

GENERAL - Black Bass Tournaments

What is being considered?

The Department is considering changing 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/entry location, and providing an offer or reward for catching black bass. The Department is considering requiring a permit for all fishing tournaments with ten or more participating boats, regardless of whether they have a formal weigh-in location or offer incentives. This would include all non-possession tournaments for black bass including catch-photo-release and catch-weigh-release.

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 three existing stipulations, specifically those lacking a centralized weigh-in location, operate without a permit and, consequently, without mandatory reporting requirements.

This change is necessary to expand data collection and capture a more comprehensive picture of fishing effort and tournament catch statistics in competitive sportfishing. Extending 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 all multi-boat events 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.

Has this change been 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.

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.

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.