

HB446 Commercial Blue and Flathead Catfish Finfish

Uploaded by: Todd Morgan

Position: FAV

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Environment and Transportation
Committee



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony in Support of HB446 – Commercial Blue and Flathead Catfish Finfish Trotline License -
Prohibited Regulations**

February 10, 2025

Chair Korman, Vice-Chair Boyce, and esteemed members of the Environment & Transportation
Committee:

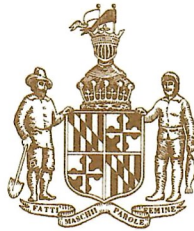
Please review the below Department of Natural Resources website: **Maryland DNR Introduces
Commercial Blue Catfish Pilot Programs**

<https://news.maryland.gov/dnr/2025/02/07/maryland-dnr-introduces-commercial-blue-catfish-pilot-programs/>

HB446 DTMorgan Testimony.pdf

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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of HB446 – Flathead Catfish Trotline License – Prohibited Regulations

January 29, 2025

Chair Korman and Members of the esteemed E&T Committee:

I am here today to introduce House Bill 446, which would allow holders of commercial finfish trotline licenses for blue and flathead catfish to fish south of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge.

For some background, both the blue catfish and flathead catfish are invasive species which pose a substantial threat to our state's ecosystem. Currently, there are no geographic restrictions on the recreational licenses for Blue and Flathead Catfish and no restrictions on the number which can be caught in a given day recreationally, highlighting the Department of Natural Resources view of the importance of removing this invasive species from our waterways.

As part of efforts to remove these nonnative species from our waterways, two years ago, legislation was passed to reinstate the Commercial Finfish Trotline License for Blue and Flathead Catfish, which had been allowed to sunset. However, under present regulations that have been adopted by the Department, trotlines cannot be used in the Chesapeake Bay south of the Bay Bridge. Running a trotline is regarded as one of the most effective and efficient means to catch these catfish at scale, and according to DNR they make for great table fare, becoming increasingly popular for charter expeditions.

For those unfamiliar, running a trotline entails taking out a length of rope, attaching two floats at each end, and tying bait at intervals along the rope. You then idle along the length of the rope and pull your meal aboard with a net. This is a timeless method, originating from before the advent of motor vessels, where the lines would be run in shallow water and an individual on horseback would **trot** along the **line** with net in hand. Trotlines remain the preferred method for commercial crabbing to this day. A similar trotline tradition exists in the Mississippi river basin, where the Blue and Flathead Catfish originated from, and the trotline also happens to be their preferred method as well.

While there is a large population of these catfish north of the bay bridge, their population has been increasing in the tidal Potomac and Patuxent, as well as in other regions south of the Bay Bridge. The holders of these licenses are a critical part of the efforts to remove these harmful species of fish from our waterways. I do not believe that the current restrictions are consistent with the goal of getting as many of these fish out of our waterways as possible. It is important to note that this bill does not change anything else in the statute creating the license or of any other part of State law. It does not relieve the license holders of their obligation to only catch blue and flathead catfish; this bill simply removes the restrictions on where these catfish can be caught. With this in mind, I respectfully request a favorable report on House Bill 446.

HB 446 - CBF - UNF.pdf

Uploaded by: Matt Stegman

Position: UNF



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

Environmental Protection and Restoration
Environmental Education

House Bill 446

Commercial Blue and Flathead Catfish Finfish Trotline License – Prohibited Regulations

Date: February 12, 2025

To: Environment & Transportation Committee

Position: **UNFAVORABLE**

From: Allison Colden,
Executive Director

Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **OPPOSES** House Bill 446 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 HB 446. 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 HB 446 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 HB 446.

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 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.

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Uploaded by: Emily Wilson

Position: INFO



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

February 12, 2025

BILL NUMBER: House Bill 446 – First Reader

SHORT TITLE: Commercial Blue and Flathead Catfish Finfish Trotline License – Prohibited Regulations

DEPARTMENT’S POSITION: LETTER OF INFORMATION

EXPLANATION OF DEPARTMENT’S POSITION

The Department currently prohibits the use of finfish trotlines in the Chesapeake Bay mainstem south of the Bay Bridge due to ecological concerns and potential user conflicts with other gears. As of February 7, 2025, the Department is soliciting for applications to a pilot program to test the feasibility of allowing trotlines in this area of the Bay based on the recommendations of the Invasive Catfish Advisory Committee (ICAC), organized under the Sport Fisheries and Tidal Fisheries Advisory Commissions. ICAC recommended allowing finfish trotlines in most portions of the Chesapeake Bay including Tangier Sound, which is a pupping ground for protected shark species and may not be an ideal environment for catfish.

The pilot will allow the Department to gather information on harvest efficiency, bycatch, and user conflict. Conducting a pilot in this manner allows us to address fishery issues early, educate the public around any concerns and pave the way for implementing a robust fishery in the future.

We appreciate the continued conversations with the sponsors with regard to this legislation and appreciate the continued collaboration around how to address the Blue Catfish population in the State.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This is the first time this bill has been introduced.

BILL EXPLANATION

The bill prohibits the Department from prohibiting certain license holders from using finfish trotlines in the mainstem of the Chesapeake Bay.

Contact: Emily Wilson, Director, Legislative and Constituent Services (Acting)
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