

FISHING IN NONTIDAL WATERS - Trout (Lower Savage River)

What is being considered?

The Department is considering changing the designation for the areas of the lower Savage River that are currently listed as trophy trout fishing areas to catch-and-return trout fishing areas.

The rules being considered for each area:

1. Savage River mainstem from the Savage River Reservoir Dam downstream to the lower suspension bridge (Allegheny Bridge) from a trophy trout fishing area to a catch-and-return trout fishing area limited to artificial fly fishing. For this section, the major change is the requirement to return all trout caught. Rules that would apply to this area are:
 - a. A person may not have any trout in possession while fishing in these areas. All trout which are caught shall be released and returned to the water.
 - b. A person may fish only with artificial flies and streamers constructed in a normal fashion using natural or synthetic materials, or both, which may include feathers, fur, hair, tinsel, thread, fiber, plastic, cork, wire, and rubber, on a single hook with the components wound on or about the hook. A person may not use molded replicas of insects, earthworms, fish eggs, fish, or any invertebrate or vertebrate, either singly or in combination with the other materials, or other lures commonly described as spinners, spoons, or plugs made of metal, plastic, wood, rubber, or a similar substance or a combination of these.
 - c. A person may fish only with conventional fly fishing tackle, including fly rods, fly reels, and fly line with a leader or monofilament line attached. Any method of angling when the fly is cast directly from the reel is prohibited. The use of centerpin, spinning, spincast, and casting reels is prohibited.
 - d. In these areas, a person may not possess or use any natural or live bait, or any device enhanced with a scent and capable of catching fish.
 - e. The open season is January 1 through December 31, inclusive.
 - f. A person may not fish with any barbed hook.

2. Savage River mainstem from the downstream side of the Route 135 bridge upstream for a distance of approximately 2.7 miles to the lower suspension bridge (Allegheny Bridge) from a trophy trout fishing area to a catch-and-return trout fishing area limited to the use of lures. For this section, the major change, other than the requirement to return all trout caught, is that treble hooks would no longer be prohibited. Rules that would apply to this area are:
 - a. A person may not have any trout in possession while fishing in these areas. All trout which are caught shall be released and returned to the water.
 - b. A person may fish only with artificial lures, including artificial flies.
 - c. In these areas, a person may not possess or use any natural or live bait, or any device enhanced with a scent and capable of catching fish.
 - d. The open season for artificial lure fishing is January 1 through December 31, inclusive.
 - e. A person may not fish with any barbed hook.

Why is this change necessary?

The Department continuously evaluates freshwater fishing regulations for efficacy based on fishery dependent and independent monitoring efforts. Currently, the Savage River tailwater trout fishery is managed under trophy trout harvest restrictions, although fishery-independent data suggests that

trout only rarely reach the minimum size for harvest under those restrictions. Additionally, a 2025 creel survey demonstrated that, although a small percentage of anglers intended to harvest trout, the total trout harvest on the river was zero, despite more than 1,800 angler hours per mile expended and each adult trout in the river being caught nearly twice each year on average. Changing to catch-and-release will better align angler expectations with reality and is necessary to provide adequate protection for this heavily used fishery, in part due to barbless hook restrictions that accompany that designation. Furthermore, relaxing single hook only restrictions will be consistent with other areas managed as catch and release for trout in Maryland, thus simplifying regulations.

Who will this affect?

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

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

1. This idea was discussed with the [Coldwater Fisheries Advisory Committee](#) at their April 2026 meeting and received general support. One committee member noted that the Department needs to consider the economic impact of the fishery to the surrounding area because a change may have an impact on visitation.
2. This idea was presented to the Sport Fisheries Advisory Committee (SFAC) and the Tidal Fisheries Advisory Commission (TFAC) at their April 2026 meetings. Commissioners noted the following: there is a lack of large (trophy size) trout in the area; the current regulation sets unrealistic expectations for being able to catch a trophy sized trout; a change will allow more people to fish; the fishery in the area is economically important; and they are generally not worried about increased pressure on the resources.

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.