



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.

Maryland Office • Philip Merrill Environmental Center • 6 Herndon Avenue • Annapolis • Maryland • 21403

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.