

NUISANCE SPECIES - Commercial Sale of Invasive Species Harvested from Fish Lifts

What is being considered?

The Department is considering allowing properly licensed commercial harvesters to sell invasive fish species (e.g., blue catfish, flathead catfish, and Chesapeake Channa (also known as northern snakehead)) that are collected in a fish lift.

A fish lift is a mechanical elevator that lifts fishes congregating at the base of dams and carries them across a dam and to the upstream side of the dam. This technology is used to allow migratory fishes the opportunity to by-pass dams and occupy essential habitats upstream of dams. In some cases, fish lifts may catch invasive fish species, which currently can be removed from the catch device and either: 1) retained for beneficial use; 2) retained for costly disposal; or 3) released to Maryland waters alive.

Why is this change necessary?

It is the Department's responsibility to reduce the influence and biomass of aquatic invasive species. This change would allow the Department to carry out its mission to protect natural resources within the guidelines of the state's Aquatic Nuisance Species Plan. Additionally, the Department has been given authority by the General Assembly to enact regulations regarding the catch devices by which invasive fish may be harvested.

Fish lift operations at the Conowingo Dam in the lower Susquehanna River have successfully removed thousands of Chesapeake Channa (also known as northern snakehead) and flathead catfish from the Susquehanna River and upper Chesapeake Bay. With significant Department involvement, these fish are euthanized and given to fish processors to prepare for human consumption. However, this process depends upon tenuous federal funding and state resources. One option to ensure long-term beneficial use of invasive fishes caught in fish lifts is to authorize fish lifts as a catch device for commercial harvesters who have a valid Unlimited Finfish Harvester or Unlimited Tidal Fish license. At a minimum, a commercial harvester will be required to coordinate with the Department and the hydropower company for accessing the fish; euthanize invasive fish; maintain records on the number and/or biomass of invasive fish collected and disposition of fish; wash and maintain storage supplies for fish; and take possession of the fish.

The consideration for change in regulation supports development of a vital option in the long-term plan to remove invasive fish from fish lifts and allow for the compensation of work via sale of fish, while minimizing burden to Department resources.

Who will this affect?

Commercial licensees who are authorized to harvest finfish and owners or those with responsibility for fish lift operations and management.

Definitions

"Fish lift" means a mechanical system that transports fish vertically over an obstruction in a river, such as a dam.

When would 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 [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) [08.02.19.04](#) and [08.02.19.06](#)
[Natural Resources Article, §4-205.1, Annotated Code of Maryland](#)