

Freshwater Fisheries Monthly Report – March 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:

- Spring walleye surveys are underway on the upper Potomac River. Staff transported 26 walleye (13 females, 13 males) to the Joseph Manning Hatchery. The eggs are incubated in hatching jars and grown to fingerling size in hatchery ponds. Walleye produced from the Potomac River brood will be stocked into suitable waters throughout Maryland. All adult walleye have been tagged as part of a study started in 2025 to assess harvest, growth, and movement.



Spring walleye surveys underway on the Upper Potomac.

- Eastern Regional staff continues to complete required maintenance of electrofishing boats for regional staff. These boats complete the majority of our sampling work in ponds, rivers, and lakes.
- The GIFS Database for Freshwater Fisheries and Hatcheries Division was updated to include eDNA in the gear codes and survey methodologies tables. This accommodates eDNA samples collected by staff.
- The GIFS database was updated with summary catch data from the 2025 Tidal Bass Survey for approximately 30 sites that were previously missing.
- Southern Region staff began an early spring survey using five standard fyke nets in St. Mary's Lake for crappie, perch, and sunfish. The first week of a weekly net set resulted in some unusual catches such as a couple of fliers and several extra large white perch (see photos) that we had not found previously using

electrofishing. Black crappie were probably the most numerous catch, with 45 individuals measured (mean length = 222 millimeters).



Some unusual catches at St. Mary's Lake spring survey (flier on the left, white perch on the right).

- Southern Region staff pressed scales and aged largemouth bass from the tidal Potomac (2024). The scales were collected to provide a more complete set of counts per bin range than can be collected from tournament mortalities from which otoliths are collected on a regular basis. In addition, largemouth bass otoliths were prepped and aged from St. Mary's Lake (2025) in order to assess the high abundance of small bass and poor size structure noted during electrofishing surveys.
- Central Region staff electrofished Liberty Reservoir and tagged 20 striped bass. Angler reports of tagged fish will help assess the striped bass fishery in Liberty Reservoir.



Striped Bass tagging at Liberty Reservoir.

2. Habitat and Water Quality

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

- West I Region staff commented on multiple applications for culvert replacements located on Amish Road located in Garrett County. Comments were provided for time-of-year closures, sediment and erosion control, proper site preparation and maintenance, pump around procedures and site restoration at the completion of the project.
- West I Region staff commented on a culvert rebuild project to be completed at the Sheetz store located in Oakland (Maryland). Comments were provided for time-of-year closures, sediment and erosion control, proper site preparation and maintenance, pump around procedures, concrete casting and curing procedures, and site restoration at the completion of the project.
- West I Region staff commented on a bridge replacement project to be completed on the Casselman River located in Grantsville (Maryland). Comments were provided for time-of-year closures, sediment and erosion control, proper site preparation and maintenance, pump around procedures, concrete casting and curing procedures and site restoration at the completion of the project.
- West I Region staff commented on an entrance road project for the construction of a new solar array to be completed in Allegany County. Comments were provided for sediment and erosion control, proper site preparation and maintenance, and site restoration at the completion of the project.
- West II staff reviewed a bridge project to restore the old Keedysville Road stone bridge across Antietam Creek. Comments were made to prevent concrete or grout contact with water to prevent pH spikes and subsequent fish kills.
- Southern Region staff provided input for Environmental Review on a rezoning

- proposal for an airport property in Charles County. The rezoning intends to remove some 200 acres from a conservation area and rezone to industrial.
- Central Region staff commented on seven Scientific Collection Permit applications and processed five Stocking Permit applications.

Additional Work with Habitat and Water Quality

- Eastern Regional staff cut trees to create additional habitat in a future blackbanded sunfish reintroduction site.

3. Stocking and Population Management

- Eastern Regional staff assisted with the removal of trout from the Unicorn Hatchery and stocking of trout in Worcester, Wicomico, Queen Annes, Caroline and Cecil counties.
- Southern staff stocked trout at three areas for Youth Only Trout Fishing Day: Hughesville, Hutchins, and Calvert Cliffs. Signage for the special day was printed. While posting the signs, we sadly had to inform several families that the ponds are closed to fishing until the designated dates on the sign. Hopefully the signs will help spread the word to those who don't know the regulations.
- West I Region staff have been assisting Bear Creek Hatchery with daily trout stocking and hatchery operations.

4. Outreach

Southern Region staff designed informational signage for Merkle Natural Resource Management Area to augment their fishing outreach events for third graders during Prince George's and Charles County Public School field trips.

5. Angler Access

- Eastern Regional staff completed maintenance on several Fishery Management Areas after the winter storms.
- Eastern Regional staff met with Engineering and Construction, Maryland State Parks, and Maryland Natural Resources Conservation Service about deepening the pond located at Cypress Branch Natural Resources Management Area. The majority of the pond is less than two feet deep, which makes fisheries management problematic.



Eastern Regional staff working on deepening the pond at Cypress Branch Natural Resources Management Area.

- Southern staff removed algae from a section of shoreline of the Fishery Management Area at Hughesville Pond to improve the experience for the kids fishing on Youth Trout Fishing Day. Additionally, staff reported to the Natural Resources Police an ongoing dumping of large piles of snakehead carcasses by the parking lot.



Dumping of large piles of snakehead carcasses at Hughesville Pond.

- Central Region staff assisted West II staff with the removal of a large white oak that was blocking the access road to the Urbana Lake Fishery Management Area.

Freshwater Fisheries: Statewide Operations

1. Invasive Fishes Program

Staff begun environmental DNA (eDNA) sampling at select locations above and below fish blockages (e.g., Patapsco River, Daniels Dam) for the presence of anadromous fishes (e.g., shad and herrings) and invasive fishes (e.g., northern snakehead) during spring. Samples will be collected through spring, when fishes are moving upstream and may be congregated at dams and other blockages.

Staff continued work with the Chesapeake Bay Program Invasive Catfish Workgroup to plan upcoming meetings with researchers studying invasive blue catfish in the watershed. Collaborative efforts to address key data gaps and share vital information has been a focus of the group, and real progress is being made.

Staff attended the Fisheries Information Exchange in Ocean Pines (Maryland). The event connects fisheries managers with stakeholders from the commercial, recreational, and for-hire sectors.

In collaboration with Maryland Department of Environment, World Wildlife Fund Sustainable Feed Program, and the Maryland Zoo, the department continued work to explore the efficacy of using small, invasive blue catfish to augment diets of piscivores in zoos. The project is now in the palatability testing phase and over 100 pounds of small fish were transferred to Maryland Zoo. Animal responses will be monitored as the fish are incorporated into their diets.

Staff have been assisting with regional trout stocking around the state.

2. Coldwater Fisheries Program

Attended the Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture Steering Committee quarterly meeting. Updates were provided for an assessment of all salmonids in the eastern United States and current initiatives and partnerships. Some members and participants provided updates for recent activities. Additionally, Maryland updated the Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture eastern salmonid catchment occupancy tool with 2024 and 2025 coldwater fisheries resource data.

Continued to work with partners on progress for several culvert removal projects in Allegany and Garrett counties. Project planning and permit application preparation was completed for a culvert removal project in Bear Pen Run in the Savage River watershed. Additionally, a pre-bid meeting was held for a culvert removal project in Winebrenner Run in the Georges Creek watershed. The department will continue to coordinate with project partners to ensure the successful completion of these projects.

Provided a presentation on current brook trout conservation projects for Antietam Fly Anglers of Maryland. The presentation provided background details regarding the history of brook trout management, the current status of brook trout, and current efforts to expand brook trout occupancy in Maryland.

Participated in planning discussions for a dam removal project and a stream restoration project in Beaver Creek. These projects will be supported by a Whole Watershed Act award for the Antietam Creek watershed, which is being managed by Catoctin Land Trust. Additional dam removal projects in Antietam Creek and a stream restoration project in Little Antietam Creek are also in consideration for this effort.

3. Tidal Bass Program

Staff attended and presented research at the annual meeting of the Southern Division of the American Fisheries Society at the beginning of March. Research was focused on the efficacy of Live-imaging Sonar on the amount of fish caught, size of fish caught and the areas where it was most effective. In addition to presenting research, staff attended talks focused on the management of black bass including movement, disease, genetics, and submerged aquatic vegetation.

Staff attended the biannual B.A.S.S. Conservation Summit during the Bassmaster Classic. This event brought together B.A.S.S. conservation directors, fisheries biologists, and industry professionals from across the country to focus on management and conservation issues directly affecting black bass. The first day of talks focused on how to best communicate your management and conservation efforts using social media. Speakers included staff from North Carolina who host the “Two Bald Biologists Podcast,” South Carolina Department of Natural Resources’ staff who host the “Fisheries Podcast,” and several media industry members who cumulatively reach over a million anglers annually. The second day of presentations focused on aquatic plant management with speakers from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, Texas Parks and Wildlife, and several other non-governmental organizations. Topics included when, why, and methods to manage for SAV, managing stakeholder conflict, and working with non-governmental organizations.

4. Fish Passage Program

Staff continue to coordinate with the Environmental Review Program on the new Bay Bridge crossing and piling protection projects. Staff also met with colleagues to finalize projects and sampling sites for the Choptank Aquatic Organism Passage Project. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will begin eDNA sampling in early April to prioritize future removal projects and gather pre-removal data.

Spring fish migration has started and ladders are being opened and maintained by removing debris.

The Girl Scout Dam Removal project will begin later this spring towards the end of the migration closure period.

American Rivers has postponed their meeting with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources to present the Daniel's Dam Feasibility Study.

5. Organized Freshwater Fishing

The second session of the Aquatic R3 Matrix team's fly fishing skills training took place at the Avalon area on March 4. Participants were able to test their casting skills in the water and practice with real flies for the first time. Afterwards the group warmed up with some delicious food at a "hot pot" restaurant and had a good conversation!



Session Two of Aquatic R3 Matrix team's fly fishing skills training.

Freshwater fisheries hosted a Youth Trout Fishing Day at Pine Lake in Wheaton Regional Park featuring the First Catch Mobile Fishing Trailer. Youth anglers were able to rent fishing equipment and harvest up to two trout each. The event was a tremendous success, drawing more than 100 youth and family members, resulting in 87 fishing rods being loaned out!



Youth-Only Trout Fishing Day at Pine Lake.

Freshwater fisheries and Aquatic Resource Education staff hosted March on the Mattawoman at Smallwood State Park to celebrate the arrival of the ospreys and kick off spring fishing. The First Catch Mobile Fishing Trailer was provided for participants to rent out fishing gear and practice fishing skills like casting and knot tying.



Freshwater fisheries staff at the March on the Mattawoman.