February 11, 2016

Dear Tournament Director:

As you and your anglers are dreaming of warmer weather and preparing for the upcoming 2016 black bass tournaments, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources Fisheries Service would like to wish you a safe and enjoyable fishing season. We would also like to make you aware of some upcoming changes in 2016.

**New Permitting Procedures**

In the past, tournament directors received a permit to hold a black bass tournament immediately. This process did not allow the Fisheries Service to keep copies of permits, quickly respond when assistance was requested, or review tournament details prior to issuing permits. Beginning February 12, the Fisheries Service will adopt a new permitting procedure that allows better dialogue between the Fisheries Service and directors. It will be free and will provide directors with a permit in the timely manner as required by regulation.

*New Procedure Timeline*

* Directors request a permit online, as normal: http://dnr2.maryland.gov/fisheries/pages/bass/ta.aspx.
* The request will be electronically sent to the Fisheries Service for review.
* The review process will be completed within 15 business days of the request for small tournaments, and within 30 business days for larger tournaments (50 or more boats).
* If granted, a permit will be issued to the tournament director electronically.

Directors are encouraged to select a rain date when requesting a permit. As always, directors are encouraged to contact the Fisheries Service if an emergency permit is needed.

**New Best Management Practices**

The Department has recently updated best management practices for black bass anglers in the 2016 Fishing Guide and for directors on the permitting website. Tournament directors who use some or all practices may be publicly recognized by Fisheries Service. Updated best management practices include those recommended by stakeholders and nationally recognized bass conservation organizations. Please help:

1. Improve survival of bass by [providing handling tips to anglers](http://dnr2.maryland.gov/fisheries/Pages/bass/ta.aspx)
2. Improve survival of bass by [excluding July and August](http://dnrweb.dnr.state.md.us/fish/tournament/register2_draft.asp) in tournament schedule
3. Improve survival of bass by [creating a fishing off-limits area](http://dnrweb.dnr.state.md.us/fish/tournament/register2_draft.asp) at weigh-in site
4. Reduce the number of fish released at the weigh-in area by having a [plan for redistributing fish](http://dnrweb.dnr.state.md.us/fish/tournament/register2_draft.asp)
5. Reduce the number of fish released at weigh-in area by [using multiple weigh-in sites](http://dnr2.maryland.gov/fisheries/Pages/bass/ta.aspx) within lake or river
6. Reduce the number of fish released at weigh-in area by [lowering creel limits](http://dnrweb.dnr.state.md.us/fish/tournament/register2_draft.asp) per angler or boat
7. Reduce the number of big fish released at weigh-in area by [implementing a fishable slot](http://dnrweb.dnr.state.md.us/fish/tournament/register2_draft.asp)
8. Reduce the number of fish released at weigh-in area by [using a no possession rule](http://dnrweb.dnr.state.md.us/fish/tournament/register2_draft.asp)
9. Increase chances a fish will return home by restricting fishing to within 20 miles of weigh-in site

**Notable Concerns for 2016**

In 2016, sampling on the Northeast River (upper Chesapeake Bay) found that 6 of 10 bass submitted for testing carried the Largemouth Bass Virus (LMBV). Even though no disease from the virus was detected, we continue to encourage directors to avoid summer tournaments when possible. The virus is more easily transmitted during summer and handling stress on bass can make them more susceptible to the disease. For more information on LMBV and helping to prevent its spread, please visit:

<http://dnr2.maryland.gov/fisheries/Documents/Largemouth_Bass_Virus.pdf>

Please encourage boaters to clean their boats, livewells, and gear thoroughly. Zebra mussels (*Dreissena polymorpha*) are in the upper Chesapeake Bay and have been found as far south as Middle River, on the western shore of the Chesapeake Bay. For more information on zebra mussels in Maryland, please visit:

<http://dnr2.maryland.gov/Invasives/Pages/zebra_mussels.aspx>

Please encourage anglers to harvest northern snakeheads if caught during a tournament. Northern snakeheads have been recently caught and confirmed from the upper Chesapeake Bay. For more information on northern snakeheads, please visit:

<http://dnr2.maryland.gov/fisheries/Pages/snakehead.aspx>

and

<https://youtu.be/UX2hdtZeWFo>

We hope that you and your anglers have a successful 2016 season. If you have any concerns or comments about the fishery, permitting system, best management practices, or challenges to the fishery, feel free to contact us. We welcome feedback from you as we continue to improve our services for you and the fishery.

Sincerely,

Joseph W. Love, Ph.D.

Tidal Bass Program Manager

joseph.love@maryland.gov

410.260.8257

Branson D. Williams

Natural Resource Biologist III

branson.williams@maryland.gov

301.888.2423