



Wes Moore, Governor  
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor  
Josh Kurtz, Secretary  
David Goshorn, Deputy Secretary

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February 27, 2026

**BILL NUMBER: HOUSE BILL 947 - FIRST READER**

**SHORT TITLE: DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES – COMMERCIAL BLUE AND FLATHEAD CATFISH FINFISH TROTLINE LICENSE – ALTERATIONS**

**DEPARTMENT’S POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS**

### **EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT’S POSITION**

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The Department supports HB 947 with an amendment. The bill, as written, could have significant unintended consequences to unwanted bycatch, including striped bass. Additionally, the Blue and Flathead Catfish Finfish Trotline License is an unlimited \$15 license. This would open up a commercial harvest gear type with high bycatch mortality to an unlimited number of individuals who pay a significantly smaller amount for their license than a tidal fish licensee.

Recently, the agency’s Invasive Catfish Advisory Committee made recommendations to the agency about gill net use and based on those recommendations, the agency has moved forward with creating a pilot program for next year that would seek to obtain more information from gill net users and areas where there is high bycatch with sensitive species versus areas with a high volume of invasive catfish.

The agency would support the bill with an amendment to remove the current gill net allowance under the \$15 license, add the pilot that is currently being created to the existing list of pilot programs for invasive catfish, and extend the existing sunset of the law until 2030 to accommodate the timeframe to complete a pilot program.

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

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Under current law, only tidal fish licensees with finfish harvester licenses or unlimited tidal fish licenses are currently allowed to use gill nets, and only a subgroup of those licensees have striped bass permits, which allow the use of 7-inch, stretch-mesh gill nets.

### **BILL EXPLANATION**

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The bill changes the current Blue and Flathead Catfish Finfish Trotline License to the Blue and Flathead Catfish License and allows licensees to harvest blue catfish with both a finfish trotline and a gill net with a mesh size of not more than 7 inches.

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BY:  
(To be offered in the Environment and Transportation Committee)

AMENDMENTS TO HOUSE BILL 947  
(First Reading File Bill)

AMENDMENT NO. 1

On page 1, strike beginning with “**Commercial**” in line 2 down through “**License**” in line 3 and substitute “**Invasive Blue Catfish Pilot Program**”; strike beginning with “commercial” in line 4 down through “license” in line 6 and substitute “Invasive Blue Catfish Pilot Program to add the blue catfish gill net program; and generally relating to the Invasive Blue Catfish Pilot Program”; strike in their entirety lines 8 through 11, inclusive, and substitute:

“Chapter 172 of the Acts of the General Assembly of 2025  
Sections 1 and 2”;

and in line 13, strike “the Laws of Maryland read as follows”.

AMENDMENT NO. 2

On pages 1 through 2, strike in their entirety the lines beginning with line 14 on page 1 through line 15 on page 2.

On page 2, after line 15, insert:

“(a) The Department of Natural Resources, in coordination with the Invasive Catfish Advisory Committee, shall establish the Invasive Blue Catfish Pilot Program.

(b) The purpose of the Pilot Program is to curb the spread of the invasive blue catfish in the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries.

(c) The Pilot Program consists of:

(1) the For–Hire/Commercial Blue Catfish Program;

(2) the Mid– and Lower–Bay Blue Catfish Trotline Program; and

(3) any other program that the Department determines to be effective in curbing the spread of blue catfish in the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries; AND

(4) THE BLUE CATFISH GILL NET PROGRAM.

- (d) (1) Under the For–Hire/Commercial Blue Catfish Program, the Department may:
- (i) authorize eligible participants to run for–hire and commercial fishing trips simultaneously; and
  - (ii) make any regulatory or administrative changes it believes will increase the commercial harvest of blue catfish.
- (2) (i) Under the Mid– and Lower–Bay Blue Catfish Trotline Program, the Department shall authorize the use of finfish trotlines south of the William Preston Lane Jr. Memorial Bridge to the maximum extent feasible to harvest blue catfish.
- (ii) The Department may restrict the areas south of the William Preston Lane Jr. Memorial Bridge where finfish trotlines may be used to harvest blue catfish based on potential bycatch, user conflicts, or other issues it considers relevant.
- (e) In implementing the Pilot Program, the Department shall consider for the harvest of blue catfish:
- (1) authorizing the use of electrofishing;
  - (2) authorizing the use of finfish trotlines of up to 2,400 feet in length;
  - (3) eliminating any limits on the number of hooks used on a finfish trotline; and
  - (4) authorizing the use of hooks that are not corrodible.
- (f) The Department shall:
- (1) expand the use of practices determined to be effective under the Pilot Program throughout the duration of the Pilot Program; and
  - (2) continue to implement and update the Pilot Program until the termination date of this Act.
- (g) [On or before December 1, 2025, the Department shall report to the Governor and, in accordance with § 2–1257 of the State Government Article, the General Assembly on its findings and recommendations under the Pilot Program.] ON OR BEFORE DECEMBER 1 OF EACH YEAR, THE DEPARTMENT SHALL SUBMIT A REPORT TO THE SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE AND THE HOUSE ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE, IN ACCORDANCE WITH § 2–1257 OF THE STATE GOVERNMENT ARTICLE, ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE PILOT PROGRAM DURING THE PRECEDING YEAR, INCLUDING FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS UNDER THE PILOT PROGRAM.

SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act is an emergency measure, is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public health or safety, has been passed by a ye and nay vote supported by three–fifths of all the members elected to each of the two Houses of the General Assembly,

and shall take effect from the date it is enacted. It shall remain effective through June 30, [2026] **2030**, and, at the end of June 30, [2026] **2030**, this Act, with no further action required by the General Assembly, shall be abrogated and of no further force and effect.”