

3/6/2024

To: Members of the House Environment & Transportation Committee

Re: House Bill 1238 - Fisheries - Striped Bass - Closed Seasons

Position: **Unfavorable**

Dear Committee Members,

We the undersigned charter captains, guides, and boating and fishing business owners respectfully request a **unfavorable report on House Bill 1238** - which would require the Maryland Department of Natural Resources(DNR) to close fishing for striped bass from March 1- May 15th each year if DNR does not allow a “trophy season”.

As an industry, our businesses rely on access to fishery resources and opportunities on the water for recreational fishing and boating activities, connecting the public to their fishery public resources. These activities drive important seasonal economic activity throughout the state in many different ways, and for many different people. Our state fish, the striped bass or “rockfish”, supports a major component of the more than 5000 jobs and over 800 Million in economic contributions that the participation of more than 700k anglers going fishing provides to our state. The benefits of fishing are further compounded when including the over 1000 businesses, and more than 16,000 jobs which support an economic impact of 4.2 Billion in Maryland.

The economic and cultural benefits derived across our state from fishing and boating in the Chesapeake Bay, cannot be understated, which is why current science based and stakeholder driven processes exist to manage our public fishery resources; **DNR should remain the lead authority for striped bass management in these changing times.**

While we collectively recognize that striped bass populations continue to struggle with meeting coast wide population goals, and that prevailing environmental conditions in the Chesapeake Bay in recent years have led to concerning failures in reproduction for our state fish, we do not support the proposed changes put forth in SB 1053.

Thankfully, studies show that access and necessary conservation can be balanced thanks to the following reasons:

- Current regulations, implemented in 1990, prohibit targeting of striped bass in spawning areas and tributaries where they spawn (*see attached DNR spawning closure map*)
- DNR already uses a dynamic approach to closing and opening areas based on multiple factors. (*see attached map example & link for full season information*)
- Catch and release fishing is only allowed in areas where fish are migrating, not staging to prepare to spawn.

- DNR has the authority to regulate gear and other practices should they be necessary, without removing access from fishing.
- DNR has gear restrictions in place in the pre-season to limit mortality.
- DNR studies show that catch and release fishing under prevailing spring conditions and using widely popular gear leads to less than 3% mortality of fish after release.
- DNR's newly implemented closures exceed measures required by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission coastwide management plan, and will limit further harvest of spawning stock fish.

In conclusion, winter and early spring catch and release fishing provides an important economic boost to businesses throughout their slowest periods of the year, without impacting necessary conservation. The economic and cultural benefits from this fishery are persistent throughout the state and in many different ways, serving many people. For these reasons, striped bass management should remain under DNR's science-based and stakeholder driven management systems without adding closures that would stifle economic opportunity but not provide measurable ecological benefits to the striped bass resource.

Please contact any of us directly should you wish to further discuss our perspectives on policies which can provide important balance for business and public access, while protecting our most cherished fishery resources for the future.

Respectfully submitted,

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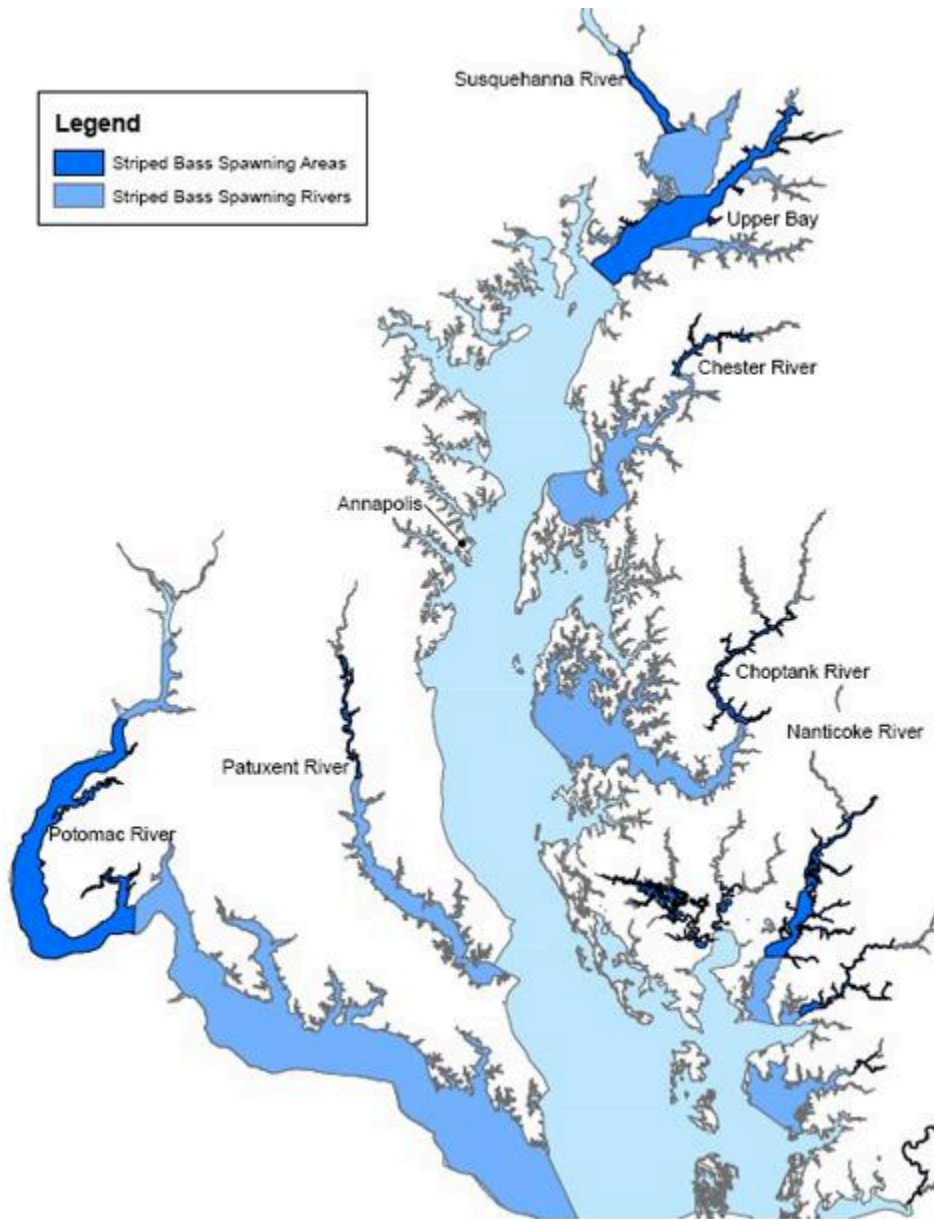
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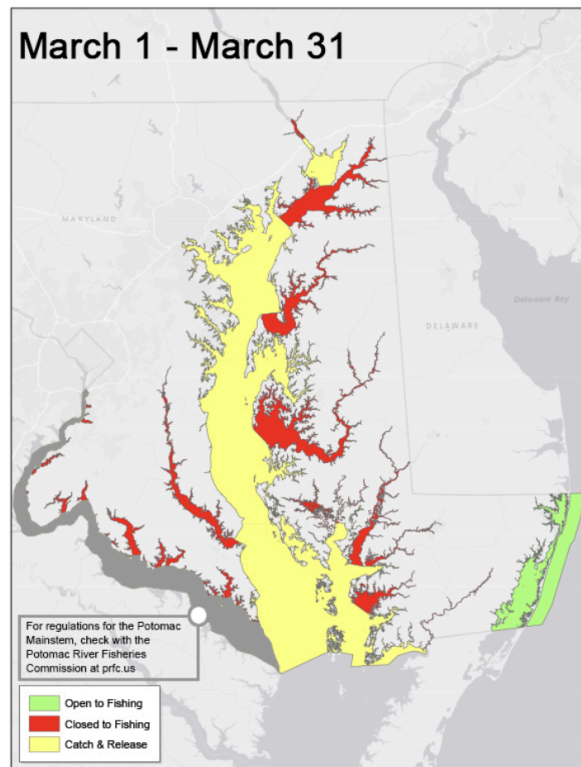
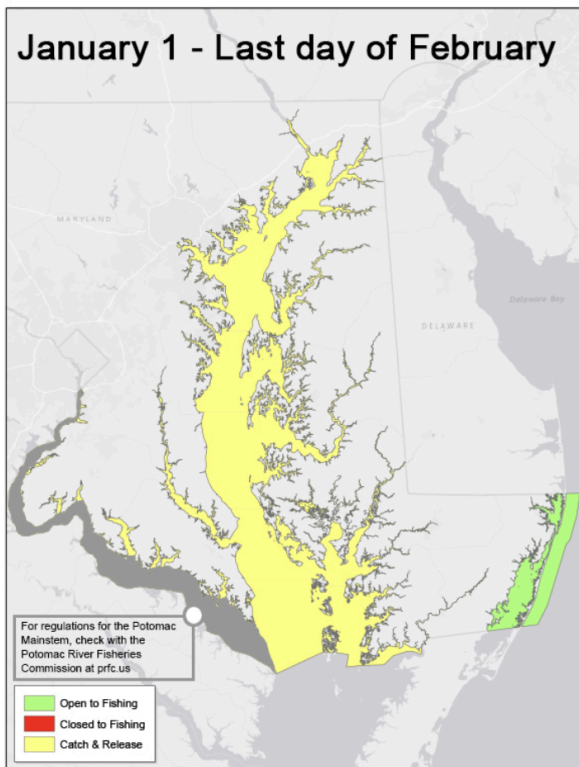
Striped Bass Spawning Areas:

<https://dnr.maryland.gov/fisheries/PublishingImages/striped-bass-spawning-map.jpg>



Additional spawning survey info:

<https://dnr.maryland.gov/fisheries/pages/striped-bass/studies.aspx>



Source : https://dnr.maryland.gov/fisheries/Pages/sb_reg_maps.aspx