

## **Proposal to Add Invasive Species Component and State Record Recognition under Maryland Fishing Challenge Contest Framework**

The Maryland Fishing Challenge (MFC) currently has 3 components: the Angler Award Program, Diamond Jim and the Youth Component. Fisheries Service proposes to create a new Invasive Species Award Component (ISC) and designate certain invasive fish species eligible for recognition.

“Invasive” describes a species that, when introduced into an ecosystem, aggressively establishes itself and has the potential to negatively affect native plants, animals or habitat. The basis for a new ISC with unique rules established specifically for invasive species is to: (1) provide incentive to recreational fishermen to report their harvest of invasive fish species; and (2) improve awareness of Maryland Fisheries Service policy on invasive fish species.

Fisheries Service’s policy for the ISC is that eligible invasive species must naturally reproduce in Maryland or reproduce outside of Maryland and migrate into Maryland waters. At present there are three invasive species in Maryland that fit these criteria, and would be eligible only in the new ISC: Blue Catfish, Northern Snakehead and Flathead Catfish.

The ISC allows anglers to be recognized for reporting their invasive fish, regardless of its size at harvest. There are 3 ways to enter:

- 1) Angler Award - fish meeting minimum award size are eligible;
- 2) State Record - fish exceeding the existing state record weight are eligible;
- 3) Angler’s Log - fish harvested at any size are eligible.

Multiple entries are allowed, but each fish can only be entered once. Two prizes will be awarded for this component via random drawing at the annual MFC Finale.

### **Invasive Species Component (ISC) Rules:**

The rules below apply only to this component and those species designated eligible

- All fish must be kept to qualify for an award certificate or a state record. There is no catch and release award for invasive species.
- Fish must be killed by one of the following methods:
  1. The head is severed from the dorsal area in line with the pectoral fins completely through the spinal vertebrae; the head does not have to be detached from the fish.
  2. At least two gill arches are completely removed from the gill area.
  3. The fish has all of its internal organs removed.
- Fish must be caught using legal recreational fishing methods. All legal recreational fishing methods and gear are allowed.

### **Angler Award** (fish meeting minimum award size are eligible)

- Minimum sizes for award certificates are established based on recommendations of Fisheries Service biologists familiar with the species. For the three species currently meeting Fisheries Service policy criteria for the Invasive Species Component, minimum award sizes are:

Blue Catfish – 40 inches  
Flathead Catfish – 34 inches  
Northern Snakehead – 30 inches

- To enter, anglers follow the established MFC Angler Award Program process. All submissions for award certificates and entry into the ISC must take place: (1) at a designated angler award center where entrants receive a registration ticket to enter their fish online; or (2) by approval of the Angler Award Program manager.
- Northern Snakehead and Flathead Catfish will be added to the eligibility list for Angler Award recognition, but fish must be kept to be eligible, as stated in the ISC rules above. Blue Catfish is already eligible; however, previously it was not required that the fish be kept to be eligible.
- At the MFC Finale event, one prize will be awarded by random drawing from all ISC Angler Award and State Record entries.

**State Record** (fish exceeding the existing state record weight are eligible)

- Benchmark weights for state records are established based on recommendations of Fisheries Service biologists familiar with the species.
- To enter, anglers follow established state record procedures. These include: positive identification by a Fisheries Service biologist, determination of weight on a state certified scale, and a dated and signed witness statement by a person other than the angler that has witnessed weighing the fish.
- Northern Snakehead and Flathead Catfish will be added to the list for state record recognition, but fish must be kept to be eligible, as stated in the ISC rules above. Blue Catfish is already recognized for state records; however, previously it was not required that the fish be kept to be recognized.
- At the MFC Finale event, one prize will be awarded by random drawing from all ISC Angler Award and State Record entries.

**Angler's Log** (fish harvested at any size are eligible)

- To enter, anglers share their experiences on the Department's Anglers Log, where a log specific to the Invasive Species Component will be maintained. Anglers will report how they caught the invasive fish, where they found them, and submit a photo of their harvest.
- In 2013, the Department added Northern Snakehead to the list of species in the Volunteer Angler Survey. However, Northern Snakehead must be reported on the Angler's Log to enter the ISC prize drawing.
- At the end of the year, one prize will be awarded via random drawing from all entries to the Invasive Species Component Anglers Log.