

# Freshwater Fisheries Monthly Report – March 2025

## Stock Assessment

**North Branch Potomac River (NBPR)** - Western Region I staff collected adult trout from the NBPR catch-and-release all tackle management area as part of an ongoing growth and mortality study using PIT tags. A number of fish were collected and tagged, with some very large trout in the sample.

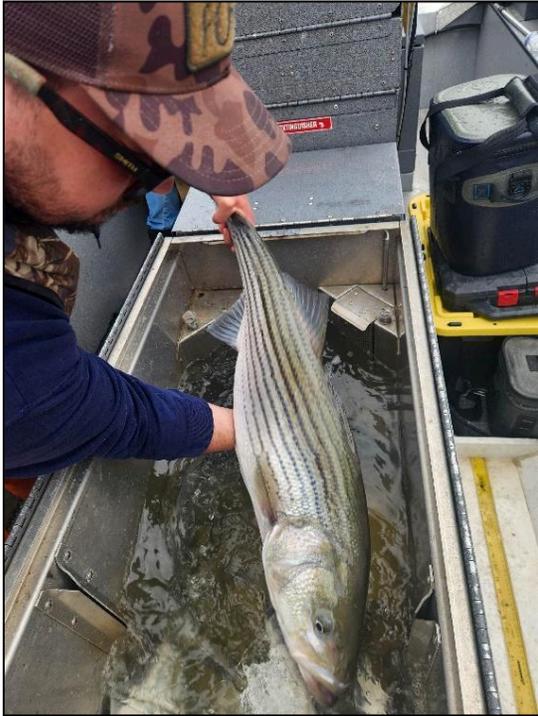


**Upper Potomac River Walleye** - The annual spring walleye brood collection from the upper Potomac River commenced in March. Sixty adult walleye (24 females, 36 males) were collected and transported to the department’s Joseph Manning Hatchery for spawning. The resulting juveniles will be stocked at various waterbodies across the state later this spring. In addition to broodstock, a walleye tagging survey is underway in sections of the river downstream from Dam 4. Anglers are asked to report any tagged walleye to 301-898-5443. Several tagged fish have already been reported. Results from this tagging study will help with the management of this fishery.



*(L to R) Upper Potomac River tagged walleye; 40 inch muskellunge collected below Dam 4*

**Liberty Reservoir** - Central Region staff electrofished Liberty Reservoir to assess the status of the striped bass fishery. Electrofishing was conducted at multiple sites over the course of two days. Multiple year classes of striped bass were collected and fish ranged from 456 to 978 millimeters (18 to 38.5 inches). Staff pulled scales for ageing purposes and each fish was tagged. In conjunction with the striped bass sampling, staff collected multiple year classes of crappie for age/growth analysis. During the course of the electrofishing sample, staff encountered and euthanized the first northern snakehead observed by Freshwater Fisheries biologists in Liberty Reservoir.



*Liberty Reservoir striped bass*

**Rocky Gorge Reservoir** - Fyke net sampling began March 3 at Rocky Gorge for collecting target species including crappie, perch, sunfish, and walleye. Otoliths from a

subsample of fish (seven species in total) are being collected and will be used for age and growth determination. Night electrofishing for walleye was also initiated in order to improve our data from Rocky Gorge for age/growth and size distribution to allow comparisons with other lakes and rivers in Maryland.

## **Habitat and Water Quality**

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

- Two sewer line projects to take place in Allegany County, Maryland. Comments provided were for equipment and material storage, sediment and erosion control, open trench dewatering, casting concrete recommendations, and site reclamation at the completion of the project.
- The Eckhart Mine Subsidence Grouting Project that is to take place in Eckhart, Allegany County, Maryland.
- An application submitted for an erosion control project to take place on Hoyes Run in Garrett County, Maryland. No comments have been provided at this point - a future site visit is warranted for appropriate commenting.
- Reviewed a structure rehabilitation project that is to take place on MD 36 over Jennings Run in Allegany County, Maryland.
- Proposed stream restoration projects in Jones Falls and in Harris Mill Creek. Site visits for both streams were conducted with project planners. The department provided aquatic resource information at both sites and made several recommendations to minimize impacts to coldwater fisheries. Impacts to the coldwater resources in Jones Falls may be minimized if appropriate modifications are made to the project design. However, the department suggested that the Harris Mill Creek project should be avoided and alternative locations should be considered.

**Temperature Probe** - Staff updated the firmware on the NBPR real-time temperature probe near McCoole. The probe provides the US Army Corps of Engineers information regarding releases from Jennings Randolph and Savage River Reservoir, as well as providing anglers information regarding current river conditions.

**Broadford Lake** - Staff collected discarded Christmas trees from the Garrett County landfill and placed them into Broadford Lake for fish habitat enhancement.

**Muddy Creek** - Staff moved hydrated lime into Muddy Creek to improve water quality for the trout resources found there.

## **Stocking and Population Management**

### **Put-and-Take Trout Stocking**

- Western Region I staff assisted Bear Creek Hatchery staff with spring trout stocking efforts in Garrett and Allegany counties for the opening of the 2025 put-and-take trout season.

- Central Region staff spent the majority of March stocking trout for Youth Day and for the opening day of trout season. Staff stocked over 25,000 rainbow, golden rainbow, and brown trout in over 25 locations.
- Rainbow and golden rainbow trout were stocked at nine Southern Region ponds and Severn Run. An enthusiastic high school volunteer assisted with stocking at several of the ponds and shows great promise for future volunteerism as well. One of the locations, Governor's Bridge Pond, required the "Fisheries ATV wagon" to ferry the trout between the truck and the remote stocking location.
- Regulation signs were posted for the new Youth Trout Fishing Day with the closure schedule at three area ponds in the Southern Region. Being the first year of having a closure for these areas, some phone calls were received reporting illegal fishing activity during the closure and these were promptly relayed to our Natural Resources Police officers. Other callers expressed concerns that there is not enough stocking of trout in the southern area; they see online notices that trout are stocked but it is always "out west" in their view.

**Fee Fishing Lake Permits:** There are currently four approved facilities, one pending review. Here is the full listing: [Fee Fishing Lakes](#)

**Fish Supplier Permits:** There are currently 12 approved suppliers. Here is the full listing: [Approved Fish Suppliers PDF](#).

**Pond Stocking Permits:** 10 issued, six pending review.

## **Outreach**

**Customer Service** - Provided customer service information for inquiries regarding:

- With the approaching Trout Opening Day, many phone calls regarding trout stocking/fishing in Maryland along with questions about youth trout fishing opportunities.
- Boat ramp access at Deep Creek Lake.
- Fishing the Youghiogheny Reservoir and NBPR.
- Becoming an Outdoors-Woman blue catfish fishing trip.
- Bass fishing tournament scheduling.
- Casselman River trout stocking.
- Walleye and smallmouth bass fishing on the nontidal Potomac River.

Staff assisted Garrett College students by performing mock interviews to help prepare them for application to positions in the natural resources field.

**Trout Presentation** - Staff provided a presentation to members of the Potomac Valley Fly Fishers in Frederick County on Catoctin Region stream monitoring. Trends in trout populations from major streams in the area were shown to the group. Additional information on recent regulation changes and proposed license fee increases were also discussed.

**Intern Position** - Conducted interviews for a summer unpaid internship position at the Southern Regional office. The job will be offered to one of the four exemplary candidates

who completed the process. It will be a difficult decision as they all had excellent qualifications.

**Youth Trout Fishing Day at Pine Lake** – Collaborated with Montgomery County Parks to provide the First Catch Mobile Fishing Trailer for the Youth Only Trout Fishing day during their World Water Day Event at Wheaton Park (Pine Lake). It was a beautiful day for fishing and approximately 140 youth borrowed fishing rods during the day. Invasive Fishes Program staff were also on hand to assist and educate about the threats of aquatic nuisance species to Maryland ecosystems.



*Photo by Montgomery Parks, MNCPPC*

**Master Naturalist Program**– Provided an Aquatic Ecosystems/Freshwater Fish training for two Maryland Master Naturalist Programs hosted at Stillmeadow Peace Park in Baltimore and Robinson Nature Center in Howard County. The aquatic presentation covered different aquatic ecosystems in Maryland, the threats to the stream ecosystems

(i.e., invasive species, land use changes, stormwater runoff) and the importance of the riparian buffers for protection of the resource. A PowerPoint presentation on the Fishes of Maryland with a focus on fish found in their region was also provided. Participants were able to do hands-on fish identification (with preserved fish samples) and learn to use a key to identify fish family/species. Each class had 25 participants.

**STEM like a Girl** – Provided a display and a mark and recapture fish population activity for the third annual STEM like a Girl event. Rocky Gap State Park and Allegany County Schools collaborated 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. (STEM = science, technology, engineering, and math)

## **Angler Access**

**Fishery Management Areas (FMAs)** - Staff continues to perform routine checks and maintenance at various FMAs across the state.

## **Fish Health**

**Largemouth Bass** - A sample of largemouth bass from Greenbrier Lake in Washington County was collected and transported to the Cooperative Oxford Laboratory for fish health testing. The impoundment currently has an overabundance of largemouth bass in the 8-11 inch size range. Pending the testing results, the plan is to relocate largemouth bass of this size to help improve growth and create a more balanced bass population.

## **Invasive Fishes Program**

Invasive Fish Program staff have begun preparations for invasive fish removals from the fish lifts at Conowingo Dam. The lifts operate each spring to allow the passage of anadromous shad and herring species. During lift operations, invasive fishes are collected and stored in a refrigerated cooler to be used for research and donations to local food banks. The project is conducted in cooperation with Constellation Energy, Normandeau and Associates, J.J. McDonnell seafood processor, and the department. Fish lifts will begin running in April and operate no later than mid-June. Last year 18,000 pounds of invasive fishes were removed through this cooperative effort.

Permits for both the Mid and Lower Bay Finfish Trotline Pilot and the For-Hire/Commercial Blue Catfish Pilot projects were sent to participants this month. Six of eight trotline pilot participants have sent signed permits back and six of sixteen of the for-hire/commercial pilot participants have sent signed permits back. The for-hire/commercial pilot is still receiving a few applications and the application will continue to stay open on a rolling basis for this pilot. We anticipate activity on both of these pilots to ramp up as the weather and the water temperatures continue to warm.

Staff worked to issue small grants to support fishing events that target blue catfish and other invasive fishes in Maryland waters. The events, the Benedict Volunteer Fire

Department 2nd annual Catfish Tournament (April 12, 2025) and Coastal Conservation Association Maryland's Great Chesapeake Invasive Count (spring 2025), engage the community to fish for and remove blue catfish and other species that threaten Maryland's waterways, and are part of a larger effort to incentivize and increase removals of invasive fishes.

## **Coldwater Program**

Toured current and past hatchery facilities with hatcheries staff to identify a location for a brook trout propagation project. This project will attempt to raise wild brook trout fingerlings for use in population reintroduction efforts. Brook trout eggs will be stripped and fertilized in the field and transported to an isolated culturing facility at a hatchery. Isolation is needed to maintain biosecurity, which will protect both put-and-take fish and the propagated wild brook trout. The brook trout eggs will be cultured to the fingerling stage, after which they will be released to targeted streams.

Continued to collaborate with researchers from University of Maryland, Center for Environmental Science, U.S. Geological Survey, and Towson University to complete and submit a grant proposal to the National Science Foundation for funding to support a brook trout genomics project. The department also supported a University of Maryland application for congressionally directing spending as an additional source of funding for this project.

Pursued congressionally directing spending funds for a culvert removal project planned in Big Run. Big Run is a brook trout stronghold in the Savage River watershed with several miles of public access. The culvert to be removed acts as a barrier for fish passage and may be undersized for high flow events. The department is working with Garrett County, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Trout Unlimited to replace the culvert with a bridge that will allow fish passage and will improve the flood resiliency of the stream crossing.

Provided a presentation about benthic macroinvertebrates in coldwater streams to Maryland Trout Unlimited. The presentation informed attendees about the biology and ecology of benthic macroinvertebrates and how benthic macroinvertebrate samples may be used by fisheries managers to make informed management decisions. Samples with representatives of various aquatic insect orders were shared with the group.

Attended the Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture Steering Committee March meeting. Agenda items included a review and vote on the rankings for 2025 Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture grant applications, discussions on the status of funding opportunities and the current budget, updates on the group's work plan and priorities, and general organizational management issues.

## **Tidal Bass Program**

Staff attended the Maryland BASS Nation Directors meeting in early March. This meeting brings together members and tournament directors from chapters across Maryland and the greater DMV region who fish in Maryland waters. The purpose of the gathering is to review the previous year and discuss plans for the upcoming fishing season. Staff were invited to give a presentation, where they covered the results of the 2024 Tidal Bass Survey, new hot weather tournament permit requirements, stocking efforts, and the Black Bass Conservation Fund.

The completed analysis of the 2024 tournament results is now available on the [Tidal Bass Tournament webpage](#). Of the 394 requested permits, 307 tournaments were reported, reflecting a reporting rate of approximately 78%, which is consistent with previous years. The most popular tournament locations were the Potomac River, Upper Chesapeake Bay, Pocomoke River, Choptank River, and Deep Creek Lake, collectively accounting for just under 50,000 angler-hours. The total reported angler-hours for the year reached 61,492, falling below the four-year average of 67,988 hours.

Staff met with researchers from West Virginia University to explore a potential collaboration on a project studying Largemouth Bass Virus in our tidal waters. The researchers are currently investigating the prevalence of the virus throughout the year using environmental eDNA sampling and mucus swabs. This project has the potential to provide valuable data on how Largemouth Bass Virus spreads through our tidal waters and impacts local fisheries.

Staff completed and analyzed data from a survey of anglers regarding Forward Facing Sonar. This new technology has been used by bass anglers nationwide. The department has been learning more about its use in the state and whether it should be incorporated into its own survey methodologies. Results of the survey will be circulated at the upcoming Black Bass Advisory Committee meeting on April 7, 2025.

## **Fish Passage Program**

Staff created and submitted for promotional outreach a video that highlighted work conducted at eel ladders each spring to ensure that they are clear of debris.

Staff participated in several meetings related to the Cypress Branch Dam Removal and Stream Restoration project. The project entails removing the dam, rerouting the river, stabilizing the shoreline, and preventing downstream sediment plumes. The project should be completed by spring 2025, with at least the majority of the in-stream work completed by the end of April.



Images taken of the Cypres Dam Removal Project using drone (March 18, 2025; near Millington, MD).

