

# Freshwater Fisheries Monthly Report – October 2025

## 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 in Maryland:

- Eastern Regional staff finished sampling the Choptank River to assess the largemouth bass population. Additional bass were stocked this month into the river from the Joseph Manning Hatchery to bolster the population.
- Eastern Regional staff completed largemouth bass surveys of Leonards Mill Pond and Wye Mills Lake. Both contained good numbers of bass in all size ranges, including some very large individuals greater than five pounds. Large redear sunfish and bluegill were also encountered. Both impoundments should continue to provide excellent fishing opportunities.



*A large redear sunfish from an Eastern Region public impoundment.*

- West II Regional staff sampled Lake Whittier in Frederick. The impoundment had very few largemouth bass and an overabundance of stunted sunfish. Plans for 2026 are to stock adult largemouth bass to improve fishing conditions.
- West I Regional staff conducted a survey on the North Branch of the Potomac River between Cumberland and Spring Gap using an electrofishing raft. Smallmouth bass and channel catfish were the most common gamefish species encountered. Redear sunfish, redbreast sunfish, and bluegill were also collected in relatively low densities, as well as black crappie. Future surveys from Spring Gap to Oldtown are planned in the future.



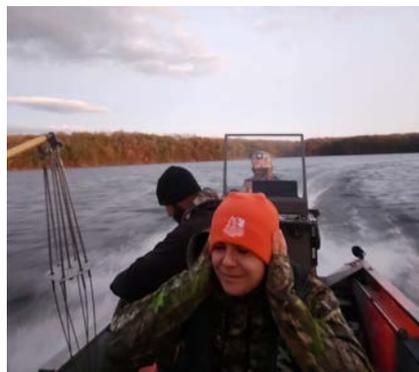
*West I Regional staff conducting their survey on the North Branch of the Potomac.*

- West I Regional staff conducted a single pass, PIT tagging effort on the North Branch of the Potomac River between Westernport and Black Oak. Despite tagging nearly 100 “new” fish, no recaptures were encountered. A follow up survey is being planned.
- Central Region staff completed Tidal Bass sampling on Middle River, the Gunpowder River, Swan Creek, and the Bush River. A total of forty sites were sampled. Special thanks to Tony Prochaska for assisting with sites on the Gunpowder and Middle Rivers.



*Left- Large blue catfish collected from Dundee Creek; Right-Three trophy bass collected from an Eastern Region public impoundment.*

- With assistance from staff from West II and the Invasive Fishes Program, Central Region staff commenced black bass sampling in freshwater impoundments. Staff completed the Liberty Reservoir survey over the course of two nights. Centennial Lake and Piney Run Reservoir will be completed within the next week. All fall impoundment samples are conducted at night.
- Central Region staff assisted Maryland National Capital Park and Planning biologists with a pond assessment on two ponds at the Royce Hanson Conservation Park near Dickerson in Montgomery County. One pond needs largemouth bass corrective stocking and one pond is very eutrophic and not suitable for fish management.



*Freshwater Fisheries staff traveling to one of 20 black bass sample sites on Liberty Reservoir on a chilly fall evening.*

## 2. Habitat and Water Quality

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

- Attended a planning meeting for a stream restoration project that has been proposed for an unnamed tributary to Severn Run. The restoration project proposes to use regenerative stream conveyance to manage high stream flow events and reconnect the incised stream to the floodplain. Fishing and Boating Services expressed concerns about the use of this technique and the resulting loss of riparian buffer and stream habitat. Data documenting poor water quality after the completion of similar restoration projects was also stated as a reason to avoid the use of this method. Improved stormwater management in the headwaters of the stream was recommended as a more appropriate option for addressing the degraded state of the stream.
- Attended a meeting to discuss a wastewater treatment discharge study planned for the Rocky Gap wastewater treatment plant. The study will attempt to determine the thermal influence of wastewater discharge on Rocky Gap Run at varying dam release flows from Lake Habeeb. Fishing and Boating Services recommended a minimum flow for the study that is substantially higher than the minimum permitted flow for the dam. Higher flows maintain stream habitat and colder temperatures downstream.
- Reviewed a permit for a culvert repair project on an unnamed tributary in the Little Tuscarora stream network. Comments were made recommending a bottomless culvert design to maintain stream hydrology and fish passage. Additional comments were provided to prevent instream work during Use III closure period and to implement sediment and erosion control measures.
- Two revetment projects on Deep Creek Lake were reviewed. Comments were made to protect shallow water fish habitat and installation of additional fish habitat was recommended.

### **Additional Work with Habitat and Water Quality**

West I staff repaired damaged infrastructure at the Evitts Creek Ponds Fishery Management Area. A disconnected pipe had cut off water flow to the ponds, lowering pond levels by more than a foot.

West I staff sorted through the SAV harvested from Deep Creek Lake by a mechanical mower as part of a pilot effort to understand the potential impacts of SAV harvesting on juvenile fishes.

### **3. Stocking and Population Management**

- Several calls were answered inquiring if the trout were stocked yet for ponds in the Southern Region and reduced fall stocking locations has caused some

consternation from our constituents. Some of these folks call regularly enough that we know them by name at this point.

- West I staff assisted Bear Creek Hatchery staff with the transport of fingerling trout from the Mettiki facility to the Bear Creek facility.
- West I staff scouted fall trout stocking locations in order to ensure ongoing drought conditions did not affect the planned schedule.
- Central Region and Albert Powell Hatchery staff stocked rainbow trout for the fall trout season. Eight locations in the region were stocked with hatchery rainbow trout.
- Central Region and Joseph Manning Hatchery staff stocked roughly 1,250, three to five inch largemouth bass in the tidal Gunpowder River.



*Fall fish stocking*

#### 4. Outreach

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

- Fall trout stocking
- Fishing Deep Creek Lake
- Fishing the North Branch of the Potomac River
- Community Service needs

#### **Additional Outreach Events**

Provided a fisheries management field demonstration to students in the Forest Technology program at Allegany College. The relationship between forested watersheds and healthy aquatic ecosystems was discussed. Demonstrations of benthic macroinvertebrate and fish surveys were provided, as well as information on how survey results are used to manage fisheries resources. Students also had the opportunity to

explore a stream for benthic macroinvertebrates and net fish during an electrofishing survey.



*Golden rainbow trout at Fair Hill*

Attended a meeting of the Big Hunting Creek Workgroup in Frederick County. The workgroup is made up of members from Cunningham Fall State Park, Catoctin Mountain National Park, USGS, and multiple local angling groups. Freshwater Fisheries staff provided an update on 2025 trout surveys in the Catoctin Region. Plans to develop a larger central Maryland workgroup were discussed.

## 5. Fish Health

It's not "fish health", but rather "fisheries biologist health"... but please wish biologist Jody Johnson a speedy recovery after a horrible spiral fracture of both bones in his right leg. Jody was retrieving a temperature logger from the Youghiogheny River and suffered a terrible fall from slippery rocks. Other staff were able to retrieve the logger after the fact, but employed an abundance of caution in doing so



*Biologist retrieving temperature logger from the Youghiogheny River.*

## **Freshwater Fisheries: Statewide Operations**

### **1. Invasive Fishes Program**

Invasive Fishes Program staff, along with Eastern Regional staff, continued work on a project in support of a graduate student at Salisbury University. The project aims to determine if targeted removals of large blue catfish can alter and depress size structure of populations in the tidal, freshwater Choptank River. Sampling has concluded for 2025 as temperatures have fallen below the threshold where low-frequency electrofishing is effective.

Invasive Fishes Program staff and USFWS Maryland Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office concluded work on a collaborative project that tagged northern snakeheads in the upper Chesapeake Bay to estimate fishing mortality for 2025. Anglers who harvest and report tagged fish will receive a monetary reward (yellow, \$10; blue, \$200). For 2025, over 150 fish were tagged in the upper Chesapeake Bay and Bush and Gunpowder rivers. Both Eastern and Central regions of Freshwater Fisheries assisted with tagging efforts while conducting upper bay tidal bass surveys. Tagging will resume in spring 2026.

Invasive Fishes Program staff attended the Fall 2025 Chesapeake Bay Program Invasive Catfish Workgroup meeting. The meeting provided members, who represent academia, non-profit organizations, industry, recreational and commercial anglers, conservation groups, and state and federal agencies, with updates on progress towards managing invasive catfishes in Chesapeake Bay.

The Invasive Fishes Program facilitated the Invasive Catfish Advisory Committee (ICAC) Meeting on October 8. Staff provided updates on all things invasive catfish going on at the department and gave a presentation discussing the first season of the Commercial Chase Boat Electrofishing Pilot Project. ICAC gave some recommendations on sampling areas for the next year of the project and requested that the department figure out a way to study the effect of electrofishing on blue crabs before making any further decisions on commercial electrofishing in Maryland. ICAC also requested that the department discuss the potential for opening up a gill net season for blue catfish. The next meeting will be January 7, 2026.

### **2. Coldwater Fisheries Program**

Organized and convened the October meeting of the Coldwater Fisheries Advisory Committee. The committee discussed a proposed equestrian training center that is being planned for the Gillis Falls watershed and in-stream work that has been conducted

throughout Allegany County following the May 2025 flood events. Both issues will likely impact coldwater fisheries resources. Action items included both member and department communications with local governments and state regulatory agencies.

Observed instream work throughout Allegany County that will likely have adverse consequences for multiple coldwater fisheries resources. The work included the construction of excessively high stream embankments with little or no stabilization, the removal of natural stream bottom substrate, extensive removal of riparian vegetation, and, in at least one case, the construction of a stormwater management pond that discharges to a Use Class III coldwater stream. Fishing and Boating Services communicated the observations and concerns to the Maryland Department of the Environment, which is the state regulatory agency that is responsible for investigating these issues.

Continued to retrieve 2025 stream temperature loggers and began compiling and reviewing all 2025 coldwater data. The data will be uploaded to the coldwater database after the quality control process is complete.

Completed the 2025 brook trout reintroduction project activities that were started in September. This work was a continuation of three projects that are attempting to establish new populations of brook trout in streams that have coldwater habitat but no existing trout populations. A fourth reintroduction project was planned but was postponed after the source population abundance was determined to be too small. The decline in the source population abundance was likely caused by land use practices in the watershed.



*Freshwater Fisheries and Hatcheries Division staff prepare brook trout for release to a coldwater stream as part of a reintroduction project.*

Initiated a brook trout propagation project by monitoring brook trout stronghold streams for redd construction and other spawning related behaviors. Once these activities are observed, staff will attempt to collect ripe brook trout eggs and milt in the field and bring fertilized eggs back to an isolation hatchery. This is a first attempt at the development of

a wild trout propagation program that will raise and release trout to streams with coldwater habitat but no existing trout population.

Provided a presentation to the Potomac Valley Fly Fishers. The presentation provided an update on the status of brook trout in Maryland, the importance of managing these resources, and efforts to protect and expand coldwater fisheries resources.

### 3. Tidal Bass Program

The Black Bass Advisory Committee (BBAC) met for their fall quarterly meeting. Among the agenda items was a review of tournament monitoring data, which showed varying levels of compliance with new and established permit requirements for the summer (41 percent - 82 percent); staff committed to holding a pre-season tournament directors meeting and internally discussing changes to permit wording based on BBAC suggestions. Updates from the department included an analysis of forward-facing sonar use during a Major League Fishing event and the commencement of the tidal bass survey in key river systems. Results from forward-facing sonar use showed no effect on the size of fish caught; however, angler catch rates did increase with its use depending on the waterbody and day of the tournament. Additional updates included the upcoming razing and reconstruction of the Dundee Creek Marina Store and the attendance of staff at the American Fisheries Society's Black Bass Symposium for networking and research presentations. The committee added cormorant mitigation in tidal fisheries as a future agenda item, and members also suggested pursuing a habitat project at Little Seneca Lake during a future draw down and discussing the reduction of tournament speed limits following recent boating accidents.

Tidal Bass: Eastern and Central region staff stocked out several thousand largemouth bass to our tidal fisheries in October. In total, 4,050 fish were stocked with 1,000 three inch fish being dispersed to the Northeast River, 1050 three inch fish to Middle River, and 2,000 four to six inch fish to Marshyhope Creek.

The Central, Southern, and Eastern regions completed the tidal bass survey in October covering over 150 sites in the Potomac, Gunpowder, Bush, Middle, Chester, and Choptank rivers, as well as the Upper Bay. In the Southern Region; forty-one sites have been completed on the Potomac River so far and 11 to go. We were grateful for the help from Joseph Manning Hatchery and staff from Tawes who stepped in while our comrade Dave was out for a while. A few unusual captures this season included a grass carp and a largemouth bass eating a snakehead. Some of the very best catches of largemouth bass were found in Mattawoman Creek where one site produced 33 bass and four snakehead in 250 meters of shoreline. Staff will start analyzing the data in the coming months, which will be available in Volume 18 of the Black Bass Annual Review. Additionally, regional staff collected fish health information on all survey rivers that will be compiled in a Survey123 tool built by Adam Eshleman. This database will be shared with USGS for use in standardizing fish health surveys in the Northeast.



*Some beautiful bass and a few unusual captures during surveys, including a grass carp and a largemouth bass eating a snakehead.*

#### 4. Fish Passage Program

Staff conducted a walkthrough of the Cypress Branch removal project (minus our Federal partners who are affected by the government shutdown). All agree the project was a great success. We will continue to monitor the riparian vegetation that was planted following the removal and conduct biological monitoring to detect target species next spring. Work has been completed on the eel ladder at Eden Mill. Though too late in the year to expect passage, we will run the ladder through October to tweak the ladder before shutting it down until next spring. Deer Creek has some of the highest densities of American eel in the State and we are optimistic that the ladder will be successful at passing eel upstream.



*Post removal photo of Cypress Branch - 10.2.25*



*Top view of Eden Mill Eel Ladder 10.15.25*



*Collection barrel at Eden Mill Eel Ladder 10.15.25*

## 5. Organized Freshwater Fishing

Staff provided the First Catch Mobile Fishing trailer for the first session of an afterschool fishing club, organized between freshwater fisheries staff and Mr. Moseley, a teacher from Edgewood Middle School. Mr. Moseley reached out to staff back in August,

claiming all of his students had one thing in common: fishing! We've been collaborating together since to create a safe and inviting afterschool fishing club for these students. This first session was a success! With the help of the aquatic resource education team, around 13 students and two teachers learned how to tie basic fishing knots, cast, and put it all to the test on the water. Although most of the students had fishing experience, Mr. Moseley was thrilled to learn the ins and outs of fishing and have another way to connect to his students. We're all looking forward to our next session on November 5th!

Broadneck High School held an environmental literacy "Wilderness 101" event at Goshen Farm on October 7th for 40 students. It was a perfect fall day for students to get outside and practice basic wilderness skills. Freshwater Fisheries staff set up a casting practice station where students learned how to effectively cast a fishing rod, and reel in a fake fish! Invasive staff also assisted in leading a fish filet demonstration and gave students the opportunity to filet a fish themselves. Students were able to try their filets after a quick cook on the campfire stove. Other stations included basic first aid, fire and shelter, and learning how to navigate. The event wrapped up with smores over the bonfire!



*Broadneck High School students assisting in the filet demonstration led by Branson Williams and Lena Sawyers*

Freshwater Fisheries staff provided field support for the tidal bass surveys in the southern region and snakehead tagging in the Gunpowder with the invasive fishes staff. Taylor has also officially joined the Organizational Effectiveness Team (OET) team!