

FISHING IN NONTIDAL WATERS – Catch-and-Return Trout Fishing Areas

What is being considered?

The Department is considering requiring anglers to use barbless hooks when fishing in all Catch-and-Return Trout Fishing Areas and Delayed Harvest Fishing Areas during the catch-and-return season.

Why is this change necessary?

This change aims to reduce the injury and handling time of fish caught by anglers, thereby increasing fish survival during the catch and release event. Independent and dependent fishery surveys conducted by the Freshwater Fisheries and Hatcheries Division (FFHD) on the North Branch Potomac River tailwater trout fishery have documented high angler use and catch and a significant proportion (> 20 percent) of adult trout showing evidence of hooking injuries within the Catch-and-Return Trout Fishing Areas. Data collected by FFHD also suggests that each adult trout in the Catch-and-Return, All-Tackle management area of the North Branch Potomac River is caught on average twice annually. Similar results can be expected in other Catch-and-Return Trout Fishing Areas, which are smaller, more accessible, and more effectively fished than the North Branch Potomac River.

The scientific literature generally supports that using barbless hooks reduces physical injury and handling time to unhook fish. Further, physiological stress and mortality of released fish generally increase with handling time and temperature. Survival of released fish is necessary to maintain a quality fishery and angling experience in pressured fisheries.

Who will this affect?

This action will affect nontidal recreational anglers fishing for trout in Catch-and-Return Trout Fishing Areas.

When will this be effective?

The Department projects that this change could be effective in the winter of 2023-2024. However, the exact date cannot be determined. The Department will follow our normal scoping and proposal procedures.

Has this change been discussed with stakeholders?

No.