



MEDIA RELEASE

VIRGINIA MARINE RESOURCES COMMISSION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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2026 Winter Dredge Survey Shows Improved Blue Crab Abundance in Chesapeake Bay

HAMPTON, VA – Results of the 2026 Bay-wide Blue Crab Winter Dredge Survey show a 46% increase in the abundance of blue crabs in Chesapeake Bay, for a total population of 349 million crabs. This increase comes despite another cold winter, which increased the overwintering mortality of crabs throughout the bay and caused cold-stun events in several finfish species throughout Virginia. Overall, the results suggest improved conditions for the 2026 fishery.

The Winter Dredge Survey found the total estimated population of blue crabs in Chesapeake Bay increased from 238 million crabs in the winter of 2024-2025 to 349 million crabs in the winter of 2025-2026. This was driven mainly by an increase of 120% in juvenile blue crabs, up to 228 million juveniles. Adult male crab abundance also increased, from 26 million to 37 million crabs. The adult female population, however, declined to 81 million. Similar conditions were observed following the severe winter conditions experienced in 2014. While overwintering mortality was also elevated during that period, the blue crab population demonstrated resilience and rebounded in subsequent years without long-term impacts to the stock.

Over the last 15 years, blue crab fishery managers in Virginia, Maryland, and the Potomac River Fisheries Commission have used the annual Winter Dredge Survey estimates to help inform management for the coming fishing season. Additional information on the blue crab population is also anticipated through the completion of a bay-wide benchmark stock assessment. Managers will review that information alongside other ongoing monitoring efforts as it becomes available.

The Chesapeake Bay Stock Assessment Committee (CBSAC), an advisory group under the Chesapeake Bay Program, met on May 13 to discuss the results from the 2025-26 Winter Dredge Survey and the upcoming release of the benchmark stock assessment. Their analysis of the Winter Dredge Survey will be published in the full CBSAC Annual Report this June. The results of the Winter Dredge Survey will also be presented to the Crab Management Advisory Committee in a public meeting on May 27, 2026, at 4 PM.

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