

Freshwater Fisheries Monthly Report – December 2024

Stock Assessment

Mapping Rocky Gorge – Taking advantage of low water levels, staff mapped locations for fyke nets sites. The exposed shoreline was mapped with color coded sections to rate sites as premium, good, moderate, and bad locations for the fyke nets to be set in the early spring 2025.

Staff are working to complete summary reports for stock assessments performed during 2024.

Habitat and Water Quality

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

- Staff attended meetings to discuss the impacts of and options for submerged aquatic vegetation control in Deep Creek Lake.
- Staff reviewed a draft of the Grantsville Comprehensive Plan. Fishing and Boating Services provided resource information about the coldwater fisheries that could be impacted by the plan. Recommendations included the use of stormwater management treatments that use best management practices for surface water temperatures, riparian buffer protection for the Casselman River and tributaries that support wild trout populations, consideration of prioritizing development outside of coldwater drainages, and careful planning of public water well placement to minimize spring and ground water capture in coldwater drainages.
- A revised plan set for a proposed stream restoration project in an unnamed tributary to First Mine Branch. The plan set incorporated some of Fishing and Boating Services' recommendations from a previous review. Fishing and Boating Services requested additional details for a proposed stormwater management treatment, suggested reductions to tree removal, and recommended a phased approach to the restoration project with post-restoration monitoring to determine the thermal impacts to First Mine Branch before continuing with subsequent phases. The review process and discussion with project planners is ongoing in an effort to minimize impacts to downstream coldwater resources.

St. Mary's Lake - Completed a side scan sonar pilot study of parallel transects at St. Mary's Lake for the purpose of mapping the lake bottom habitat with depth contours. Future man-made habitat structures will be strategically placed in areas that lack stumps and downed trees, currently present in only some areas of the lake.

Stocking and Population Management - Staff completed annual maintenance stocking requests.

Staff worked with the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources to complete necessary fish health testing for fish that will be stocked into the North Branch of the Potomac River.

Pond Stocking Permit - No permits requested/issued this month.

Annual renewal reminder emails were sent to Fish Suppliers and Fee Fishing Lake permit holders.

Outreach

Customer Service - Provided customer service information for inquiries regarding:

- Obtaining a Maryland fishing license
- Ice fishing Deep Creek Lake
- Ice fishing access on Broadford Lake
- Walleye fishing in the nontidal Potomac River
- Winter and preseason trout stocking
- Invasive fishes, particularly blue catfish
- Black bass tournaments permitting and scheduling for 2025

Invasive Fishes Program - Staff are in the planning stages of a joint invasive species tournament to be held on June 1, 2025 in the District of Columbia with Department of Energy and Environment fisheries staff. Staff are also planning the fourth annual Snakes on the Dundee tournament, to be held on June 7, 2025 on the Gunpowder River, in partnership with US Fish and Wildlife Service and Gunpowder State Park staff.

Staff continued work on youth-specific outreach materials for events at department booths that engage the public and educate them on invasive fishes.

Staff are working with the Invasive Catfish Advisory Committee Chair to prepare for the January 2025 meeting.

Staff attended the Certified Local Farm and Fish Informational Event hosted by the Maryland Department of Agriculture. The session provided farmers and fish processors information on the state's procurement process and allowed staff to discuss challenges with fish processors.

Staff provided comments and information to a journalist about invasive blue catfish, their management, and Maryland's actions pertaining to the fish.

Staff developed a sampling plan with Maryland Department of Environment and World Wildlife Fund to perform nutritional composition, vitamin, macro- and micronutrient, and other analyses on whole, juvenile blue catfish. Maryland's blue catfish industry is interested in supplying whole, juvenile blue catfish as animal feed at zoos and wildlife facilities. A necessary first step is to determine nutritional composition of these fish to ensure they compare favorably to current items fed to zoo piscivores. These smaller fish are routinely caught and released by harvesters because there is currently no cost-effective market.

Coldwater Program - Continued to review all 2024 coldwater fish survey and temperature data for quality control and prepared the data for upload to the coldwater database.

Reviewed the 2024 coldwater fish survey and temperature data and historic data in the database for survey stations that fully or partially meet Use Class III, coldwater water quality criteria. Data for 22 stream segments suggested that additional regulatory protection for temperature may be needed. These data will be submitted to Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) for review and analysis. Stream segments that qualify for additional regulatory protection may receive use class redesignations or existing use determinations.

Provided technical guidance and support to the Heart of Maryland Collaborative for their grant application through the Whole Watershed Fund. The group is seeking funding for water quality improvement projects in the Antietam Creek watershed. These projects may improve water quality for coldwater fisheries resources throughout the watershed.

Tidal Bass Program - Staff attended Major League Fishing's (MFL) Berkley Labs virtual summit with over 100 state and federal biologists, professional anglers, and representatives from tournament organizations. Topics covered included data collected by anglers during the MLF Bass Pro Shops tour and presentations from Mighty River Recovery, Northwest Arkansas Fish Habitat Alliance and Anglers for Improving Opportunities. MFL is hosting one stop on the Bass Pro Tour at Smallwood State Park in June of 2025. Sixty-six anglers will compete over the course of four days in a catch-photo-release format tournament where every legal fish caught will be recorded with size, location, and time data. The raw data as well as a summary will be provided to the Tidal Bass Program at the end of the tournament.

Staff met with the Maryland Park Service to discuss the renovations of Smallwood State Park and the addition of a storage area for conservation equipment that will be provided to tournament directors.

Completed edits to all tidal bass datasheets with site length measurements and start/stop coordinates prior to bulk loading into GIFS database.

Other - Staff attended a virtual meeting to discuss an upcoming angler creel survey that will incorporate the lower Savage River wild trout fishery. The survey is scheduled to be conducted during 2025. Results will provide insights into angler use, demographics, tackle preferences, catch and harvest and will help to inform management on the extremely popular wild brown trout fishery.