

MD DNR Fisheries Service

May 6, 2013

RECREATIONAL AND CHARTER BLUE CRAB REGULATORY PROPOSAL

Maryland's current recreational blue crab license structure has shortcomings which are recognized by crabbers, enforcement officers, and fishery managers alike. Recreational crabbers find it complicated and confusing. Natural Resources Police have a hard time explaining its multiple catch limits and different gears to help crabbers understand and follow the rules. And fishery managers do not have the information on recreational harvest needed to make management decisions. The impact of the recreational blue crab license shortcomings also extends to Maryland's budding eco-tourism industry and terrapin conservation efforts.

All these problems make it clear that something must be done. Fisheries Service has identified a way to fix the problems by restructuring the recreational and charter crabbing license structure. We have developed a draft regulatory proposal which simplifies the recreational crabbing license structure and modifies it to provide better estimates of recreational catch and effort. It would also implement a waterfront property crab pot license and mechanism to notify waterfront property owner's with crab pots of measures to conserve terrapins. The proposal provides a crabbing charter decal to facilitate development of charter crabbing and eco-tourism businesses, and increases non-resident recreational crabbing license fees to address stakeholder concerns about congestion at boat ramps and on the water.

The regulations would:

- Reduce the number of license exemptions by eliminating the crab boat license, discounted license, and the complimentary crabbing license provided with the Bay Sport Boat decal.
- Simply the regulations by developing consistent catch limits for all recreational crabbers, licensed and unlicensed.
- Maintains exemptions for individuals who want to handline or dipnet for crabs from the shoreline.
- Create a Private Property Crab Pot license to improve harvest estimates, and conserve terrapins via improved outreach and enforcement of terrapin excluder devices that are required in these crab pots.
- Creates 2 types of charter crabbing decals (depending on type of commercial licenses).
- Provides for use of commercial crabbing gear and harvest of crabs on a eco-tourism charter with certain decals.
- Raise fees for out of state recreational crabbers due to concerns from residents regarding how inexpensive it is for nonresidents and congestion at boat ramps and on the water.
- Decrease harvest impacts of unlicensed crabbers by altering allowable gear limits and extending license requirements.

Draft Blue Crab Recreational License Structure:

The following table reflects the draft regulations for recreational crabbing licenses. The recreational license regulations would not apply to Maryland’s coastal bays.

	No License	License Required	License Required for Crab Pots from Private Property
Allowable Gear	Unlimited handlines and dipnets	30 traps or 30 net rings, or a maximum of 1200 feet of trotline.	Two pots from a pier for waterfront property owners and tenants.
Daily Catch Limits	2 dozen crabs/person (hard, soft and peeler combined)	1 bushel/person, with a maximum of 2 bushels per boat (hard, soft, peeler combined)	1 bushel

Draft Blue Crab Charter License Structure:

The Charter decal would apply to all State tidal waters (just like charter fishing). A dual decal is necessary because some charter captains are not licensed to use commercial gear. In order for Natural Resources Police officers to tell the difference between charter trips with a commercial crabbing license and those without, different decals would be attached to vessels.

Crabbing Charter Decal:

- Would allow a person with a fishing guide license and a Coast Guard license to take paying customers to harvest recreational amounts of crab.
- All recreational rules apply (including gear and time restrictions).
- Paying customers on board would not be required to have a recreational crabbing license.
- Captains would be required to report similar to finfish charters are now.

Crabbing Charter Decal B. Applies as follows:

- Would allow a person with a commercial crabbing license, fishing guide license and a Coast Guard license to take paying customers to harvest recreational amounts of crab.
- All recreational rules apply except crab pots, scrapes, and channel pounds/bank traps would be permissible gear types (trotline would still be limited to recreational amounts)
- Paying customers on board would not be required to have a recreational license.
- Captains would be required to report similar to finfish charters are now.

Draft Fees:

The annual resident recreational crabbing license would remain at \$5.00, but the discount for crabbing when buying a Tidal/Coastal fishing license, the crabbing boat license, and the complimentary crabbing license that is attached to the Bay Sport Decal would be eliminated.

The Private Property Crab Pot license would be **\$5** regardless of residency status.

The nonresident license fees would be as follows:

\$10.00 for a 7-day non-resident- this short term license option currently does not exist.

\$35.00 for an annual non-resident – the current price is \$10.00

Crabbing Charter Decal A: **\$100**

Crabbing Charter Decal B: **\$150**

This restructuring would effectively resolve the problems that plague the current recreational blue crab license structure. However, the solution does have consequences - you may have to get a license when you didn't need to before or crab under a lower gear and catch limit. Although this will not be welcome news, the need for action is clear. This proposal would bring the simplicity and harvest accountability which are lacking in the current recreational blue crab license structure. It also presents an opportunity for recreational crabbers to help with blue crab management and terrapin conservation.

You are encouraged to attend one of the upcoming Open House events where you can learn more and discuss your concerns:

May 2 at Anne Arundel Community College, Arnold, MD 3:00 – 7:00 p.m.

May 9 at Sailwinds Park, Cambridge, MD 3:00 – 7:00 p.m.

Or if you would like to submit written comment, please email:
fisheriespubliccomment@dnr.state.md.us