

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 755 (Senators Muse and Hershey)
Education, Energy, and the Environment

Natural Resources - Striped Bass Recreational Seasons and Fisheries Regulations

This emergency bill prohibits the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) from establishing a catch and release season for striped bass, commonly known as rockfish, and requires the department to establish, annually, a specified recreational and charter boat summer and fall striped bass season and a specified trophy season for striped bass. The bill also requires DNR to complete and submit, as specified, an economic impact statement for any proposed regulations governing fisheries that the department identifies as having a major impact on interested stakeholders.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Special fund revenues may decrease, as early as FY 2026, as discussed below. Expenditures are not affected.

Local Effect: The bill does not directly affect local government finances.

Small Business Effect: Potential meaningful.

Analysis

Bill Summary:

Prohibition on Catch and Release Season

The bill prohibits DNR from establishing a catch and release season for striped bass, commonly known as rockfish.

Summer and Fall Season

The bill requires DNR to establish, annually, a recreational and charter boat summer and fall striped bass season beginning May 16 each year and ending December 10 each year.

For the recreational summer and fall striped bass season, a person (1) may not catch or possess more than one striped bass per day and (2) may use as bait shad or artificial lures designed to mimic shad that are of any size.

For the charter boat summer and fall striped bass season, (1) a person may not catch or possess more than two striped bass per day; (2) not more than 12 lines per boat may be in the water at any one time; (3) planer boards may not extend more than 75 feet on either side of the boat; and (4) not more than 75 spot fish per person may be on board the boat for bait.

Trophy Season

The department must establish, annually, a trophy season for striped bass.

The 2026 trophy season for catching striped bass is (1) from April 17 through April 19, inclusive; (2) from April 24 through April 26, inclusive; and (3) from May 1 through May 3, inclusive.

In 2027 and each year thereafter, DNR must establish a trophy season for striped bass that consists of (1) two periods of three consecutive days in late April and (2) one period of three consecutive days in late April or early May.

During the trophy season, a person may not (1) catch or possess striped bass that are less than 28 inches in length or (2) use as bait shad or artificial lures designed to mimic shad that are less than 9 inches long or have more than one trailer hook.

Fisheries Regulations – Economic Impact Statement

At least 15 days before the date a proposed regulation governing fisheries is submitted to the Maryland Register for publication, DNR must complete and submit to the Joint Committee on Administrative, Executive, and Legislative Review (AELR Committee), the Department of Legislative Services (DLS), and the Administrator of the Division of State Documents (DSD) for review an economic impact statement for any proposed regulations identified by DNR as having a major impact on interested stakeholders.

Current Law:

Fishery Management Plans

Pursuant to changes made by Chapter 430 of 2025, DNR prepares fishery management plans for certain species (white perch, yellow perch, oysters, blue crabs, hard shell clams, catfish, and cow nose ray), but for species of fish that have an Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) fishery management plan (or a federal Regional Fishery Management Council fishery management plan), DNR must (1) manage those species in accordance with those plans and any supplements to those plans; (2) may implement conservation and management measures in accordance with those plans; and (3) may prepare a Maryland-specific supplement to those plans if it is determined that imposing more restrictive measures is necessary to conserve the fishery. (There is an ASMFC interstate [fishery management plan](#) for Atlantic striped bass – which manages the coastal migratory striped bass stocks on the East Coast of the United States and, as part of the coastal migratory stock, striped bass in the Chesapeake Bay.)

DNR may adopt conservation and management measures by regulation for an ASMFC fishery management plan.

Department of Natural Resources Regulations – Recreational and Charter Boat Striped Bass Seasons

Current Regulations

Under current DNR regulations, during the period from April 1 through May 15, a person may not target striped bass or striped bass hybrids in the Chesapeake Bay or its tidal tributaries.

There is a recreational and charter boat early summer and fall season from May 16 through May 31, in specified areas, when a person may catch or possess one striped bass per day of 19 inches or more in total length. The recreational and charter boat summer and fall season is from June 1 through December 10 (with the exception of a closure from July 16 through July 31), throughout the Chesapeake Bay and its tidal tributaries, when a person may catch or possess one striped bass per day of 19 inches or more in length.

Proposed Regulations

DNR has proposed regulations (that have not yet been adopted) that modify the recreational and charter boat striped bass seasons by:

- allowing for catch-and-release fishing in the month of April;

- allowing for striped bass fishing in specified areas from May 1 through May 15, and in specified additional areas from May 16 through May 31, with a limit of catching or possessing one striped bass per day of between 19 and 24 inches; and
- allowing for striped bass fishing throughout the Chesapeake Bay and its tidal tributaries from June 1 through December 5 (with the exception of a closure for the month of August), with a limit of catching or possessing one striped bass per day of between 19 and 24 inches.

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

Maryland is a member of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Compact, which is enacted in State statute. The purpose of the compact is to promote the better utilization of the fisheries – marine, shell, and anadromous – of the Atlantic seaboard by (1) the development of a joint program for the promotion and protection of the fishing industry and (2) the prevention of the physical waste of the fisheries from any cause. The compact established ASMFC and gives the commission the power to recommend the coordination of the exercise of the police powers of the several states within their respective jurisdictions to (1) promote the preservation of those fisheries and their protection against overfishing, waste, depletion, or any abuse whatsoever and (2) assure a continuing yield from the fisheries resources of the member states.

States are responsible for implementing and enforcing the measures contained in ASMFC coastal fishery management plans. If ASMFC determines that a particular state is not in compliance, it must notify the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, who, within 30 days makes a finding on (1) whether the state has failed to carry out its responsibility (giving careful consideration to input from the state) and (2) if so, whether the measures the state has failed to implement and enforce are necessary for the conservation of the fishery in question. If the Secretary finds that the state has failed to carry out its responsibility and that the measures are necessary for the conservation of the fishery, the Secretary must declare a moratorium on fishing in the fishery in question within the waters of the noncomplying state until the state is in compliance, with the moratorium taking effect as specified by the Secretary, on any date within six months of the declaration.

Regulations – Economic Impact

At least 15 days before the date a proposed regulation is submitted to the Maryland Register for publication, the promulgating agency must submit the proposed regulation to the AELR Committee, DLS, and the Administrator of DSD.

If the agency estimates that the proposed regulation will have a significant small business impact, the agency must (1) undertake a specified process to provide to small businesses or other interested parties notice of, and an opportunity to comment on, the proposed

regulation, or the scope of the proposed regulation, at least 15 days before the proposed regulation is submitted to the AELR Committee and DLS and (2) prepare, and update as needed, a compliance guide written in clear, plain English to assist small businesses in complying with the proposed regulation (the guide must be posted on the agency's website).

In addition, a small business economic impact analysis and rating must be prepared by the appropriate agency for each regulation the agency proposes for adoption. The analysis must be submitted to the AELR Committee at the time the agency submits the regulation, and to DLS no later than the time the agency submits the regulation to the committee, to allow DLS to comment on the analysis. If the agency or DLS determines the regulation will have a meaningful economic impact on small businesses, the agency or DLS must develop a complete written economic impact analysis; however, if the agency or DLS is unable to provide a complete written economic impact analysis, a written explanation of why the regulation was determined to have a meaningful economic impact must be provided, which may identify the impact in general terms and need not quantify the specific economic impact. "Small business" means a corporation, partnership, sole proprietorship, or other business entity, including its affiliates, that (1) is independently owned and operated; (2) is not dominant in its field; and (3) employs 50 or fewer full-time employees.

Economic impact analyses and ratings of the agency must be published in the Maryland Register at the same time a notice of proposed or emergency adoption of a regulation is published in the Maryland Register.

State Fiscal Effect:

Striped Bass Recreational Seasons – Potential Special Fund Revenue Decrease

Special fund revenues from recreational tidal fishing license sales may decrease, as early as fiscal 2026 (accounting for the bill's emergency status), to the extent that the bill results in a finding by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce that the State is not in compliance with ASMFC's interstate fishery management plan for Atlantic striped bass and a moratorium is imposed. DNR indicates that (1) the bill puts the State out of compliance with the management plan and (2) if a moratorium is imposed by the Secretary (see Current Law) on the striped bass fishery, one of the State's most popular recreational fisheries, it may cause some individuals to no longer purchase a Maryland Chesapeake Bay and coastal sport fishing (recreational tidal) license. Whether a moratorium is imposed, and the length of any moratorium, cannot be predicted. Similarly, the extent of any special fund revenue decrease resulting from a moratorium cannot be reliably estimated.

Recreational Tidal Fishing Licenses – Background

In general, a person who is age 16 or older is required to obtain a Chesapeake Bay and coastal sport fishing (recreational tidal) license before fishing for finfish in the tidal waters of the State, including the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries, the State waters of the Atlantic Ocean, and the Atlantic coastal bays. The annual license fee for a Maryland resident is \$15.00, while the fee for a resident seven-day short-term recreational tidal fishing license is \$6.00. The annual license fee for a nonresident is \$22.50, while the fee for a nonresident seven-day short-term recreational tidal fishing license is \$12.00. DNR collects these fees and deposits them into the Fisheries Research and Development Fund (FR&D).

Under the provisions governing the Chesapeake Bay and coastal sport fishing license, DNR is also authorized to provide by regulation for the issuance of an annual special Chesapeake Bay and coastal sport fishing license (which DNR [calls](#) a “consolidated Chesapeake Bay and coastal sport boat license”), which when permanently affixed to a boat (other than a boat hired to take persons fishing) authorizes any person on the boat to fish under the license, provided the person registers with DNR. The annual license fee is \$50 for a resident and \$100 for a nonresident.

For context, in fiscal 2025, DNR issued 175,414 Chesapeake Bay and coastal sport fishing licenses (all license types, including consolidated Chesapeake Bay and coastal sport boat licenses), which under current fees generates approximately \$4.5 million in special fund (FR&D) revenues.

Fisheries Regulations – Economic Impact Statement

The bill’s requirement that DNR complete and submit an economic impact statement for any proposed regulations governing fisheries that it identifies as having a major impact on interested stakeholders is similar to efforts the department undertakes under current law and can be handled with existing resources.

Small Business Effect: Small businesses involved in, or benefiting from, recreational fishing in the State may be meaningfully affected by the bill (fishing guides, charters, tackle shops, marinas, hotels, and restaurants). While some businesses may benefit from the striped bass management measures under the bill, DNR indicates, as noted above, that the measures, if put into effect, may prompt a declaration of a moratorium on striped bass fishing in the State by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, which would, instead, harm small businesses involved in, or benefiting from, recreational fishing in the State, as well as those involved in, or benefiting from, commercial fishing, if the moratorium applies to all striped bass fishing in the State, including commercial striped bass fishing. The impact of the bill on small businesses cannot be reliably estimated.

For context regarding the economic impact of recreational fishing (overall) in the State, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) [Fisheries Economics of the United States](#) data indicates that recreational fishing can involve a range of trip expenditures (*e.g.*, fuel, bait, ice, and charter or guide fees) and durable goods expenditures (*e.g.*, fishing tackle, equipment, and boat and vehicle expenses). The most recent estimate from that data of trip expenditures resulting from recreational fishing (overall) in the State is \$471.0 million in 2022, and the most recent estimate of durable goods expenditures from recreational fishing (overall) in the State is \$593.1 million in 2018. (NOAA indicates that state-level durable goods expenditures estimates are not provided after 2018 due to changes in the availability of contributing data.)

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of Natural Resources; Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission; National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; Department of Legislative Services

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