

HB 386_CBF_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Allison Colden

Position: FAV



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

*Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education*

House Bill 386

Natural Resources – Blue and Flathead Catfish Finfish Trotline License – Establishment

Date: February 15, 2023

Position: Support

To: House Environment & Transportation Committee

From: Allison Colden, Sr. Fisheries Scientist

Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS** HB 386 which would make permanent a fishing license for the commercial harvest of blue and flathead catfish by trotline in Chesapeake Bay.

Blue and flathead catfish were first introduced in the 1970s and 1980s in Virginia to develop a recreational fishery. Since then, these invasive fish have expanded their range into nearly every Chesapeake Bay tributary. The blue catfish's ability to tolerate varying salinities, temperatures, and habitat types make it easy for them to move throughout the Bay. This expansion is especially troublesome as blue catfish are voracious generalist predators that feed on native species such as menhaden, striped bass, eel, shad, river herring, and blue crabs. In areas where blue catfish populations have been established, catfish make up approximately 75% of the total weight of all fish inhabiting the river. The Chesapeake Bay Program's Invasive Catfish Management Strategy, published in August 2020, identifies increased commercial fisheries harvest as a priority management strategy.

The commercial blue catfish trotline license was first established in 2019 with a sunset in June 2022. Currently, commercial trotline harvest of blue catfish is occurring under a pilot program established by Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) following the expiration of the license program. Making this program permanent will aid in the removal of these invasive predators through continued commercial harvest.

CBF urges the Committee's FAVORABLE report on HB 386.

For more information, please contact Matt Stegman, Maryland Staff Attorney at mstegman@cbf.org.

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The Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) is a non-profit environmental education and advocacy organization dedicated to the restoration and protection of the Chesapeake Bay. With over 300,000 members and e-subscribers, including over 109,000 in Maryland alone, CBF works to educate the public and to protect the interest of the Chesapeake and its resources.

HB386_MarylandSierraClub_fav 15Feb2023.pdf

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Committee: Environment and Transportation

Testimony on: HB386 – “Natural Resources – Blue and Flathead Catfish Finfish Trotline License - Establishment

Position: Support

Hearing Date: February 15, 2023

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club strongly supports HB386, which would establish a licensing program to allow the commercial fishing of invasive blue and flathead catfish in the tidal waters of the State using a finfish trotline.

Introduced to Maryland throughout the second half of the 20th century to create a recreational fishery, blue and flathead catfish have been causing harm to Chesapeake Bay ecosystems ever since¹. As invasive species, blue and flathead catfish have few natural predators within the Bay². This, coupled with the fact that they have proven to be more resilient to changes in salinity than originally anticipated, has allowed them to multiply rapidly and extend their range into most river systems throughout the Chesapeake¹. Their large numbers and apex predator status have also led to heavy losses of native sea organism populations including Shad, Perch, Alewife, and Herring species, and have contributed to the population decline of our beloved Blue Crab, among other sea life³. This degradation has led to ecosystem instability and food web imbalance¹.

Given that the presence of blue and flathead catfish is having a harmful effect on our state’s waterways, and that this bill would ease the barriers for Maryland fishers hoping to catch and remove these invasive finfish from our tidal waters, the Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club fully supports this legislation. It is in keeping with our core mission to promote the responsible use of the earth’s ecosystems and resources and to restore the quality of the natural and human environment.

We are fortunate to have the Chesapeake Bay as a central part of our state, which brings with it a variety of wildlife, diverse ecosystems, and strong economic benefits. However, a critical part of Maryland’s Chesapeake Bay ecosystem is being disrupted and imbalanced by the encroachment of invasive finfish such as blue and flathead catfish. We should protect our ecosystems and wildlife by removing these invasive species. Therefore, the Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club requests a favorable report.

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¹ <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/feature-story/blue-catfish-invasive-and-delicious>

² <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1009&context=vimsbooks>

³ <https://afspubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/nafm.10279>

HB386 Blue Cat JAJ.pdf

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Subcommittees

Motor Vehicle and Transportation

Natural Resources, Agriculture,
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Local Government & Bicounty Agencies

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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB 386 Natural Resources-Blue and Flathead Catfish Trotline License-Establishment

Chairman Barve and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

Today I am presenting HB386 titled Natural Resources -Blue and Flathead Catfish Trotline License-Establishment. This is an emergency bill to establish the commercial blue and flathead catfish finfish trotline license in which the prior legislation SB7 of 2019 did sunset on June 30, 2022.

These catfish are considered invasive species and according to the Department of Natural Resources website, the department asks that all fishermen remove and kill any blue and flathead catfish they catch. Catch and release of these fish is discouraged, as they are invasive top predators and pose a serious long-term threat to our native species.

Emergency bill HB386 will continue to provide another tool in tool box to help control the proliferation of these dangerous invasive species that are causing the eco system to be out of balance in the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries.

I ask for your favorable vote for this Emergency legislation.

HB0386_DNR_SUP_E&T_2-15-23.pdf

Uploaded by: Sarah Widman

Position: FAV



Wes Moore, Governor
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor
Josh Kurtz, Acting Secretary

February 15, 2023

BILL NUMBER: House Bill 386 – First Reader

SHORT TITLE: Natural Resources – Blue and Flathead Catfish Finfish Trotline License – Establishment

DEPARTMENT’S POSITION: SUPPORT

EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT’S POSITION

This law was previously in place until July 1, 2022. The intention of the license is to allow greater harvest of blue and flathead catfish by trotline in the Chesapeake Bay and its tidal tributaries.

These two species are highly invasive and the ability to use increased harvest with effective gears is an important tool in controlling these invasive fish populations. Although both species are considered invasive in the Chesapeake Bay, the threat of blue catfish is particularly concerning because of their increasing populations, rapid range expansion, and capacity to consume significant amounts of native species. This bill allows for an additional method of harvest for commercial harvesters who do not hold specific finfish harvest license authorizations that would allow such harvest. The bill also allows licensees to target invasive species that can cause both ecosystem and, in turn, economic damage.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Natural Resources Article, Section 4-701.2, abrogated on June 30, 2022 (SB 7, 2019). This law created an invasive catfish trotline license for \$15 that could be purchased whether an individual held an existing commercial tidal fish license under 4-701, or held no commercial tidal fish license. The Department had 101 individuals licensed in 2021-2022 under the previous law.

BILL EXPLANATION

The bill returns a blue and flathead catfish finfish trotline license for \$15 which can be held by individuals with existing tidal fish licenses under Natural Resources Article, Section 4-701, or those with no commercial tidal fish license. The license would allow commercial harvest and sale of the two species harvested with this gear.

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