

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2025 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader - Revised

House Bill 446

(Delegate T. Morgan, *et al.*)

Environment and Transportation

Education, Energy, and the Environment

Natural Resources - Invasive Blue Catfish Pilot Program

This emergency bill requires the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to establish an Invasive Blue Catfish Pilot Program, which includes (1) a for-hire/commercial program, under which eligible participants can run for-hire and commercial fishing trips simultaneously and (2) a mid- and lower-bay trotline program, under which finfish trotlines can be used south of the William Preston Lane Jr. Memorial Bridge (Bay Bridge). For harvesting blue catfish under the pilot program, DNR must consider, among other things, authorizing the use of electrofishing and the use of trotlines of up to 2,400 feet in length. DNR must (1) report its findings and recommendations under the pilot program by December 1, 2025; (2) expand the use of practices determined to be effective throughout the duration of the program; and (3) continue to implement and update the program until the bill's termination date. **The bill terminates June 30, 2026.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: DNR can implement the bill with existing budgeted resources; the bill establishes, in State law, pilot programs that DNR is already in the process of implementing.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: Potential meaningful.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The bill requires DNR, in coordination with the Invasive Catfish Advisory Committee, to establish the Invasive Blue Catfish Pilot Program to curb the spread of the invasive blue catfish in the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries.

The pilot program consists of:

- the For-Hire/Commercial Blue Catfish Program, under which DNR may (1) authorize eligible participants to run for-hire and commercial fishing trips simultaneously and (2) make any regulatory or administrative changes it believes will increase the commercial harvest of blue catfish;
- the Mid- and Lower-Bay Blue Catfish Trotline Program, under which DNR (1) must authorize the use of finfish trotlines south of the Bay Bridge to the maximum extent feasible to harvest blue catfish, but (2) may restrict the areas south of the bridge where finfish trotlines may be used to harvest blue catfish based on potential bycatch, user conflicts, or other issues the department considers relevant; and
- any other program DNR determines to be effective in curbing the spread of blue catfish in the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries.

In implementing the pilot program, DNR must 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.

DNR must (1) expand the use of practices determined to be effective under the pilot program throughout the duration of the program and (2) continue to implement and update the program until the bill's termination date.

By December 1, 2025, DNR must report to the Governor and the General Assembly on its findings and recommendations under the pilot program.

Current Law:

Pilot Program Authority

DNR regulations, under COMAR [08.02.01.10](#), authorize the department to conduct pilot programs, with the participation of tidal fish licensees, to demonstrate and evaluate new approaches to managing fisheries under the fishery management plans the department has adopted for various species, including catfish.

Regulations Governing the Use of Finfish Trotline Gear by Commercial Licensees

DNR regulations governing the use of finfish trotline gear by commercial licensees, under COMAR [08.02.25.06F](#), establish that finfish trotlines may not (1) be set in the Chesapeake Bay south of the Bay Bridge, including Pocomoke Sound and Tangier Sound, or (2) exceed 1,200 feet in length.

Apart from limitations applicable to “shortlines,” a type of finfish trotline that may only be used in the Atlantic Ocean, the regulations do not limit the number of hooks on a finfish trotline or the use of hooks that are not corrodible.

Small Business Effect: The bill establishes, in State law, pilot programs that DNR is already in the process of implementing; however, small business commercial harvesters and processors may meaningfully benefit from the bill to the extent the bill’s requirements (1) cause DNR to expand allowable harvesting practices and opportunities – whether within the pilot programs or to harvesters outside of the programs – to a greater extent or earlier than they otherwise would do in the absence of the bill and (2) as a result, increase harvest of blue catfish.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: SB 186 (Senators Bailey and Mautz) - Education, Energy, and the Environment.

Information Source(s): Department of Natural Resources; Department of Legislative Services

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Analysis by: Scott D. Kennedy

Direct Inquiries to:
(410) 946-5510
(301) 970-5510