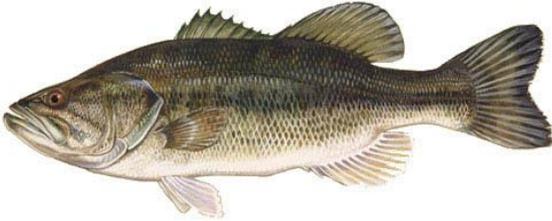


Black Bass Annual Review

From the Tidal Bass Manager
Joseph W. Love, Ph. D.



The recreational fishery for black bass is the most popular in Maryland and the nation. With an incredible team of DNR researchers from the Southern and Eastern regions, and helpful collaboration with in-state anglers and the general public, we will soon be working toward building a stronger fishery of largemouth bass for the state. The *Black Bass Annual Review* will serve as an annual communication to anglers of Maryland on current and future DNR studies, as well as updates on tournament fishing and angler opinions on largemouth bass fishing. Do you have a Rant? Or do you want more information on the largemouth bass population, stocking efforts, or volunteer opportunities, please visit our website periodically, or contact myself (jlove@dnr.md.state.us; 410-260-8257), the southern regional manager, Mary Groves (mgroves@dnr.md.state.us), or the eastern regional manager, Rick Schaefer (rschaefer@dnr.md.state.us). Thanks and I look forward to hearing from you soon!

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Catch a Fish with a Tag? Call in the tag: Joe Love (jlove@dnr.state.md.us; 410-260-8257) or Mary Groves (mgroves@dnr.state.md.us; 301-888-2423)

FATE OF TOURNAMENT BLACK BASS

What really does happen to black bass when they are dumped from release boats?

In the Potomac River, initial mortalities of largemouth bass following a tournament are generally very few, usually less than 5% of the catch. Delayed mortality, however, may be high during summer and a recent count of 600 dead tidal bass on Mattawoman Creek suggests that such a high number of deaths, though uncommon, may occur. Currently, we are working with tournaments to assist with handling procedures and in measuring both initial and delayed mortality. While such events likely happen infrequently across the nation, the percent of fish that usually survive following tournaments is at least 85%. Of the fish that live, most that are released by release boats do not likely travel large distances to their stream of capture. A review of published studies in the Chesapeake Bay and nationally indicate that black bass usually have small home ranges (less than 0.5 miles squared). This has implications for both recreational and tournament angling. Taking black bass from small streams and transplanting them 30 miles away could cause local depletion of a small streams' population. We don't know if this has an impact on the whole population. We will soon be studying the importance of sanctuaries, or "off-limits" zones, to learn if such habitats benefit the population at large.

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POPULATION SIZES

How big are the largemouth bass populations in Maryland's Rivers?

Using survey and tag-return information, we found similarly high abundance of black bass in surveyed stretches of the Potomac River and upper Chesapeake Bay rivers. This is probably because of the size of the rivers and the abundance of freshwater flow from run-off. The other systems targeted by the black bass survey (Chester River, Patuxent River, Choptank River) showed much lower abundance. We have recently stocked 100,000 largemouth bass to the Choptank River to boost that population. Approximately 6000 largemouth bass were stocked to the Patuxent River this year.

TOURNAMENT WEIGH-IN

Over the past 2 months, I've spoken with many tournament directors and anglers, and they've weighed in on fish kills. The consensus is that no one wants to see dead bass; how can we prevent it? Fisheries Service is continuing to assess the effects of tournament angling on populations within the Chesapeake Bay watershed. We are doing this by assessing survivorship of tournament-caught fish under different experimental scenarios and obtaining better estimates of delayed mortality. These Tournament angling data are used to estimate fishing mortality, learn preventable factors that reduce mortalities, and compliment on-going data collection on life history and size structure of black bass by the Fisheries Service.

FISHING REGULATIONS

From Maryland's tidal tributaries, each angler may possess 5 largemouth or smallmouth bass per day. From 1 March to 15 June, kept fish must be at least 15 inches. For the rest of the year, kept fish must be at least 12 inches.

Please remember, you will need a fishing license to fish Maryland's tidal tributaries. License fees help to support on-going research on black bass. To apply for a fishing license online, please navigate your web browser to <https://www4.wildlifelicense.com/md/>.



EVERYONE WANTS A TROPHY

Where are the fish?

Most populations of largemouth bass in four rivers of the Chesapeake Bay have remained the same size since 1999. The best rivers to catch legal largemouth bass are the Northeast River, Susquehanna River, and the Potomac River. Of these rivers, the upper Chesapeake Bay rivers, Northeast and Susquehanna rivers, have the largest population of legal adults (> 12"). The robustness of the fish in the Potomac River and the upper Bay is slightly lower than other rivers, possibly because of greater abundances in these rivers and greater competition for prey among individuals.

Middle River Fishing

Historically a good spot for fishing, several anglers have noted a decline in fishing in Middle River. Relatively high salinity prevents our sampling gear from effectively surveying the river. It's possible that limited reproduction, combined with high salinities following May and translocation of fish by anglers, have contributed to population declines at Middle River. We are currently discussing stocking options for that region of the Chesapeake Bay in hopes of revitalizing the fishery.

Choptank River Fishing

Thanks to folks at the Eastern and Southern Regions and their Hatcheries! We have stocked over 100,000 largemouth bass to the Choptank River. In light of declines in its populations and the historically popular fishery on the Choptank River, we hope to improve the fishery by adding fish to the river and conducting a long term study aimed at improving our stocking efforts.



TOURNAMENT SERIES

American Bass Anglers American Fishing Tour
8 August, Potomac River
22-23 August, Potomac River
WalMart Bass Fishing League
15 August, Gunpowder Falls
12-13 September, Potomac River
8-10 October, Potomac River
New Jersey Bass Federation
4 October, Susquehanna Flats