GENERAL - Black Bass Tournaments

What was proposed?
The Department proposed regulation changes to update and clarify the requirements for obtaining a black bass tournament permit. Currently, a permit is only mandatory if a tournament meets three specific criteria: having ten or more boats, having a specific weigh-in or entry location, and providing an offer or reward for catching black bass.

The proposed action modifies the criteria and requires non-possession based tournaments with catch-weigh-release or catch-photo-release formats to obtain a permit if the tournament fishing occurs either exclusively in Maryland, or in Maryland and up to two additional jurisdictions (for example, waters under the jurisdiction of Virginia or the Potomac River Fisheries Commission).

The proposed action also clarifies that the reward or incentive offered must be specifically for black bass. These changes ensure the Department is capturing relevant tournament information specific to black bass.

Why is this change necessary?
The Department continuously evaluates fishing regulations for efficacy based on fishery monitoring efforts. Currently, tournaments that do not meet all of the criteria operate without a permit and, subsequently, do not have mandatory reporting requirements.

Modifying the permit requirement allows the Department to gather information from a wider range of organized fishing events.

Increased tournament reporting provides critical fishery-dependent data that helps managers understand fishing pressure and population trends for black bass.

Standardizing reporting across possession and nonpossession tournaments ensures that management decisions are based on the full scope of tournament activity rather than a smaller subset of competitions.

Who will this affect?
This action will affect tournament directors, fishing clubs, and black bass anglers who participate in organized events involving ten or more boats. Specifically, it will now include groups that were previously exempt because they did not have a specific weigh-in location.

What is the specific regulatory action?
Amend Regulation .11 under COMAR 08.02.01 General.

Was this change discussed with advisory bodies or other interested or impacted individuals?
1. This idea was discussed with the Black Bass Advisory Committee at their April 2026 meeting and received general support.
2. This idea was scoped with the Sport Fisheries Advisory Commission (SFAC) and the Tidal Fisheries Advisory Commission (TFAC) at their meetings in April 2026.

Commissioners generally supported the idea but noted that education is necessary and it could affect kayak tournaments the most.

3. This idea was scoped with the general public from May 14, 2026, through June 4, 2026.

Regulatory Process

Fishing rules in Maryland may be created by either the General Assembly or the Department. When the Department creates a fishing rule, it is called a regulation. When the General Assembly creates a rule, it is called a statute. The Department often has to create a regulation to implement a statute. The regulatory process begins with scoping and the Department follows normal procedures as concepts move forward.

During the scoping process, the Department gathers suggestions and ideas from stakeholders and others about how to solve a fishery problem or address a need. The goal of scoping is to identify issues, potential impacts, and reasonable alternatives associated with the issues so that management actions can be developed. After the public has had an opportunity to comment on possible management actions during the scoping process, the Department considers these comments and develops an appropriate management strategy.

At the conclusion of the scoping process, the Department determined that the action is necessary and appropriate. The rules are being promulgated following the Administrative Procedures Act described in Title 10, Subtitle 1 of the State Government Article Annotated Code of Maryland.

- The General Assembly's Administrative, Executive, and Legislative Review Committee reviews the regulatory proposal for fiscal and legal analysis.
- The proposal was printed by the Division of State Documents in the Maryland Register on October 2, 2026.
- A 30-day public comment period began on the day of publication. The comment period ends November 2, 2026.
- After reviewing the comments, the Department may adopt the changes.
- If the Department adopts the changes, they become effective after a notice is published in the Maryland Register that announces the adoption and effective date.

When could this be effective?

The Department projects that this change could be effective January 1, 2027. However, the exact date cannot be determined at this time.