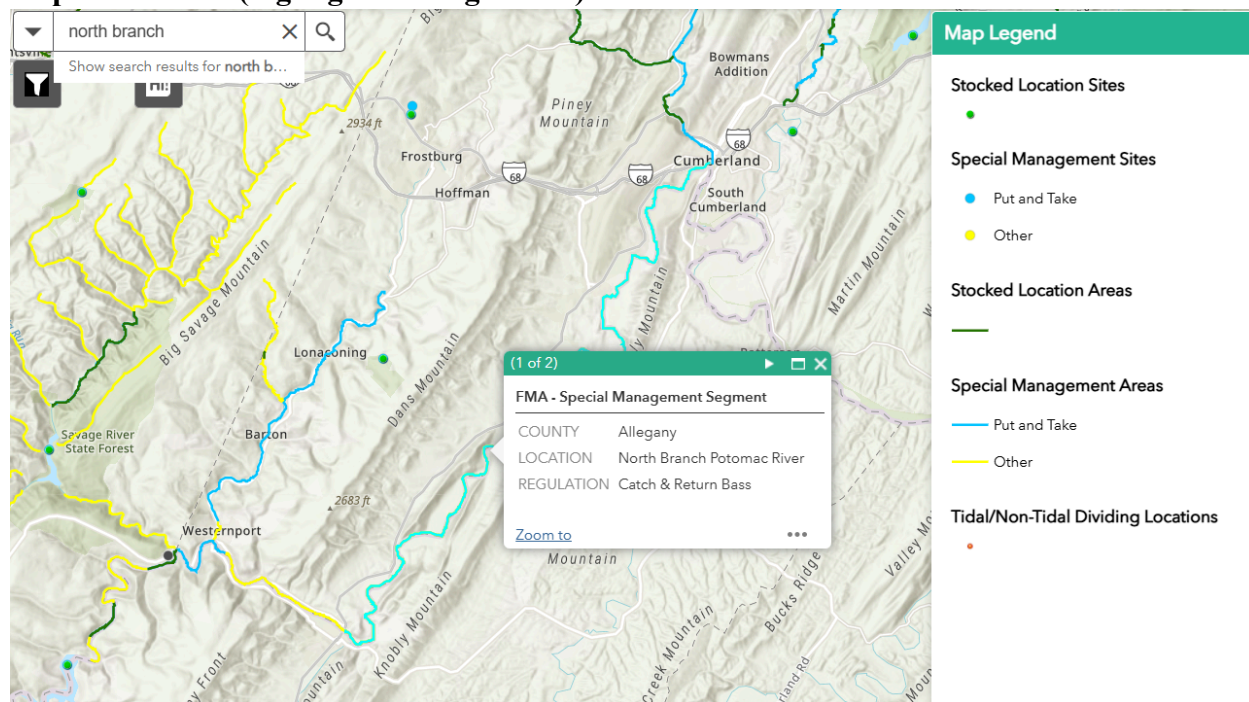


FISHING IN NONTIDAL WATERS - Catch-and-Return Bass Areas

What is being considered?

The Department is considering eliminating the Catch-and-Return Bass Area on the North Branch of the Potomac River. The designated area extends from the spillway in Cumberland, Maryland upstream approximately 25 miles to US Route 220 Bridge at Keyser, West Virginia.

Map of the Area (highlighted in light blue)



Why is this change necessary?

The Department continuously evaluates freshwater fishing regulations for efficacy based on fishery monitoring efforts and habitat assessments. After the initial introduction, the smallmouth bass fishery in this portion of the North Branch of the Potomac River was characterized by faster growth rates, a desirable size distribution, and a higher density of fish. Recent surveys indicate that with the improvements in upstream water quality relating to temperature (i.e., colder temperatures), smallmouth bass growth rates have slowed significantly and the fishery now has a contracted, downstream distribution compared to their initial range following introduction. Age and growth data suggest that the catch and return regulation has become ineffective since smallmouth bass now only rarely reach quality size or the statewide minimum size for harvest (12 inches). Because few fish will survive to reach a quality size, catch and release regulations are no longer expected to improve the overall quality of the fishery or meet angler expectations for a catch and release fishery.

Who will this affect?

This action will affect nontidal anglers that fish within the affected area.

When will this be effective?

The Department projects that this change could be effective in the spring of 2026. However, the exact date cannot be determined. The Department will follow our normal proposal [procedures](#) if this concept moves forward.

Has this change been discussed with advisory bodies or other interested individuals?

This idea was discussed with the Sport Fisheries and Tidal Fisheries Advisory Commissions at their July 2025 meetings.

Additional Information

Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) [08.02.11.03](#)

Rules for Catch-and-Return Bass Areas. Special provisions in effect for catch-and-return bass areas are that a person:

- (a) Who catches a largemouth or smallmouth bass shall immediately release that bass in the water where it was caught; and
- (b) May not possess largemouth or smallmouth bass while within the designated catch-and-return areas.