

2019 Blue Crab Advisory Report Released

Chesapeake Bay blue crab population increases by 60 percent



Annapolis, MD – The annual [Blue Crab Advisory Report](#), released today by the Chesapeake Bay Program and developed by the Chesapeake Bay Stock Assessment Committee, finds that the overall Chesapeake Bay blue crab population is not depleted and is not being overfished. The blue crab population in the Bay has increased nearly 60 percent from 372 million in 2018 to 594 million in 2019.

The report provides scientific analysis of the Chesapeake Bay's blue crab population that helps resource managers set blue crab fishing regulations. The Chesapeake Bay Program's Sustainable Fisheries Goal Implementation Team recently approved the 2019 report. It includes expert analysis of data from the annual Bay-wide [Winter Dredge Survey](#) (released earlier this year by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and Virginia Institute of Marine Science) and harvest estimates from recent years.

To ensure continued resiliency of the population, resource managers focus on maintaining a robust stock of female crabs. The population estimate of adult females increased to 191 million in 2019 from 147 million in 2018. This number is above 70 million, which is considered to be the minimum acceptable level for female blue crabs in the Bay, but lower than the target of 215 million. In the 2018 blue crab fishing season, 23 percent of all female crabs were harvested—safely below the target (25.5 percent) and threshold (34 percent) levels for the eleventh consecutive year.

The juvenile blue crab population—crabs that will grow to harvestable size this fall—was estimated to be 323 million, above the long-term average of 224 million. The number of crabs that die in-between fall and spring—the overwintering mortality—was lower this year at 1.8 percent, due to the warmer 2018-19 winter. This is a decrease from the 6.37 percent observed in the winter of 2017-18.

The 2019 Advisory Report recommends:

- Jurisdictions should maintain a risk-averse approach; no adjustments to management are warranted.
- Jurisdictions should implement ways to more accurately track commercial and recreational harvest.

The Blue Crab Advisory Report is developed by the [Chesapeake Bay Stock Assessment Committee](#), a group of experts from state and federal agencies and academic institutions. The blue crab fishery in the Chesapeake Bay is managed by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Virginia Marine Resources Commission and Potomac River Fisheries Commission.

Facts

The Blue Crab Advisory Report supports the [blue crab abundance](#) and [blue crab management](#) outcomes outlined in the [Chesapeake Bay Program Watershed Agreement](#). The blue crab abundance outcome is designed to maintain a sustainable blue crab population, while the blue crab management outcome promotes

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We Recommend:

- [Blog](#)
- [NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office Blue Crab Fish Facts](#)
- [Sustainable Fisheries Goal Implementation Team](#)
- ChesapeakeProgress: [Blue Crab Abundance](#)
- ChesapeakeProgress: [Blue Crab Management](#)

collaboration between the Chesapeake Bay Program and stakeholders in working toward a stable and productive blue crab fishery.

Issues

Blue crab populations can vary naturally from year to year, based on weather, water temperature and other environmental conditions, as well as on how many are caught. Commercial fishermen rely on having a steady supply of crabs in the Bay, and recreational crabbers enjoy being able to catch crabs. Using science such as that included in the Blue Crab Advisory Report enables resource managers to make informed decisions that promote coordination across the jurisdictions and a healthy supply of crabs for everyone.

Importance

[Blue crabs](#) are an important part of the Chesapeake Bay's ecology and economy. They serve as food sources for the Bay's planktonic community, fish and birds. They support a large recreational and high-value commercial fishery. The commercial blue crab harvest increased about nine percent during the 2018 crabbing season, as commercial fishermen harvested approximately 55 million pounds of blue crabs from the Bay and its tributaries. Recreational crabbers harvested roughly 3.4 million pounds in 2018, similar to the previous year.

Quotes

"By using sound science included in this annual report to manage the fishery, the Bay jurisdictions have enabled responsible harvest of female blue crabs for the past ten consecutive years. Consumers can enjoy their Chesapeake Bay crab feasts knowing blue crabs are responsibly managed."

- Sean Corson, Acting Director, NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office; Chair, Sustainable Fisheries Goal Implementation Team

"While the environment plays a huge role in determining the number of juvenile blue crabs that enter the population, it appears that management measures aimed at maintaining a robust spawning stock, consistent with CBSAC guidance, have been effective."

- Glenn Davis, Maryland Department of Natural Resources; Chair, Chesapeake Bay Stock Assessment Committee

"We are pleased that the female-specific management framework has continued to be successful at protecting the blue crab spawning stock. Thanks to the committee for their efforts to evaluate the data, which ensure recommendations to management are grounded in sound science."

- Jeannie Haddaway-Riccio, Secretary, Maryland Department of Natural Resources

"The record precipitation observed over the past year appears to have had minimal impact on blue crab abundance. The combination of higher numbers of adult females spawning, very high abundance of juveniles that will enter the fishery later this year, and knowing that overfishing is not occurring, will allow us to consider a modest increase in November daily harvest limits."

- Patrick Geer, Deputy Chief, Fisheries Management Division, Virginia Marine Resources Commission

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“Given the natural variability of the population and the challenges of working across jurisdictions, we are heartened to see improvements to this year's blue crab stock metrics and the continued stability in the long-term management of the resource.”

- Marty Gary, Executive Director, Potomac River Fisheries Commission