



P.O. Box 278  
Riverdale, MD 20738

**Committee: Environment and Transportation**

**Testimony on: HB386 – “Natural Resources – Blue and Flathead Catfish Finfish Trotline License - Establishment**

**Position: Support**

**Hearing Date: February 15, 2023**

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club strongly supports HB386, which would establish a licensing program to allow the commercial fishing of invasive blue and flathead catfish in the tidal waters of the State using a finfish trotline.

Introduced to Maryland throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to create a recreational fishery, blue and flathead catfish have been causing harm to Chesapeake Bay ecosystems ever since<sup>1</sup>. As invasive species, blue and flathead catfish have few natural predators within the Bay<sup>2</sup>. This, coupled with the fact that they have proven to be more resilient to changes in salinity than originally anticipated, has allowed them to multiply rapidly and extend their range into most river systems throughout the Chesapeake<sup>1</sup>. Their large numbers and apex predator status have also led to heavy losses of native sea organism populations including Shad, Perch, Alewife, and Herring species, and have contributed to the population decline of our beloved Blue Crab, among other sea life<sup>3</sup>. This degradation has led to ecosystem instability and food web imbalance<sup>1</sup>.

Given that the presence of blue and flathead catfish is having a harmful effect on our state’s waterways, and that this bill would ease the barriers for Maryland fishers hoping to catch and remove these invasive finfish from our tidal waters, the Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club fully supports this legislation. It is in keeping with our core mission to promote the responsible use of the earth’s ecosystems and resources and to restore the quality of the natural and human environment.

We are fortunate to have the Chesapeake Bay as a central part of our state, which brings with it a variety of wildlife, diverse ecosystems, and strong economic benefits. However, a critical part of Maryland’s Chesapeake Bay ecosystem is being disrupted and imbalanced by the encroachment of invasive finfish such as blue and flathead catfish. We should protect our ecosystems and wildlife by removing these invasive species. Therefore, the Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club requests a favorable report.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/feature-story/blue-catfish-invasive-and-delicious>

<sup>2</sup> <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1009&context=vimsbooks>

<sup>3</sup> <https://afspubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/nafm.10279>