

Tournament News



Spring 2007

Changes proposed to Delaware's fishing license fees

By Roy Miller, Fisheries Program Administrator

Delaware's Division of Fish and Wildlife needs to revise the structure of recreational fishing licenses to include fishing in tidal waters. Several years ago the Delaware Advisory Council on Wildlife and Freshwater Fish recommended that the Division pursue legislation to generate additional funds for fish management and fishing access through a general recreational fishing license that includes tidal water fishermen and recreational crabbers and clambers. Freshwater fishermen have been purchasing licenses in Delaware for over a hundred years; in all that time, anglers fishing tidal waters have been exempt from recreational licensing requirements. This means that freshwater fishermen support the vast majority of expenses associated with funding marine fisheries management and marine fishing access. In addition, there has been no increase in Delaware's recreational fishing license fees since 1985, and increased costs for nearly everything—including energy, fuels, and employment costs—have risen considerably since then.

The Division is heavily dependent on Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration funds to support the fisheries programs in Delaware. In order to acquire this federal aid allocated for our state, the Division uses freshwater fishing license revenue to pay for the required state match to these federal funds. The license account is no longer adequate to sustain this purpose.

Unless drastic steps are taken, the Division of Fish and Wildlife will not be able to meet everyday operating expenses. For this fiscal year, the Division had to cut approximately \$500,000 from the budget. Some programs were ended or suspended to meet this shortfall, including the Delaware Sport Fishing Tournament and the distribution of plastic rulers with measurements for fish minimum length increments. Existing vacancies for biologists and biological aids will not be filled, and much-needed maintenance of marine access areas will be deferred. One popular boat access ramp in need of major renovation has already been closed to the public, and others may eventually follow. It's noteworthy that with passage of a major new funding initiative, such as the proposal for a general fishing license to include tidewater angling, these popular programs will be among the first to be restored.

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Telephone numbers of Interest

- For tournament reports or tag returns: Cathy Martin, 302-653-2887, ext 106. Email:

catherine.martin @state.de.us
or

- Jared Jacobini, 302-653-2887, ext 110, Email:

jared.jacobini @state.de.us

- For tournament permit applications: Carol Weyant, 302-739-9913

Fish & Wildlife Enforcement

Agents:

New Castle County: 302-836-4682

Kent County: 302-739-6189

Sussex County: 302-856-5644

Dispatch Center: 302-739-4580

24-hour Enforcement Number for Environmental Complaints

1-800-662-8802

Note New Website:

Permit applications:

www.fw.delaware.gov/

Click on Fisheries, Go to More Info for Anglers, & click on Boating/fishing Event Reports & Apps.

New Proposed License Structure:

A resident license will remain \$8.50, but would be required for fishing in either freshwater and/or tidal waters. Non-resident licenses would increase from \$15 to \$20 per year and be required for fishing in any Delaware waters. Charter boat/guide and head boat licenses would cover all anglers fishing in that vessel for the year. Licenses would be required for recreational fishing, crabbing or clamming. **All Delaware fishing license revenue by existing state and federal law must be dedicated to the Division of Fish and Wildlife for use on fisheries projects and programs and cannot be diverted to other causes.**

1. Resident annual license - \$8.50
2. Non-resident annual license - \$20
3. 7-day tourist license - \$12.50
4. Charter boat/guide license (for-hire vessel 6 passengers or less) - \$150 Resident/ \$300 Non Resident
5. Head boat license (for-hire vessel with more than six passengers) - \$300 Resident/\$600 Non Resident
6. Recreational Delaware Registered Boat fishing license (for vessel less than 20 feet) - \$40 Resident
7. Recreational Delaware Registered Boat fishing license (for vessel greater than >20 feet) - \$50 Resident
8. Boat fishing license - \$100 Non-Resident

The recreational boat fishing license would cover not only the license holder, but all occupants in that boat. **Resident anglers who presently buy a freshwater fishing license would not be required to pay anything additional**, unless they wished to purchase a boat fishing license. Children under the age of 16 and senior residents, 65 and older, would be exempt from the new licensing provisions as now exist.

The Division estimates that as much as \$1.5 million in new license revenue could be generated from the sale of these new licenses to equal \$1.7 million in total recreational license revenue. These would be 'dedicated' funds, guaranteed by law to be used on Fisheries programs. Other benefits from this user-pay, user-benefit proposal are that, for the first time, saltwater recreational fishermen will be able to stand up and be counted when it comes to allocating resources and funding. If Delaware has a registry of names of marine fishermen, then the federal government will not have to establish and charge for such a registry in Delaware. (Recently-passed federal law requires the Department of Commerce to establish a recreational fishing registry for survey purposes by 2009 and to begin charging for it as early as 2011 [translation: a new federal saltwater fishing license].) This same law would exempt states that already have such a registry. Currently, every state to our south, all of the Gulf coast states, and all Pacific states have some form of a license for tidal waters, and the few remaining states to our north are considering it. Thus, this is not a unique concept.

A new tidal license, in addition to restoring suspended programs like the Delaware Sport Fishing Tournament, would enable the Division to meet its funding needs for the immediate future, and also to begin addressing access area maintenance and new construction that has been deferred. Examples of projects currently in need of funding include improvements to the Augustine Beach breakwater and launch ramp; Cedar Creek ramp and parking lot; a new boat ramp in Laurel; reopening the 7th Street boat ramp in Wilmington; and repair work at Bowers Beach. License money also could be spent on oyster, clam or crab management and research. We cannot spend Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration funds on shellfish, but recreational crabbing and clamming are popular activities in Delaware, and these species are important components of our aquatic ecosystem that should be studied, monitored, and enhanced if possible. Beyond all this, the Division will have the funding to insure that we continue to meet the monitoring requirements for compliance with some 23 state-federal fishery management plans.

If you feel that this licensing proposal has merit, please encourage your elected officials to support legislation that establishes these new proposed fees. Inevitably, you, your children and grandchildren, will be glad you did.

If you have any questions about these proposals, contact Roy Miller at 302-739-9914 or roy.miller@state.de.us or

Revised Fishing Guide

This year the familiar map-style Delaware fishing guide has been revised into a booklet format. The new format makes it easier for anglers to find the information they need.

The booklet has been divided into sections for ease of use. It's now possible to include additional information such as what invasive species to be on the look out for; how circle hooks work; the annual youth fishing tournament in June; and how to measure finfish.

Some of the more general topics will include freshwater fishing regulations, freshwater trout

information, tidal finfish regulations, and surf fishing. A section on the artificial reef program and some hints on how to fish the reefs can also be found in the new guide. Information about clamming, crabbing, and other shellfish broaden its contents even more.

The Division hopes that anglers find the booklet useful and informative, so let us know what you think about the new format and if there is any topic that you might like to have included next year.

Invasive Species: Nutria

Picture a muskrat five to 10 times normal size, with large orange teeth and a round, naked tail—and you have a nutria. In 1937 nutria were brought to a private zoo in Louisiana but escaped during a hurricane. Later, nutria were brought to Maryland for the fur trade. Both instances have backfired ecologically, and nutria now have become a big problem at the Blackwater Wildlife Refuge on Maryland's Eastern Shore, where they have destroyed over six square miles of marsh and damaged an additional 53 percent of the remaining marsh. Nutria impact the marsh by feeding on the base of plant stems and digging for roots and rhizomes. This creates openings in marsh vegetation and turns the area into open water.

In Louisiana, the only predators for nutria other than alligators are trappers. However, the decline of the fur market means trapping isn't sufficient to control this prolific rodent, which reaches sexual maturity at 6 months and produces two litters (4-5 young/litter) a year.

A 10-year nutria control program is underway at Blackwater Refuge,



where the damage is greatest.

Here in Delaware, nutria occasionally are sighted on the Nanticoke River, especially the area near the Delaware-Maryland state line and in Broad Creek near Portsville. The large boxy-looking head, visible orange incisor teeth, and round tail are all distinctive characteristics to distinguish nutria from muskrats or beaver. If you see any nutria in Delaware waters, please contact Steve Kendrot of the MD Nutria Project at 410-221-7857.



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Fisheries Section
4876 Hay Point Landing Rd
Smyrna De 19977

On the Web

www.fw.delaware.gov/

Tournament Report 2006

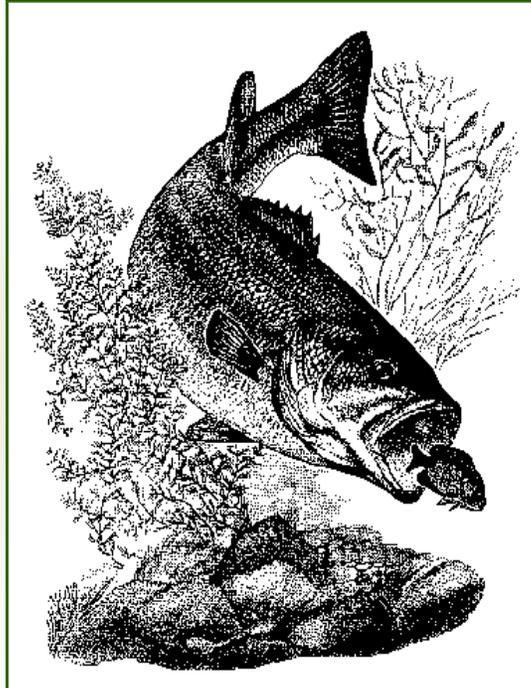
A total of 110 bass tournament report forms was filed for 2006. This is more than any other year since 1996. The bad news was the 32 reports that went unreturned despite three reminders.

Total angling hours reported were 12,046, an increase of nearly percent over the 8,817 hours in 2005. All events were bass club contests, no "open" contests [sponsored by non-angling clubs with a variety of species and open to all types of anglers] were held.

A trend noted in recent years is the increase in bass per angler hour, which has risen from 0.16 bass per hour between 1989 and 1995 to 0.30 between 2000-06—nearly double the earlier catch rate.

The Nanticoke River was the top tournament location for the 15th consecutive year. A total of 21 tournaments were reported from the Nanticoke/Broad system with 5,026 tournament angling hours, 42.7% of all tournament angling effort reported. The average number of anglers per Nanticoke River event was 30 anglers, compared to the smaller pond events, which averaged 13 anglers per contest.

Locations with two or more events were ranked by the average weight of



bass weighed in. Red Mill Pond had the highest (2.39 lb. average), but Garrison Lake (2.32 lbs.), Moores Lake (2.11 lbs.), and Killens Pond (2.08 lbs.) were also high. The total number of bass over 5 lbs. was 18.

The biggest change in the tournament reporting program in recent years has been the availability of the internet report form. In mid-1999, online reporting of tournament events, permit applications, and tagged fish reports was initiated on the Division of Fish & Wildlife web site. The number of reports filed electronically has increased annually and now constitutes nearly 90 percent of all reports.

The reporting program has provided valuable data on this specialized type of fishing in Delaware particularly on the Nanticoke River system. Angler catch rates and pounds of largemouth bass by angler-hour for the more heavily used tournament locations supplement the Division's fisheries monitoring efforts.

