



Wes Moore, Governor
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor
Josh Kurtz, Secretary
David Goshorn, Deputy Secretary

February 4, 2025

BILL NUMBER: Senate Bill 258 – First Reader

SHORT TITLE: Natural Resources – Fishing Licenses and Stamps – Alterations

DEPARTMENT’S POSITION: SUPPORT

EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT’S POSITION

The Department supports Senate Bill 258. The additional revenue generated through fee increases will support existing nontidal fisheries management efforts as well as provide critical funding for additional projects and infrastructure needs related to non-tidal fisheries and hatcheries.

The Freshwater Fisheries and Hatcheries Division is focused primarily on the management of non-tidal freshwater fisheries, which includes impoundments (lakes, reservoirs, and ponds), coldwater streams, warm-water streams, and rivers. Essential functions carried out by the division and supported by fishing license revenue include enhancement of sport fish populations, protecting, restoring, and expanding the aquatic habitats they need, stocking to improve angling opportunities, management of invasive aquatic species, and maintenance and creation of public fishing access. These services provide ecological, recreational, social, and economic benefits to Maryland residents and visitors.

In the summer of 2024, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (department) established a workgroup that consisted of members from the Sport Fisheries Advisory Commission, Black Bass Advisory Committee, and the Coldwater Fishery Advisory Committee. Members of these advisory bodies represent the interests of Maryland’s freshwater angling constituency. The charge of the workgroup was to evaluate current nontidal recreational fishing license fees and make fair and reasonable fee recommendations based on information provided by the department (e.g., Fishing and Boating Services and Finance and Administrative Services), inflation over a specific time period, price benchmarking with fishing license fees of neighboring states, and current national/local average fees for comparable licenses and stamps. The fees recommended by the workgroup are in line with neighboring states with similar fishery resources that have recently adjusted their nontidal license fees (PA in 2023-24).

The division's aging trout hatchery infrastructure (e.g., Bear Creek Hatchery, 1928; Albert Powell Hatchery, 1949) is currently not capable of meeting production goals that satisfy constituent demand. Without additional revenue, not only are investments to improve production impossible, but production at existing facilities would have to be significantly reduced or eliminated, effectively

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terminating very popular fishing programs such as the put and take trout stocking program, fingerling production that supports extremely popular trout resources, restoration of brook trout, and the Youth Rodeo Program. Revenue from the sale of fishing licenses and stamps provides the majority of the funding for these programs, as well as funding all other conservation, habitat protection, land management/access, and fishery restoration and management costs.

Without an increase in special fund revenue, the Freshwater Fisheries and Hatcheries Division will no longer be able to maintain services and programs, meeting the desires and expectations of the constituents that we serve.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The resident trout stamps fees were last changed in 1992 under Chapter 602, which also created the senior consolidated license and set the current license fee (this bill also made the 7-day nontidal license 5-days). The annual resident and non-resident nontidal licenses were changed in 2007 under SB 1012. HB 1345 changed the 5-day nontidal license to a 7-day and increased the non-resident trout stamp to \$10.

BILL EXPLANATION

The bill would increase nontidal recreational fishing license fees which go primarily to the Fisheries Management and Protection Fund under Natural Resources Article, Section 4-208.