



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education

Senate Bill 186

Commercial Blue and Flathead Catfish Finfish Trotline License – Prohibited Regulations

Date: February 4, 2025
To: Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Position: **UNFAVORABLE**
From: Allison Colden,
Executive Director

Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **OPPOSES** Senate Bill 186 which would prohibit the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) from promulgating regulations that would limit finfish trotlining for blue or flathead catfish in the mainstem of the Chesapeake Bay below the William Preston Lane, Jr. Memorial Bridge (“Bay Bridge”).

Blue catfish were first introduced in the 1970s and 1980s in Virginia to develop a recreational fishery. Since then, these highly invasive fish have rapidly expanded their range into nearly every Chesapeake Bay tributary. 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 fish weight of all fish inhabiting the river.

CBF has long supported regulations that would facilitate the commercial harvest and removal of blue catfish to minimize its negative effects, including the creation of the special commercial trotline license that is the subject of SB 186. However, trotlines are a non-specific fishing gear, meaning the hooks can attract and capture any species that encounter them, not just catfish. Given the likelihood of interactions with other commercial species (e.g. white perch) and federally endangered species (e.g. Atlantic sturgeon) in the Bay’s mainstem, expanding the use of trotlines to an additional 400,000 acres should be considered carefully.

DNR has initiated a pilot program to allow blue catfish trotlining south of the Bay Bridge in a limited capacity with DNR staff observing fishing trips and documenting any bycatch. This one-year pilot program, slated for completion in November 2025, will produce valuable data that will be reviewed by DNR’s stakeholder advisory committees before being extended or expanded to additional users. CBF believes that this approach allows for the flexibility SB 186 seeks to achieve while ensuring the impacts of any such changes are documented and well-understood by both DNR and industry members before being finalized.

For these reasons, CBF urges the Committee’s UNFAVORABLE report on SB 186.

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 200,000 members and e-subscribers, including 71,000 in Maryland alone, CBF works to educate the public and to protect the interest of the Chesapeake and its resources.