



# CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION

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Environmental Protection and Restoration  
Environmental Education

## House Joint Resolution 6

### Commercial Fishery Disaster Declaration Due to Invasive Species

Date: March 4, 2024  
To: House Rules Committee

Position: **Favorable**  
From: Allison Colden  
MD Executive Director

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Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) **SUPPORTS** HJ 6 which expresses the support of the Maryland General Assembly for a federal fisheries disaster declaration and encourages further efforts to obtain federal assistance to address impacts to commercial fisheries by invasive species.

Blue catfish were first introduced in the 1970s in Virginia to develop a recreational fishery. Since their introduction, these highly invasive fish have rapidly expanded their range into nearly every Chesapeake Bay tributary. This expansion is especially troublesome as 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 have become established, they make up approximately 75% of the total fish weight of all fish inhabiting the river. The adverse effects of blue catfish on Maryland's seafood industry and the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem could be catastrophic.

Similar impacts have been noted for northern snakeheads, another invasive fish species first documented in a pond in Crofton in 2002. Since the discovery of snakeheads in Maryland, they have spread throughout tidal freshwater areas of the state (*see attachment*). A [study](#) of the fish community in Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge before and after establishment of snakeheads found that 17 out of 21 species declined in abundance between 30-97% after snakeheads became prevalent.

In March 2023, Gov. Moore filed a petition with the U.S. Department of Commerce for the declaration of a federal fisheries disaster due to the impact of these invasive species. This process, administered by the National Marine Fisheries Service, provides financial assistance to commercial fishermen who have been negatively impacted by the decline of a fishery. Unfortunately, Gov. Moore's petition was denied.

Current challenges to successfully managing these invasive fishes in Maryland include lack of market demand for wild-caught catfish, insufficient processing infrastructure, barriers to processing due to duplicative seafood inspection requirements and consumer buy-in. Each of these challenges could be improved by the increased federal investment supported and encouraged by HJ 6.

### **CBF urges the Committee's FAVORABLE report on HJ 6.**

For more information, please contact Matt Stegman, Maryland Staff Attorney, at [mstegman@cbf.org](mailto:mstegman@cbf.org).

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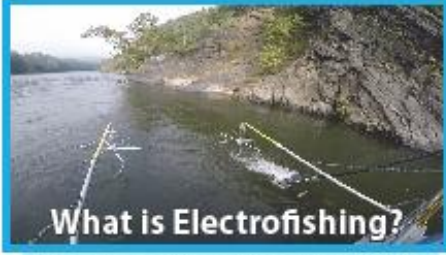
# Northern Snakehead increasing abundance in Maryland waterways



Data below are from Maryland Department of Natural Resources boat electrofishing surveys.

<b>SUSQUEHANNA FLATS, NORTHEAST</b> (tidal freshwater) First caught in 2015 low: 5 snakeheads/hr (2015) high: 9.5 snakeheads/hr. (2017)*	<b>90%</b> ↑
<b>PATUXENT RIVER</b> (tidal freshwater) First caught in 2012 low: 10 snakeheads/hr (2012) high: 35 snakeheads/hr. (2018)*	<b>250%</b> ↑
<b>WICOMICO RIVER</b> (tidal freshwater) First caught in 2013 low: 7 snakeheads/hr (2013) high: 28 snakeheads/hr. (2015)*	<b>300%</b> ↑
<b>POTOMAC RIVER</b> (tidal freshwater) First caught in 2007 low: 8 snakeheads/hr (2007) high: 35 snakeheads/hr. (2018)*	<b>337.5%</b> ↑

\*Some years there was no survey of the areas above. The "high" ratios above represent the highest number in the overall survey timeline and not necessarily the most recent data. However, the overall trend in all of these areas is an upward population growth.



## What is Electrofishing?

Electroshocking (also called electrofishing) stuns fish temporarily for survey. When a fish is caught in the electric current, it can get stunned temporarily, allowing scientists to net it from the water. Since snakehead are invasive, we do not return them to the water after sampling.



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DNR 17-041619-142 4/19

Species found in major drainages identified from reports to department and USGS NonIndigenous Aquatic Species Database