

Department of Legislative Services
 Maryland General Assembly
 2025 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
 First Reader

House Bill 1249 (Delegate Jacobs, *et al.*)
 Environment and Transportation

Natural Resources - Blue Catfish - Population Control

This emergency bill requires that Department of Natural Resources (DNR) regulations for catching blue catfish, among other things, must establish a pilot program authorizing the use of electrofishing and must authorize the use of finfish trotlines of up to 2,400 feet in length. The bill also requires the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) to issue a report by September 1, 2025, outlining needs and best practices for collecting and processing harvested blue catfish, marketing blue catfish, and financing those efforts.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: No effect is assumed in FY 2025. Special fund expenditures increase by \$10,000 in FY 2026 only. Revenues are not affected.

(in dollars)	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
SF Expenditure	0	10,000	0	0	0
Net Effect	\$0	(\$10,000)	\$0	\$0	\$0

Note:() = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate increase; (-) = indeterminate decrease

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: Potential meaningful.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The bill, under provisions governing the commercial blue and flathead catfish finfish trotline license, requires that DNR regulations, for catching blue catfish:

- must establish a pilot program authorizing the use of electrofishing;
- must authorize the use of finfish trotlines of up to 2,400 feet in length;
- may not set a limit on the number of hooks used; and
- must authorize the use of hooks that are not corrodible.

The bill also requires MDA to issue a report to the General Assembly by September 1, 2025, outlining needs and best practices for (1) collecting and processing harvested blue catfish; (2) marketing blue catfish to private and government merchants; and (3) financing these needs and best practices.

Current Law:

Commercial Blue and Flathead Catfish Finfish Trotline License

A commercial blue and flathead catfish finfish trotline license authorizes the holder to catch for sale blue and flathead catfish in the tidal waters of the State using a finfish trotline, as defined in DNR regulations. An applicant does not need to hold a tidal fish license (DNR's primary commercial fishing license) to be eligible for the license. A licensee must fish in accordance with DNR regulations.

Regulations Governing the Use of Finfish Trotline Gear by Commercial Licensees

DNR regulations governing the use of finfish trotline gear by commercial licensees (not specific to commercial blue and flathead catfish finfish trotline licensees), under COMAR [08.02.25.06F](#), establish that a finfish trotline may not 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.

Seafood and Aquaculture Products Marketing Program

There is a Seafood and Aquaculture Products Marketing Program established in statute as part of MDA, and a Seafood and Aquaculture Products Marketing Fund, administered by the Secretary of Agriculture, that is used for expenses related to seafood and aquaculture marketing. The fund receives revenue from an annual marketing surcharge paid by tidal fish licensees.

Pilot Program Authority

DNR regulations 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.

State Expenditures: Special fund (Seafood and Aquaculture Products Marketing Fund) expenditures increase by \$10,000 in fiscal 2026 for MDA to hire a consultant to assist with gathering information and issuing the report on needs and best practices for collecting and processing harvested blue catfish, marketing blue catfish, and financing those efforts. While the bill takes effect upon enactment, and presumably work on the report begins in fiscal 2025, this analysis assumes the cost (payment) for the consultant is incurred in fiscal 2026.

DNR is anticipated to adopt and implement regulations to comply with the bill, including the establishment and implementation of an electrofishing pilot program, with existing resources.

Small Business Effect: Small business commercial harvesters and processors may meaningfully benefit from a pilot program authorizing the use of electrofishing for catching blue catfish and/or the ability for harvesters to use longer finfish trotlines, to the extent those requirements of the bill result in a greater amount of blue catfish harvested than in the absence of the bill. DNR indicates that electrofishing may help to sustain the harvest of blue catfish in summer months when the level of harvest otherwise decreases. Commercial harvesters may incur relatively significant equipment/technology costs, however, potentially exceeding \$15,000 according to DNR, in order to participate in an electrofishing pilot program.

DNR is currently planning, even in the absence of the bill, a project supported by federal funding that will compensate commercial harvesters for assisting the department in developing an annual monitoring survey for blue catfish, which will involve electrofishing and allow the commercial harvesters to sell the resulting harvest.

Additional Information

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

Designated Cross File: SB 960 (Senator Mautz) - Education, Energy, and the Environment.

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

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 27, 2025
rh/lgc

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