

Freshwater Fisheries Monthly Report – April 2026

Freshwater Fisheries: Regional Operations

1. Stock Assessment

Monitoring and Assessment – The following work was done in support of assessing the health and quality of fish populations or stocks in Maryland:

- Central Region staff sampled the landlocked striped bass population in Liberty Reservoir. Age and growth data was collected. Over 40 individuals were tagged and released in conjunction with an ongoing creel survey.



Sampling landlocked Striped Bass in Liberty Reservoir

- Southern Region staff have been busy aging lots of otolith and scale samples. Samples included scales of largemouth from tidal Potomac River (2024) and St. Mary's Lake (2025), as well as bluegill from Rocky Gorge Reservoir (2025). Otoliths of white perch from Rocky Gorge Reservoir (2025) were aged with the help of Fishing and Boating Services' Finfish group's Keith Whiteford out of Matapeake. Black crappie, largemouth, and smallmouth otoliths from waterbodies in West II were also prepped, imaged, and aged.



A 15 year-old white perch otolith from Rocky Gorge Reservoir (2025) viewed whole in oil. The fish measured 262mm (10.3 inches), weighed 213g, and was female.

- Southern Region staff completed setting fyke nets at the 5th week mark at St. Mary's Lake. Approximately 60 black crappie otoliths were collected to determine the age and growth for the lake. Since the last report, a few uncommon specimens were collected, such as a 403 mm brown bullhead and a 375 mm creek chubsucker with [tubercles](#) on its head.
- Assisted the Joseph Manning Hatchery in collecting brood fish including striped bass, largemouth bass, and black crappie. The striped bass were collected on the Patuxent River, the largemouth bass were from Mattawoman Creek, and the black crappie were caught in St. Mary's Lake. All were gladly accepted by the hatchery.
- Several fish were collected for the USGS for an Earth Day event. The fish included a 30 pound blue catfish, as well as smaller bluegill, carp and perch.
- Responded to five data requests received through the online Freshwater Fisheries Data Request Form.
- Conducted interviews for a summer unpaid internship position at the Southern Regional office. The job will be offered to one of the three exemplary candidates who completed the process. It will be a difficult decision because they all had excellent qualifications.

2. Habitat and Water Quality

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

- Southern Region staff reviewed the St. Mary's County 10-year Comprehensive Plan for its impact on aquatic resources.
- West I Region staff commented on an application for a culvert installation project located in McHenry (Maryland). Comments were provided for time-of-year restrictions, Best Management Practices for sediment and erosion control, pump around procedures, and stabilizing disturbed areas at the completion of the project.
- Central Region staff attended a post-restoration site visit with agency staff on Jones Falls.
- West II Region staff reviewed three projects on Little Bennett Creek for a culvert repair, fiber optic line installation and a retaining wall repair. Comments were made to promote fish passage, protecting riparian zones, sediment and erosion prevention, and avoiding water contact with curing grout and cement to prevent pH spikes.

Additional Work with Habitat and Water Quality

- Central Region staff collected macroinvertebrates and collected flow data in tributaries to a brook trout stream outside of Manchester.
- Central Region staff participated in a meeting to discuss management options for blue-green algae blooms in Clopper Lake in Seneca Creek State Park near Germantown.

3. Stocking and Population Management

- West I Region staff assisted Bear Creek Hatchery staff with daily hatchery operations and stocking efforts throughout the region.
- Central Region and hatchery staff stocked 18 different areas.

4. Outreach

Customer Service - Provided customer service information for inquiries regarding:

- Central Region staff gave presentations at the Maryland Water Monitoring Council temperature workshop. Presentations included the influence of farm ponds on stream temperature in brook trout watersheds and on the influence of urban stormwater runoff on stream temperatures in a Piedmont brook trout watershed.
- Central Region staff gave a presentation on the Gunpowder Tailwater trout fishery to the Free State Fly Fishers monthly meeting in Davidsonville.
- Southern Region staff designed large outdoor information signage for Merkle Natural Resource Management Area to help augment experiential learning for third graders while they are at the beach seining station on their field trips. The signage provides fish identification and touches on watersheds, pollution, and their effects on spawning migratory fish like striped bass and shad.

5. Angler Access

- Central Region staff added signage to the downstream end of the Gunpowder tailwater statewide trout regulations area and upstream end of the put-and-take management areas. Additional signs were added at other access points.
- West II Region staff conducted routine maintenance and algal treatment at several Fishery Management Areas.
- Replied to several inquiries regarding the Put and Take Trout Stocking Program and nontidal license and trout stamp fees.
- Provided information on Monocacy River smallmouth bass fishing.

Freshwater Fisheries: Statewide Operations

1. Invasive Fishes Program

Staff continued environmental DNA (eDNA) sampling of select locations above and below fish blockages (e.g., Patapsco River, Daniels Dam) for the presence of anadromous fishes (e.g., shad and herrings) and invasive fishes (e.g., northern snakehead) during spring. Samples will be collected through May, when fish are moving upstream and congregate at dams and other blockages.



eDNA sampling in the Patapsco River and Daniels Dam Areas

Staff have resumed the high-reward tagging project of northern snakehead with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Maryland Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (USFWS MFWCO). The project is focused on the upper Chesapeake Bay and its tidal rivers. Reported tags from harvested fish are worth up to \$200 and must be reported prior to the end of 2026. The project aims to incentivize harvest and helps to estimate movement and harvest rates.



Northern Snakehead tagging in the upper Chesapeake Bay

Staff deployed acoustic receivers in the lower Susquehanna for a northern snakehead telemetry project with USFWS MFWCO. The project aims to monitor where these fish go once they encounter a blockage to movement (i.e., Conowingo Dam). Ten fish will be tagged in May 2026 to examine residence time and movements.

Staff facilitated the April 2026 meeting of the Invasive Catfish Advisory Committee. At the meeting, a proposed pilot to examine bycatch associated with large-mesh gill nets during winter was discussed.

Staff met with researchers at USGS Eastern Ecological Science Center to discuss ongoing and upcoming research for invasive blue catfish and flathead catfish in the region.

2. Coldwater Fisheries Program

Staff initiated the 2026 coldwater field season with benthic macroinvertebrate sample collection and water temperature logger deployment. Benthic macroinvertebrates were sampled at six stations to confirm the presence of coldwater obligate stoneflies and to collect data for water quality analysis. Sample data collected from one of the stations may be submitted to Maryland Department of the Environment to support a use class redesignation that would provide additional thermal protection.

Water temperature loggers were calibrated, reviewed for quality control, and prepped for field deployment. The Coldwater Fisheries Program will deploy approximately 77 temperature loggers to stream survey stations prior to the summer index period (June 1 through August 31). The loggers record water temperatures every 20 minutes and provide critical information about the thermal regime of coldwater streams. Logger deployment started in April and will continue through May.

Attended and presented at the Maryland Water Quality Council's You're Getting Warmer: Taking the Temperature of Maryland's Waters workshop. Presentation topics included The History of Maryland Brook Trout Populations and Evaluating and Mitigating the

Thermal Impact of Small Ponds in Maryland Trout Watersheds. The workshop included extensive discussions about warming water temperature trends in Maryland and practices that may slow or reverse these trends.

Coordinated and convened the April meeting of the Coldwater Fisheries Advisory Committee. The department presented four regulatory ideas for coldwater fisheries for potential public scoping, described a non-native trout removal project in Savage River above the Savage River Reservoir, and provided an update on proposed changes to water quality regulations in North Branch Potomac River. There was considerable discussion on all topics and committee members are expected to communicate them to their constituents. Several new actions are developing from the on-going discussions.

Virtually attended the annual meeting of the Southern Division of the American Fisheries Society Trout Committee. Coldwater fisheries biologists from around the southeast region gathered to discuss various coldwater issues, including trout stocking practices, wild trout management, efforts to expand brook trout occupancy, and planning for the next East Coast Trout meeting in 2028. The theme of the 2026 meeting was managing trout through extreme events, which explored resource recovery and protecting fishing opportunities in the aftermath of severe flood events.

Attended a site visit to a proposed solar farm in the Mill Run (Allegany County) watershed. Mill Run is a use class III coldwater stream and supports a small brook trout population. The proposed project would clear approximately 38 acres of forested land for the solar farm. The Freshwater Fisheries and Hatcheries Division submitted concerns about the location of the solar farm and recommended an alternative location that does not drain to Mill Run. Additional comments were submitted about access and a stream crossing for project activities, sediment and erosion control, and the maintenance of a robust riparian buffer.

Staff participated in an environmental education event for Allegany College of Maryland Forestry students. Discussion and education stations included stream geomorphology, installation of instream habitat structures, watershed health and importance of land use and stream riparian buffers, discharge measurements, water quality measurements and equipment, benthic macroinvertebrate collection and identification, as well as completion of maintenance on a two year old riparian buffer tree planting. In addition to Coldwater Program staff, partners included MD DNR Forestry Service, Allegany College of Maryland, Bedford County Conservation District, Fort Bedford Chapter of Trout Unlimited, and Ridge and Valley Streamkeepers.

3. Tidal Bass Program

Two virtual tournament director meetings were held at the beginning of April to improve communication with stakeholders on conservation and program work. Discussions highlighted updated tournament requirements intended to reduce fishing mortality, including requirements that tournament fish spend no more than two minutes without supplemental aeration during weigh-ins, an increase to 0.5 pounds for a dead fish penalty

during the hot weather season to incentivize fish care, and a limit on the amount of weigh-in bags distributed based on the number of aerated livewells present. A summary of the 2025 tidal bass survey results was presented including positive and stable trends in most fisheries. During this presentation staff emphasized the use of tournament reporting data to supplement department surveys. Lastly, the tidal bass stocking program had an in-depth discussion that included the process of raising fish, the why behind stocking size and location, and the first year stocking results using the hatchery bead filter purchased using the Black Bass Conservation Fund. Feedback from nearly 20 tournament directors who attended meetings was positive and the potential to host a hybrid meeting with similar information open to the public next year was discussed.

Staff submitted a manuscript for publication to North American Journal of Fisheries Management for a special issue detailing research from the Black Bass Symposium. The research looked at the difference in the size and number of black bass caught, as well as the habitat they were caught from, while using live-imaging sonar on Major League Fishing's Bass Pro Tour.

The Black Bass Advisory Committee (BBAC) met virtually on April 13 with the primary agenda items including regulatory updates and the status of Maryland's black bass fisheries. A significant outcome of the meeting was a vote on scoping a regulatory idea to expand tournament permitting to include catch-photo-release and catch-weigh-release formats. This change is intended to remove the centralized weigh-in criteria before a tournament permit is required, which would broaden the scope of management data available to the department. All but one member voted in favor of the regulation change. Michael Kashiwagi, West II Region Manager, gave a presentation on the Upper Potomac River's smallmouth bass fishery, indicating a robust population characterized by strong natural recruitment; consequently, no supplemental stocking is planned for 2026. Active monitoring of the expanding distribution of invasive flathead catfish within the watershed was also discussed. Of note were several tagging programs, including a department initiative to understand movement and exploitation of walleye in the upper Potomac as well as a citizen science tagging program of smallmouth bass. Infrastructure and environmental updates included the successful completion of the Rogues Harbor breakwater project and repairs to the "Potomac Interceptor" pipeline following the recent sewage spill in Potomac River, although a partial health advisory remains in effect for Montgomery County. Finally, a formal study on cormorant management has been deferred pending the hiring of a new Director of Fishing and Boating Services, and a discussion regarding local fundraising for stocking efforts at Big Slackwater has been scheduled for July.

Staff assisted the southern region in collection of broodstock largemouth bass. These fish are called broodstock because they provide a stock of fish that will spawn at the Joseph Manning Hatchery. The juveniles that are produced will be stocked throughout tidal rivers in the coming months. All broodstock will be returned to the river they came after they spawn.



Broodstock Largemouth Bass collected from Mattawoman Creek.

4. Fish Passage Program

Fish ladders and the eel ladder at Eden Mill Dam are up and running. Staff replaced some substrate at the Eden Mill ladder with a weave that is believed to be more suitable for young eels, or elvers. Right now this change is only for the lower ramp, but staff plan to replace the upper section in May. Staff have seen a few runs, but the runs appear to be slower than normal. Staff are also conducting a solicitation for proposals to enhance volitional fish passage at Conowingo Dam. The department is seeking proposals from qualified candidates to develop Artificial Intelligence (AI) driven technology that will help enhance the passage of target species like shad and herring while removing invasive species from the fish lift. Proposals are due at the end of the month.



Fish and eel ladder work at Eden Mill Dam

Sampling of eDNA is being conducted at 4 dams across the upper Bay watershed to detect anadromous and invasive fishes - that sampling will continue through May. The

Feasibility study for the Daniels Dam removal was delayed but is wrapping up now, with a presentation by American Rivers to DNR leadership in early June.



eDNA sampling at four dams across the Upper Bay watershed

Staff also participated in several "Future Focus Days" at area high schools - describing to students what DNR does and helping answer questions for those that wish to pursue a career in biology.



Participating in Future Focus Days at local high schools

5. Organized Freshwater Fishing

The spring session of the After-School Fishing Club for Edgewood Middle School kicked off on April 8. This is a continuation of the club that was developed in August of last year. More students joined and the club is up to 20 students! Many of them brought their own rods and tackle and were eager to get outside and re-connect with nature after the cold winter.

Staff recently assisted with trout stocking efforts in the Western Region and visited two impoundments that will serve as venues for youth bass fishing events in June. In May, largemouth bass will be tagged in these impoundments, and freshwater fisheries staff will launch an incentive program encouraging youth anglers to catch and report these tagged

bass to DNR. On the event days, two lucky winners will be drawn from the pool of participants who have successfully reported a tagged bass. The winners will receive a behind-the-scenes tour of the National Aquarium!

Freshwater fisheries assisted with a Master Naturalist class held at Tawes on April 29. Staff delivered an engaging presentation on fish biology, concluding with a hands-on blue catfish dissection. Participants were eager to deepen their understanding of the impacts of the invasive blue catfish species. We also discussed how, as Master Naturalists, they can play a key role in educating the public on the importance of native species conservation and promoting responsible angling practices.

Freshwater fisheries staff partnered with Shore Rivers and Kent County High School to host an Invasive Fishes Meaningful Watershed Education Experience (MWEE) on April 30. Invasive Fishes Program staff helped to lead a blue catfish dissection and provided hands-on education about electrofishing techniques and otolith extractions. Students gained valuable insight into the challenges posed by invasive species. Looking ahead, two additional field events are scheduled for May, offering more opportunities to get the students outdoors and engaged in fishing activities.



Taylor Anderson with Shore Rivers at Kent County High School

With a busy event season on the horizon, the Mobile Fishing Trailer recently received a well-deserved tune-up thanks to the support of Eastern Region and Freshwater Fisheries staff. New fishing rod holders were installed, improving organization and creating additional space inside the trailer. This upgrade looks great and will make a big difference for upcoming events.



New fishing holders in the Mobile Fishing Trailer!