

Maryland Department of Natural Resources

Fishing and Boating Services

Subject: Youth Fishing Rodeo Program

Effective Date: October 14, 2016

Approved:  **Date:** 10/18/16

Background

Children's fishing rodeos have a long history in Maryland and some rodeo events originated more than 60 years ago. Maryland Department of Natural Resources Fishing and Boating Services has provided a variety of support functions for rodeo events over time. The Youth Fishing Rodeo Program in its current configuration commenced operations in the early 1990s and supports up to 70 rodeos annually.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program supports the Fishing and Boating Services Youth Fishing Rodeo Program through excise taxes on sport fishing equipment, motorboat and small engine fuel, import duties and interest. This support is conditional, and Fishing and Boating Services must adhere to Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program requirements regarding eligibility. These requirements include that the fish must be accessible to the general angling public for at least 14 days after the event is held. Rodeo events are sponsored by a wide variety of community and non-profit organizations through annual requests for Fishing and Boating Services support. A list of scheduled youth rodeo events is posted on the department's website (under *Fishing* tab) each spring to inform parents and young anglers about events in their area. Events are held throughout the state from March through November, and are open to participants from 3 to 15 years of age. Approximately 7,000 children participate in Maryland Youth Fishing Rodeo Program events each year. Fishing and Boating Services staff produce and stock trout or hybrid sunfish as needed. Event organizers typically provide fishing equipment, bait, assistance, food and prizes to ensure that all the children have an educational and enjoyable experience.

Maryland Youth Fishing Rodeo Program Objectives:

1. Provide fishing opportunities and experiences in a safe, controlled environment
2. Teach basic angling skills
3. Promote a stewardship ethic in children
4. Provide a positive fishing experience to foster future interest in fishing
5. Encourage fishing as an outdoor family activity

Fishing and Boating Services Role

The Youth Fishing Rodeo Program is very popular and Fishing and Boating Services can only support a limited number of events through fish stocking. Fishing and Boating Services can offer support and assistance in a variety of other ways. This support could include locating commercial sources for fish purchases, advertising the event on the department's web page (under *Fishing* tab), or providing technical advice and information to organizers and participants.

Requirements

A rodeo event that seeks Fishing and Boating Services stocking support must meet the following criteria:

1. The event must be structured as an organized fishing event for youth anglers and will be posted on the department's website (under *Fishing* tab)
2. The event must anticipate minimum participation from 25 youth anglers
3. The event must be open to all interested youth anglers aged 3-15
4. The body of water must be a lake, pond, or stream (not to exceed 10 acres surface area for events held on private property)
5. Fees will not be collected for the cost of fish provided by the Fishing and Boating Services
6. The stocked area will remain open to the angling public for at least 14 days after the event. It must be open for at least 8 hrs/day and for consistent hours. This information will be clearly posted at the event location and on the department's website (under *Fishing* tab)
7. Fishing and Boating Services regional biologists will be granted sufficient pre-event access to evaluate the stocking need and develop species recommendations and stocking density
8. A post-event evaluation report must be sent to the Youth Fishing Rodeo Program Coordinator within 30 days of the event date. If a report is not received, your organization will not be granted a rodeo permit or receive fish the next year.

The Program Coordinator will begin accepting applications after September 1 of the year prior to the scheduled event. All proposed rodeo events must complete an application form and submit by January 15 each year.

Applications will be prioritized according the receipt date, information provided, and rodeo event details. **Applications received after January 15 will not be considered for stocking under the program.**

Exemptions

A waiver from the program youth angler requirements can be granted by Fishing and Boating Services to groups that meet the standards listed in the Annotated Code of Maryland Title 4-217 for one-day or annual fishing license exemptions. These exemptions generally apply to organizations that serve individuals with physical or mental disabilities and veterans with service-connected disabilities. These events will not be exempt from the public access requirement and the event site must be open to the angling public for 14 days, 8 hrs/day, after the event. The public access schedule will be clearly posted at the event site and on the department's website (under *Fishing* tab). Unlicensed individuals, 16 years of age and older, can assist a youth angler; but not to the extent that they are holding the rod or actively fishing.

Stocking Protocol

Fish will only be stocked according to the recommendations of the Fishing and Boating Services regional biologists. Stocking is not always required in order to host a successful fishing rodeo, since natural populations are frequently sufficient to provide angling success. Regional fisheries biologists will use criteria based on established principles of fisheries science and best management practices to evaluate stocking needs. Event organizers must agree to accommodate Fishing and Boating Services schedules for property access and evaluation within 30 days prior to the scheduled event. Fish will be stocked during the week preceding the scheduled event as hatchery staff schedules permit. Trout will be stocked at a rate of 50 trout per surface acre, with a minimum of 100 trout per event. Trout will not be stocked for rodeo events that occur between May 15 and October 1 unless receiving waters meet basic criteria for trout survival (morning surface temp $\leq 72^{\circ}\text{F}$). Hybrid sunfish may be stocked for rodeos that do not meet these temperature criteria. Stocking personnel and/or the regional biologist will make the final determination whether criteria are met at the time of stocking. Fishing and Boating Services personnel will not participate in tagging or marking rodeo fish.

Notifications

Fishing and Boating Services will issue a Youth Fishing Rodeo Program permit to each sponsor. Permits will be mailed in mid-January. The organization must have the permit in their possession at the rodeo event. The Youth Fishing Rodeo Program Coordinator will provide the rodeo schedule to the Maryland Natural Resources Police prior to the first scheduled rodeo for each calendar year.