

Freshwater Fisheries Monthly Report – December 2025

Freshwater Fisheries: Regional Operations

1. Stock Assessment

Monitoring and Assessment – The following work was done in support of assessing the health and quality of fish populations or stocks in Maryland:

- Southern Region began analysis of the 2025 Fall Survey of Triadelphia. Highlights of the survey included catching an unusually high number of juvenile smallmouth bass (n=28, < 180 millimeters). Similarly, the number of caught juvenile largemouth bass was higher than usual (n=146, < 200 millimeters). One exceptionally large walleye measured 619 millimeters in length (24.4 inches) and weighed 2,600 grams (5.7 pounds).
- Staff reconciled 125 records from 2021 for largemouth bass and northern snakehead in the database for Freshwater Fisheries (GIFS). Those records did not get entered for most of the samples that year. The data added will improve querying of data and analysis for species counts.
- Staff performed quality assurance and check procedures for data collected during the 2025 tidal bass survey, as described in its Standard Operating Procedure.

2. Habitat and Water Quality

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

- Eastern Region staff continues to receive reports from area residents of animal waste leaking into Basin Run in Cecil County. Basin Run supports wild trout and is classified as Use III (coldwater) by Maryland Department of Environment (MDE). Segments of the stream are also designated as Tier II (high quality waters). Both these designations should provide the highest level of protection from degradation. Over the last three years, there have been repeated reports of foul smelling, grey water below a high density dairy operation located in the watershed south of Firetower Road. At least one fish kill has been documented by department staff and MDE Fish Kill Investigation Program in Basin Run as a result. Numerous complaints have been sent to MDE for investigation. Over that three year period, MDE completed several inspections and found frequent and recurring violations including releasing animal waste into the stream at points between Firetower Road and Colora Road. Those investigations have led to some financial penalties and promised future agricultural improvements which have been planned for completion in 2026. However, despite fines and planned future improvements, animal waste still continues to actively pollute a Use III, Tier II stream at regular intervals. Recent pollution events have been documented by area residents as well as MDE inspectors in November and December 2025. Staff will continue to monitor the situation and advocate for corrective actions to stop these pollution events.



Basin Run November 29, 2025: Left - at the Firetower Road crossing. The water is clear. Right - at the Colora Road crossing. The water has a grey appearance and carries a foul odor.



Basin Run Dec 3, 2025: Left - at the Firetower Road crossing. The water is clear. Right - at the Colora Road crossing. The water is grey in color and carries a foul odor.

- Central Region staff participated in one conference call and one site visit regarding a Time Of Year Waiver request from the Maryland Department of Transportation for ditch cleaning in the Morgan Run watershed of Carroll County. Wild reproducing brown trout have been documented in the vicinity of the outfall of the ditch and potential sediment inputs could jeopardize the health of any trout eggs that may be in the gravel near the outfall.

Freshwater Fisheries: Statewide Operations

1. Invasive Fishes Program

Staff obtained and processed approximately 100 pounds of blue catfish to be used in a palatability trial for feeding piscivores at Maryland Zoo. The small blue catfish were donated by a commercial harvester and processed (i.e., removed dorsal and pectoral spines) by staff. Fish were bagged and frozen. Testing will occur during spring after the 3 month quarantine period. This work is the next step in the development of a fishery for small blue catfish as a food item for zoos, aquaria, and wildlife rehabilitators.



*Left: Measuring board of pectoral and dorsal spines removed from juvenile blue catfish;
Right: Cooler of bagged juvenile blue catfish to be fed to piscivores at Maryland Zoo.*

2. Coldwater Fisheries Program

Staff continued to review all 2025 coldwater fish surveys and temperature data for quality control and began to analyze the data at the stream and basin levels.

Completed an interim report for a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant that supports brook trout conservation projects. Reported activities included progress towards land protection in brook trout watersheds, participation in coldwater outreach and education events, identification of riparian buffer planting opportunities, and brook trout population establishment through translocation and propagation.

Organized a meeting to discuss a project that will replace failed culverts in Winebrenner Run with a bridge that allows fish passage. Attendees included project designers, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and Trout Unlimited. Participants exchanged information and comments to ensure a desirable project outcome. The project will be completed in 2026.

Participated in several Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture projects and in several meetings. These projects included the ongoing development of a brook trout story map that will be released in early 2026, planning for an update to the brook trout catchment occupancy map, and state specific technical support for brook trout occupancy data that is being used to predict range-wide occupancy and abundance. Staff also attended a quarterly steering committee meeting that discussed the FY27 habitat project request for proposals, future sponsorship of the joint venture, various state and partner updates, and updates on the previously described projects.

3. Tidal Bass Program

Tidal Bass staff in conjunction with West II regional staff met with a group of recreational anglers that are leading a citizen science tagging project of smallmouth bass in the upper Potomac River. The meeting aimed to inform their sampling methods to make them more conducive to analysis for growth and movement data that comes from tag reports.

Staff are in the process of analyzing 2025 tournament reports that will summarize trends in the results and participation of anglers in black bass tournament locations around the state. This effort will emphasize the tournament reporting requirement to directors as well highlighting tournament organizations that use best management practices in tournament permits and record low mortality rates across the season. Additionally, staff are in the process of analyzing the results from the 2025 tidal bass survey. The survey sampled over 150 sites in the Potomac, Middle, Bird, Gunpowder, Choptank, and Chester rivers as well as the upper Chesapeake Bay. Analysis is not complete, but anecdotally reproduction and abundance look to be at or above long-term averages.

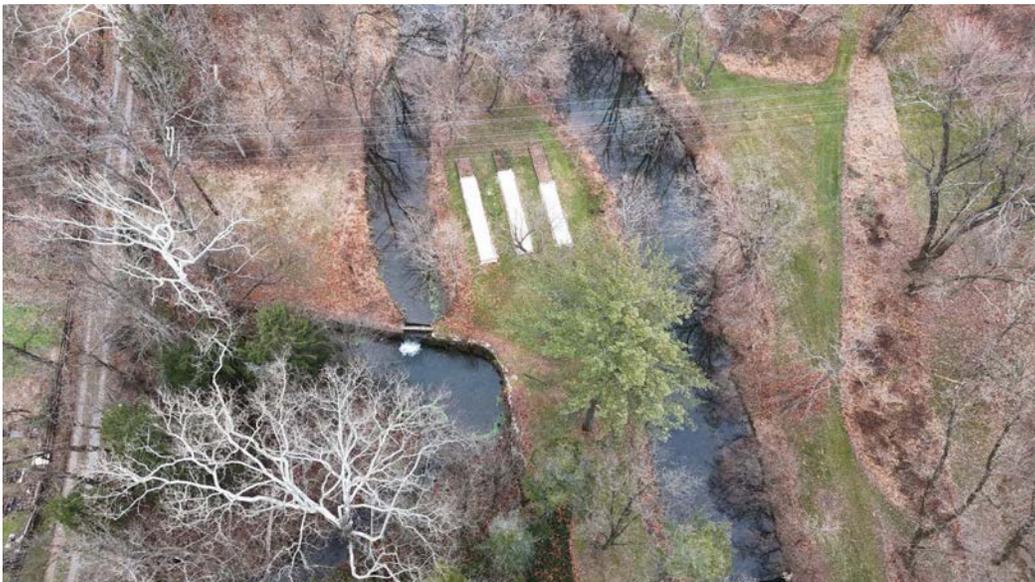
4. Fish Passage Program

Fish Passage Program staff met with MDE Dam Safety staff to identify priority dams between our programs and increase coordination for future dam removal projects. The Maryland Department of Environment has added messages to their correspondence with dam owners to direct them to the Fish Passage Program if they would like help removing obsolete dams. Work continues on the feasibility study of the Daniels Dam removal. American Rivers recently hosted a webinar explaining the purpose of the study to increase awareness of the project and solicit comments. The State Highway Administration is considering two dam removals as part of a mitigation package for the I-81 widening project. Resource agencies held a site meeting on December 10 to visit Doubts Mill and Widmeyer Dams. Both projects are feasible and likely to move forward,

though Widmeyer Dam will likely be addressed first. The department continues to work with the United States Geological Survey (USGS) and United States Fish and Wildlife Service to address fish passage issues at Conowingo Dam. Following a long delay due to the government shutdown, a meeting was held to provide an update on the project. The USGS is constructing a flume to test various acoustic and hydrological devices to deter the passage of invasive fish, while increasing passage efficiency of targeted anadromous fish. This testing will hopefully produce results that can be implemented at Conowingo and other dams in the future.



Widmeyer Dam 12.10.25 - Jim Thompson

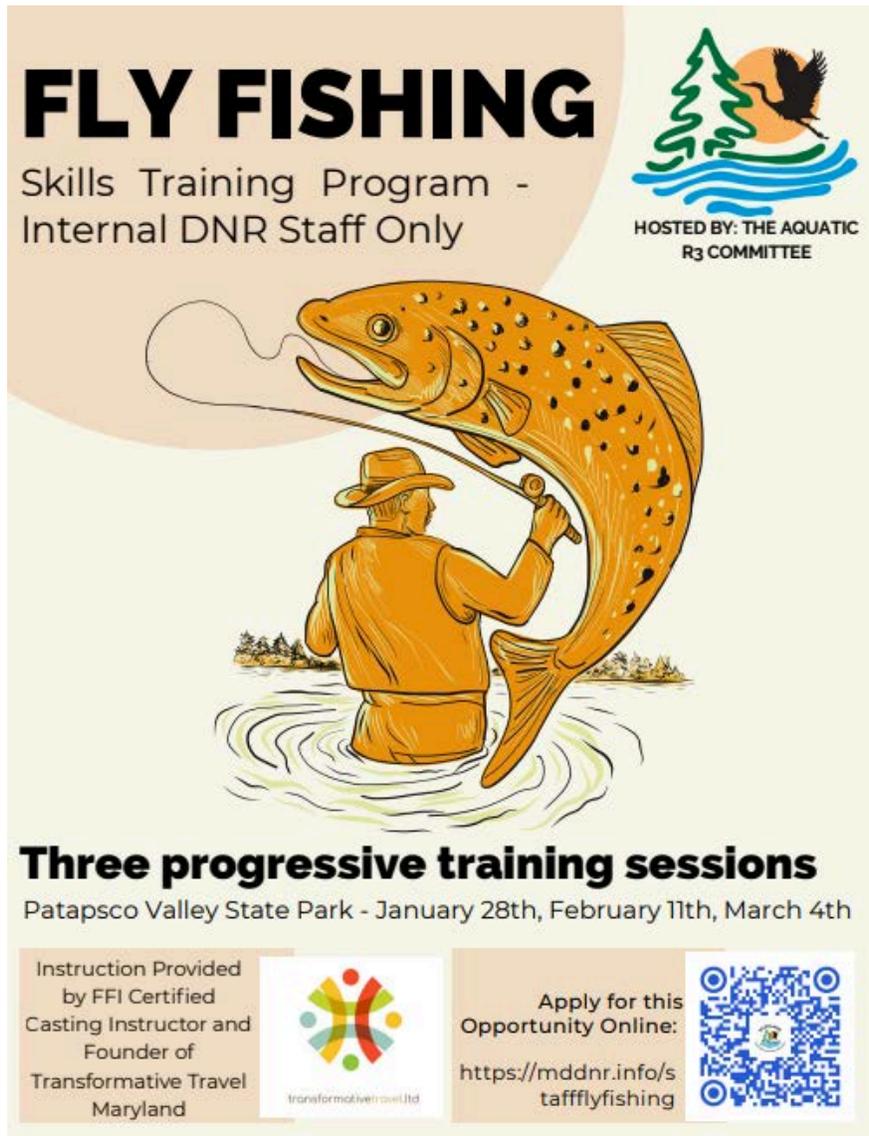


Doubs Mill Dam 12.10.25 - Jim Thompson

5. Organized Freshwater Fishing

The third session of Edgewood Middle’s afterschool fishing club was scheduled for December 3rd but was cancelled due to weather conditions. The club will be taking a break during the winter months and will pick back up in March.

The Aquatic R3 Matrix team will be hosting a fly fishing skills training program for departmental staff members in 2026. Instruction will be provided by a Fly Fishers International certified casting instructor and will take place at Patapsco State Park over the course of three separate sessions. Departmental staff will then be better equipped for promoting fly fishing opportunities and teaching tactics to the general public.



FLY FISHING
Skills Training Program -
Internal DNR Staff Only

HOSTED BY: THE AQUATIC
R3 COMMITTEE

Three progressive training sessions
Patapsco Valley State Park - January 28th, February 11th, March 4th

Instruction Provided
by FFI Certified
Casting Instructor and
Founder of
Transformative Travel
Maryland

Apply for this
Opportunity Online:
<https://mddnr.info/s/tafflyfishing>

transformative travel

