Freshwater Fisheries Report – May 2025

Freshwater Fisheries - Stock Assessment

Impoundment Surveys - Inclement weather has affected the ability of regional staff to conduct annual electrofishing surveys on impoundments. Ten of the 20 stations scheduled for Deep Creek Lake were completed on May 19-20, while the remaining 10 sites are scheduled for the end of the month. Due to excessive debris and turbid water resulting from flood impacts, sampling on Savage River Reservoir has been postponed until 2026.

Small impoundment surveys were conducted on Blairs Valley Lake and Greenbrier Lake in Washington County. Largemouth bass catch and size distribution indicated a well balanced population in Blairs Valley Lake with numerous fish that were greater than 12 inches in length. The lake had numerous bluegill and redear sunfish. Black crappie were abundant with several fish in the 7-10 inch size range.

Greenbrier Lake continues to have an overabundance of largemouth bass in the 7-12 inch size range. Eighty-three percent of the bass collected were in this size category. In an effort to reduce bass crowded conditions to improve the number of quality size fish, 200 largemouth bass were removed from Greenbrier Lake and stocked in tidal sections of the Patapsco River following appropriate fish health screening.

Additional survey work during 2025 is being planned for the North Branch of the Potomac River and the lower Savage River tailwater to assess any impacts the recent flooding may have had on the trout populations and habitat.

Kentland Community Pond - A pond check was performed with a 30-foot seine at Kentland Community Pond inside the beltway near Landover, MD. The pond is a candidate site for the Sunfish in Schools program to release fish grown in classrooms in the area. The seining result showed a variety of sunfish already in the pond, and plenty of golden shiners and brown bullheads; basic water quality readings were sufficient to maintain populations of warmwater fish.

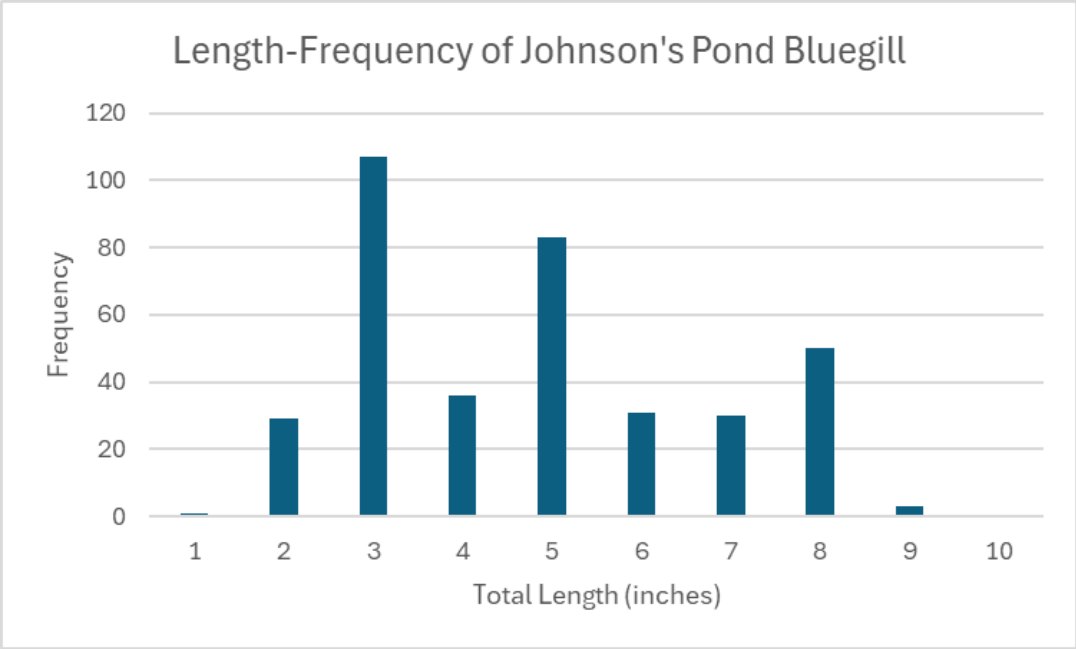
Electrofishing Surveys - Conducted electrofishing surveys on St. Mary's Lake and the Indian Creek Wildlife Management Area pond. The Indian Creek pond survey indicated a good balance of black crappie, bluegill, and largemouth bass and is quite possibly one the best bass fishing ponds in the Southern Region. The St. Mary's Lake survey included chain pickerel, flier, and tadpole madtom. Preliminary results for largemouth bass in St. Mary's indicated low densities but a variety of sizes.

Flier found in St. Mary's Lake.

Rocky Gorge Reservoir -The tenth and final fyke-net survey date at Rocky Gorge Reservoir was May 2. Most surveys were 2-night sets but the final one was one-net-night and results included a giant 17.2 inch black crappie weighing 2.7 pounds, pictured below. White perch continued to be captured, but at lower numbers than early spring samples. Many bluegill and suckers were filling the nets as well.

An impressive 17.2 inch black crappie collected in Rocky Gorge.

Johnson's Pond - Eastern Region staff conducted an electrofishing survey of Johnson's Pond in Wicomico County to assess panfish populations. Staff collected all black crappie, bluegill, redear sunfish, and yellow perch from selected sampling stations. Johnson's Pond is currently supporting a robust bluegill population. Large bluegill and redear sunfish were frequently encountered during the survey. Very few black crappie were encountered. Yellow perch were abundant, however most had lengths less than nine inches.



Sunfish collected in Johnson's Pond

Freshwater Fisheries - Habitat and Water Quality

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

- Multiple applications for culvert replacements to take place in Garrett County, Maryland. Comments were provided for time of year restriction, minimal disturbance, material storage, equipment access, curing concrete monitoring, pump around procedures and site restoration at the completion of the project. Specific comments for added protection were made for culverts installed on brook trout streams.
- Western Region I staff toured Garrett and Allegany County to observe and assess flood damage from the recent storm event. The upper Savage River watershed had

considerable scouring, material deposition, and channel alterations as well as damage to road infrastructure.

- Culvert repairs and replacements that are planned for stream crossings at Cherry Creek, an unnamed tributary to North Branch Potomac River, Block Run, and Monroe Run. Additionally, an emergency culvert replacement was reviewed for Poplar Lick Run. Brook trout are present in Block Run, Monroe Run, and Poplar Lick Run. Comments were submitted to reduce impacts to these populations and to consider designs that improve habitat conditions and connectivity. Additionally the Maryland Department of Natural Resources will work with Garrett County to see if aquatic resource friendly designs are an option.
- Southern Region staff met with Charles County Roads Department, Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) Fish Kill Investigation Program and Nontidal Wetlands and Waterways Program to discuss a recently installed culvert pipe that had trapped a large number of gizzard shad in April. Rock material had been placed in front of the drainpipe causing a "fish strainer" effect.

Temperature Loggers - Staff deployed temperature loggers into stormwater sediment basins located at the I-95/Belvidere Road interchange project in Cecil County. The interchange is being constructed within a Use III, coldwater watershed. Even within Use III watersheds, traditional sediment basin BMPs during construction utilize impoundments with high residence times to trap sediment before discharging. The impounded water can warm significantly during warmer months. Instead of a direct discharge, the experimental design sends the water from the impoundment through a three-foot deep, three-foot wide trench filled with coarse rocks. The experimental design of these basins incorporates deep rock trenches to cool the water before discharge. The study is designed to determine the efficacy of this new design.

Freshwater Fisheries - Stocking and Population Management

Western Region I staff assisted Bear Creek Hatchery staff with hauling and stocking advanced fingerling (~ 5 inches in length) rainbow trout from Bowden State Fish Hatchery located in West Virginia to the North Branch Potomac River near Westernport. The West Virginia Division of Natural Resources and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources work together to supply fingerlings to support this very popular fishery enjoyed by residents of both states.

Fee Fishing Lake Permits: Currently there are five approved facilities. View the full listing: Fee Fishing Lakes
Fish Supplier Permits: Currently there are 12 approved suppliers. View the full listing: Approved Fish Suppliers PDF.
Pond Stocking Permits: 11 approved (April 26 - May 27)

Freshwater Fisheries - Outreach

Customer Service - Provided customer service information for inquiries regarding:

- Trout stocking/fishing in Maryland
- Stream flows for Garrett County
- Fishing Deep Creek Lake
- Fishing license information
- Trophy fish citation awards
- Fishing Access
- Flood related fisheries questions
- Hatchery conditions and the Put and Take trout stocking program

Women on the Water - Provided the Mobile First Catch Fish Trailer for an introductory Fishing and Boating Clinic for women. Twenty-five women attended the event held at Seneca Creek State Park. This workshop was geared toward teaching women basic boating and fishing skills. A seminar on "How to get started in Boating" was given and discussion about boating safety, boat types and where to go for boat rentals. Participants also learned basic fishing skills (knot tying, tackle selection, rigging, and casting) before heading to the water to fish. Staff from the Invasive Fishes Program and the Office of Outdoor recreation provided assistance with fishing activities and the Aquatic Education and Stewardship Unit provided kayak fishing for participants who wanted to try fishing from a kayak.

Youth Fishing Event – Provided the Mobile First Catch Fish trailer for the Husky Pup Youth Fish Rodeo held at Accident Pond. This first-time event was attended by over 130 youth anglers. Staff were on hand to answer fishing related questions and to assist wherever needed. Several families took advantage of the loaner rods provided with the trailer. Some very nice trout were caught as well.

Happy Angler with a nice rainbow trout.

Master Naturalist Program– Provided an Aquatic Ecosystems/Freshwater Fishes of Maryland presentation for the Maryland Master Naturalist Program hosted by Lake Roland in Baltimore County. The aquatic presentation covers different aquatic ecosystems in Maryland, the threats to the stream ecosystems (i.e. invasive species, land use, stormwater runoff) and the importance of the riparian buffers for protection of the resource.

Great day for a rodeo at Accident Pond.

The PowerPoint presentation on the Fishes of Maryland focused on fish found in their region. A hands-on exercise allowed class participants the opportunity to key out some fish species.

Youth Fishing Camp - Southern Region staff provided expertise at the youth fishing camp at Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Merkle Wildlife Sanctuary in cooperation with Prince George's County Public Schools, William S. Schmidt Outdoor Education Center. The kids had two stations, one was a pond fishing experience and the other was learning about aquatic life in the Patuxent River through a beach seine experience and dip netting in the shallows. Several species of fish were caught and placed temporarily in an aquarium to learn the differences in species and their variety of functions in the ecosystem.

Freshwater Fisheries - Angler Access

West Region I staff continue to perform routine checks and maintenance at the McCoole, Black Oak, and Evitts Creek Fishery Management Areas.

West Region I staff worked to clear up to 18 inches of mud from the public boat ramps at McCoole and Black Oak as a result of recent flooding.

L to R – Before and after the mud removal.

Freshwater Fisheries – Fish Health

Fish Kill - Staff made a site visit to Glendenning Park located in Frostburg, Maryland to investigate a fish kill. MDE Fish Kill Investigation Program staff were asked to visit the site due to health concerns from the City of Frostburg and the mortality was deemed to be a result of spawning stress and fluctuating temperatures.

Freshwater Fisheries - Invasive Fishes Program

Invasive Fishes Program staff have been removing invasive fish from the East Fish Lift at Conowingo Dam. The fish lift has been operating every day, when flows allow, due to higher numbers of anadromous shad and herring species. The first freshwater drum (*Aplodinotus grunniens*) was removed from the lifts in May. The fish was retained and

dissected. It was a mature female that weighed nearly 10 pounds. A small clam and snail had been found in its gut. Since as early as 2022, freshwater drums have been detected in the upper Chesapeake Bay. Freshwater drum is native to North and Central America, but not Chesapeake Bay, and is known to prey upon mollusks and crustaceans. In Maryland, 14 of our 16 mussel species are either rare, threatened, or endangered. Invasive fishes collected during lift operations are euthanized and used for scientific data collection or processed by J.J. McDonnell & Co., Inc. and donated to local food banks.

Freshwater drum found in the Conowingo Dam fish lift.

Staff gave a talk for the Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake virtual May learning lab, on Maryland's invasive fishes. The talk was presented in partnership with Dave Sikorski from Coastal Conservation Association of Maryland and local angler Eric Packard.

Staff presented a talk on invasive fish biology and management to the Maryland Chapter of Trout Unlimited. The group has interest in fishing for and harvesting snakeheads and invasive catfishes, particularly during the summer months when trout are vulnerable to angling stress due to high temperatures. The talk was coupled with snakehead fishing tips and tricks from local snakehead angler, Pat Smith.

Invasive Fishes Program staff have been working on making invasive fish print molds of blue catfish, flathead catfish, and northern snakehead, for youth outreach that is modeled after the Japanese fish print style, Gyotaku.

Staff have been working diligently in support of invasive fishes tournaments and derbies across the state. Through May 2025, grants and prizes have been distributed to three tournaments promoting the harvest of blue catfish and other invasive fishes. Additionally,

the program is co-hosting two derbies. Reel Invasion - Anacostia is on June 1, the event hosted with D.C. Department of Energy and Environment at Anacostia Park. This is the first collaboration between the agencies and prizes will be provided for the top three heaviest blue catfish, flathead catfish, and northern snakehead, in addition to numerous door prizes.

On June 7, USFWS Maryland Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office, Maryland Park Service, and Fishing and Boating Services will host 'Snakes on the Dundee IV', the fourth iteration of the invasive fish derby. The event features fish prints and demonstrations of fishing techniques, fileting fish, and bowfishing with Southern Maryland bowfishing, and more.

Freshwater Fisheries - Coldwater Program

Staff continued spring fieldwork and data collection. This included the completion of continuous temperature logger deployment in advance of the summer index period and the processing of benthic macroinvertebrate samples for coldwater obligate identification.

Staff toured the Savage River watershed following the May 13 flood event. Several coldwater habitat improvement projects were impacted by the event. The damages are being assessed and adjustments to the projects are under consideration. Any changes will be made in collaboration with project partners and Garrett County.

Savage River flood damage observed following the high water event on May 13.

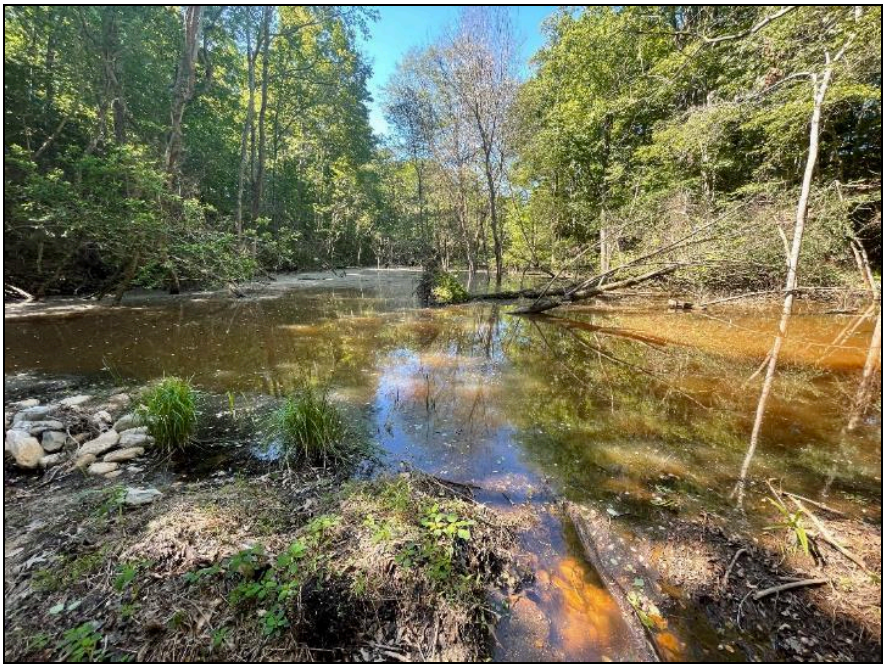
Staff provided field demonstrations for students at Mountain Ridge High School at Evitts Creek (Allegany County) and Southern Garrett High School at Pawn Run (Garrett County). Students were presented with information about the relationship between watersheds and surface waters and observed surveys for aquatic insects and fish. Students also had the opportunity to collect aquatic insects, participate in the seine demonstration, and net fish during an electrofishing demonstration.

Fishing and Boating Services provides a seining demonstration for students at Mountain Ridge High School (left). A northern pike was captured while seining with students from Southern Garrett High School (right).

Staff presented a summary of brook trout conservation projects to the Antietam Fly Anglers charter club. The presentation included background information about the status of brook trout in Maryland, the need for conservation, and details about reintroduction efforts through translocation and an upcoming propagation program.

Staff participated in the spring meeting of the Chesapeake Bay Program, Brook Trout Work Group. The development of new outcomes and targets for brook trout conservation continued for the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement beyond 2025. In addition, updates were provided for current brook trout conservation efforts by watershed states and Trout Unlimited.

Staff attended a site visit for a restoration project that was completed on an unnamed tributary to Jabez Branch. The Jabez Branch watershed is designated as Use Class III, coldwater by Maryland Department of the Environment and has supported a brook trout population. Regenerative Stream Conveyance (RSC) methods were used to try and reduce downstream sediment and nutrient transport by attenuating high flows. Post-project monitoring in and below the restoration area is on-going and is being conducted by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources' Resource Assessment Services unit. These data will be used to assess the success of the project.



Regenerative Stream Conveyance pool constructed in an unnamed tributary to Jabez Branch as part of a stream restoration project.

Freshwater Fisheries - Tidal Bass Program

The Tidal Bass Program initiated tournament monitoring in May by attending five events at Smallwood State Park on the Potomac River. These tournaments ranged in size from 16 to 230 participants. Staff observed relatively low fishing mortality, generally under two percent across all tournaments, likely aided by cooler weather conditions. During monitoring, staff collected biological data from all deceased fish, including length, weight, aging structures, and diet. Staff also gathered details on tournament weigh-ins, such as the number of bags and aerated tanks used, and release methods. This monitoring effort will continue until the end of September, with a goal of attending 40 tournaments, or 10 percent of the average number permitted tournaments.

Tournament weigh in aerated tanks

To enhance awareness and enforcement of bass tournament permit requirements, staff met with Area 6 Natural Resources Police officers. Discussions focused on topics like tournament mortality during hot weather, the criteria requiring an organization to obtain a tournament permit, and specific permit requirements for the June through September season. Plans are to meet with officers in two more areas over the next month to broaden outreach to all areas with large numbers of black bass tournaments.

An Alabama bass fact sheet was updated and prepared for public distribution via email and social media. Alabama bass (*Micropetrus hensalli*) is an invasive species that has been illegally introduced into southern states as far north as Virginia, and poses a serious threat to largemouth and smallmouth bass populations by outcompeting them for available food and reducing overall largemouth and smallmouth bass size. Although not yet detected in Maryland, this initiative aims to educate anglers on identification to prevent the species' movement into our fisheries.

Freshwater Fisheries - Other

Staff calibrated and programmed HOBO water temperature data loggers to be deployed in the Youghiogheny River when flows return to wadable conditions. These loggers record water temperature at certain intervals.