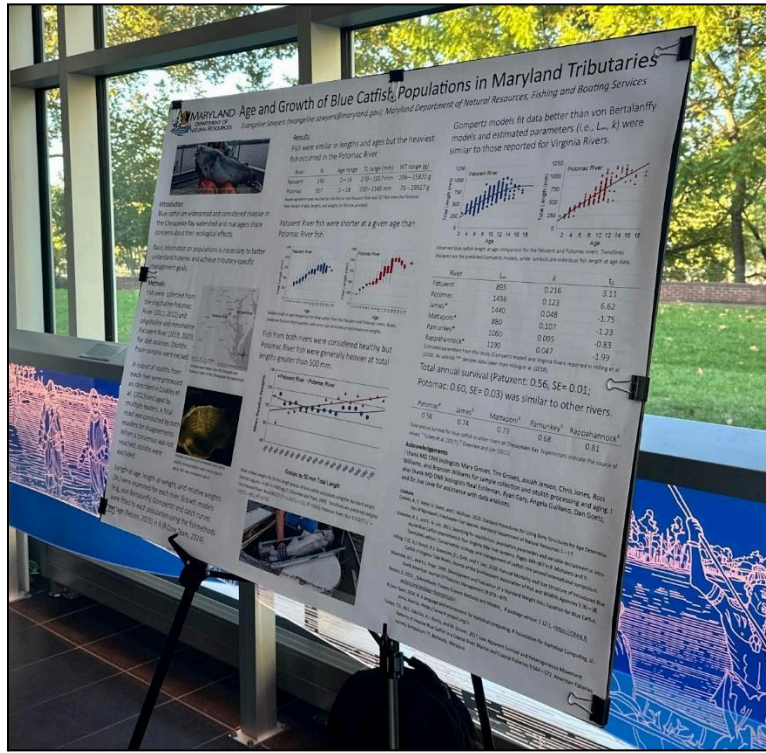
Freshwater Fisheries – Fish Health

Deep Creek Lake Mercury Study - Western Region I staff assisted MDE staff with the collection of smallmouth bass, walleye, yellow perch, and bluegill in order to determine mercury concentrations in the tissue as well as PFOS/PFAS concentrations. The information will assist in updating fish health consumption advisories for anglers.

Staff also provided support for University of Maryland researchers who are investigating mercury cycling in Deep Creek Lake, with a focus on the potential changes related to dredging in the Arrowhead Cove area and annual winter drawdowns.

Freshwater Fisheries - Invasive Fishes Program

Staff presented at the Potomac River Conference: *Reeling in the Challenge of Invasive Species* on October 17. The poster highlighted age, growth, and survival data for invasive blue catfish in the Potomac and Patuxent rivers.



Age and Growth study of blue catfish along the Potomac River (2011-12) and Patuxent River (2019-20).

The US Fish and Wildlife Service funded work to examine harvest rates of Chesapeake channa during charter bowfishing trips has been completed for the 2024 season. Invasive Fishes Program staff assisted with data collection for a subset of trips.



Invasive program staff join on a successful bowfishing charter done with Captain Nick Mathers, in a cooperative Chesapeake channa management project with USFWS.

Invasive Fishes Program staff held the second Invasive Catfish Advisory Committee (ICAC) meeting. The Committee voted Billy Rice as Chairperson and Jamie Bowling as Vice Chairperson. During the meeting, the committee voted to maintain finfish trotline

gear length restrictions, and recommend the department allow finfish trotlines in the Chesapeake Bay proper south of the Bay Bridge (except Pocomoke and Tangier Sounds). The Committee also voted to recommend the department permit commercial and charter trips for blue catfish to occur concurrently, as well as lifting crew restrictions on commercial hook and line trips for blue catfish only. The next ICAC meeting is tentatively scheduled for January 10, 2025. Requested future agenda topic items include discussion of consumption advisories with Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) and exploration of current data deficiencies for blue catfish in Maryland.

Freshwater Fisheries - Coldwater Program

Organized and convened the October meeting of the Coldwater Fisheries Advisory Committee. The department provided updates to the committee for the Non-tidal Freshwater Fisheries budget projection work group meetings and the proposed existing use determination for North Branch Potomac River. Information about the department's non-native trout removal policy was also presented. Additionally, the committee discussed the new transmission line right-of-ways that the Maryland Piedmont Reliability Project has proposed.

Attended the North Branch Potomac River Advisory Committee meeting to discuss recent developments in the management of the North Branch Potomac River and Jennings Randolph Reservoir. A presentation was provided for the proposed existing use determination for North Branch Potomac River from Savage River to an unnamed tributary near the Black Oak boat ramp.

Met with the Maryland Department of the Environment, Abandoned Mine Land Unit to tour an abandoned mine land treatment site in the Jackson Run watershed. The meeting was part of a broader collaborative effort to identify opportunities for improving water quality and aquatic organism passage in Jackson Run. The desired outcomes of this effort will include expanded habitat and improved connectivity for brook trout.

Continued to retrieve 2024 stream temperature loggers and began compiling and reviewing all 2024 coldwater data. The data will be uploaded to the coldwater database after the quality control process is complete.

Freshwater Fisheries - Tidal Bass Program

Tidal Bass Survey - Central, Eastern, and Southern regions along with Tidal Bass Program staff completed the Tidal Bass Survey. In total, 172 sites were surveyed across seven different fisheries from the Upper Bay to the Pocomoke River. The Potomac River appears to have had a good year of recruitment with an abundance of young of the year bass found in Mattawoman and Chicamuxen creeks among other sites along the river. Young of the year in some Upper Bay sites also appeared to be above average. Chesapeake channa densities seemed to be lower in some places as well, particularly Chicamuxen Creek and the Gunpowder River.



*Fish collected during Tidal Bass Survey - Top L-R: Chesapeake channa, Largemouth bass
Bottom: Measuring a quality Largemouth bass.*

Central Region staff conducted Tidal Bass sampling at selected sites in the Susquehanna River, Swan Creek, Bush River, Middle River, and Gunpowder River.



Brook Trout Biologist Jason Cessna holds a smallmouth bass collected during the survey of Swan Creek.

Southern Region staff completed their tidal bass survey for 2024 for all the tidal Potomac River. Approximately 50 sites stretching from Washington DC to Nanjemoy Creek in Charles County were electrofished. Along with a good density of largemouth bass, other species of interest were noted at several sites: Chesapeake channa, herring species, red drum, shad, spot, and striped bass. Thanks to all the assisting netters from the Division.



Regional Operation Manager Dan Goetz measures a Largemouth Bass

Eastern Region staff completed tidal bass surveys of Marshyhope Creek and the Pocomoke River. Marshyhope Creek's bass fishery has shown signs of decline in recent years and has been aggressively stocked with young largemouth bass. Adult bass densities were good throughout most areas sampled. High numbers of blue catfish were encountered, especially in downstream areas. Bass numbers were very consistent in areas sampled on the Pocomoke River, with a balanced size structure which included juveniles and adult bass. Blue catfish abundance was much higher than in previous surveys there. Chain pickerel, white perch, yellow perch, and various sunfish species were also commonly encountered in both systems.



L to R: Sampling the beautiful Pocomoke River; A large chain pickerel from the Pocomoke River



A quality largemouth bass from Marshyhope Creek

Staff worked with Eastern Region to stock approximately 1,400 largemouth bass from Joseph Manning Hatchery into the Choptank River, where anglers have recently reported poor catch rates. Fish stocked averaged 4-5 inches with several in the 8-9 inch range. To help bolster largemouth bass populations, the Joseph Manning Hatchery has produced over 10,000 largemouth bass ranging from 2-9 inches that have been stocked throughout early summer to fall.



Juvenile and advanced juvenile bass stocked into the Choptank River.

The Black Bass Advisory Committee held its scheduled quarterly meeting on October 7. Among the more prominent agenda items were an update on recommended license fee increases, the logistics of a tournament benefiting the black bass conservation fund, insight from Theaux Le Gardeur, the Gunpowder Riverkeeper, on the recent pollution issues in the watershed, and the introduction of two new members of the committee - Logan Summers and Evan Morsell. There will be another ad hoc meeting in early November to address tournament permitting and additional conservation fund details, which were not covered in the October meeting.

Freshwater Fisheries - Other

Staff will begin the winterization process on equipment now that the sampling season has unfortunately come to an end.