

Freshwater Fisheries Monthly Report – September 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:

- West I Region staff completed seining surveys at long-term monitoring sites on Deep Creek Lake. Staff also collected young-of-year largemouth bass for University of Maryland researchers to be tested for mercury as part of an ongoing study.
- West II Region staff concluded trout surveys on Beaver Creek. All West II trout surveys for the 2026 year have been completed.
- West II Region staff conducted exploratory surveys to recover put-and-grow juvenile brown trout that were stocked in Saint James Run, Washington County, during Late February. Adipose fins were clipped prior to stocking to identify stocked trout during recapture surveys. Not many fish were observed at this site, but other streams where fish were stocked had better recapture rates.



Clipped vs non clipped adipose fins. Adipose fins were clipped to identify stocked Romiskany strand, juvenile Brown trout.

- West II Region staff conducted all-night surveys for catfish populations in the Upper Potomac River; Whites Ferry, McCoys Ferry, Potomac fish and game club, and Sheppardstown (West Virginia).
- Central Region staff completed summer index period sampling of trout streams across the region. Central Region staff have sampled over 50 coldwater sites this summer and have begun retrieving water temperature loggers.
- The Central Region creel survey of Liberty Reservoir and the Gunpowder Tailwater continued in September. This project will continue through the month of October.
- Central Region staff seined two public ponds to provide fish population information to Howard County Parks and Recreation and Montgomery County Parks, respectively. Both ponds were found to need extra largemouth bass.

2. Habitat and Water Quality

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

- West I Region staff reviewed Potomac Garrett State Forest Annual Workplan for proposed timber sales for Fiscal Year 2028.
- West I Region staff attended a Land Reclamation Committee meeting to approve re-vegetated mine sites for bond releases.
- West I Region staff provided comments for multiple culvert replacement projects to be completed in Garrett County. Comments were provided for time-of-year restrictions, sediment and erosion control best management practices, minimal disturbance, material storage, equipment access, curing concrete, pump around procedures, and site restoration at the completion of the project.
- West I Region staff provided comments for a powerline structure replacement to be completed on the banks of the North Branch Potomac River in Kitzmiller, Maryland. Comments were provided to sediment and erosion control best management practices.
- West I Region staff provided comments for two sewer line replacements that are located in Allegany County. Comments were provided for time of year restriction, sediment and erosion control best management practices, minimal disturbance, material storage, equipment access, curing concrete monitoring, pump around procedures, and site restoration at the completion of the project.
- West I Region staff provided comments for a bridge replacement project to be completed on Sang Run Road located in Garrett County. Comments were provided for time of year restriction, sediment and erosion control best

management practices, minimal disturbance, material storage, equipment access, curing concrete monitoring, pump around procedures, and site restoration at the completion of the project.

- West II Region staff provided comments on multiple environmental reviews in both Frederick and Washington counties.
- Central Region staff attended a meeting with the Power Plant Research Program to discuss how solar power projects in Maryland are reviewed.
- Central Region staff provided information to Maryland Park Service about removing strainers from the Gunpowder River and Little Gunpowder River in state parks. The goal of staff is to maintain as much fish habitat as possible while reducing risks for kayakers and tubers. Instream work cannot be completed during the closure period in Use III, coldwater streams.
- Central Region staff provided comments for multiple time of year waiver requests and Solar Farm reviews in Harford County.

Additional Work with Habitat and Water Quality

- West I Region staff participated in a meeting with members from University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science (UMCES) to discuss possible ways to provide data that combines species richness with available habitat. The UMCES members are interested in the side scan sonar technology that West I Region staff uses for habitat mapping at annual monitoring stations. A future meeting will be held on site at Deep Creek Lake for demonstration.
- West I Region staff has begun retrieving HoBO temperature loggers that were deployed for the summer monitoring period.
- Southern Region staff assessed Cosca Lake one month after it was refilled for suitability to be restocked. The dissolved oxygen levels were 0.21 mg/L and no fish were encountered in a few pulls of a 25 foot seine; so stocking will be delayed until the lake's water quality returns to safe levels.
- West II Region staff have pulled all temperature loggers that were deployed for the 2026 season. Temperature data will be uploaded and analyzed.

3. Stocking and Population Management

- West I Region staff continues to help Bear Creek Hatchery with daily operations when available.
- West II Region staff stocked brown trout from Cushwa Hatchery into Antietam Creek.
- Central Region and hatchery staff stocked 3,000 brown trout from Cushwa Hatchery. Staff also stocked 1,500 brown trout in Morgan Run and 1,500 in the

upper Patuxent River. Fish averaged six inches and will supplement the wild brown trout populations in both streams.

4. Outreach

Customer Service - Provided customer service information for inquiries regarding:

- West I Region staff provided information for a sunfish release site.
- West I Region staff provided information on fishing the Casselman River.
- West I Region staff provided guidance on registering a citation size fish.
- Southern Region staff provided comments on an application for a new land acquisition abutting Cedarville State Forest.
- Southern Region staff provided comments for a Maryland National Capital Parks and Planning Commission land acquisition that will join Southwest Branch Stream Valley Park in Upper Marlboro.
- West II Region staff dropped off 2026 fishing guides to libraries in Frederick and Washington counties, and tackle shops.
- Tidal Bass Program provided information on black bass regulations in tidal and nontidal waters for multiple tournament directors.
- Tidal Bass Program provided guidance on fish care and infrastructure maintenance for WIN Waste Innovations.

Additional Outreach Events

- West I Region staff worked the Marlon Whoolery Memorial Bass Tournament at Deep Creek Lake. Staff provided a holding tank for weigh-in and then transferred fish back to the lake for release.
- Southern Region staff taught a fish biology class for the Eden Mills Master Naturalist 2026 cohort. The class included a dissection and filet demonstration on blue catfish and students got to take their filets home.
- West II Region staff assisted with a mother-daughter fishing and kayaking program held at Seneca Creek state park. Attendance was good, the event was an overall success!

5. Angler Access

- West I Region staff conducted maintenance checks at Fishery Management Areas

- located in Allegany County.
- Southern Region staff conducted maintenance at Hughesville Pond Fishery Management Area. Staff have been constructing a prototype of a duck weed harvesting device to clear the surface of Hughesville Pond for anglers.
- West II Region staff have continued mowing and general upkeep of West II Region's Fishery Management Areas' ponds throughout the month.

Freshwater Fisheries: Statewide Operations

1. Invasive Fishes Program

Staff completed the Tidal Catfish Monitoring Survey of 2026. The survey uses department electrofishing vessels and crews of commercial watermen on chase boats to collect and measure fish that surface. All invasive catfish (i.e., blue catfish, flathead catfish) are harvested and watermen are permitted to sell their catch. In 2026, 60 sites across four rivers (Nanticoke River/Marshyhope Creek, Patuxent, Potomac, Sassafras rivers) were surveyed and over 13,500 pounds of blue catfish were removed. This is the second year of fishery-independent monitoring that targets catfishes in tidal, freshwater rivers of Maryland and contributes to necessary baseline data. Data will be used to refine population models, determine population trends, and gauge the effectiveness of commercial and recreational harvest as a management tool.

Staff presented a webinar about Maryland's strategies and actions to manage invasive blue catfish to the North American Invasive Species Management Association (NAISMA). The webinar highlighted many of the collaborative projects the department has undertaken to advance research and engage stakeholders like recreational anglers and commercial harvesters for blue catfish in Maryland.

The department opened bid solicitations for a Gill Net Pilot Project that will begin in December 2026. The project aims to examine fish bycatch, catch of non-targeted fish, for gill nets with 5 inch to 7 inch mesh when the gear is targeting blue catfish. Blue catfish aggregate in locations during winter and are susceptible to the gear, but current regulations do not allow the harvest of those fish when caught. Bycatch of other fishes while targeting blue catfish must be determined to ensure those fisheries are not impacted. Fishery observers will count and measure bycatch from gill nets that target blue catfish, and commercial harvesters will retain and sell blue catfish collected. The pilot will employ up to two harvesters (one in each the upper Chesapeake Bay and lower Eastern Shore) for the duration of the striped bass winter gill net season (December – February). Bids may be submitted via an [online form](#).

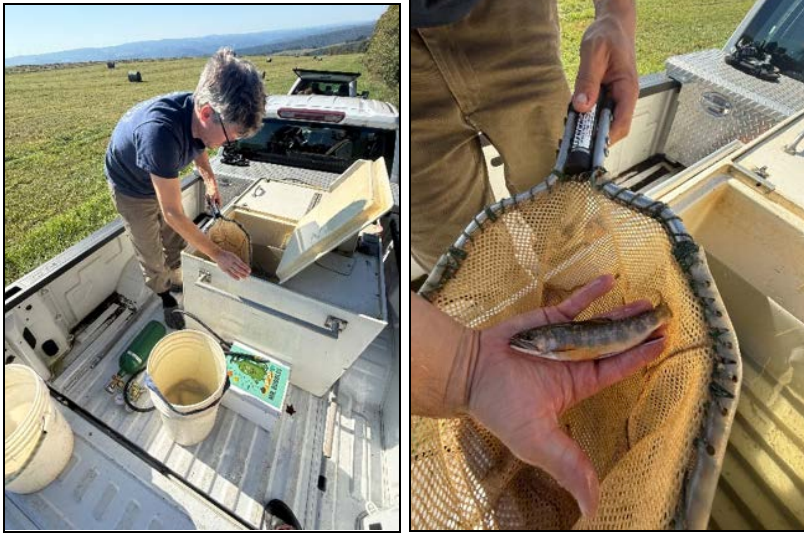
2. Coldwater Fisheries Program

Staff completed annual coldwater fisheries surveys and began to retrieve continuous temperature data loggers from targeted streams. Temperature logger retrieval will continue into October. During the 2026 summer field season, the Coldwater Fisheries Program completed 41 multipass surveys to estimate trout population abundances, 25 qualitative surveys to determine coldwater resource occupancy and/or coldwater potential, and deployed 80 temperature data loggers to gather information about stream temperature regimes. Additionally, tissue samples were collected from 31 brook trout patches for genomic analysis.



Brook trout collected during a coldwater survey in September 2026

Staff initiated a new brook trout translocation project in one stream in Garrett County. The stream is located in a watershed that supports brook trout and has suitable coldwater habitat. However, a steep stream gradient near the mouth of the stream limits natural colonization. In September 2026, 50 brook trout were captured from a healthy source population and were released in the project site. Follow-up surveys will be conducted in the summer of 2027 to determine continued occupancy and successful reproduction by translocated individuals. Observations of translocated individuals will determine if a second translocation will occur in September of 2027. This project will support efforts to meet Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement outcomes by expanding brook trout occupancy in the watershed.



Brook trout reintroduction activities in September 2026

Staff provided aquatic biology field demonstrations for students at Allegany College of Maryland and graduate students at University of Maryland, Center for Environmental Science. The demonstrations included a discussion about watershed science and fisheries management as well as electrofishing surveys for stream fish and benthic macroinvertebrate surveys. Additionally, descriptions were provided for some of the organisms that inhabit Maryland streams. These demonstrations are scheduled annually to provide students with information about careers in natural resources management.



Coldwater Fisheries Program provides an electrofishing demonstration for graduate students at the University of Maryland, Center for Environmental Science

Staff continued a brown trout removal project in the Upper Savage River watershed above the Savage River Reservoir. The Upper Savage River supports the largest, most

connected brook trout watershed in Maryland. Concerns for competition between native brook trout and an introduced brown trout population in the mainstem of the river necessitated a project to mechanically remove brown trout. Approximately 11 kilometers of the river were surveyed using backpack electrofishing starting downstream of Poplar Lick Run and continuing upstream into the Savage River gorge. The project also provides important occupancy data for brook trout following a severe flood event in May of 2025.

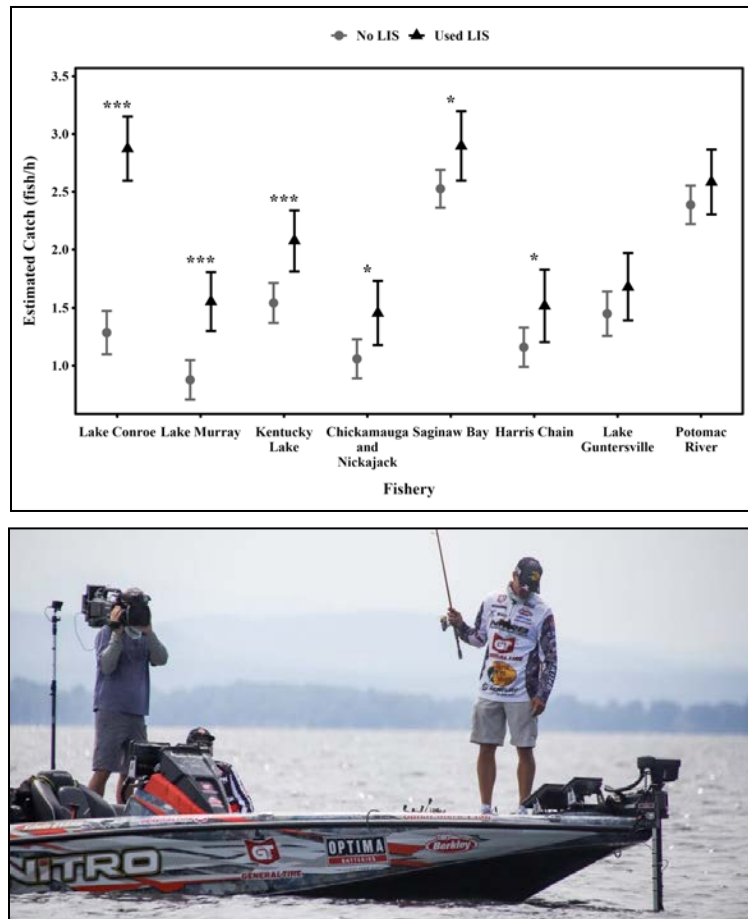
Staff attended a site tour and listening session for flood recovery efforts in Allegany County with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Geological Survey, Maryland Department of the Environment, the Department of Natural Resources, Watershed and Climate Services, Natural Resources Conservation Service, National Weather Service, Allegany County government, and several local governments. The goal of the event was to discuss opportunities for improving flood resilience in the Georges Creek watershed. The site tour visited locations that created particularly difficult challenges during a May 2025 flood event. The tour was followed by a meeting with local long-term flood recovery planners to identify opportunities to improve flood resilience in the watershed.

Staff attended the Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture Steering Committee quarterly meeting. Agenda items included discussions about the Fiscal Year 2026 and Fiscal Year 2027 budgets and support for a contractual staff position that would expand analyses of a range-wide brook trout data set. Additionally, a presentation was provided for the management decision making process for coldwater ecosystems in the National Park Service and several states provide updates for on-going coldwater resource projects.

3. Tidal Bass Program

Program staff published a peer-reviewed article in the North American Journal of Fisheries Management as part of the Special Section on the Black Bass 2025 Symposium Proceedings (Gary, Love, and Bardin 2026; <https://doi.org/10.1093/najfmt/vqag064>). The study was a collaboration with Major League Fishing. It evaluated how live-imaging sonar (LIS), also known as forward-facing sonar, affects black bass catch across eight professional Bass Pro Tour events in 2025, including the Potomac River. Tournament rules limited LIS use to one of three daily competition periods. This allowed staff to compare catch with and without LIS for the same highly skilled anglers, separating the effect of the technology from angler skill. Across 12,324 catches by 73 anglers, LIS increased catch rates at six of eight fisheries, but it did not generally increase the size of bass caught. LIS provided no significant advantage on the Potomac River or Lake Gunterville, where anglers primarily fish shallow, vegetated, and shoreline habitats. Anglers catching bass in water deeper than 10 feet were nearly three times more likely to be using LIS. These results suggest the risk of increased exploitation from LIS depends

on a fishery's depth and habitat, and they give managers and tournament directors an objective baseline as the technology becomes more widespread.



Top: Catch rate data from the 2025 Bass Pro Tour showing differences between live-imaging sonar use and non-use for individual events. Asterisks designate statistical differences in catch between fishing with and without Live Imaging Sonar (LIS). Bottom: Edwin Evers fishing with live-imaging sonar during a 2025 Bass Pro Tour Event.

Staff and regions began fall sampling for the Tidal Bass Survey on the Potomac River and Marshyhope Creek. Other fisheries that will be surveyed include the upper Chesapeake Bay and Gunpowder River. Sampling will continue into October, and results will be used to track trends in tidal largemouth bass abundance relative to management reference points.

Staff presented on black bass tournaments at the 2026 Administrative Support Staff Conference. The presentation covered the ecology and distribution of Maryland's two black bass species and trends in tournament participation. The presentation also covered the tournament permit process, permit conditions for fish care and weigh-ins, and 2026 black bass regulations. Staff also outlined what park managers are responsible for before,

during, and after tournaments hosted at their facilities, to improve coordination between parks and Fisheries staff.

4. Fish Passage Program

Staff continue to prepare sites for field investigation via drone once the leaves fall off the trees. Staff attended the FishBio meeting to discuss improvements to the Conowingo Fish Lift to improve passage of target fish, while limiting upstream movements of invasive fishes. Finally, staff coordinated with others in Fishing and Boating Services for several important Environmental Review projects, including one project seeking a time-of-year waiver for dredging in the Wicomico River.

5. Organized Freshwater Fishing

Freshwater fisheries staff member Joe Love provided an educational and public outreach table for the 10th Annual Anacostia Watershed Society BioBlitz, held at Lake Artemesia Park on September 12. The event offered an opportunity to engage with community members, share information on local aquatic ecosystems and fishing, and support regional conservation awareness efforts. There were 525 people engaged, 1,070 species reported from 3,505 observations, 20 of which were fish.



The 10th annual BioBlitz at Lake Artemesia, featuring our Go Fish Maryland outreach table and a luna moth caterpillar!