

BAIT — Prohibit the Use of Certain Species as Bait

What is being considered?

The department is considering prohibiting the use of select sportfish species (largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, walleye, muskellunge, and all species of trout) as bait (live or cut bait). The prohibition would be for all waters in Maryland.

Why is this change necessary?

Large, piscivorous, invasive flathead catfish (*Pylodictis olivaris*) have become established in the nontidal waters of the Potomac River. Because of their large size and fighting ability, flathead catfish have become popular with the catfishing tournament community. The largest specimens are typically caught using large fish as bait. Some anglers have begun using largemouth and smallmouth bass as bait. Current regulations allow the use of largemouth and smallmouth bass and all other sportfish as bait as long as they are caught using legal gear and within the size and creel limits established for that species.

Maryland spends considerable resources to protect and enhance largemouth and smallmouth bass, walleye, muskellunge, and trout populations as well as control invasive species such as flathead catfish. Angler preference surveys conducted in 2004 and 2015 (Knoche, 2016) both documented the nontidal Potomac River as the most popular freshwater fishing destination and black bass as the most sought after sportfish. Fourteen percent of all nontidal fishing trips were to the Potomac River (239,000 trips) with 63 percent of those trips specifically targeting largemouth and smallmouth bass with an estimated economic impact of 23 million dollars. Statewide, 41 percent of all freshwater fishing trips targeted largemouth and smallmouth bass with an estimated economic impact of nearly 150 million dollars (Knoche, 2016).

A smallmouth bass stocking program was initiated in 2019 to supplement natural reproduction to offset poor recruitment due to flooding. In 2020, the department produced more than 35,000 fingerling smallmouth bass for the nontidal Potomac River at a considerable cost to address declining catch rates and angler complaints. Allowing intensively managed sportfish species to be used as bait is counter to the department's goals and objectives of enhancing recreational fisheries and creates conflict among our angling groups.

Who will this affect?

This would affect recreational anglers who use these species as bait. It may affect bait suppliers if an angler needs to switch to a different type of bait.

When will this be effective?

The department would like this change to be effective in 2021, however the exact date cannot be determined. The department will follow our normal scoping and proposal procedures.

Has this change been discussed with advisory groups?

Scoped at the Sport Fisheries Advisory Commission and the Tidal Fisheries Advisory Commission meetings in January 2021. Commissioners did not have any comments at the time of scoping.