

Freshwater Fisheries Monthly Report – July 2025

The Freshwater Fisheries and Hatcheries Division held a divisional meeting in Hagerstown. Division Director John Mullican organized the staff meeting for each of the regional managers and program managers to provide an update of work being conducted and short-term initiatives planned for the coming year. Special thanks to Martha Bruder, Administrative Officer, who helped with logistics, the agenda, and managing attendance.



Freshwater Fisheries: Regional Operations

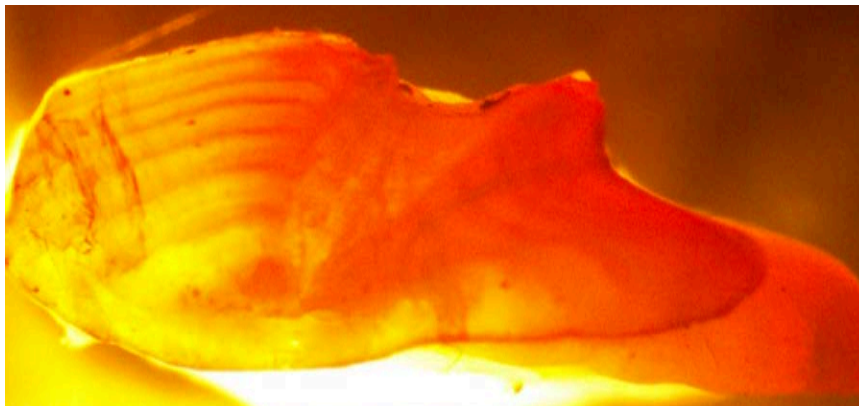
1. Stock Assessment

Southern Region biologists launched a QR-code Volunteer Angler Survey at eleven angler access sites in the region that were chosen to represent a mixture of large, medium, and small impoundments, as well as tidal freshwater, low- and high-use. This survey will help bolster our data collection in waterbodies seldom sampled, provide long-term stock assessment trends, help ground-truth our survey results, and give statistics to display on our regional website.



An example of signs used to support a QR-code Volunteer Angler Survey in Southern Region.

Southern region is also busy prepping and aging yellow perch otoliths collected from Rocky Gorge Reservoir during the spring. Otoliths were taken when catches appeared to reveal a low PSD and we began to wonder if the population was perhaps stunted. Preliminary results show that they are indeed stunted—severely so! Here is a 134 millimeter, 24 gram male yellow perch's otolith. This five inch perch appears to be seven years old!



Otolith from a yellow perch.

Western Region I staff began sampling coldwater fisheries locations throughout Garrett County.

Western Region I staff conducted a fish removal effort on Poplar Lick below New Germany Lake due to a report of several warm water species noticed below the dam following spring flooding events. Staff were able to remove and relocate largemouth bass, bluegill, brown bullhead, and pumpkinseed.

Western Region II staff celebrated the retirement of Mark Toms who spent 33 years as a biologist in Washington and Frederick counties. We also welcomed a new employee, Samuel Burke, who started July 23rd as a biologist in West II.

Western II regional staff have started the annual juvenile smallmouth bass monitoring. A 30 foot shoreline seine is used to collect young-of-year smallmouth bass to assess spawning success. Surveys were completed on the Monocacy River in Frederick County. Smallmouth bass juvenile numbers were below average and fish collected were smaller than those typically seen mid-summer. High flow events and flooding in May were likely a major factor responsible for limited spawning success and a late spawn. Additional surveys will be conducted on Conococheague Creek and the upper Potomac River when conditions allow.



Juvenile smallmouth bass collected from Monocacy River

Trout surveys were conducted in the Beaver Creek watershed in Washington County. Trout numbers have not improved in stream sections impacted by the 2023 fish kill. The adult brown trout that were collected were in good condition, but juvenile numbers remain extremely low. Low stream flows brought about by the drought last fall appear to have contributed to an unsuccessful spawn and a poor year-class. Additional water quality monitoring is planned and discussions on additional management steps to improve the fishery are ongoing.



Adult brown trout from Beaver Creek

Central Region biologists conducted coldwater electrofishing surveys on Kellogg Branch (Harford County), Deep Run (Carroll County), Piney Run (Carroll and Baltimore counties).

Eastern Regional staff began aging black and white crappie from Smithville Lake and Conowingo Reservoir. Preliminary results suggest that the black crappie in Smithville Lake are growing very slowly (stunted) while white crappie from Conowingo Reservoir grow very quickly to impressive size. Crappie age data will be used to determine where and how management actions could improve fishing for this popular panfish.

2. Habitat and Water Quality

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

- Central Region biologists attended a pre-application site visit for a culvert replacement on Kellogg Branch in Harford County.
- Central Region provided comments on a pond conversion project in Baltimore County. Former shallow water wetland ponds will be filled and graded. The landowner has grown tired of the maintenance needs.
- Central Region conference call with Seth Moessinger and Beth Schlimm (bog turtle biologist) to discuss potential for leveraging bog turtle and brook trout co-occurrence sites into better aquatic passage projects.
- Central Region reviewed four culvert projects on Use III streams. Comments were made to provide aquatic organism passage, minimize sediment transport, and work in the dry to avoid water contact with curing cement and grout.
- Southern Region staff reviewed the Calvert County Town Hall Master Plan (2025-2035)
- Eastern Region staff continued review and participation in the I-95 interchange project at Belvidere Road. Thermal monitoring of trenches installed to reduce discharge temperatures from sediment basins is continuing.
- Western Region I office reviewed and commented on an application submitted for a solar farm project to be constructed in Garrett County. The project consists of a permanent bridge being installed to gain access for the construction of a 20.14 acre solar farm.

- Western Region I office reviewed and commented on a culvert replacement project located on New Germany Road.
- Western Region I office reviewed the Potomac Garrett State Forest FY27 annual workplan.
- Western Region I office reviewed a project for the removal of two low water bridges to be removed from Poplar Lick located in Garrett County.
- Several failing culverts on unnamed tributaries in the Poplar Lick and Big Run watersheds were reviewed for Garrett County. Most of these locations are intermittent sites with steep grades offering little habitat for brook trout. However, comments were made to maintain/improve aquatic organism passage and minimize sediment transport during construction.
- Western Region II office provided comments for minimal riparian disturbance, replanting of native vegetation, and sediment and erosion control on two stream restoration projects in Frederick County. Both streams are Use Class III water bodies but no longer support coldwater resources.
- Staff provided sediment and erosion control and time of year restriction comments for the construction of a temporary bridge for timber harvest operations on a Use Class I stream in Frederick County.
- An application for two projects on Antietam Creek. Comments were made encouraging the implementation of a submerged gravel wetland instead of the proposed stormwater management pond and culvert design.
- Staff provided comments on the repair of a historical mill structure within Beaver Creek in Washington County. Proper channel diversion guidance as well as maintenance procedures to minimize potentially harmful effects from concrete and grout were conveyed.

Additional Work with Habitat and Water Quality

- Central Region biologists provided geospatial data to Maryland Forest Service for a project to target tree planting in brook trout watersheds in Baltimore and Carroll counties
- Western Region I office placed the remaining Hobo temperature loggers in the Youghiogheny River. Several high water events throughout the spring delayed the logger deployment.
- Western Region I office collected side scan sonar recordings from twenty specific sampling locations on Deep Creek Lake to coincide with spring sampling efforts for comparison of habitat and species composition.
- Western Region I office collected side scan sonar recordings in areas for an aquatic vegetation harvest/mowing pilot study to be conducted at three sites on Deep Creek Lake.

3. Stocking and Population Management

Southern regional staff stocked largemouth bass from Joseph Manning Hatchery into several prime locations in the tidal Potomac between Piscataway Creek and Oxen Creek.

Eastern Regional staff received largemouth bass from Joseph Manning Hatchery and stocked 760 juveniles by boat into the tidal Choptank River and Marshyhope Creek.

A Southern Region biologist has been participating in the state's 10-year review of State Wildlife Action Plans. On 12 July experts from Southern Maryland gathered at Watkins Regional Park to discuss specific threats, goals, and actions to conserve the state's threatened, endangered, and species of greatest conservation need for the next ten years.

4. Outreach

Customer Service - Provided customer service information for inquiries regarding:

- Fishing the Lower Savage River
- Fishing Deep Creek Lake
- Bass tournaments on Deep Creek Lake
- Youghioheny River Lake water levels
- Fishing license fee increase information

5. Angler Access

Western Region I staff continues to perform routine maintenance and inspection on the Fishery Management Areas located within the region.

6. Fish Health

Commercial blue catfish harvesters on the Patuxent River noticed hundreds to thousands of small creatures attached to the skin, mouth, and gills of fish brought aboard their vessels and an associated loss of marketability of those fish. Our local commercial harvesters notified the Southern Region and images of those creatures were shared with the Aquatic Animal Health Program (Cooperative Oxford Laboratory). Fish health experts identified the species as *Argulus*, a copepod that is also known as fish louse. The commercial harvesters were informed of the species identification and the incident recorded.

Freshwater Fisheries: Statewide Operations

1. Invasive Fishes Program

A cooperative sampling event took place on the tidal, freshwater Patuxent River with USGS Eastern Ecological Science Center researchers (lead by Dr. Heather Walsh), the Invasive Fishes Program, and Southern Region biologists. Ten, mature blue catfish from each of five sites were collected and provided to USGS biologists. Fish were measured and organs, tissue, blood, and otoliths were extracted to be evaluated for pathology and parasites. Summer 2025 marks the second year of the cooperative effort between agencies.

The Invasive Catfish Advisory Committee (ICAC) held a quarterly meeting on July 9, 2025. Jesse Howe from Coastal Conservation Association - Maryland and Sport Fisheries Advisory Commission gave a presentation on recreational juglining and suggested that we explore relaxing seasonal restrictions around this gear type to encourage harvest of invasive blue catfish. Staff also provided updates on the Commercial Electrofishing Chase Boat Pilot program, which aims to sample from late-July through mid-September in several tidal, freshwater rivers of the state. The program utilizes crews of commercial harvesters as chase boats to collect catfishes as they surface during low-frequency electrofishing surveys. Fishes will be enumerated and measured, and afterwards, harvesters will take possession of all invasive catfishes, which may be sold commercially.

The department continues its efforts to support fishing derbies and events that promote the harvest of invasive fishes, including blue catfish. In total, over \$1,450 in prizes were distributed to two tournaments that engage the community to harvest invasive fishes in July. The 4th annual Nanticoke River Invasive Fishing Derby, hosted by Salisbury University was held on July 19, 2025 and removed over 200 lbs of invasive fishes, primarily blue catfish, with over 30 teams of anglers. Prizes were also provided for the upcoming Hellcat Big10 Bowfishing Tournament, to be held in September on the Potomac River. Funds were made possible through funding provided by the USDA.

2. Coldwater Fisheries Program

Coldwater fisheries surveys continued through the month of July. Survey locations were carefully selected to avoid potentially stressful conditions for trout caused by warm temperatures. Over 15 multi-pass and single-pass surveys were conducted throughout the state to estimate population abundance or assess presence/absence, respectively. Adipose fin clips were collected in some cases for use in genomic analysis.

Conducted surveys in two of three streams that were selected for brook trout reintroduction projects. Following extensive surveys to determine sufficient habitat and water quality and to confirm the absence of existing trout species, approximately 100 brook trout were translocated to each stream in September, 2024. Similar to the first survey conducted at a translocation site in June, the July surveys captured both adult and young-of-year brook trout. The adults were translocated individuals, but the documentation of young-of-year suggests that those adults successfully spawned following translocation in 2024. Data collection will continue to monitor the population and document successful population establishment.



A translocated adult brook trout (left) and a young-of-year brook trout (right) collected at a brook trout translocation project site during a July coldwater survey. The adult was one of 100 individuals translocated to the stream in September, 2024. The young-of-year brook trout suggests successful reproduction following the translocation effort.

Organized and convened the July meeting of the Coldwater Fisheries Advisory Committee. The committee discussed a range of issues, including the new Maryland Outdoors licensing system, communication with anglers about best practices when fishing for trout during warmer temperatures, and the western Maryland flood event in May. The department also provided a presentation about current brook trout translocation and propagation projects.

Provided an aquatic biology field demonstration for participants in the Natural Resources Careers Camp at the Hickory Environmental Education Center. Campers were informed about stream ecology, the benthic macroinvertebrates and fish that inhabit streams, and the importance of monitoring these organisms for natural resources management. Campers were also given the opportunity to see and hold live fish and look for benthic macroinvertebrates in a stream. This has become an annual outreach effort that connects fisheries biologists with students that are interested in learning more about the field.



Fisheries biology demonstration for participants at Natural Resources Careers Camp at the Hickory Environmental Education Center.

3. Tidal Bass Program

The Black Bass Advisory Committee convened on July 7, 2025. Agenda items included discussions on the efficacy of Catch-Weigh-Release (CWR) tournaments led by Logan Summers, with a presentation on the format's benefits and challenges for tournament directors. Scott Sewell led a conversation on concerns surrounding cormorant populations increasing in numbers and impact on fisheries. Updates from the Tidal Bass Program included a proposal to change the Marshyhope speed zones above and below the Federalsburg VFW boat ramp to improve clarity and consistency of the regulations in that area. Departmental tournament monitoring showed that 29 of the target of 40 tournament events have been attended, primarily in the Potomac River and Upper Bay, with "dry bags" being the most common infraction. An investigation into a fish kill on Chicamuxen Creek on June 25, 2025, found more than 40 dead bass and noted low dissolved oxygen. Finally, the launch of the new Maryland Outdoors licensing system was announced, which now features the Black Bass Conservation Fund as the first donation option during checkout.

Staff assisted southern and eastern regions with stocking of fingerling bass in the Potomac, Patuxent, and Choptank rivers as well as Marshyhope Creek. Approximately 35,000 fingerlings were distributed mostly by boat into prime habitat. Additionally, the bead filter acquired with donations from the Black Bass Conservation Fund is now housing approximately 5,000 fish that will be raised to larger sizes to be stocked this fall.

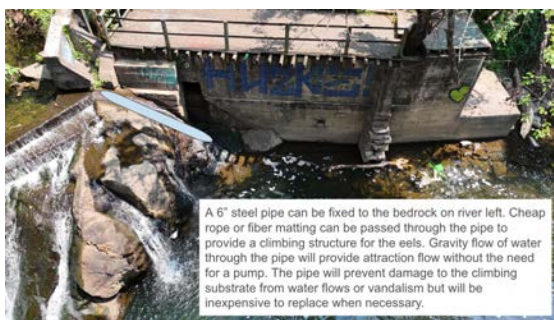
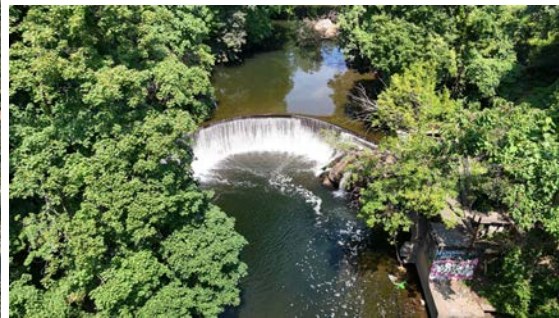
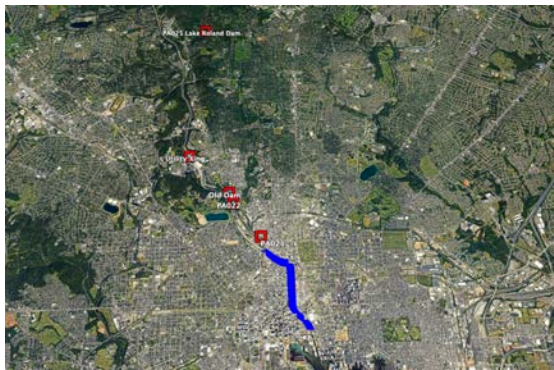


Staff released fingerling largemouth bass as part of statewide stocking efforts to sustain or improve bass fishing.

Staff attended the BASS Open on the upper Chesapeake Bay, which drew 153 anglers from across the country. The top six anglers weighed in more than 50 pounds over the three day tournament with the first place angler, Dillon Filardeau, weighing in 62 pounds, 13 ounces.

4. Fish Passage Program

Staff spent time working with “Friends of the Jones Falls” who contacted us seeking help with a grant they are submitting following a fish kill event in the Jones Falls. Given the extended urban nature of the lower Jones Falls, anadromous fish restoration is unlikely to occur here, but review of data collected by MBSS indicates an opportunity to enhance eel passage into the watershed. Following a desktop study using the Fish Passage Prioritization Tool, staff met with the President of Friends of the Jones Falls to conduct a field survey of known and suspected blockages. Five blockages were found, two of which appear to be blockages for American eel. The lower most blockage could likely provide passage with a simple DIY structure, similar in nature to the ladder built on the Patapsco River at Daniels Dam. The last remaining blockage would require a more engineered approach, similar to the ladder being constructed at Eden Mill Dam on Deer Creek. Staff will continue to work with the watershed group and should funding become available, assist as necessary.



Images of the Jones Falls area with impassable dams that may provide suitable areas for installation of eel ladders and support upstream migration for American eel.

5. Organized Freshwater Fishing

Staff held a retirement party for Letha Grimes, who after 37 years of service, has retired her position as freshwater fishing coordinator. Staff celebrated her service at Albert

Powell Fish Hatchery along with Mary Groves, the outgoing manager for the southern regional office, who also retired in late 2024. Staff welcomed the new Organized Freshwater Fishing specialist, Taylor Anderson, who will begin work officially on August 6 and have an office at headquarters in Annapolis, Maryland.



A history of 37 years of service by Letha Grimes, outgoing Freshwater Fishing coordinator, and Mary Groves, outgoing regional manager for the southern region office.