

Recreational Crabbing



Purpose of Open House:

Maryland's current recreational crab regulations and license structure have problems which are recognized by crabbers, enforcement officers, fishery managers, and scientists alike.

Crabbers find them complicated and confusing.

Enforcement officers struggle to explain them to help crabbers understand and follow the rules.

Managers do not have the necessary information on recreational harvest to make management decisions.

Recreational Crabbing



Purpose of Open House:

We are soliciting your comment on ways to improve the sustainability of Maryland's recreational crab fishery by:

- 1) Simplifying Maryland's overly complex regulations and license structure.
- 2) Creating a more cost effective means to gather essential information on blue crab recreational catch and effort.

The Problems with Complex Regulations and License Structure

There are five possible in-state license scenarios for recreational crabbing, including having no license at all.

There are different catch limits depending on whether a crabber is licensed, unlicensed, crabbing from a boat or shore, alone or with friends and even if it's the person or the boat that is licensed.



Several types of gear are allowed to be used to harvest crabs by both licensed and unlicensed recreational crabbers but at different amounts based on license status.

All of this is confusing for crabbers and makes regulations difficult to enforce

The Problems with Complex Regulations and License Structure

Current In-state Recreational Crabbing License Scenarios

1) Resident Recreational Crabbing License

This is the \$5.00 license people buy to go crabbing using a trotline or greater numbers of net rings or collapsible traps and keep up to 1 bushel of crabs. People who have this license can be easily and cost effectively surveyed for catch and effort information but they represent less than half of the people allowed to crab.

2) Free crabbing license w/ Pleasure boat Decal

This is issued when you purchase a pleasure boat decal for fishing. The complimentary crabbing portion only licenses the person who buys the boat decal (not everyone on the boat like the fishing portion of the decal, which is confusing). There are approximately 43,000 of these issued, but probably only a fraction are used. It is extremely expensive to survey all of these people to find out who is crabbing.

The Problems with Complex Regulations and License Structure

Current In-state Recreational Crabbing License Scenarios

3) The Crabbing Boat License

This is a license that people buy to license a boat, not a person. It allows one unlicensed individual on that boat to catch a bushel of crabs. It does not license everyone like the fishing boat decal. Confusing. AND, there is no way for DNR to survey these people to estimate harvest.

4) Waterfront Property Owners

There are thousands of waterfront properties on Chesapeake Bay where two crab pots may be deployed. It is extremely expensive to survey all these people and get a reliable estimate of harvest.

5) No license at all

There is no cost effective way to estimate the harvest by this group of people.

What happens when you combine the complex license structure with different catch limits and gear?

Can you figure out what you're allowed to do?

	Catch Limits	Gear Limits
No Recreational License	2 Dozen Hard Crabs 1 Dozen Peelers or; 1 Dozen Soft Crabs or; Combination of 1 Dozen Peelers & Soft Crabs	Dipnet; Handlines; Up To 10 Collapsible Traps or Net Rings or; Combination of Up To 10 Traps or Rings
Individual with Recreational License But Not On Boat	1 Bushel Hard Crabs; and 2 Dozen Peelers or; 2 Dozen Soft Crabs or; Combination of 2 Dozen Peelers & Soft Crabs	Trotline Max. 1200 feet. Not More Than 30 Collapsible Traps or Net Rings or; Not More Than 30 of a Combination of Traps and Rings; Up to 10 Eel Pots for Bait
Individual Not Licensed- Boat Is Licensed with crab boat license	1 Bushel Hard Crabs; and 2 Dozen Peelers or; 2 Dozen Soft Crabs or; Combination of 2 Dozen Peelers & Soft Crabs	Trotline Max. 1200 feet. Not More Than 30 Collapsible Traps or Net Rings or; Not More Than 30 of a Combination of Traps and Rings
1 Individual Licensed- Boat is Licensed	1 Bushel Hard Crabs; and 2 Dozen Peelers or; 2 Dozen Soft Crabs or; Combination of 2 Dozen Peelers & Soft Crabs	Trotline Max. 1200 feet. Not More Than 30 Collapsible Traps or Net Rings or; Not More Than 30 of a Combination of Traps and Rings; Up to 10 Eel Pots for Bait
2 Individuals Licensed- Boat is Licensed	2 Bushel Hard Crabs; and 2 Dozen Peelers or; 2 Dozen Soft Crabs or; Combination of 2 Dozen Peelers & Soft Crabs	Trotline Max. 1200 feet. Not More Than 30 Collapsible Traps or Net Rings or; Not More Than 30 of a Combination of Traps and Rings; Up to 10 Eel Pots for Bait per licensed individual

But Wait! There's more!

	Catch Limits	Gear Limits
Individual(s) Not Licensed- Boat Not Licensed	4 Dozen Hard Crabs; and 1 Dozen Peelers or; 1 Dozen Soft Crabs or; Combination of 1 Dozen Peelers & Soft Crabs	Dipnet; Handlines; Up To 10 Collapsible Traps or Net Rings or; Combination of Up To 10 Traps or Rings
1 Individual Licensed- Boat Not Licensed	1 Bushel Hard Crabs; and 2 Dozen Peelers or; 2 Dozen Soft Crabs or; Combination of 2 Dozen Peelers & Soft Crabs	Trotline Max. 1200 feet. Not More Than 30 Collapsible Traps or Net Rings or; Not More Than 30 of a Combination of Traps and Rings; Up to 10 Eel Pots for Bait
2 Individuals Licensed- Boat Not Licensed	2 Bushel Hard Crabs; and 2 Dozen Peelers or; 2 Dozen Soft Crabs or; Combination of 2 Dozen Peelers & Soft Crabs	Trotline Max. 1200 feet. Not More Than 30 Collapsible Traps or Net Rings or; Not More Than 30 of a Combination of Traps and Rings; Up to 10 Eel Pots for Bait per licensed individual
Land Owner- Not Licensed	2 Dozen Hard Crabs; and 1 Dozen Peelers or; 1 Dozen Soft Crabs or; Combination of 1 Dozen Peelers & Soft Crabs	2 Pots Per Parcel of Private Property and; Dipnet; Handlines; Up To 10 Collapsible Traps or Net Rings or; Combination of Up To 10 Traps or Rings
Land Owner- Licensed	1 Bushel Hard Crabs; and 2 Dozen Peelers or; 2 Dozen Soft Crabs or; Combination of 2 Dozen Peelers & Soft Crabs	2 Pots Per Parcel of Private Property and; Dipnet; Handlines; Up To 30 Collapsible Traps or Net Rings or; Combination of Up To 30 Traps or Rings; Up to 10 Eel Pots for Bait

Complexity & Data

The current recreational license structure makes it difficult and extremely expensive to gather harvest data that is needed for management because we don't know who is crabbing.

Currently the Maryland recreational crab harvest is estimated using a phone survey that calls a random group of individuals to ask if they went recreationally crabbing.



With an unknown number of unlicensed crabbers and issuing complimentary crabbing licenses to people that don't intend to crab there is no way to know how many people are recreationally crabbing.

Complexity & Data

We do know Recreational harvest is significant!

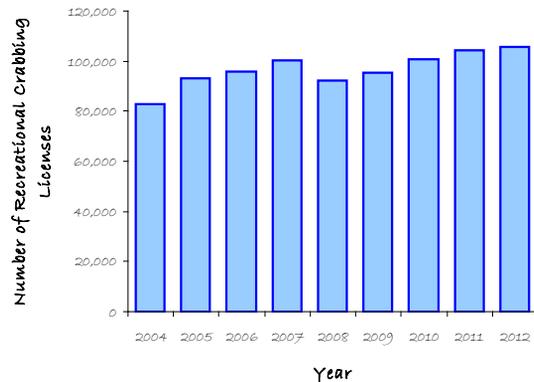
In 2011 there was a total of **104,452** recreational crabbing licenses issued with 75% being discounted or complimentary.

If all of those license holders caught 2 bushels over the course of the year, total harvest would be about

8.4 Million Pounds

And what about the unknown number of people with no license at all???

The number of licensed recreational crabbers has been going up the last few years so potential recreational harvest could increase.



There is unlimited potential recreational harvest and without an accurate survey managers do not know how much of that potential is being harvested.

The ability to accurately estimate recreational harvest at a reasonable cost will be good for the resource and has potential benefits for the recreational crabber.

Complexity & Data

Why is having better recreational harvest data good for the resource?

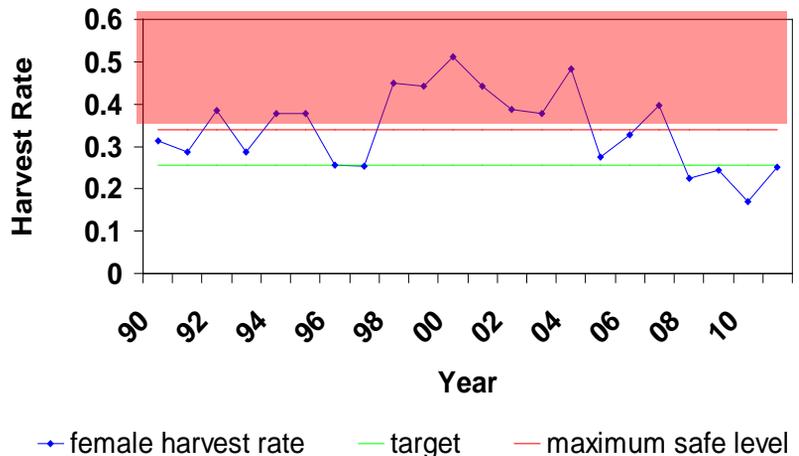
Maryland manages it's blue crab fishery so that harvest rates remain near a scientifically - established target level.

It is essential to understand harvest to make sure we are not exceeding safe fishing levels.

How could better harvest data benefit recreational crabbers?

In 2008, Maryland prohibited all recreational harvest of female crabs because of the inability to estimate harvest.

Annual harvest rates for Chesapeake female crabs



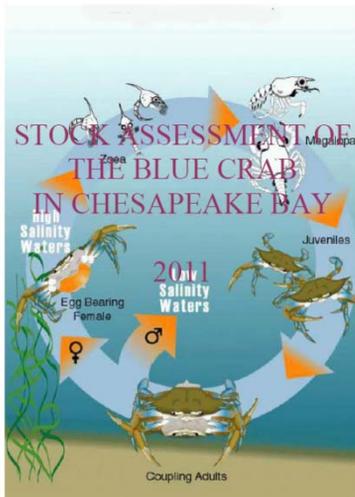
With the Bay-wide objective to protect female crabs, it is unlikely that Maryland would allow recreational harvest of females without a reliable means to estimate harvest.

Complexity & Data

Scientists who advise Maryland and Virginia on crab fishery management have advised that better recreational harvest estimates are necessary to ensure a healthy stock

Since 2007 the Chesapeake Bay Stock Assessment Committee (CBSAC) has pointed out the need for improved information on the recreational crab fishery

The need for a bay wide recreational survey was supported by an international panel of experts in 2011 during a review of the new benchmark blue crab stock assessment



Dr. Julian Addison – independent fisheries consultant; France:

"A baywide survey of recreational catches should be undertaken immediately and at regular intervals to quantify the overall landings from the recreational sector."

Dr. Billy Ernst – Dept of Oceanography; University of Concepcion, Chile:

"In recent years some areas in the Chesapeake Bay seem to be experiencing higher recreational fishing mortality than reported in this analysis. It is recommended that a new baywide recreational survey be undertaken."

What are DNR's goals in developing a solution?



First - Redesign license structure

Better identify recreational crabbers to provide a solid framework from which a cost effective survey can be done to provide reliable harvest estimates and improve management.



Second - Provide for unlicensed crabbing activity, but with reduced gear and catch limits to minimize impacts of unknown harvest.

DNR recognizes the cultural importance within Maryland of handlining or dipnetting for crabs with the family, without the hassle of buying a license. DNR wishes to maintain this cultural 'mainstay' but ensure that its impacts to a sustainable crab population are minimal.



Third - Simplify regulations to reduce confusion and improve compliance.

Develop gear regulations that are easier to understand and enforce.

Solution - Redesigning the License Structure for Better Data

Option: Eliminate the crabbing boat license

This license covers the boat and allows for one unlicensed person to keep 1 bushel and use licensed amounts of gear.

Because this license does not work like the fishing pleasure boat decal which covers everyone on the boat, there is an enormous amount of confusion on allowable gear and catch limits with this license.

There is no way for DNR to identify who is crabbing under this license, and therefore it is impossible to estimate harvest occurring in this license category.

Solution - Redesigning the License Structure for Better Data

Option: Discontinue the complimentary crabbing license that is issued with the pleasure boat decal and the discounted individual crabbing license.

Individual recreational crabbing license (\$5) can be purchased at a discounted rate (\$2) with a bay and coastal sport fishing license.

The free license creates confusion because it does not cover everyone on the boat like the fishing portion of the decal. This license only covers the individual who purchased the boat decal.

In 2011, discounted and complimentary licenses accounted for about 75% of the crabbing licenses issued.

Nearly 80,000 licenses were issued to people who may have no intention to go crabbing but got the license because it was included in their fishing license or added for just \$2.00. This dilutes the sampling pool for harvest phone surveys which increases cost and reduces reliability of harvest estimates.

Solution - Redesigning the License Structure for Better Data

Option: Require a special license to use waterfront crab pots

Waterfront property owners are permitted to use 2 crab pots off their private property or pier.



There are close to 40,000 residential waterfront properties but managers do not know how many of the potential 80,000 pots are being used or who is deploying them.

A license would allow DNR to efficiently survey waterfront property owners using pots resulting in a reliable harvest estimate.

Licensing waterfront crab pots would also be of substantial benefit to the conservation of Maryland Terrapin Turtles (state reptile) by improving education on the importance of the required turtle saver devices and other regulations.

Solution - Redesigning the License Structure for Better Data

Option: Raise non-resident license fees to \$35 and create a 7 day non-resident license for \$10

Over the years, DNR has had substantial comment from stakeholders that the current price of \$10.00 for an annual non-resident crabbing license is too low.

An annual license is good for the entire year, but many people use the license for a only brief time while vacationing in Maryland. This creates a problem for surveys, because we don't know when the activity is happening.

Raising the annual fee to \$35.00 and offering a 7-day license for \$10.00 would give managers better information on the level of participation and be similar to the current fishing license structure.

Solution - Simplify Catch Limits w/ option for unlicensed crabbers

What's the current limit?

License	Situations	Hard Crabs	Soft/Peeler
Individual	Unlicensed	2 dozen	1 dozen
	Unlicensed on a boat	4 dozen	1 dozen
	Licensed Individual	1 bushel	2 dozen
Licensed Boat	Unlicensed person(s)	1 bushel	2 dozen
	1 or more licensed (other than the boat owner) with or w/out additional unlicensed people	2 bushels	
Unlicensed Boat	Unlicensed person(s)	4 dozen	1 dozen
	1 license alone or w/ unlicensed crabbers	1 bushel	2 dozen
	2 or more licenses	2 bushels	2 dozen

Option: Make catch limits for unlicensed crabbers the same when on shore or on a boat

From shore or on a boat	Male Hard Crabs	Soft/Peeler
Unlicensed Individual	2 dozen	1 dozen
Licensed Individual	1 bushel	2 dozen

Solution - Simplify Gear w/ option for unlicensed crabbers

What are the Current regulations?

Unlicensed	Licensed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hand line • Dip net • 10 traps or rings • Seine • 2 crab pots - waterfront property owners ONLY 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1200ft of trotline and • 30 traps or rings (or combo) • 10 eel pots for bait • Hand line and dip net • Seine

Option: limit unlicensed crabbers to hand lines and dip nets only while limiting licensed crabbers to using one gear type at a time.

Unlicensed	Licensed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unlimited hand lines and Dip nets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1200ft of trotline OR • 30 traps or 30 rings • Hand line and dip net • Seine • 2 crab pots – waterfront property owners ONLY

Just how will these options affect me?



I'm an unlicensed crabber:

You would be limited to hand lines and dip nets, and would have a catch limit of 2 dozen male hard crab and 1 dozen soft/peeler limit on a boat. You would need to get a \$5 recreational crabbing license to continue using traps or net rings.



I'm a licensed crabber:

You will only be able to use one type of gear on a trip. The license fee will still be \$5. With a license, your catch limit will be one bushel of male hard crabs and 2 dozen soft or peeler crabs regardless of where you are, or what gear you are using.



I have a recreational crab boat license

You would need to get a \$5 individual license. Unlicensed crabbers that operate your boat would need to get a license or be limited to hand lines only and a 2 dozen male hard crab and 1 dozen soft/peeler catch limit.

Just how will these options affect me?



I use a discounted or complimentary license:

You would need to purchase a \$5 recreational crab license rather than the \$2.00 discounted license.



I'm a waterfront property owner:

You will need a \$5 waterfront property license to set the 2 allowable crab pots. You can still crab without a license but will be limited to handlines and dipnets only.



I'm an out of state recreational crabber:

The non-resident crabbing license would be \$35 for the entire year but there is an option to purchase a \$10.00 license that is good for 7 days.

Submitting Comments



If you have questions please ask the
DNR staff available.

We would like to get your feedback.

You can submit comments by:

Filling out a comment card

Emailing your comments to:

fisheriespubliccomment@dnr.state.md.us

Faxing you comments to [410-260-8310](tel:410-260-8310)