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SMALL BUSINESS COMPLIANCE GUIDE
Amendment to Subtitle 02 Fisheries Service
Regarding the Department's Regulations for Striped Bass – Recreational Seasons
COMAR 08.02.15
Released November 14, 2025
Updated January 27, 2026
Updated March 31, 2026

This Guide is prepared in accordance with the requirements of State Government Article, §10-110, Annotated Code of Maryland. It is intended to help small businesses comply with the revised rules adopted in the above-referenced sections of the Code of Maryland Regulations. This Guide is not intended to replace or supersede these rules, but to facilitate compliance with the rules. Although we have attempted to cover all parts of the rules that might be especially important to small businesses, the coverage may not be exhaustive. This Guide cannot anticipate all situations in which the rules apply. Furthermore, the Department retains the discretion to adopt case-by-case approaches, where appropriate, that may differ from this Guide. Any decisions regarding a particular small business will be based on the statute and any relevant rules and regulations.

In any civil or administrative action against a small business for a violation of rules, the content of the Small Business Compliance Guide may be considered as evidence of the reasonableness or appropriateness of proposed fines, penalties, or damages. Interested parties are free to file comments regarding this Guide and the appropriateness of its application to a particular situation. The Department will then consider whether the recommendations or interpretations in the Guide are appropriate in that situation. The Department may decide to revise this Guide without public notice to reflect changes in the Department's approach to implementing a rule, or it may clarify or update the text of the Guide. Direct your comments and recommendations, or calls for further assistance, to Fishing and Boating Services:

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. SUMMARY..... 3
 What is Necessary?..... 3
 What was Proposed?..... 3
 Reasons Why the Department Proposed the Baseline Season Adjustment.....4

II. DEFINITIONS..... 5

III. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS..... 6
 1. Why does the Department think these changes are appropriate?..... 6
 2. Who will the changes affect?..... 6
 3. How do the new seasons in the Baseline Season Adjustment provide more fishing opportunities?..... 7
 4. Why has the Department opened catch and release fishing in the spring and put pressure on pre-spawn fish after we were told we had to protect the female spawners?..... 7
 5. Do the changes impact one user group more than others?..... 8
 6. Why aren't there enough young striped bass surviving to enter the fishery if the spawning stock is considered healthy?..... 8
 7. Was this change discussed with advisory bodies or other interested individuals?..... 8
 8. Are there any changes to the spawning rivers, areas and reaches?..... 9
 9. Are there any changes to the rules about what gear we can use?..... 9
 10. Can I catch and release striped bass in January and February?.....9

IV. RULES FOR STRIPED BASS EFFECTIVE 4/1/2026..... 10
 Chesapeake Bay and Tidal Tributaries..... 10
 Susquehanna Flats, Lower Susquehanna River, and Northeast River..... 12

V. MAPS..... 13

VI. LINKS..... 14

VII. RECORDKEEPING AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS..... 14

VIII. REGULATORY PROCESS..... 14

IX. EFFECTIVE DATE OF THE CHANGES..... 15

I. SUMMARY

What is Necessary?

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) adopted Addendum III to Amendment 7 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Striped Bass. The Department needs to take action to implement Addendum III. The Addendum modifies requirements for commercial tagging programs, implements a standard method of measuring total length for size limit regulations, and allows Maryland to change its Chesapeake Bay recreational season baseline if the state so chooses. Maryland is already in compliance with the commercial tagging requirements and is not considering any changes to its tagging program.

What was Proposed?

The Department proposed actions to implement the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (ASMFC) Addendum III to Amendment 7 to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Striped Bass. The Addendum implements a standard method of measuring total length for size limit regulations and allows Maryland to change its Chesapeake Bay recreational season baseline. The Department decided to move forward with the Baseline Season Adjustment rather than keep the 2025 recreational season rules.

The proposed action:

- (1) Modifies the definition of total length. Addendum III specifies that when measuring total length of a striped bass, it must be a straightline measurement with the upper and lower forks of the tail squeezed together.
- (2) Reestablishes the catch and release season for April.
- (3) Reestablishes the season from May 1 through May 15 where an individual may harvest one fish per person per day between 19—24 inches total length.
- (4) Removes the July 16 through July 31 no targeting closure and establishes a no targeting closure from August 1 through August 31.
- (5) Changes the end date of the recreational season to December 5 of each year.
- (6) Reorganizes the regulations to simplify the recreational and charter boat seasons making them easier to find and read.
- (7) Adjusts the gear and bait rules to align with the recreational seasons.
- (8) Allows for more access to recreational fishing opportunities without increasing mortality or total number of fish removed.

Please read the full statement of purpose in the [Maryland Register](#).

What is the Specific Regulatory Action?

The Department proposed to:

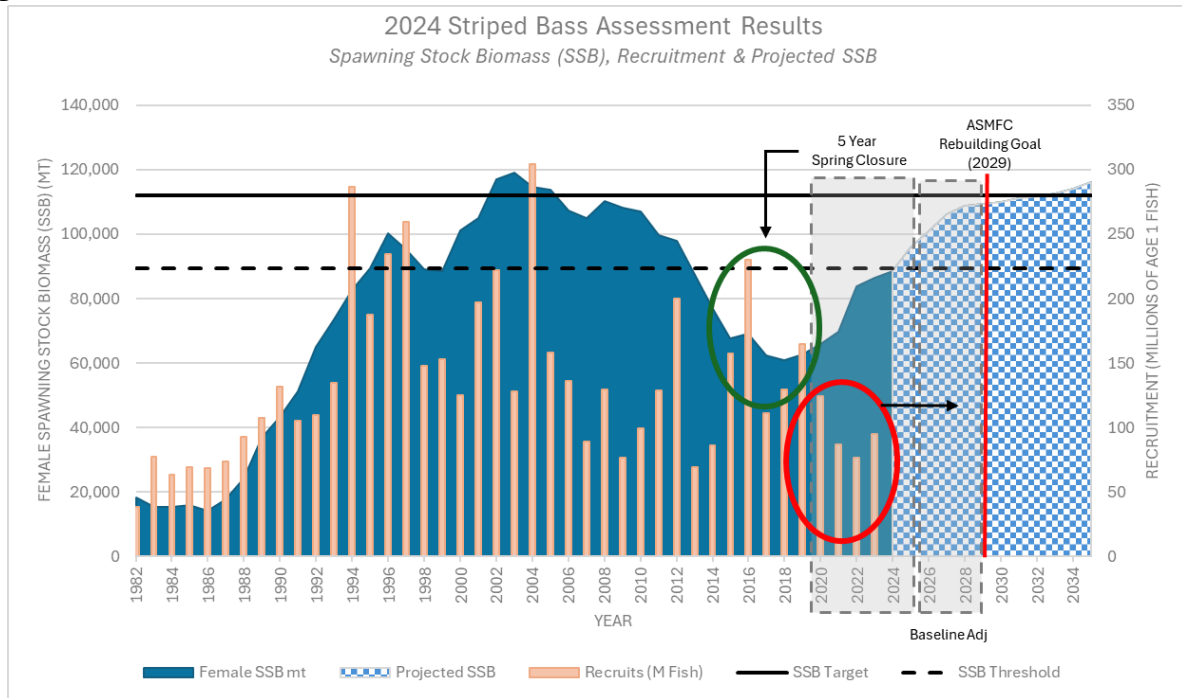
- 1) Amend Regulation .02 under 08.02.05 Fish;
- 2) Amend Regulations .02, .09, and .12, and repeal existing Regulation .10 under COMAR 08.02.15 Striped Bass; and
- 3) Amend Regulation .03 under COMAR 08.02.25 Gear.

Reasons Why the Department Proposed the Baseline Season Adjustment

- The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (ASMFC) Striped Bass Management Board approved a stakeholder-developed and DNR-sponsored proposal (Baseline Season Adjustment) to modify Maryland's recreational striped bass season with the goal of addressing the needs of the recreational community in Maryland while focusing on protections for the resident striped bass to reduce mortality and boost their survivability until migration.
- The Baseline Season Adjustment re-directs the Department's conservation approach (protection of large females) to one that provides protection to the more vulnerable (juvenile) resident population of striped bass in the Chesapeake Bay.
- During the summer (July and August), young resident fish in the population are more vulnerable to mortality given the extreme temperatures and poor water quality during that time of year. As they age, these younger resident fish will leave the Chesapeake Bay to join the spawning stock.
- A longer closure in August will protect the residents trying to survive, including those fish that would be caught and released. This is especially important since the resident abundance is low due to 7 consecutive years of poor juvenile fish production ([Chesapeake Bay 2025 Young-of-Year Striped Bass Survey Results](#)).
- Moving the closure from July to August could minimize the impacts to small businesses because there are a number of other species present in the Bay that can be targeted in August during the proposed month-long no-targeting closure on striped bass.
- The proposal aligns with ASMFC's recent action (voted to approve a 0% reduction in fishing mortality in Addendum III; Development of a workgroup to discuss upcoming stock and management challenges beyond 2029) which indicates a sign to the fishing public that management should focus more on the needs of the future (younger resident fish) under a low production regime, rather than the immediate interests of having more abundance of adult fish.
- The Baseline Season Adjustment reduces regulatory complexity, re-aligns Maryland seasons more closely with our Chesapeake Bay jurisdiction neighbors (Virginia and Potomac River Fisheries Commission), and refocuses our management efforts where needed given the status of the striped bass population along the coast.
- Bringing fishing opportunities back to the spring will greatly benefit the communities around the Chesapeake Bay who rely on recreational fishing to support their businesses.
- The Baseline Season Adjustment removes the no-targeting restrictions in the spring to allow catch and release fishing to occur from January through April.
 - Concern has been raised about anglers interacting and catching pre-spawning females during the month of April.
 - Studies indicate that release mortality is low in April due to cool water and air temperatures which greatly increase survival of released fish.
 - The past five years of implementation has demonstrated that there is little to no relationship between the number of large females in the population and a successful spawning event.
 - The current population size of the large females is capable of producing a large year-class. Reopening the catch and release fishery in April is not expected to change the outcome of the spawn, known to be heavily influenced by environmental factors such as water/air temperature, precipitation, and storm events.

- Current scientific understanding is that increasing protection for the young resident fish, which are subject to high release mortality during the summer months, will likely bolster the future spawning stock.
- While the ‘5 Year Spring Closure’ protected the strong year-classes (green circle in Figure 1) and helped contribute to the growth of the SSB, the Baseline Season Adjustment offers Maryland the opportunity to protect the young resident striped bass in poor abundance (red circle in Figure 1) for the next few years in an effort to allow more young fish to survive to adulthood when they will become part of the coastal migratory population (Figure 1)

Figure 1.



II. DEFINITIONS

Catch

To take, kill, trap, gather, harvest or in any manner reduce any fish to personal possession.

Circle Hook

A non-offset hook with the point turned perpendicularly back to the shank. Circle hooks used in bait fisheries should be non-offset. That is, if the hook is laid on a flat surface, all parts of the hook lie flat on the surface.

Harvest

To take, kill, trap, gather, catch, or in any manner reduce any fish to personal possession or to attempt to engage in this conduct.

Possession

Any condition where a fish is controlled with the angler's intent of ownership. Possession limit is the maximum number of fish that an angler may have in their possession after two or more days of fishing.

Stinger Hook

A hook which trails another hook or hook unit, either by direct physical attachment to the lead hook or hook unit, or by a connective device such as a line, swivel or chain, and is part of the same bait or lure.

Target

To catch, attempt to catch, harm, harass, or pursue.

Total Length means the greatest straight line length in inches as measured on a fish laid flat on its side on top of the measuring device with its mouth closed from the anterior-most tip of the jaw or snout to the farthest extremity of the tail with the upper and lower fork of the tail squeezed together.

Trolling

The method of angling during which fish are attracted to a lure or bait being trailed from a boat which is moving forward or backward by mechanical, manual or wind power.

III. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Why does the Department think these changes are appropriate?

Since 2015, many changes have been made to protect the spawning stock of striped bass through reductions in quotas, recreational size and creel limits, and closed seasons. This has resulted in complicated and segmented recreational fishing regulations. The measures over the last ten years have helped improve the number of large, spawning adults needed to reproduce, but the numbers of striped bass that survive the first stages of life and grow big enough to be caught in a survey net continue to remain low. The Department believes it is time to simplify striped bass regulations and re-focus on efforts to protect the young resident stock during the summer months when they are most vulnerable to release mortality.

The Department believes that management measures should be focused on protections to the smaller, resident population of striped bass to provide the best chance of survival to spawning and migration size while also ensuring anglers can still enjoy opportunities to fish for striped bass. The Department believes that the change in seasons is in the best interest of anglers, charter captains, communities around the Bay reliant on recreational fishing, and the overall health of the striped bass resource.

2. Who will the changes affect?

The proposed changes will affect anyone who fishes recreationally for striped bass in the Chesapeake Bay or its tidal tributaries. The proposed changes do not apply to anyone fishing

for striped bass in the Atlantic Ocean, its coastal bays, and their tributaries or anyone commercially fishing for striped bass.

3. How do the new seasons in the Baseline Season Adjustment provide more fishing opportunities?

The restructuring of Maryland’s seasons allows for 30 fewer no-targeting days and 35 more days of catch and release fishing open to all recreational anglers. While there will be five fewer days to harvest fish, the tradeoff shifts effort to accessing fish when water conditions are better, which adds protection to the younger, resident fish.

Season Type	2025 Regulations	Baseline Season Adjustment
Catch & Release (days)	111	146
Harvest (days)	193	188
No Targeting (days)	61	31
Total Days	365	365
<i>Total Access (C&R + Harvest)</i>	<i>304</i>	<i>334</i>
<i>Total Access %</i>	<i>83%</i>	<i>92%</i>

4. Why has the Department opened catch and release fishing in the spring and put pressure on pre-spawn fish after we were told we had to protect the female spawners?

Atlantic Coast states have taken many steps to protect the large, spawning females (spawning stock biomass or SSB) and we have seen increases in the numbers of large females. The protection of the older and larger fish has not led to increases in numbers of young striped bass surviving and growing large enough to be caught. The Department believes that there is a need to shift its management approach to focus on protecting the smaller, Chesapeake Bay resident portion of the stock, so that they may grow to become large spawning fish.

In the later summer months, the number of fish that die after being caught is higher because the fish are under a lot of stress from heat, low amounts of oxygen in the water, and months of fishing pressure. The number of fish that die after being caught is lower during the spring months when water and air temperatures are cooler and there is more oxygen in the water. There is no conclusive evidence that catch and release fishing hinders females spawning. We have produced large year-classes with the same, or lower, number of spawning females; and in many years when the pre-season catch and release and trophy fisheries were active.

Because the smaller fish that are caught in the summer are more likely to die if they are released than the larger fish caught and released in the spring, the Department believes it is appropriate to shift the season for catch and release fishing to the spring, when fish are less likely to die when they are released, and close the fishery in August when fish are stressed and more likely to die when released.

5. Do the changes impact one user group more than others?

These changes address the current striped bass fishery challenges for all recreational anglers. To improve long-term outcomes for the striped bass fishery, short-term changes could affect some parties more than others. Fishing practices may need to adapt to new seasons, away from traditional models, and reflect new management approaches. The Department believes that overall the Baseline Season Adjustment will be a benefit for all fishermen, regardless of fishing method, gear, or license type, because it offers more opportunities for all anglers to be on the water fishing for striped bass and helps businesses in local communities, like tackle shops, marinas, and restaurants.

6. Why aren't there enough young striped bass surviving to enter the fishery if the spawning stock is considered healthy?

Good question, and one that biologists, managers, and fishermen think is not caused by one single factor. The current population size of the large females is capable of producing a large year-class, but environmental factors seem to be most critical to the ability of striped bass eggs and larvae to survive. Changing water temperatures, food availability (plankton), drought status, spring flow and related salinity, and other habitat conditions are likely all contributing to low survivability. Unfortunately, as managers, the State has little to no control over these environmental factors that influence the size of the population. Our primary control is over the harvest of adults, and that is the tool that we are manipulating based on past experience and best available science to produce the most sustainable population size.

In February 2025, managers, scientists and field biologists met to review and discuss available data and potential causes of low recruitment. The materials from this workshop are available [here](#), and data continues to be reviewed, discussed, and analyzed for new insights.

7. Was this change discussed with advisory bodies or other interested individuals?

- As a result of fishermen expressing frustration over the complicated and segmented recreational fishing regulations for striped bass in Maryland's portion of the Chesapeake Bay, DNR brought together a collection of leaders in the recreational fishing community to discuss alternative approaches to the season.
 - The participants on this workgroup representing the recreational fishing community included charter boats, light tackle guides, tackle shops, and conservation organizations. The goal was to address the needs of the recreational community, without compromising the health of the striped bass resource.
 - A series of open public meetings and discussions resulted in the Maryland Seasonal Adjustment Baseline Proposal that was presented to ASMFC and approved by the Board in May 2025 for inclusion in Addendum III.
- This has been discussed through the ASMFC process, most recently at the 2025 Annual Meeting. Two public hearings were held in Maryland prior to that meeting on September 22, 2025 (Wye Mills) and September 23, 2025 (Annapolis and virtual). A summary of comments received on this topic during the Addendum III Public Comment Period can be found beginning on page 30 of the [Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board Annual Meeting Supplemental Materials](#).
- Scoped with the public by:

- Posting [information](#) on the Fishing and Boating Services' Changes to Fishing Regulations webpage
- Holding an Informational Webinar on Friday, November 21 at noon
- Receiving comments via Google form, phone, and email
- Scoping Comments were accepted from 11/14/2025 through 11/29/2025

8. Are there any changes to the spawning rivers, areas and reaches?

Maryland has historically prohibited targeting striped bass in the majority of the striped bass spawning rivers, areas, and reaches from March 1 through May 31. Those rivers, areas, and reaches are not being changed and targeting striped bass in those places will remain off limits, except for the continued allowance to catch and release striped bass during the month of March in the Susquehanna Flats, Northeast River, and the Susquehanna River below the Lapidum boat ramp.

From 2008 to 2023, the Susquehanna Flats area was open to striped bass harvest during the last 2 weeks in May under a reduced bag and slot limit (when compared to the limits at the time). This area was closed in 2024 in response to AMSFCs actions in 2023 to reduce mortality on the female SSB and establish a 1 fish bag limit and consistent slot (19 - 24 inches) throughout the Chesapeake Bay region. When ASMFC went through the Baseline Season Adjustment proposal and calculations for Addendum III, it did not specifically address any proposed change for the Susquehanna Flats. This means that it is not possible for the Department to change the no-targeting closure for this area at this time.

See Sections IV and V for more information.

9. Are there any changes to the rules about what gear we can use?

In order to ensure that striped bass caught and released in April and early May have a low release mortality, the same gear rules that apply in March were extended through May 15. That means stinger hooks are prohibited, there is a limit of 6 rods while trolling, and barbless hooks are required while trolling.

See Sections IV and V for more information.

10. Can I catch and release striped bass in January and February?

Yes, striped bass catch and release fishing remains open in January and February throughout the Chesapeake Bay and its tidal tributaries.

IV. RULES FOR STRIPED BASS EFFECTIVE 4/1/2026

**Chesapeake Bay and Tidal Tributaries
(excluding the Susquehanna Flats, Lower Susquehanna River and Northeast River)**

SEASON	FISHING LOCATIONS ALLOWED	CREEL AND SIZE LIMITS	RESTRICTIONS AND REMARKS
JAN. 1 – FEB. 28	All areas open to catch and release fishing only.	No harvest.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catch and release only. • Circle hook rules remain the same. • Eels may not be used as bait.
MAR. 1–APR. 30	Chesapeake Bay downstream from a line between Abbey Point and Worton Point to the Virginia line including Tangier and Pocomoke Sounds.	No harvest.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catch and release only. • Stinger (trailing) hooks are prohibited. • Barbless hooks are required when trolling. • No more than 6 lines may be employed while trolling. • Circle hook rules remain the same. • Spawning rivers and the Upper Bay spawning area are off limits. • Eels may not be used as bait. • See maps in Section V
MAY 1–MAY 15	Chesapeake Bay from the Brewerton Channel to the Virginia line, excluding all bays, sounds, tributaries, creeks and rivers, except Tangier and Pocomoke Sounds and all Potomac River tributaries downstream of the Nice Memorial Bridge (U.S. 301).	1 fish per person per day. Must be at least 19" and cannot exceed 24".	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stinger (trailing) hooks are prohibited. • Barbless hooks are required when trolling. • No more than 6 lines may be employed while trolling. • Circle hook rules remain the same. • Spawning rivers and the Upper Bay spawning area are off limits. • Eels may not be used as bait. • See maps in Section V
MAY 16–MAY 31	Chesapeake Bay downstream from a line drawn from the south corner of Hart-Miller Island Dike to the end of MD Route 21 at Tolchester and south to the MD/VA line, excluding all bays, sounds, tributaries, creeks and rivers. EXCEPT: Tangier Sound and Pocomoke Sound; Chester River and its tributaries downstream of a line drawn from Hail Point to Long Point to Ferry Point; Patuxent River and its tributaries downstream of a line drawn from Point Patience to the west point of land at the entrance of Little Kingston Creek; Choptank River and its tributaries downstream of a line drawn from Holland Point to a point of land at the west entrance of Chapel Creek; and all Potomac River tributaries downstream of the Nice Memorial Bridge (U.S. 301) are open.	1 fish per person per day. Must be at least 19" and cannot exceed 24".	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circle hook rules remain the same. • Spawning rivers and the Upper Bay spawning area are off limits. • See maps in Section V
JUNE 1–JULY 31	All areas open.	1 fish per person per day. Must be at least 19" and cannot exceed 24".	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circle hook rules remain the same.

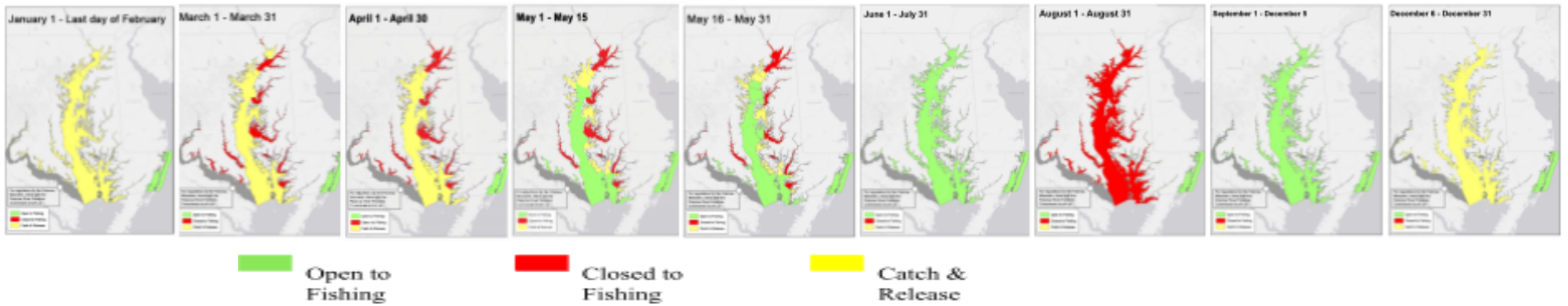
SEASON	FISHING LOCATIONS ALLOWED	CREEL AND SIZE LIMITS	RESTRICTIONS AND REMARKS
AUG. 1–AUG. 31	All areas closed to striped bass fishing.	CLOSED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No targeting. • Attempting to catch striped bass is illegal during this time period.
SEPT. 1–DEC. 5	All areas open.	1 fish per person per day. Must be at least 19" and cannot exceed 24".	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circle hook rules remain the same.
DEC. 6–DEC. 31	All areas open to catch and release fishing only.	No harvest.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catch and release only. • Circle hook rules remain the same. • Eels may not be used as bait.

Susquehanna Flats, Lower Susquehanna River, and Northeast River

SEASON	FISHING LOCATIONS ALLOWED	CREEL AND SIZE LIMITS	RESTRICTIONS AND REMARKS
JAN. 1 – FEB. 28	All areas open to catch and release fishing only.	No harvest.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catch and release only. • Circle hook rules remain the same. • Eels may not be used as bait.
MAR. 1–MAR. 31	<p>Susquehanna Flats, upstream of a line from Sandy Point to Turkey Point and the Susquehanna River downstream from a line connecting the Susquehanna State Park boat ramp at Lapidum (defined by Lat. 39°35.86' N and Long. 76°07.67' W) to Twin Rocks (defined by Lat. 39°36.17' N and Long. 76°07.56' W) to Tomes Wharf in Port Deposit (defined by Lat. 39°36.23' N and Long. 76°06.99' W); and the Northeast River.</p> <p>Note: The "Tomes Wharf" coordinate is closest to Lee's Landing Dock Bar.</p>	No harvest.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catch and release only. • Stinger (trailing) hooks are prohibited. • Barbless hooks are required when trolling. • No more than 6 lines may be employed while trolling. • Circle hook rules remain the same. • Eels may not be used as bait. • See maps in Section V.
APR 1–MAY 31	All waters upstream of a line from Abbey Point to Worton Point closed to striped bass fishing.	CLOSED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No targeting. • Attempting to catch striped bass is illegal during this time period.
JUNE 1–JULY 31	All areas open.	1 fish per person per day. Must be at least 19" and cannot exceed 24".	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circle hook rules remain the same.
AUG. 1–AUG. 31	All areas closed to striped bass fishing.	CLOSED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No targeting. • Attempting to catch striped bass is illegal during this time period.
SEPT. 1–DEC. 5	All areas open.	1 fish per person per day. Must be at least 19" and cannot exceed 24".	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circle hook rules remain the same.
DEC. 6–DEC. 31	All areas open to catch and release fishing only.	No harvest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catch and release only. • Circle hook rules remain the same. • Eels may not be used as bait.

V. MAPS

New Maryland Recreational Baseline Season Adjustment Maps



[2026 Striped Bass Regulations Maps](#) - this page has maps by date for the season.

[Interactive Map for the 2026 Striped Bass Regulations](#) - this resource allows you to see the maps in more detail.

VI. LINKS

[ASMFC Striped Bass](#) – species information

[ASMFC Press Release](#) - ASMFC Atlantic Striped Bass Board Approves Addendum III Without Reductions in Fishery Removals

[ASMFC 2025 Annual Meeting](#) - Meeting Summaries, Press Releases and Motions

[Striped Bass Survey Assessment and Habitat Connections](#) - Chesapeake Bay Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) Workshop

[Chesapeake Bay 2025 Young-of-Year Striped Bass Survey Results](#) - Striped Bass Juvenile Survey Results

[2026 Striped Bass Regulations Maps](#) - Maps for the striped bass recreational season.

[Interactive Map for the 2026 Striped Bass Regulations](#) - this resource allows you to see the maps for the season in more detail.

VII. RECORDKEEPING AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

This action does not create any new recordkeeping or reporting requirements.

VIII. 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. The ideas for this proposal were scoped from November 14 through November 29, 2025.

At the conclusion of the scoping process, the Department determined that the action was necessary and appropriate, and the rules were 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 January 23, 2026.
- A 30-day public comment period began on the day of publication and ended February 23, 2026.
- In a letter dated March 6, 2026, the Joint Committee on Administrative, Executive, and Legislative Review (AELR) notified the Department of its intent to conduct a more detailed study of the regulation proposal and asked the Department to delay the final adoption.
- In a letter dated March 11, 2026, the committee notified the Department that their concerns about the proposed regulations were resolved and that the Department may proceed with the adoption of the regulations.
- After reviewing the comments, the Department decided to adopt the changes as proposed.
- The notice of final action, announcing the adoption and the effective date, was published in the Maryland Register on March 20, 2026.

IX. EFFECTIVE DATE OF THE CHANGES

April 1, 2026.