

Shad Fishing Fun



Tom Parham – Free State Fly Fishers

March 29^h, 2025

Outline

- A bit about shad
- Where to find them
- When to go
- Effective gear
- How to catch them
- Great resources
- Protecting our waters
- Final thoughts

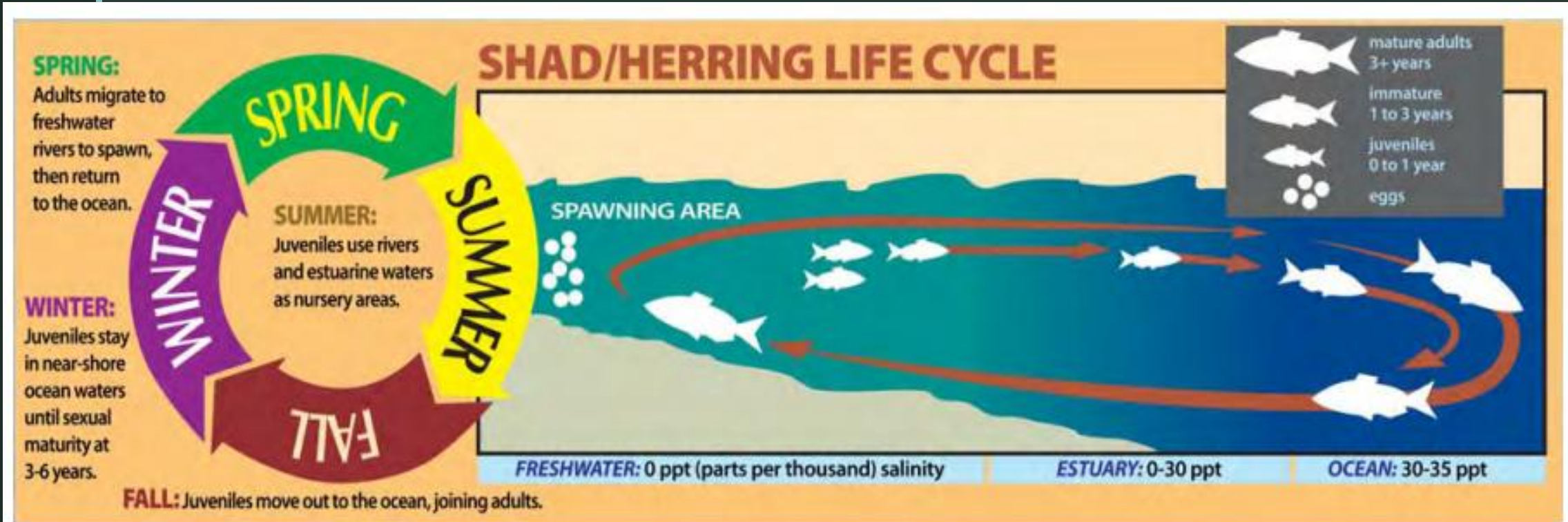


A bit about shad



- Life Cycle
- Stock Status
- Restoration
- Regulations
- Identification

Life Cycle



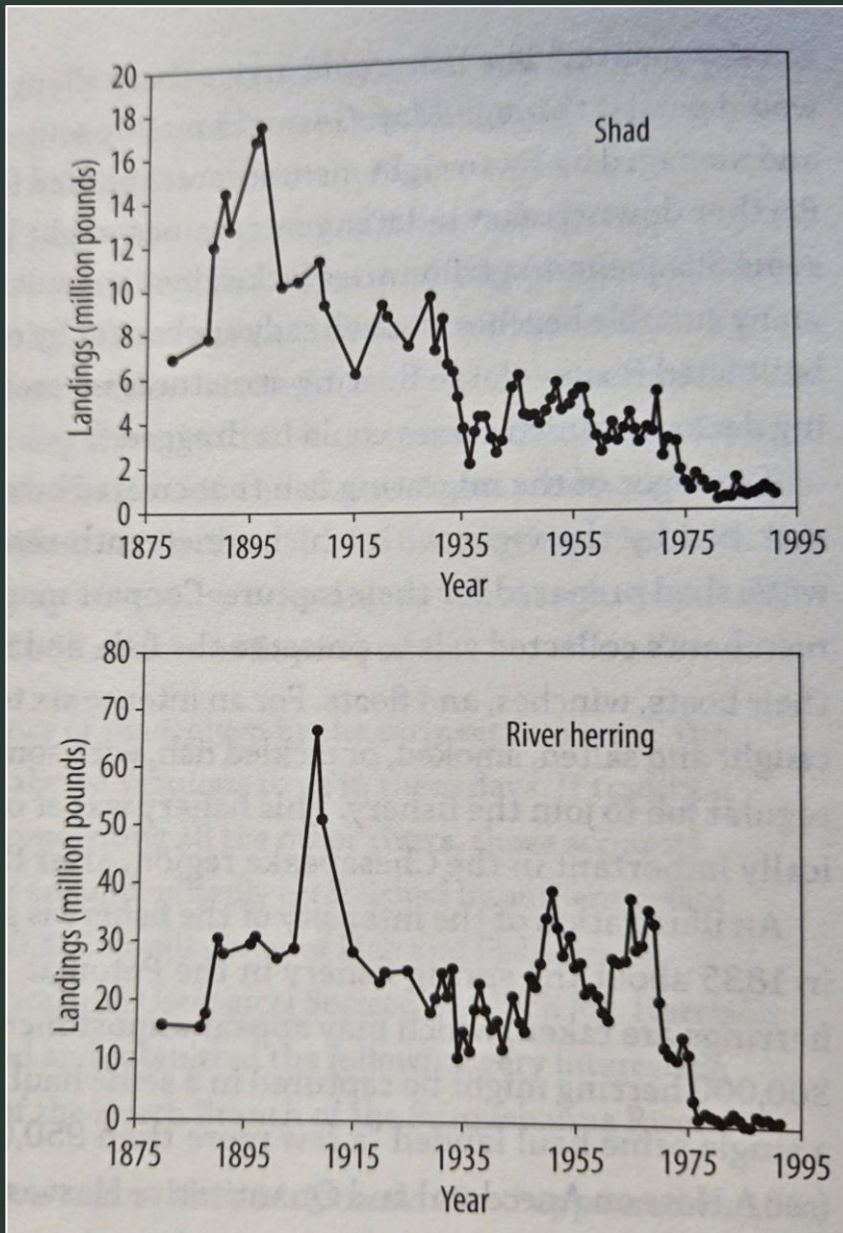
Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission

Stock status

- Peak Landings in 1890's
- Fishery closed in 1980-81

Cause of Population Declines

- Dams, altered habitat, flow, water quality, changing landuse, predation and offshore bycatch
- **Worldwide – Migratory fish populations have declined 80% since 1970's (35% in US)**



Shifting Baselines

Where it all Began



- 1980s - Started with striped bass moratorium
- 1993 - Pilot American shad project
- 1995 - Successful full-scale project
 - Non-funded
 - 470,000 AMS stocked
- 1996 - Hickory shad incorporated
- 1999 – Sport Fish Restoration Funds
 - Federal grant source



Shad Restoration

Stocking Summary



American Shad

- **Patuxent River** – 10 million
 - 1994-2009
- **Choptank River** - 49 million
 - 1996-present
- **Patapsco River** – 4.5 million
 - 2012-present
- **Nanticoke River** – 1 million
 - 1995, 1997, 2001-2006
- **Marshyhope Creek**-1.5 million
 - 2002-2009

Hickory Shad

- **Patuxent River** – 9 million
 - 1996-2007
- **Choptank River** – 56 million
 - 1996-2014
- **Patapsco River** – 12 million
 - 1997-2000, 2004, 2013-present
- **Nanticoke River** – 5 million
 - 2001-2006
- **Marshyhope Creek** – 7 million
 - 2001-2009

Regulations

- Fishing fees increases in MD and VA
- Can't keep American, blueback, alewife in MD, DC and VA waters. While there is protection in MD and DC waters, there is no protection for hickory shad in VA

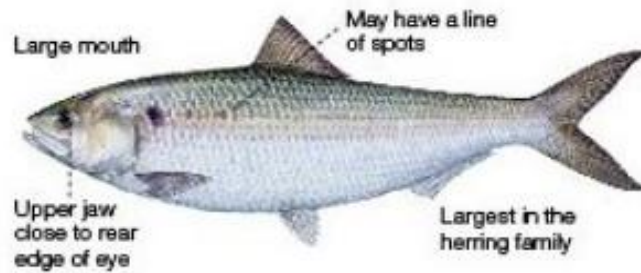


What's out there

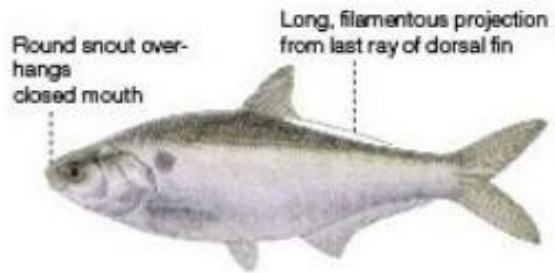
ALEWIFE (A RIVER HERRING)



AMERICAN SHAD



GIZZARD SHAD



BLUEBACK HERRING (A RIVER HERRING) HICKORY SHAD



American Shad
Terminal Mouth



Hickory Shad
Superior Mouth



American and Hickory Shad Differences

A photograph showing two fish being held side-by-side for comparison. The top fish is an Alewife, characterized by its large eye and olive-colored back with horizontal stripes. The bottom fish is a Blueback Herring, which has a smaller eye and a more pronounced blue-grey back with horizontal stripes. The fish are held in a person's hands against a dark background.

Alewife

**Blueback
Herring**

Photo by Alan Weaver/DWR

Herring Differences

Alewife

- Somewhat olive colored (back/upper body).
- Larger eye than blueback herring with eye diameter being greater than the distance from the front of eye to the top of snout.

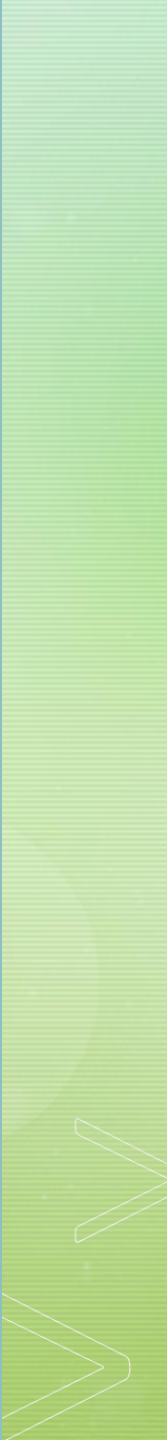
Blueback Herring

- The diameter of the eye is smaller than the distance from the front of the eye to the top of the snout.



Virginia -VWR



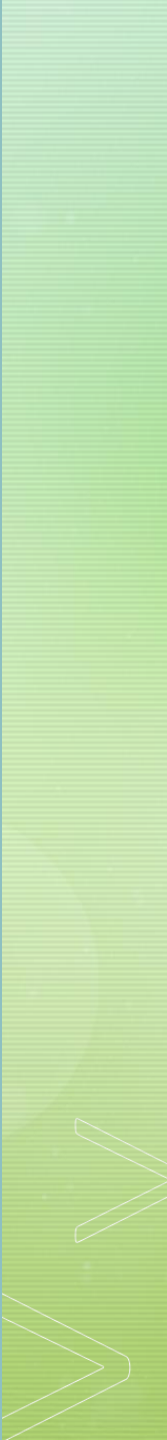




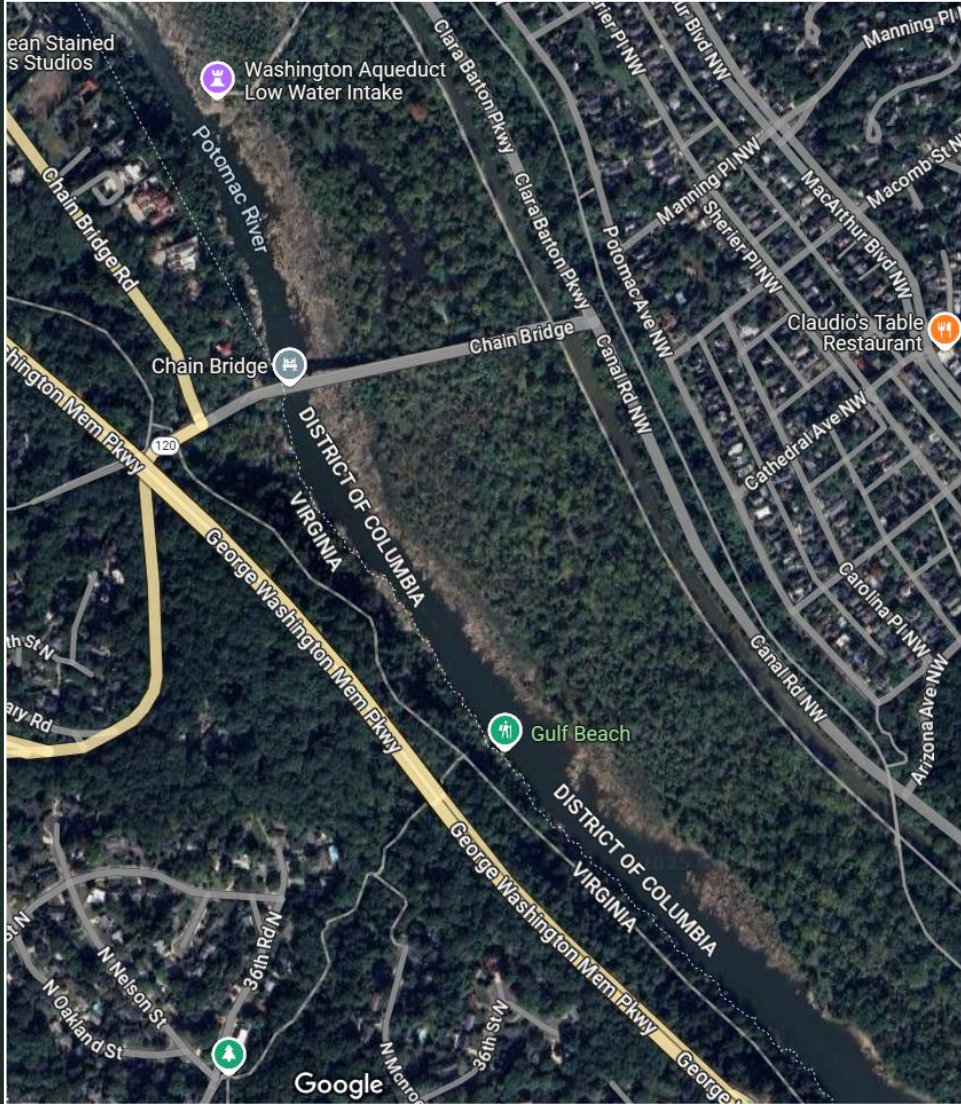




Where to find them

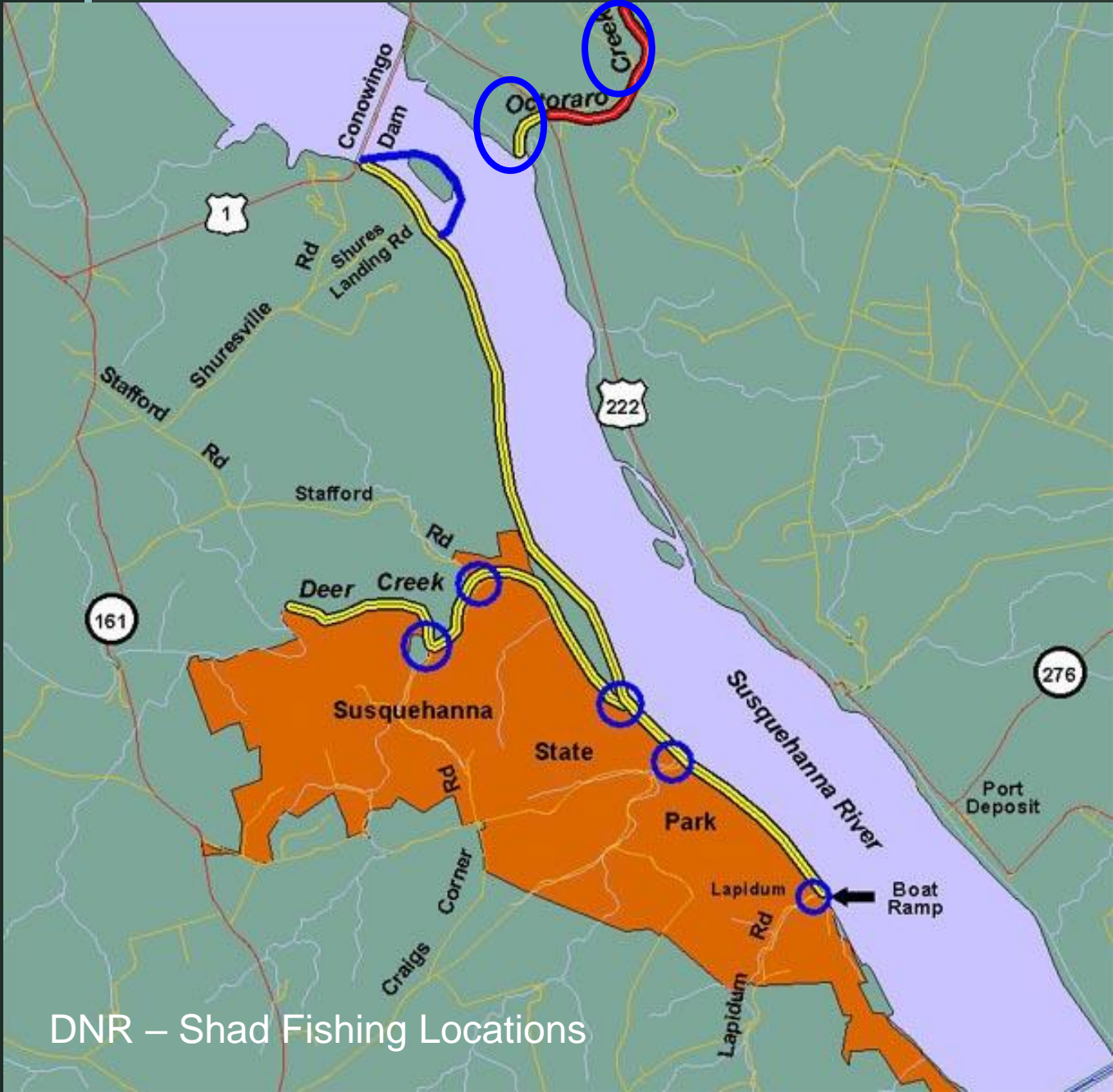


Fletcher's Boathouse – Potomac River



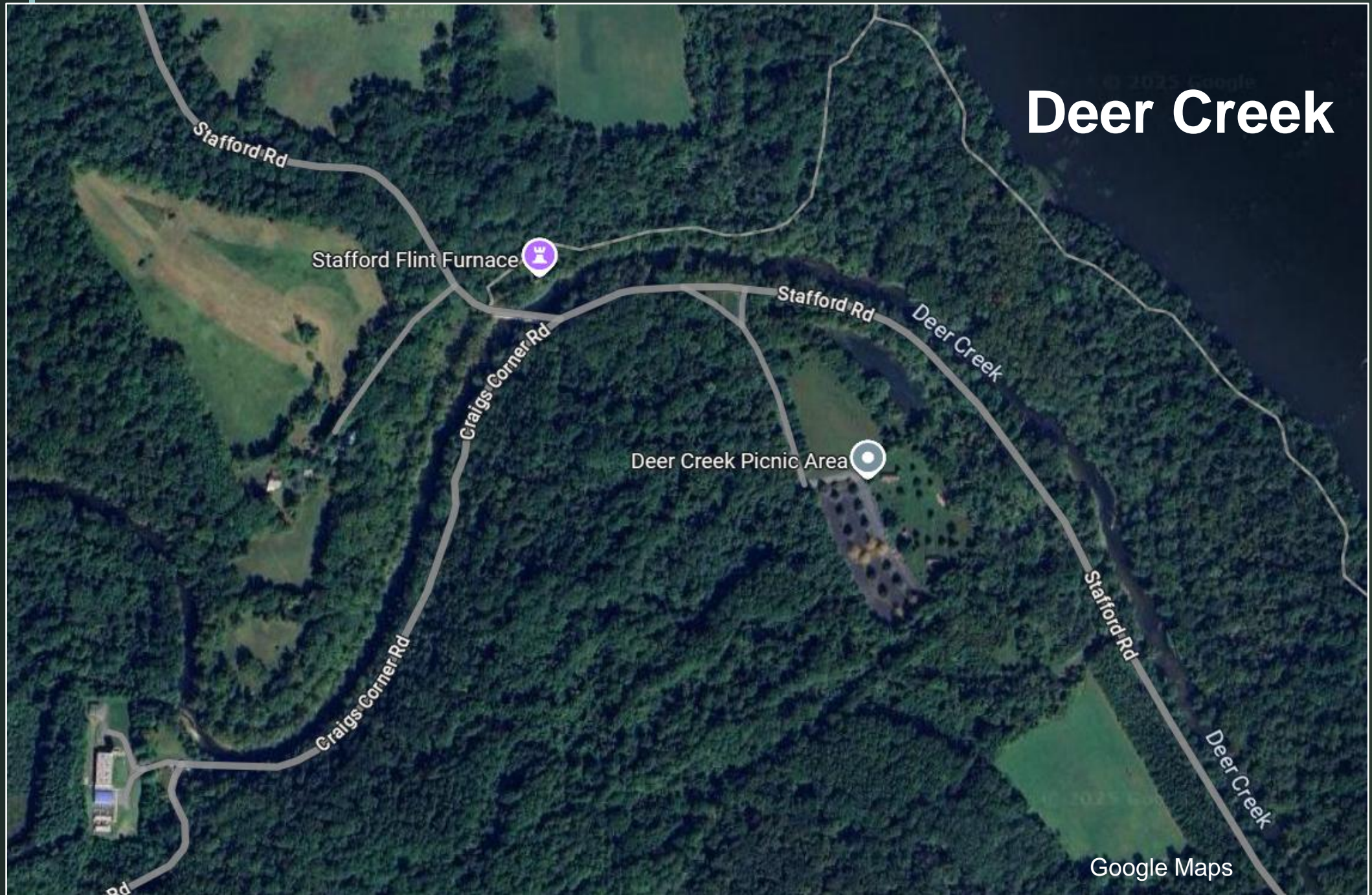


Susquehanna River Deer Creek Octoraro Creek



DNR – Shad Fishing Locations

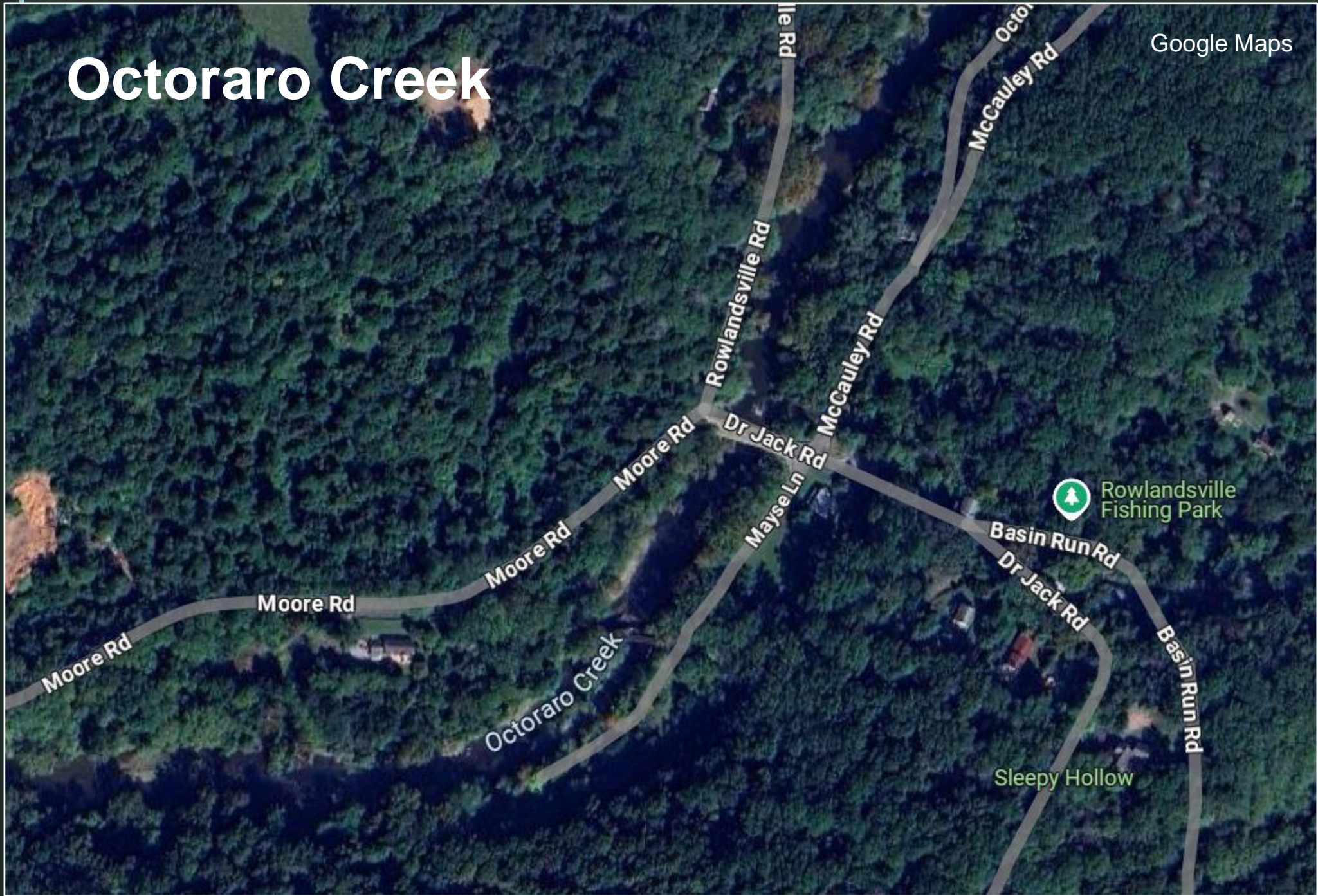
Deer Creek



Google Maps

Octoraro Creek

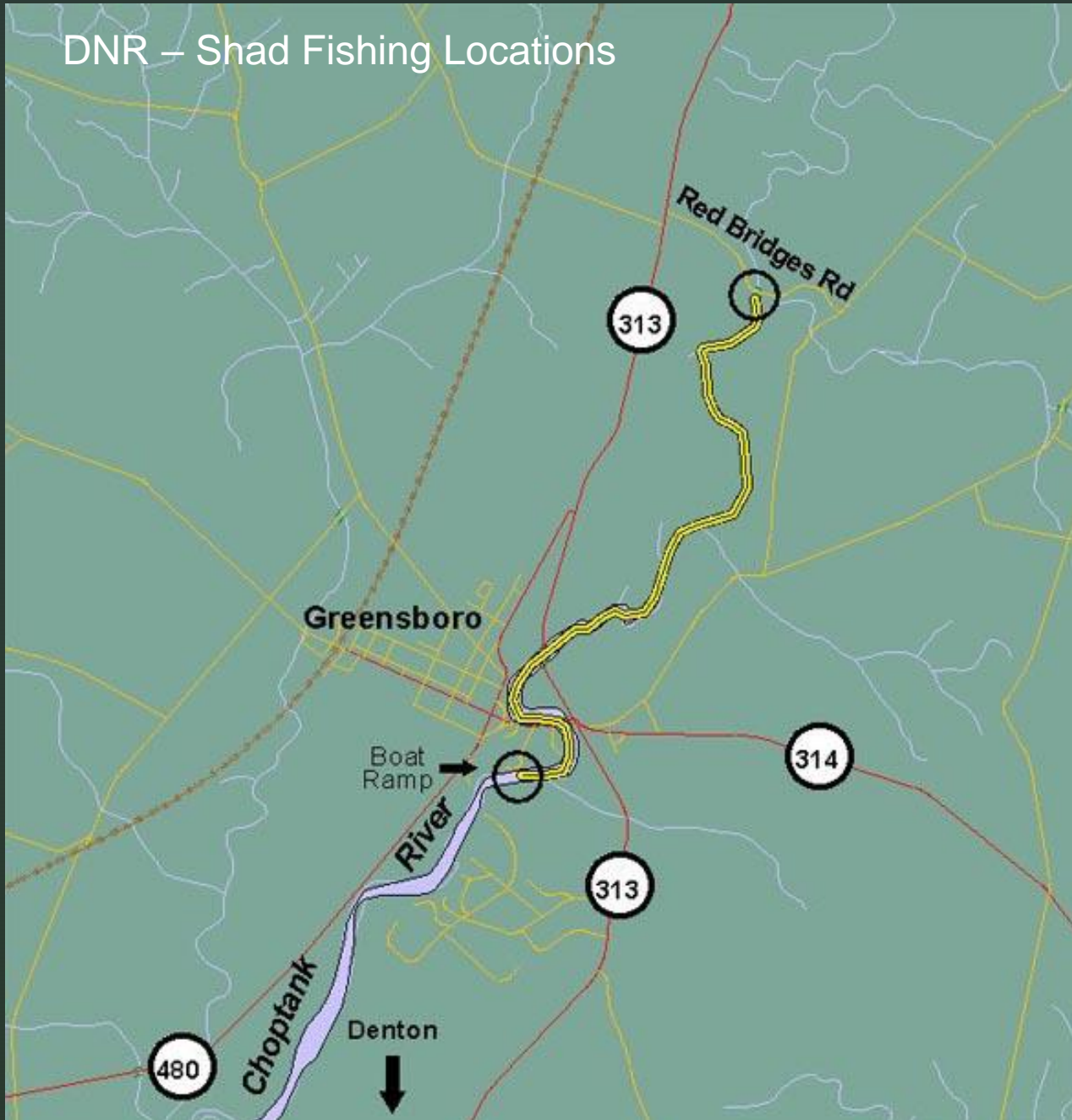
Google Maps



Rowlandsville Fishing Park

Sleepy Hollow

DNR – Shad Fishing Locations



Choptank River

DNR – Shad Fishing Locations



Gunpowder River

Gunpowder River

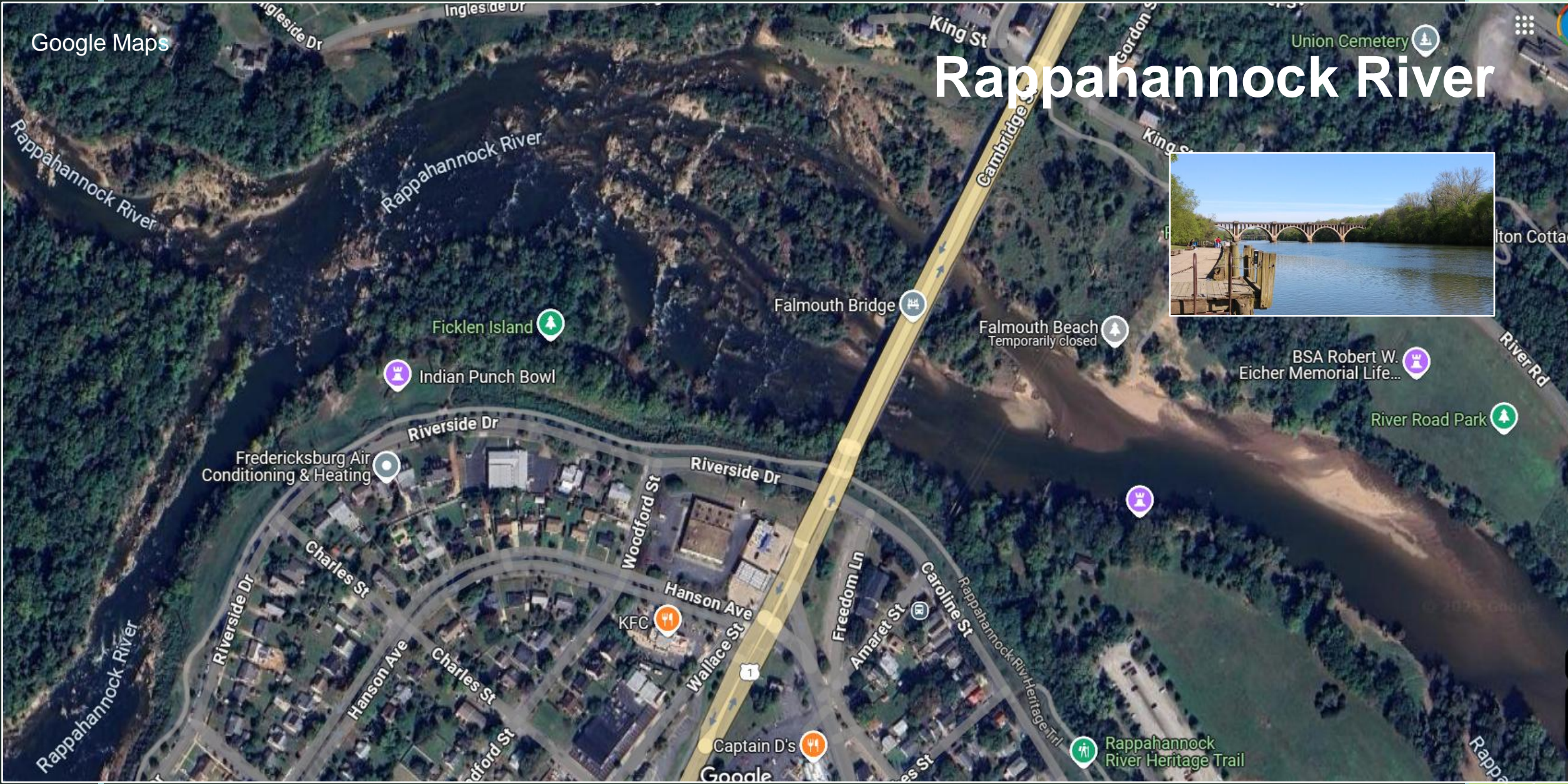
Search this area



Google Maps

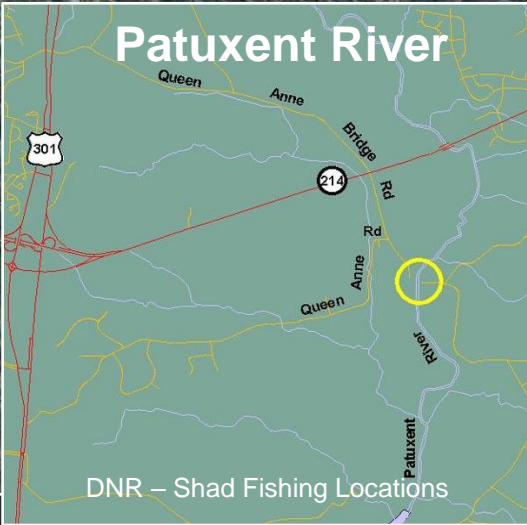
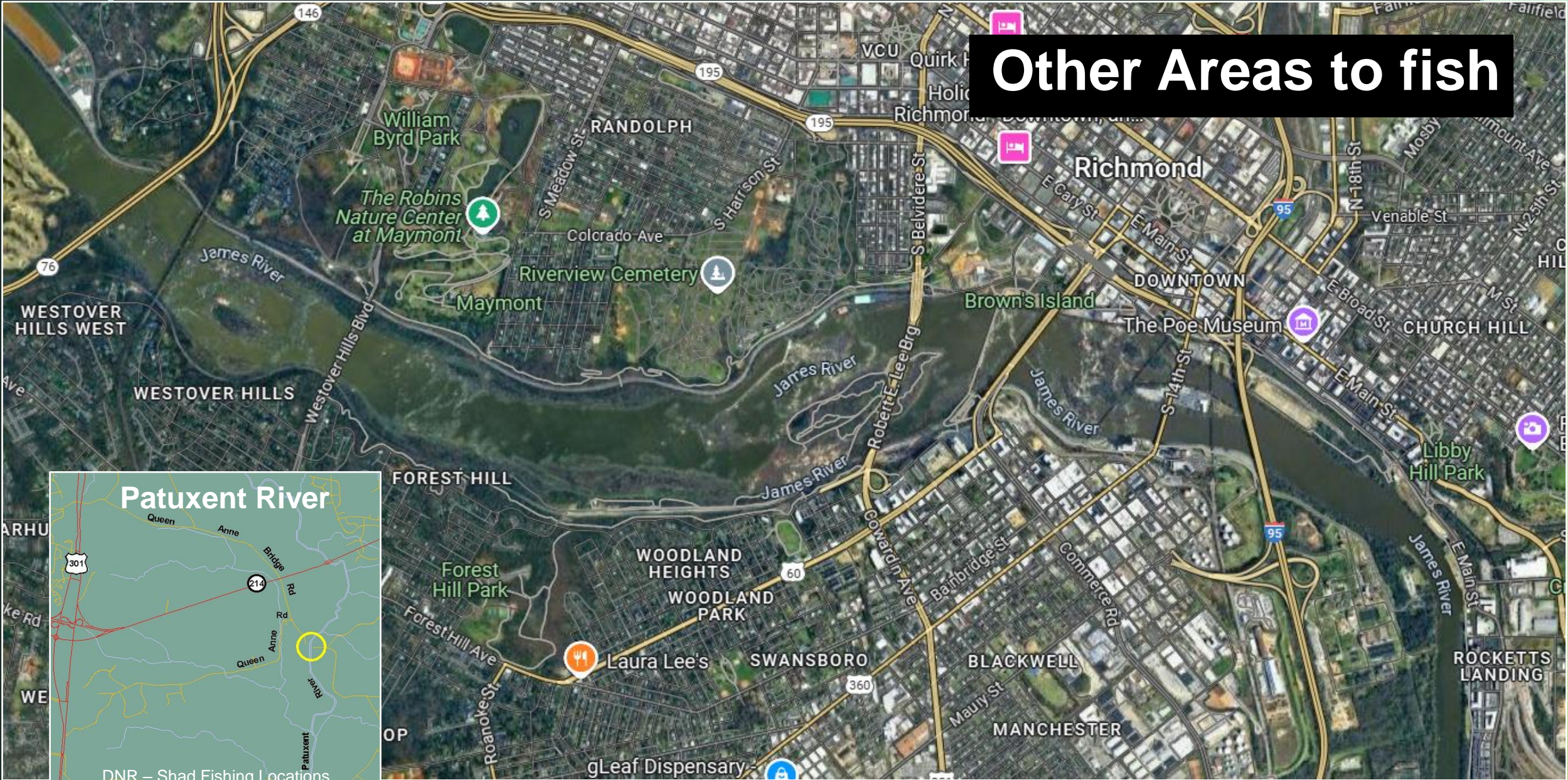
Google Maps

Rappahannock River



Google

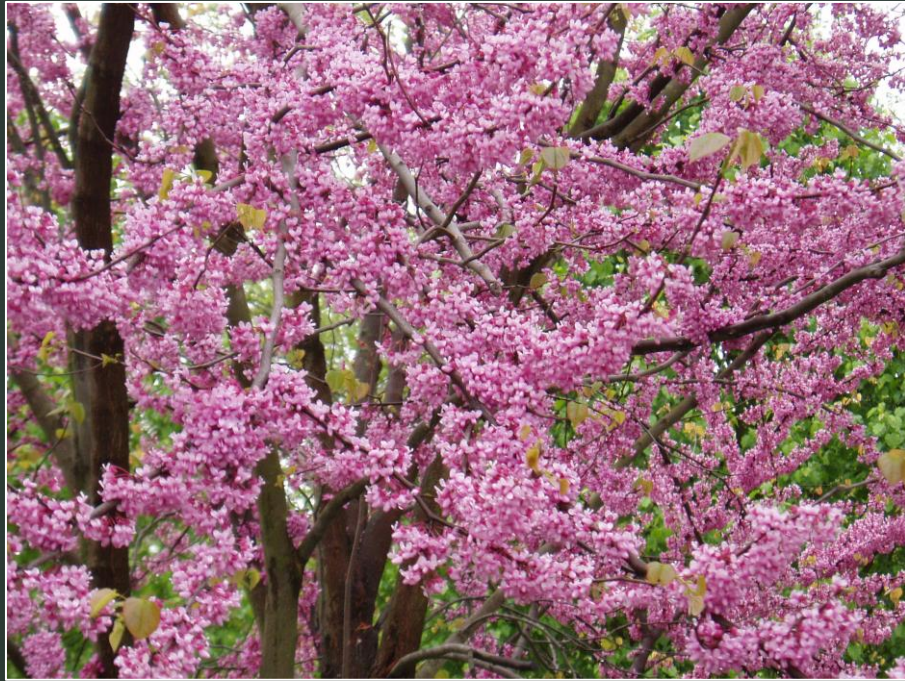
Other Areas to fish



When to go



- Late March to mid May
- Water Temperatures between 50°F to 70°F, best 60°F-64°F
- Good water clarity (<20 FNU)
- Normal flows



When to go

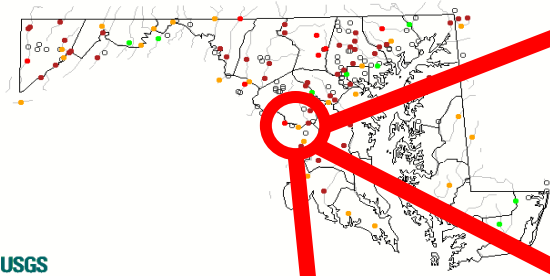
- **Hickory Shad** – Redbuds and Cherry Trees blooming
- **American Shad** - Dogwoods and Shadbush blooming



Map of real-time streamflow compared to historical streamflow for the day of the year (Maryland)

Maryland or Water-Resources Regions

Sunday, March 23, 2025 16:30ET

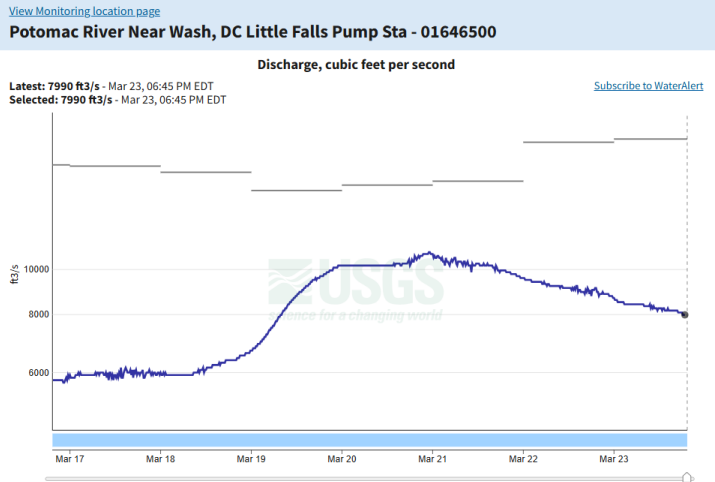


Search USGS streams

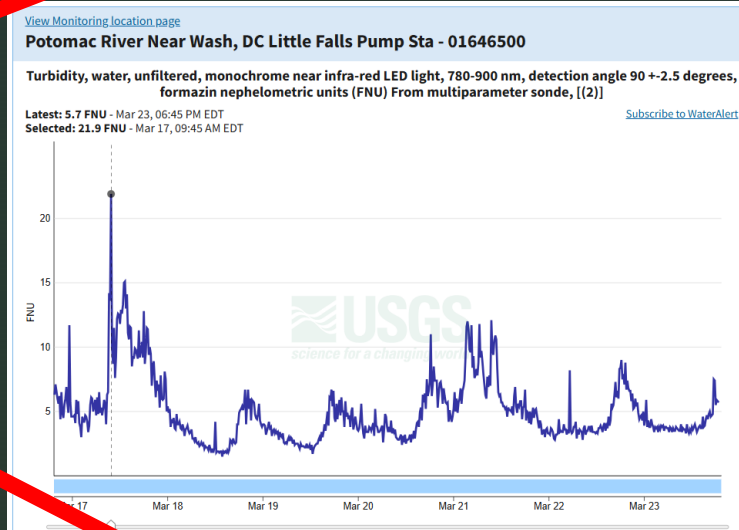
Choose a data retrieval option and select a location on the map
 List of all stations Single station Nearest stations Peak flow

Explanation - Percentile classes							
Low	<10	10-24	25-75	76-90	>90	High	Not-ranked
	Much below normal	Below normal	Normal	Above normal	Much above normal		

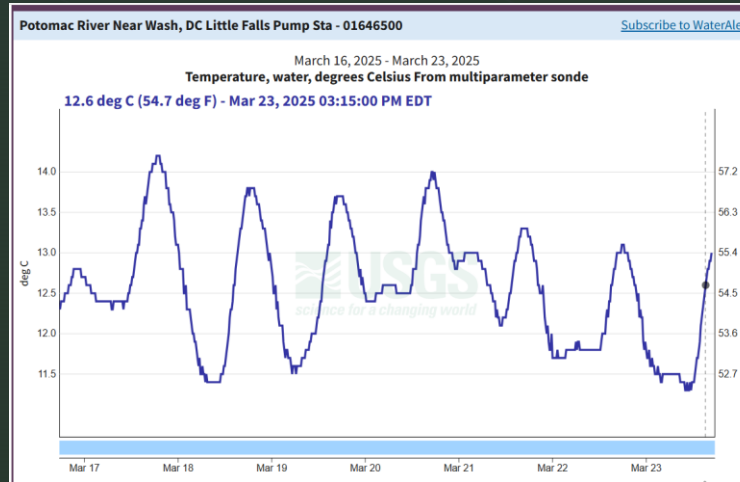
Flow Rate



Water Clarity



Water Temperature



Checking conditions

USGS
WaterWatch

[USGS WaterWatch](#)
-- [Streamflow conditions](#)

Real-time conditions on your favorite streams and rivers.

Other things going on...



- Waterfowl, Migratory warblers and lots more

Other things going on...



What gear to use



Spinning gear

- Light to Medium-Light Rods
- 1000 to 2500 Series Reels
- 6lb Braided line
- 6-10lb Fluorocarbon leaders



Effective Lures

- 1/16 –1/32oz Shad Darts
- 1/16-1/32 oz Jigs
- Small Silver/Gold Spoons
- Rigging – Single or double

What gear to use



Fly gear - Streams

- 4-6wt Fly Rods
- Sink-tip fly lines
- 4' of 10lb fluorocarbon leader

Fly gear – Larger Rivers

- 7-8wt Fly Rods
- 250 – 350 grain sinking lines
- 2'-3' of 10lb fluorocarbon leader (add 1' for 2nd fly)



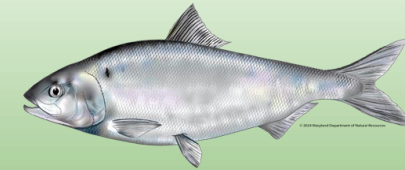
Effective Flies

- Red/Yellow Shad Fly
- Crystal Buggers
- Barbless hooks
- Size #2-#6

Choosing Color

Clearer Waters

- Start with lighter colors – white, light blue, light pink, silver



Stained Waters

- Start with brighter, dark or fluorescent colors – chartreuse, orange, yellow, black, purple, gold



How to Catch them – Reading the water

- How do I identify productive areas?
- Where are the seams or edges?
- Where do I stand?

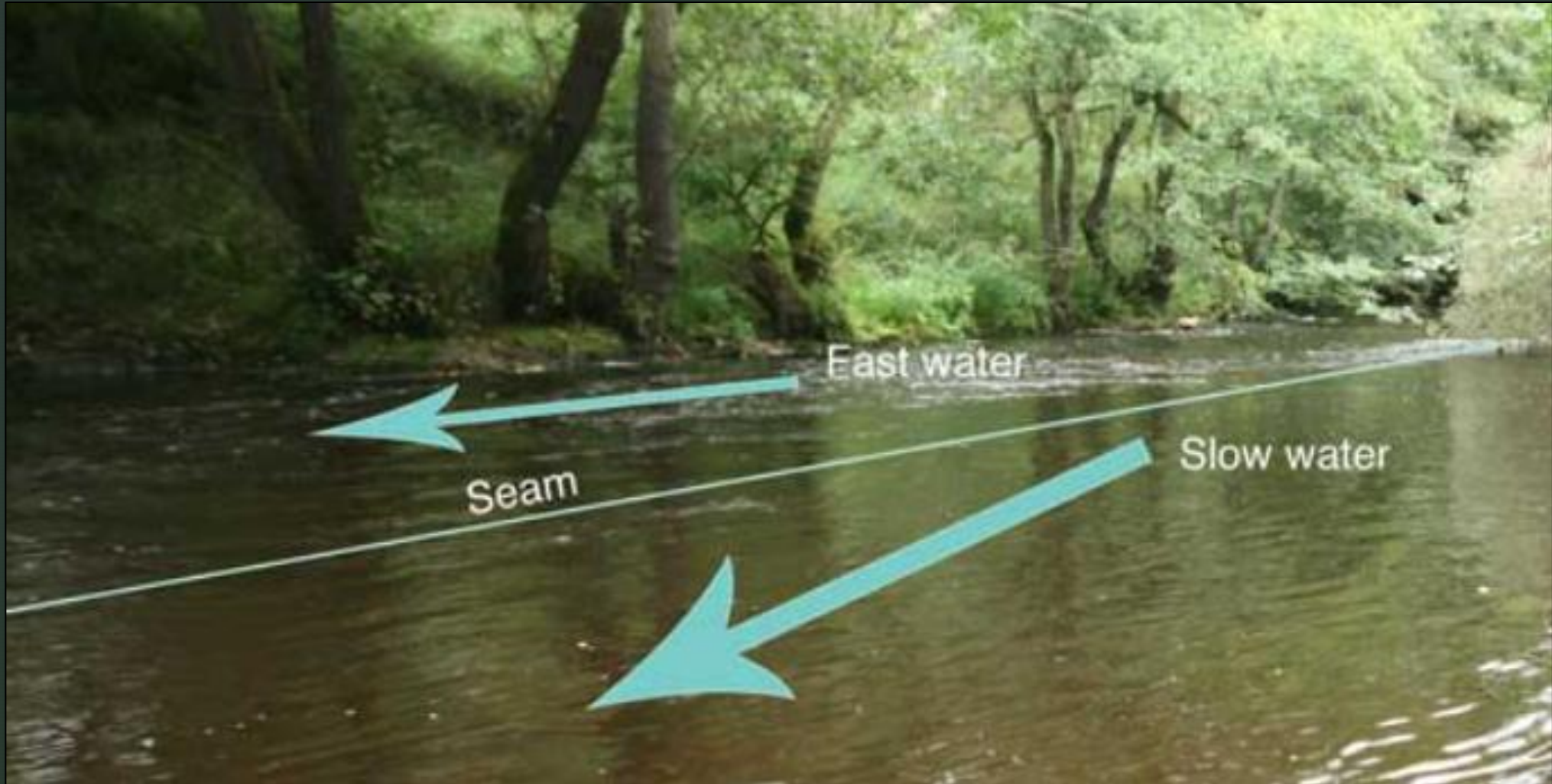


Identifying productive waters



- Rocky or gravel bottomed streams or rivers
- American shad mostly move along the bottom while hickory shad can be anywhere in the water column
- Look for the prime travel lanes through an area
 - Find the edges of seams (line between fast and slow water)
 - Find constriction points
 - Connect the dots
- Eddies off edges of seams can be very good

Edges and Seams



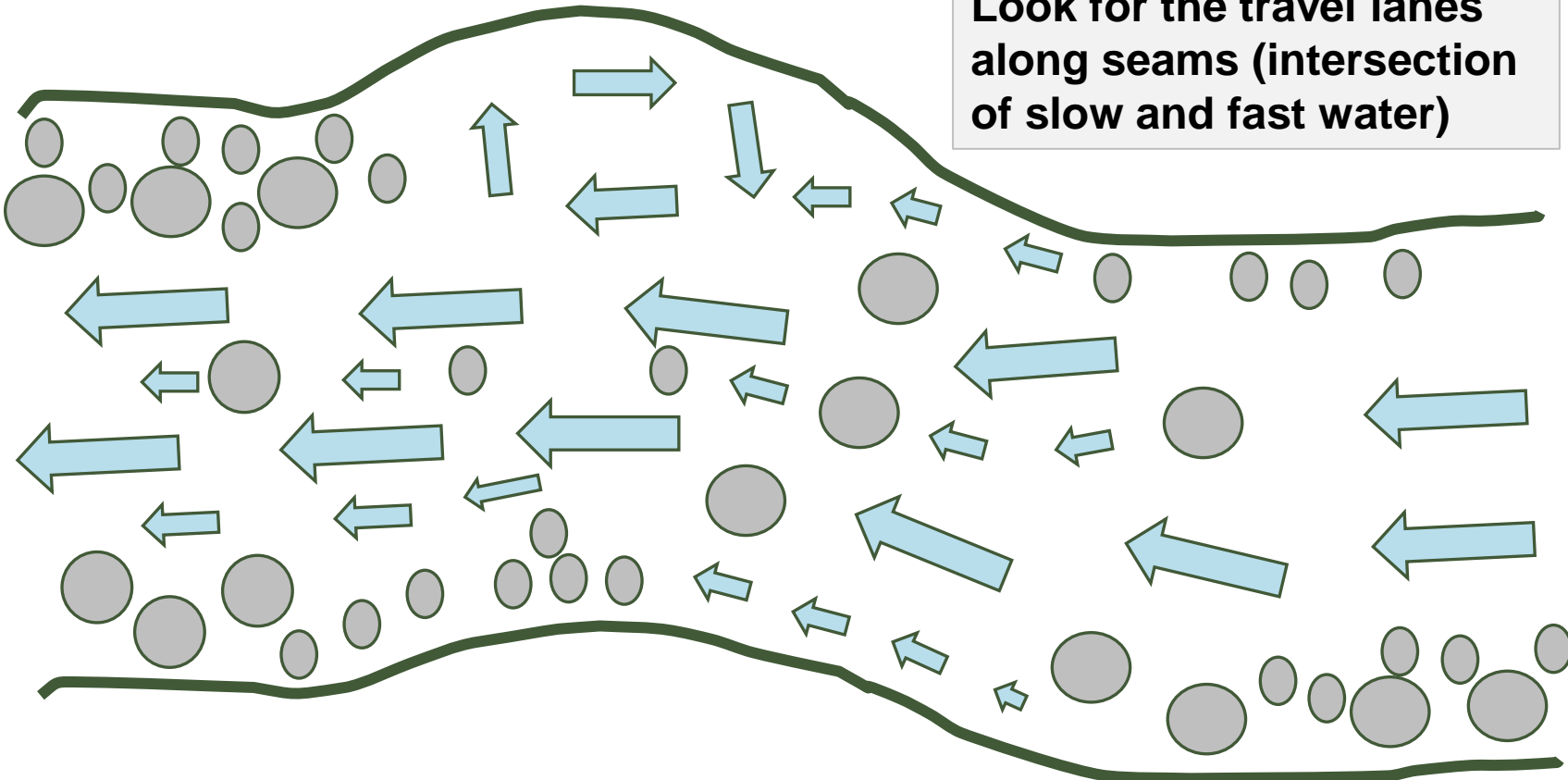
Where do you stand and cast? Shallow water tactics

- Key factors are direction of fly and position
- Shad can be temporarily bunched up at one spot or moving along travel lane
- Stand so your fly will swing across their path
- Start with short casts across travel lane – Keep rod pointing across travel lane, but don't follow line.
- Make progressively longer casts to swing the fly across travel lane further down seam
- Repeat until you find the fish.
- Cover larger eddies thoroughly

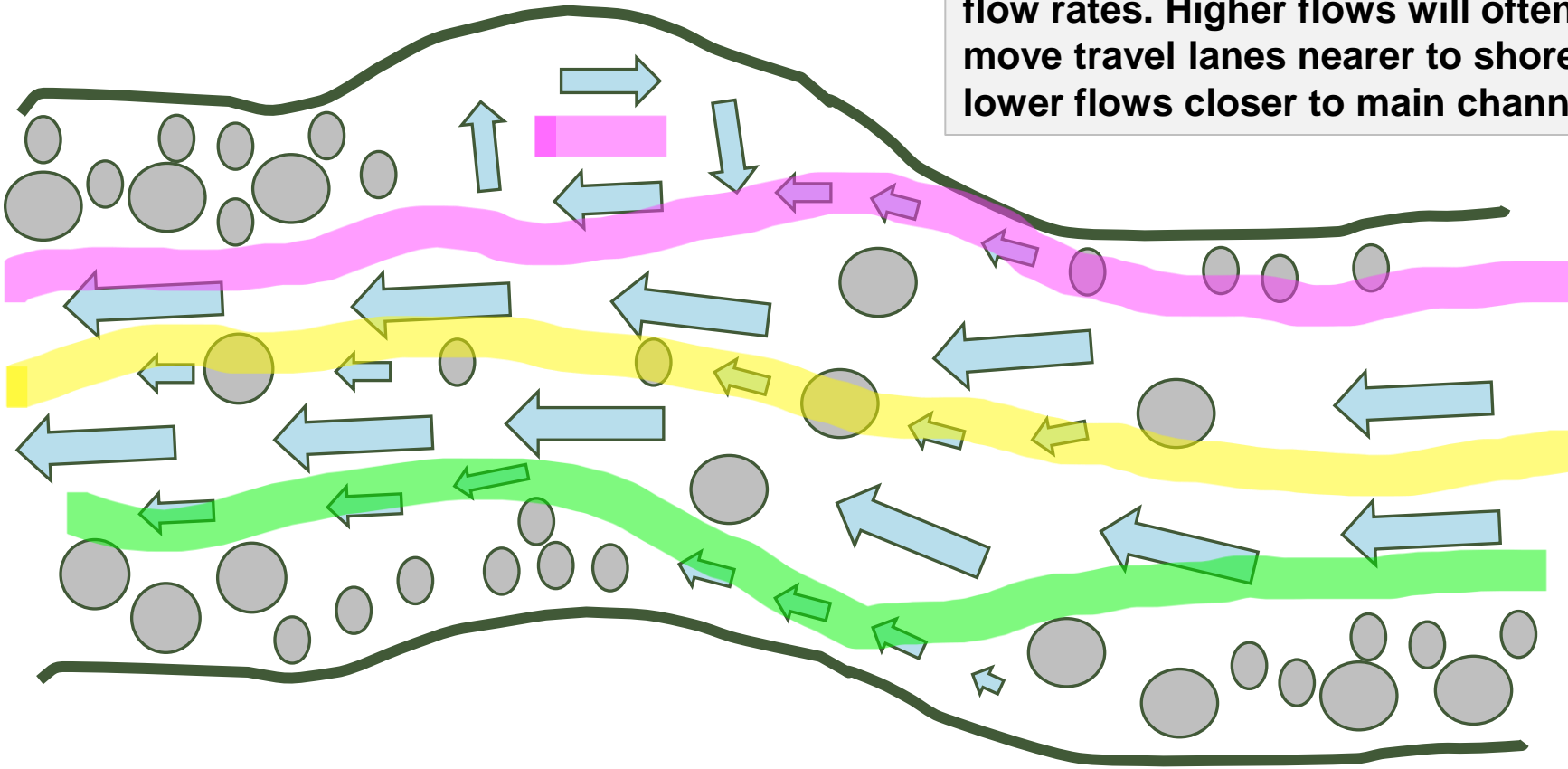
Where do you anchor and cast? Deeper water tactics

- Key factors are depth, direction of fly and position
- Position your boat to have your fly swing across their path
- Start with short casts across travel lane – Keep rod pointing across travel lane, but don't follow line.
- Once fly is directly down current, let it flutter in current
- Make progressively longer casts to swing the fly across travel lane further down seam
- Repeat until you find the fish.
- Cover larger eddies thoroughly

**Look for the travel lanes
along seams (intersection
of slow and fast water)**



Travel lanes will vary based on flow rates. Higher flows will often move travel lanes nearer to shore, lower flows closer to main channel.



Find the Seam



Find the Seam





Find the Seam





**Find the
Seam**





**Find the
seam**



Find the Seam



Great Shad Resources



- **The Founding Fish (Book)** - John McPhee
- **Fly Fishing for Shad (eBook)**– Joe Bruce
- **Shad night** – You Tube – NCC-TU
- **Potomac River Shad reports** – NCC-TU
- **Maryland DNR Fishing Report**
- **Maryland DNR Shad Fishing Locations** - <https://dnr.maryland.gov/fisheries/pages/shad-locations.aspx>
- **Virginia Shad-cam** - <https://dwr.virginia.gov/shad-cam/>

Protecting our Waterways

- **Chesapeake Bay Hotline**
1-877-224-7229
- Boaters are encouraged to patronize certified **Clean Marinas** and to adopt **clean boating habits**
- **Pick up trash**

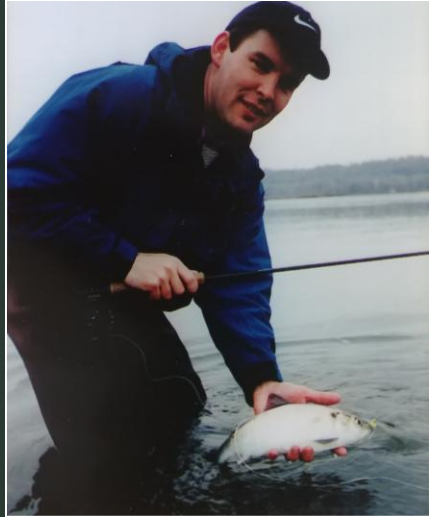


Final Thoughts

“The more people we can get out there to fish, the better this world will be, if they’re not there, they won’t care.”

- Lefty Kreh (1925-2018)





Thanks for your time!

Questions?