

Freshwater Fisheries Monthly Report – March 2024

Freshwater Fisheries - Stock Assessment

Upper Potomac River - Spring electrofishing surveys were completed on the upper Potomac River. A survey to collect and tag muskellunge was conducted in the section from Dam 5 to Williamsport. A total of eight adult muskellunge, ranging in size from 28 to 44 inches, were collected and tagged with a yellow dart tag adjacent to their dorsal fin. Anglers who catch a tagged fish are asked to report the tag number and catch information (date, location, length). These data help with the management of the fishery.



42-inch muskie from the upper Potomac River

Triadelphia Reservoir - Continued setting fyke nets in Triadelphia Reservoir and collecting targeted species such as crappie, walleye, white perch, and yellow perch. One net contained four adult walleye with large, full bellies indicating the spawn was yet to be completed.

Freshwater Fisheries - Habitat and Water Quality

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

- Stormwater management features planned for an unnamed tributary to Little Seneca Creek. Little Seneca Creek is designated as a Use Class III coldwater stream by the Maryland Department of the Environment. The stream does not support wild trout but has been the focus of angler interest for stocking efforts. This project will convert an existing dry retention pond and infiltration features to submerged gravel wetlands and will stabilize the stream. Additional information was requested due to a lack of detail in the plans. Appropriate placement and application of submerged gravel wetlands could be supported, but more information was needed for depth, treatment medium, infiltration capacity, and subsurface drainage. Furthermore, the stream restoration plans included a series of cascade structures with little information about the elevation drop or the volume of water that would be impounded above and below each structure. In addition, comments were submitted to request strict sediment and erosion control practices

- and reduced riparian vegetation removal.
- Commented as a stakeholder for the state forest audit that is to take place this spring.
- Attended a proposed stream restoration site at the headwaters of First Mine Branch in Harford County.
- Reviewed and approved five Scientific Collection Permits.

Muddy Creek Liming - Staff took advantage of a break in the weather to spray high calcium limestone sand into Muddy Creek in order to increase stream pH where it is impaired by acid deposition from snowmelt and rain events. The ultimate goal of this project is to provide better water quality within the stream to prevent fish kills that occurred prior to the initiation of this project.

Fish Habitat - Recycled Christmas trees were sunk to improve fish habitat in Unicorn Lake (Queen Anne's County) and Newtown Pond (Worcester County). Many thanks to the Kent County Public Works Department for delivering over 70 Christmas trees, and the Worcester County Parks and Recreation Department for assisting in deployment.

Brook Trout Joint Venture - Participated in the Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture FY25 Project Scoring Team. Reviewed and assigned scores to six habitat restoration projects on brook trout streams throughout the Eastern United States.

Freshwater Fisheries - Stocking and Population Management

Trout

- Western Region I assisted Bear Creek Hatchery for multiple days with routine trout stocking efforts.
- Central Region Staff spent the majority of the month stocking trout for youth opening day and the opening day of trout season. Staff stocked 25 management areas with over 25,000 trout during March.
- Trout were stocked in 13 area ponds as well as Severn Run completing the spring stocking for Southern Region locations.
- In total, the trout stocking program stocked more than 111,000 adult trout during March in Put and Take and Special Trout Management Areas.

Saugeye - Staff stocked Piney Reservoir with approximately 100,000 saugeye fry.

Youth Only Trout Day - Central Region staff went out on youth opening day to see how many youth anglers were fishing at the Farm Museum Pond, South Branch Patapsco River Road, and Westminster Pond. Despite the cold and rainy weather, youth anglers were fishing at all locations checked by staff.

Fish Suppliers - One additional Fish Supplier has been approved and we currently have nine approved suppliers. Here is the full listing: [Approved Fish Suppliers PDF](#).

Pond Stocking Permits - Seven received so far for March, six approved and one pending.

Freshwater Fisheries - Outreach

Provided customer service information for inquiries regarding:

- Provided anglers with information concerning the new walleye regulation that went into effect for Deep Creek Lake.
- Trout stocking and fishing information.
- Saugeye stocking information for Piney Reservoir.

STEM Like a Girl – Provided a display and activity for the second annual STEM Like a Girl event. [STEM Like a Girl](#) works to empower girls with knowledge in science, technology, engineering, and math. Rocky Gap State Park and Allegany County Schools partnered to host this event to provide visitors with hands-on STEM activities. The event was a success with over 250 people walking through the 20 plus exhibitors.

Envirothon - Provided Aquatics training for the Frederick County Envirothon students. Study topics for the Aquatics stations included: fish anatomy, impact of stormwater runoff, invasive species, watersheds, and water quality. Students also received training on Forestry, Soils, Wildlife, and this year's 5th Issue is "Renewable Energy for a Sustainable Future".

Freshwater Fisheries - Angler Access

Fishery Management Areas (FMA) - Regional staff continued routine checks and maintenance at the McCoolle, Black Oak and Evitts Creek FMAs. Due to excessive littering and suspicious activity, cellular trail cameras were placed at the McCoolle FMA in order to collect evidence and work with NRP to charge individuals for littering and other illegal activities.

Signage - Posted tidal bass regulation and invasive fish signs at access points in the Eastern Region. To date, over 40 fishing access points have been visited and posted with signs, if necessary. Remaining areas will be completed by the end of April.

Freshwater Fisheries - Invasive Fishes Program

Blue Catfish - Staff met with members and stakeholders from the Office of Communications, Maryland Department of Agriculture, Maryland Department of Environment, Coastal Conservation Association, Fish & Hunt Maryland, and Caroline County Public Schools to discuss marketing blue catfish to consumers and the public's misunderstanding of Maryland's Fish Consumption Advisories. Risks associated with eating blue catfish are minimal and similar to or lower than those associated with consuming other fishes in Maryland. Those advisories are recommendations based on prolonged consumption of seafood over a span of 30 years and a 1 in 100,000 increased risk of negative health outcomes. Partners are working to allay the public's fears with documents and statements that address concerns, better frame risks, and clarify advisories.

Northern Snakehead - Staff met with United States Fish and Wildlife Service and Maryland Park Service staff to plan Snakes on the Dundee III, the third fishing event that targets invasive northern snakehead in the Gunpowder River hosted by Maryland Parks Service. The event is currently scheduled for June 8, 2024 and hopes to attract hundreds of participants.

Invasive Catfish Workgroup - Staff attended the Chesapeake Bay Program Invasive Catfish Workgroup, Science and Management subgroup meeting to discuss management priorities to address the blue catfish invasion in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Identified priorities included the need for tributary-specific management plans, identifying harvest objectives, and the need for population estimates and projection models.

Conowingo Dam – Conowingo began operating the East and West Fish Lifts as part of a cooperative project for anadromous fish passage. This is the fourth year that invasive fishes collected in the lifts are removed and used for science, or donated to needy families at local food banks. The project is a cooperative effort between the department, Constellation Energy, Normandeau Associates, and J.J. McDonnell. Nearly 100 flathead catfish ranging in size from 12 to 30 inches were removed and processed by J.J. McDonnell in the first week of operation.

Freshwater Fisheries - Coldwater Program

North Branch Potomac River - Worked with Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) to determine data collection needs for North Branch Potomac River in 2024. The department is working with MDE staff to develop an existing use determination and a possible use class re-designation for the North Branch below Savage River. Additional temperature logger locations were identified to strengthen the pending existing use determination. The loggers will be deployed in the spring and will be retrieved after the summer index period. The data will be submitted to MDE for the existing use determination.

Coldwater Database - Updated the Coldwater Fisheries Database to include all of the brook trout genetics data that have been collected by the department and collaborators. These data will be used to better understand diversity within brook trout patches and to determine optimal source populations for reintroduction projects in the future.

Continued to update population estimates for the 2020 brook trout patch assessment with population data collected after the assessment was completed. These data will be used to confirm that the brook trout patch assessment remains current and informative about the status of brook trout patches. The information will be used to guide management decisions and prioritize the allocation of limited resources.

Updated the Trout Fishing in Maryland webpage with new information and resources for anglers. The webpage can be found at:

<https://dnr.maryland.gov/fisheries/pages/trout/index.aspx>.

Stream Restoration - Attended a site visit for a stream restoration project in the headwaters of an unnamed tributary to First Mine Branch. The project proposes an

integrated stream and floodplain wetland approach to lower and widen the floodplain and reconnect the stream to groundwater. Freshwater Fisheries and Hatcheries Division previously reviewed and submitted comments for this project. Concerns for project activities that would clear riparian vegetation and create scour pools while failing to address stormwater management in the headwaters and poor land use practices were communicated during the discussion. Requests included additional pre-project temperature monitoring, reduced riparian clearing, fewer scour pools and impounded water, and pre-and post-project temperature data collected from comparable projects.

Brook Trout - Attended the Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture Steering Committee quarterly meeting. Updates were provided for brook trout habitat improvement project grant applications, the latest update for the range-wide brook trout occupancy mapping tool, outreach efforts related to the mapping tool, and general organizational management issues.

Freshwater Fisheries - Tidal Bass Program

Staff completed and sent the Black Bass Annual Review to over 200,000 licensed, self-identified black bass anglers, over 100 bass tournament directors, and members of the Black Bass Advisory Committee (BBAC).

Staff addressed concerns with the fees associated with the weigh-in station at Smallwood State Park, discussing the concern with park staff and arranging a meeting with representatives from Maryland Bass Nation.

Staff finalized publication process for a paper in Ecological Modeling, *A GIS-based approach for managing catch-and-release fisheries*.

Staff welcomed Ryan Gary, the new Tidal Bass Program Manager, during the March statewide operations meeting.

In collaboration with members of BBAC, staff finalized three bass conservation videos from Mike Iaconelli and posted them online: <https://dnr.maryland.gov/fisheries/pages/conserves-bass.aspx> and <https://dnr.maryland.gov/fisheries/pages/bass/ta.aspx>.

Set up map and equipment to start the cooperative tidal black bass tagging project on the Potomac River.

Freshwater Fisheries – Other

Kicked off the new [GIFS Extractor Map](#) by sending out a link and description for how to use the app to all GIFS users. The new Extractor Map has the ability to query data from the GIFS database from either the Summary Catch data or the Individual Fish data. Benefits of the extractor map are that you can either view your results in the attribute table or export it as a *.csv file that can be opened using Microsoft Excel.