

Freshwater Fisheries Monthly Report – July 2026

Freshwater Fisheries: Regional Operations

1. Stock Assessment

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

- The Southern Region Office worked with Taylor Anderson (Freshwater Fishing Events Specialist) to conduct a fish community survey of Mattawoman Creek, which is a stream that drains into the tidal Potomac River. Notable catches so far include a quillback that weighed seven pounds and seven ounces, which was four ounces heavier than the state record. As expected, goldfish are proving to be the most abundant fish in the system. During the survey, a wide variety of species were also documented, including a longnose gar, hogchoker, and yellow perch.



A seven pound and seven ounce quillback, four ounces heavier than the state record!



A longnose gar (Left) and hogchoker (Right) found during the Potomac River survey.

- Southern Region worked with the Invasive Fishes Program to conduct low frequency electrofishing (LFE) for blue catfish in the tidal Patuxent River. This was part of a new survey being developed using drone footage to better estimate the actual number of fish stunned from LFE. The LFE technique is highly effective; however, fish do not stay stunned long enough to net every individual fish. If a drone can capture quality images of blue catfish at the surface of the water, then those fish may be counted from digital images.



Blue catfish in the tidal Potomac River



Natural reproduction of blackbanded sunfish in a small eastern shore pond (Above). Staff used a seine net to collect fish from the pond (Right).

- West I Region staff have been conducting coldwater surveys to monitor trout populations throughout Garrett County.
- Central Region staff conducted multiple coldwater surveys when temperatures allowed in Baltimore and Carroll counties.
- West II Region staff completed all 2026 juvenile smallmouth bass seining surveys for the upper Potomac River, Monocacy River, and Conococheague Creek.
- West II Region staff mowed and generally upkept Fishery Management Area ponds throughout the month.
- Coldwater station surveys were started in Little Hunting Creek and Beaver Creek in West II. An environmental consulting firm completed surveys downstream of the Beaver Creek fly shop station. Those data were shared with the DNR.
- Eastern Region and Unicorn Lake Hatchery staff documented successful natural reproduction of blackbanded sunfish in an impoundment where 30 adult fish were stocked in early spring. This bodes well for future reintroduction efforts.
- Eastern Region and Unicorn Lake Hatchery staff sampled the wild trout population in Nesbitt Run in Cecil County. Both adult and juvenile brown trout were present. Nesbitt Run is a significant coldwater tributary to Basin Run.



Staff sampling Nesbitt Run in Cecil County.

2. Habitat and Water Quality

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

- West I Region staff reviewed and commented on an application for a mountain bike trail realignment and bridge installation project to take place within Green Ridge State Forest.
- West I Region staff reviewed and commented on an application for a culvert replacement to be conducted on an unnamed tributary to Braddock Run in Allegany County.
- Eastern Regional staff continues to engage with Maryland Department of Environment staff on the ongoing pollution of Basin Run. Staff provided comments to the Department of Natural Resources' Environmental Review Program on a proposed dam removal on the site.

3. Stocking and Population Management

- West I Region staff continues to assist Bear Creek Hatchery staff with daily operations.
- Southern Region stocked largemouth bass into several locations in the tidal Patuxent River.
- Eastern Regional staff and Tidal Bass Program staff stocked more than 12,000 juvenile largemouth bass raised at Joseph Manning Hatchery into multiple rivers on the eastern shore.
- Eastern Region staff stocked rodeo fish at several locations throughout the region.
- Eastern Region staff repaired a small outboard from Southern Region Office and delivered it to Somers Cove Marina for use in their water line repair.

4. Outreach

Customer Service - Provided customer service information for inquiries regarding:

- The City of Annapolis Parks and Recreation contacted the Southern Region Office regarding a fish kill occurring in the outflow of Annapolis Waterworks Reservoir. Staff contacted fish kill investigator Chris Luckett of Maryland Department of Environment who confirmed the presence of many dead fish in the plunge pool below the dam. The cause of the fish kill was most likely due to extreme heat and drought conditions which stopped all water flow from the dam. Dam operators were advised to crack open the outflow, which combined with some much-needed rain, will help prevent fish kills in the future.
- Staff responded to questions regarding the summer heat wave and potential impacts to Maryland's coldwater resources.

Additional Outreach Events

- West II Region staff participated in the Camp Guardian summer outreach program hosted at Greenbrier State Park with NRP officials.
- Southern Region staff held a hands-on boat electrofishing, backpack electrofishing, and beach seining demonstration for the Anacostia Watershed Society's Master Naturalist Class at the Bladensburg Waterfront Park on the tidal Anacostia River. Biologists were quite surprised to find a juvenile walleye in what has historically been called the state's most polluted river.



Juvenile walleye documented at Bladensburg Waterfront Park

5. Angler Access

- West I Region staff conducted routine maintenance at multiple Fishery Management Areas (FMAs) located in Allegany County.
- Eastern Regional staff assisted in the routine maintenance of Wye Mills, Smithville Lake, and Unicorn Lake FMAs.

6. Fish Health

- Southern Region investigated a fish kill of a private 10-acre farm pond that is used for local fishing derbies in Avenue, Maryland. Seining produced a fair

number of surviving sunfish and juvenile largemouth despite the obvious presence of an algae bloom and a dissolved oxygen measurement of 1.48 milligrams per liter. It was recommended that the owners install aerators and try to limit the amount of fertilizer spread on the surrounding fields.

*Small pond fish kill
resulting from algal
bloom and low dissolved
oxygen.*



Freshwater Fisheries: Statewide Operations

1. Invasive Fishes Program

The Invasive Fishes Program worked with students at Salisbury University to collect invasive blue catfish from the lower Sassafras River. The fish were collected as part of a graduate students' Master's of Science project aimed to examine the diet of the fish and potential effects on native, aquatic resources.

The Invasive Fishes Program and USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) staff scouted potential sites in Marshyhope Creek, Nanticoke River for the upcoming Tidal Catfish Monitoring Survey. Drought conditions and subsequent higher salinities may have invasive blue catfish occupying more upstream habitats than in previous years. Electrofishing requires fresh, low salinity waters (usually less than 3 practical salinity units) to effectively survey fish populations.

Invasive Fishes Program selected participants for the 2026 Commercial Electrofishing Chase Boat Pilot Program. Participants represent commercial harvesters of invasive catfish and assist the department's efforts to monitor populations of invasive catfishes. Generally, low-frequency electrofishing catfish surveys are labor intensive and require multiple chase boats to collect fish that surface for just a few moments, oftentimes more than 50 yards away from the electrofishing boat. As part of the program, participants are permitted to sell invasive catfish collected during the surveys. Four rivers are tentatively scheduled for summer 2026, with work beginning in late-July. The project is made possible via federal funding from USDA APHIS.

The department randomly selected 100 winners of the [Reel in the Blues Bonanza](#). The promotion offers free, chartered fishing trips for the public to harvest invasive blue catfish from Maryland waters. The program aims to engage recreational anglers in the harvest of blue catfish and highlight fishing opportunities for the invasive fish. Winners were selected from over 9,000 eligible entries. Winners will schedule trips with participating charter guides by the end of October 2026. The effort is funded via federal grants administered through NOAA.

Freshwater fisheries staff, along with assistance from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), supported the Invasive Fishes Program by surveying sites in the tidal, freshwater Patuxent River using low-frequency electrofishing. A drone operator gathered aerial videography and imagery of the sampling to test the efficacy of using aerial imagery to quantify fish density at sites and better estimate the number of fish from surveys.



Blue catfish caught by staff from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service while working with staff electrofishing on the Patuxent River.

2. Coldwater Fisheries Program

Coldwater fisheries surveys continued throughout July. Over 14 multi-pass and single-pass surveys were conducted to monitor population abundance, determine coldwater management potential for streams with no prior survey records, and assess the status of low abundance trout populations with no recent survey data. Adipose fin clips were collected during some surveys for use in genomics analyses. Periods of high temperatures necessitated careful survey location selection to avoid unnecessary stress on sampled trout.



*Electrofishing for brook trout under a woody debris jam during a coldwater survey (Left).
Juvenile brook trout collected during a coldwater survey (Right).*

Staff organized and convened the July meeting of the Coldwater Fisheries Advisory Committee. Melinda Cutler with the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE), attended to discuss various topics, including the status of the North Branch Potomac River existing use determinations, the timeline for the next Triennial Review of Water Quality Standards, and future plans for MDE's Cold Water Advisory Committee. Additionally, the committee selected Jason Andrick to continue serving as chair and Mike Selckmann to serve as the vice chair. Finally, the committee held a planning discussion to prioritize upcoming agendas and actions.

Staff provided an aquatic biology field demonstration at Friendsville Community Park for participants in the Natural Resources Careers Camp at the Hickory Environmental Education Center. Campers were informed about stream ecology, the benthic macroinvertebrates and fish that inhabit streams, and the importance of monitoring these organisms for natural resources management. Campers were also given the opportunity to capture live fish and look for benthic macroinvertebrates in a stream. This is an annual outreach effort that connects fisheries biologists with students that are interested in learning more about the field.



Fisheries biology demonstration at the Friendsville Community Park for participants in the Natural Resources Careers Camp at the Hickory Environmental Education Center.

Staff attended an Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture (EBTJV) data stewards meeting. The meeting brought together regional coldwater fisheries managers to discuss EBTJV's efforts to assess range-wide brook trout data. Managers discussed concerns about impacts to brook trout populations caused by high temperatures and low stream flows, how occupancy data are handled when wild trout co-occur and when stocked trout are present, and the data needed for determining localized extirpation of brook trout populations. The outcomes of the discussion will be incorporated into a range-wide brook trout occupancy data analysis.

3. Tidal Bass Program

Staff held the July meeting of the Black Bass Advisory Committee, where newly appointed Fishing and Boating Services (FABS) Director Michael Luisi introduced himself and shared that Carrie Kennedy will serve as interim lead for his former tidal role during the leadership transition. Staff reviewed tournament reporting metrics and discussed proposed protocol updates, such as boat caps, flight intervals, and weigh-in procedures, to reduce heat-related fish mortality. They also noted positive public feedback on expanding permit regulations for catch-weigh and catch-photo-release formats. The committee discussed the Big Slack Water section of the upper Potomac River, and agreed to pause restocking and fundraising proposals until staff complete nighttime baseline surveys this fall to establish bass abundance. Additionally, staff announced a \$616,000 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service grant awarded to support high school fishing clubs, equipment distribution, and updates to the agency's "Bass Class" program. Finally, staff presented departmental updates including findings on the July 4th Potomac River fish kill attributing the loss of approximately 21,000 fish (mostly

nongame) to low water levels and extreme heat, updates on discussions surrounding cormorant management, Nanticoke River and Marshyhope Creek sampling, and the status of the Black Bass Conservation Fund.

In June staff worked with Joseph Manning Hatchery and Southern and Eastern regions to stock approximately 21,800 largemouth bass to tidal rivers. Advanced fingerlings were stocked in the Choptank and Patuxent rivers, as well as Marshyhope and Tuckahoe creeks. Fish were stocked from boats targeting habitats with emergent vegetation and fallen woody cover while spreading them throughout the system. Remaining largemouth bass in Joseph Manning Hatchery will continue to grow to larger sizes before stocking later this fall.



Staff stocking largemouth bass in tidal rivers.

4. Fish Passage Program

Staff in the Fish Passage Program are prioritizing fish passage blockages to identify projects suitable for outreach to dam owners. High priority projects that do not currently have passage may be targeted for outreach.

American eel passage at Eden Mill has slowed dramatically. Staff observed no visible issues and suspect low passage could be due to high water temperatures and low river flow.

5. Organized Freshwater Fishing

Staff partnered with Aquatic Resource Education to lead a Train the Trainer session with the Natural Resource Police. The Natural Resources Police will collaborate with Aquatic Resource Education (ARE) and our unit to assist in public fishing events and eventually develop the capacity to host these events on their own as well. The day started out with an instructional lesson on how to effectively run a fishing program for the public, which was then followed by a detailed review of the processes and organization associated with operating the First Catch Mobile Fishing Trailer.

Go Fish Maryland hosted the Terrapin STEM Camp at Riverfront Park in Laurel for a day of fishing. Staff led the fishing activity with the support from the ARE unit as well as Vanessa Walsh and Jason Hanlon from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). A total of 44 campers aged seven to eleven years participated across four separate group rotations, learning basic angling safety and skills such as how to hold a rod, casting techniques, fish identification, and safe fish handling. Staff set up a specialized viewing tank with bubblers and a fish view finder so campers could examine species like redbreast sunfish up close before release. Additionally, 23 kindergarten and first-grade campers who were too young to fish joined in the fun by receiving educational coloring books and stickers, including snakehead stickers provided by USFWS.



Go Fish Maryland hosts the Terrapin STEM Camp for a day of fishing!