

STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE

Notice of Agency Rulemaking Proposal

AGENCY: Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Advertise: March 18, 2026

CHAPTER NUMBER AND RULE TITLE: Chapter 2 – Rules Pertaining to Commercial Fishing, Fish Culture and Fishing Derbies and Tournaments

TYPE OF RULE: Routine Technical

PROPOSAL FILING NUMBER:

BRIEF SUMMARY: The Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (IFW) is proposing to amend Chapter 2 rules as they apply to fishing derbies and tournaments to improve IFW’s ability to ensure bass tournaments conduct aquatic invasive species and livewell inspections on all watercraft as intended, allowing additional opportunity for trained aquatic invasive species inspectors not associated with a bass club to conduct inspections if available and mutually agreed upon, and ensure that data is submitted legibly, and in a complete manner. Please contact the agency contact person for a complete copy of the rule proposal.

PUBLIC HEARING: April 7, 2026 @ 4:00pm – IFW, 353 Water St, Room 400, Augusta. An online option via Microsoft Teams will also be available. Please contact the agency contact person for log in information.

COMMENT DEADLINE: April 17, 2026

CONTACT PERSON FOR THIS FILING:

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CONTACT PERSON FOR SMALL BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT: Click or tap here to enter text.

FINANCIAL IMPACT ON MUNICIPALITIES OR COUNTIES: None anticipated

STATUTORY AUTHORITY FOR THIS RULE: 12 MRS Section 10104, 12504, 12505

SUBSTANTIVE STATE OR FEDERAL LAW BEING IMPLEMENTED: Click or tap here to enter text.

AGENCY WEBSITE: www.maine.gov/ifw

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Choose one of the following:

The summary provided above is for publication in both the newspaper and website notices.

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Rulemaking Fact Sheet

(see 5 M.R.S. § 8057-A(1))

Agency: Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Name, Address, Telephone Number, and Email Address of Agency Contact Person:

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Comment Deadline(s): April 17, 2026

Principal Reason(s) or Purpose for Proposing this Rule [see 5 M.R.S. § 8057-A(1)(A)]: The Fisheries & Hatcheries Division, in discussion with the Department of Environmental Protection’s (DEP) Aquatic Invasive Species Program and MDIFW’s Warden Service, identified areas of concern in which rule regarding bass tournament aquatic invasive species and livewell inspections were resulting in issues of clarity in inspection requirements, poor inspection data quality, and inconsistent practices in identifying watercraft associated with the tournament and location of necessary displayed documents during the tournament. The Fisheries & Hatcheries Division additionally identified a need to collect data from bass tournaments & fishing derbies on fish submitted for the purpose of a derby or tournament to better inform the Division’s management of fisheries resources. The proposed changes are intended to clarify and elucidate rules pertaining to these matters.

Is Material Incorporated by Reference into the Rule [see 5 M.R.S. § 8056(2-A)]? No

Analysis and Expected Operation of the Rule [see 5 M.R.S. § 8057-A(1)(B) & (D)]:

The proposed change will meaningfully improve IFW’s ability to ensure bass tournaments conduct aquatic invasive species and livewell inspections on all watercraft as intended, allowing additional opportunity for trained aquatic invasive species inspectors not associated with a bass club to conduct inspections if available and mutually agreed upon, and ensure that data is submitted legibly, and in a complete manner. The proposed change will improve the ability of IFW’s Warden Service to enforce bass tournament rules and permit conditions by requiring consistency in identification of watercraft, inspection of watercraft and identified sites in which inspections will occur, and identification of the location of all relevant documentation for the tournament. The proposed rule change will also impact IFW’s collection of fisheries resource information via submission from both bass tournaments and fishing derbies upon request from IFW, which will improve IFW’s ability to manage and protect valuable fisheries resources.

Brief Summary of Relevant Information Considered During Development of the Rule (including up to 3 primary sources relied upon)[see 5 M.R.S. §§ 8057-A(1)(E) & 8063-B]: Input received from the Department of Environmental Protection that relies upon the bass tournament aquatic invasive species and

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livewell inspection data for the purpose of documenting occurrences of aquatic invasive plants and to track or predict the spread potential of those invasive species. Guidance and input from IFW Warden Service staff, select regional IFW staff, and IFW Aquatic Invasive Species staff.

Estimated Fiscal Impact of the Rule [see 5 M.R.S. § 8057-A(1)(C)]: None anticipated.

FOR EXISTING RULES WITH FISCAL IMPACT OF \$1 MILLION OR MORE, ALSO INCLUDE:

Economic Impact, Whether or Not Quantifiable in Monetary Terms [see 5 M.R.S. § 8057-A(2)(A)]:

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Individuals, Major Interest Groups and Types of Businesses Affected and How They Will Be Affected [see 5 M.R.S. § 8057-A(2)(B)]:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Benefits of the Rule [see 5 M.R.S. § 8057-A(2)(C)]:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Note: If necessary, additional pages may be used.

Chapter 2: RULES PERTAINING TO COMMERCIAL FISHING, FISH CULTURE AND FISHING DERBIES AND TOURNAMENTS

2.04 Rules Pertaining to Fishing Derbies**A. Scope of Rules**

These rules shall be applicable only to fishing derbies as authorized by Title 12, M.R.S.A., Sections 12504 & 12504-A.

B. Applications

1. An application for a permit to conduct a fishing derby shall be on such forms as the department requires. The following information is required:
 - a. Name and address of the sponsor
 - b. Rules of the derby
 - c. Body(s) of water affected
 - d. Date(s) and time(s) of the derby
 - e. Prize structure
2. *(Repealed. This fee has been established by the Legislature, P.L. 1991, c.443)*
3. Applications for open water fishing derbies will be accepted after January 1 annually.
4. Applications for ice fishing derbies will be accepted after September 1 annually.
5. Applications for fishing derbies will be processed in order of receipt.

C. Restrictions

1. No fishing derbies will be permitted on any single body of water having a surface area of less than 100 acres and managed by the department for cold water fish species (trout, salmon and/or togue) or if the issuance of a permit would be inconsistent with the fisheries management objectives of the waters being affected.
2. Open water fishing derbies are not allowed to be held between April 1 – June 15, except where fishing derbies are consistent with the fisheries management objectives of the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife.
3. No more than 4 derbies will be permitted on any single body of water in any calendar year. County-wide or state-wide derbies shall not be counted as a derby on any one body of water.

4. The total cash value of prizes to be awarded at any single fishing derby (excluding door prizes) shall not exceed \$10,000, except:
 - a. when the derby is of a regional or statewide nature, involves more than a single body of water, or only involves waters not managed by the department for cold water fish species (trout, salmon and/or togue), in which case the total cash value of prizes to be awarded (excluding door prizes) shall not exceed \$25,000.
5. No derby shall occur at a public access facility in a manner that prevents non-event participants from launching and retrieving watercraft.
6. The Commissioner has the authority to put any condition necessary on any derby to assure that appropriate measures are taken to protect biological resources and address social concerns.

D. Requirements

1. Except as otherwise provided by law, all anglers in the derby must comply with the licensing requirements of Title 12, M.R.S.A., Sections 10751 to 10759.
2. A copy of the derby permit and a copy of the rules affecting the derby shall be conspicuously displayed during each derby at a location accessible to all derby contestants.
3. Watercraft participating in an open water derby must be inspected for invasive aquatic species prior to launching and for a second time after the watercraft is retrieved from the water. Inspections may be performed by the watercraft operator, a passenger, or an available courtesy boat inspector.
4. All anglers participating in a derby must possess a valid Maine fishing license unless of an age where a license is not required.
5. Any person or organization hosting a derby must submit a completed questionnaire via a state-approved electronic data collection and management tool or system when requested to do so by an agent of the Commissioner, provided that such request is identified on the derby permit or made in writing to the derby host prior to the day of the derby.

2.05 Regulations Pertaining to Bass Fishing Tournaments

A. Scope

These rules shall be applicable to bass fishing tournaments as authorized by Title 12, M.R.S.A., Section 12505.

B. Definition of a Bass Club Definitions

For the purposes of these rules the following terms have the following meanings:

Bass Club

For purposes of determining eligibility to apply for a permit to conduct a one-day bass tournament, a "bass club" is defined as any organized group of five or more individual bass anglers which is able to satisfy one of the following criteria:

1. Provide current documentation of being a member club in a nationally recognized bass fishing organization; or

2. Provide a current listing of club officers and members along with a signed affidavit affirming that the club (consisting of at least 5 members), although not affiliated with any nationally recognized bass fishing organization, is a bona-fide independent fishing club. The affidavit must include a list of all members with contact information and must indicate those members who have participated in an approved aquatic species and livewell inspection training program within the last three five years, with a minimum of four trained inspectors per club.

NOTE: It is a Class E crime to obtain a permit through fraud, misstatement, or misrepresentation - Title 12 M.R.S.A., Section 10757.

Pre-fish

For the purpose of determining whether or not an activity falls under the term “pre-fish” within these rules, pre-fishing is defined as the activity of launching a watercraft on a body of water for the purpose of angling on that body of water with an immediately upcoming bass tournament. Watercraft launched for this purpose are only to be considered pre-fishing if they are not retrieved from the water between the initial launch to pre-fish and the commencement of the bass tournament on that body of water.

C. Requirements (General)

1. Any bass club which sponsors a bass tournament must submit a completed bass tournament questionnaire via a state-approved electronic data collection and management tool or system, when requested to do so by an agent of the Commissioner, provided that such request must be identified on the tournament permit or made in writing to the sponsoring club prior to the day of the tournament.
2. Each tournament requires at least two aquatic species and live well inspectors, the presence of boat inspectors who have participated in an aquatic species and livewell inspection a state-approved aquatic invasive species inspection training program within the last five-three years, to conduct aquatic species and live well watercraft and livewell aquatic invasive species inspections. Inspectors during a tournament must be at a sufficient number such that all watercraft can be inspected at the launch sites identified by the hosting bass club as an inspection station launch. Each watercraft will first be inspected immediately before a tournament participant launches prior to the tournament, unless the watercraft was inspected for the purpose of pre-fishing by an inspector who has taken a state-approved aquatic invasive species inspection training program. Watercraft will be inspected and for a second time after retrieval from the water immediately after the conclusion of the tournament for that participant by an inspector who has taken a state-approved aquatic invasive species inspection training program. If a watercraft remains on the water after the end of the tournament, the watercraft must be inspected either on the water, inclusive of trimming up motor and opening livewell for thorough inspection, or upon final retrieval from the water by an inspector who has taken a state-approved aquatic invasive species inspection training program. For watercraft that pre fish prior to a permitted event, or continue to fish following the permitted event, an aquatic species inspection must be completed by the operator, a passenger, or an available courtesy boat inspector.
 - a) Bass clubs must submit all watercraft inspection data via a state-approved electronic data collection and management tool or system. For boats that pre-fish prior to a tournament or remain on the water at the end of a tournament and intend to be inspected by an inspector who has taken a state-approved aquatic invasive species inspection training program but is not associated with the bass club (e.g., Courtesy Boat Inspector), record that an inspection has or will be taking place with an outside inspector must be noted.
 - b) Bass clubs will ensure that all tournament participants are informed of the water access site(s) at which aquatic invasive species inspections will occur such that every watercraft associated with the tournament can receive required launching and retrieval inspections at one of the designated inspection sites. Bass clubs must designate at least one water access

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site for inspections in their permit application, however additional water access sites for inspections can be added, removed, or changed without notification to the Department so long as the full, final list is available upon commencement of the tournament.

3. All anglers in the tournament must possess a valid Maine fishing license unless of an age where a license is not required.
4. Bass tournament watercraft must be specifically identified in a plainly visible manner by attaching at least one strand of fluorescent biodegradable tape to the watercraft in a manner visible from the exterior of the watercraft and a roster of participants must be available on site.
5. Only one permit will be issued on a waterbody for a specific date.
6. All fishing will be restricted to artificial lures.
7. No weigh-in bass tournaments will be permitted on a body of water less than 500 surface acres.
8. A copy of the tournament permit, and a copy of the rules affecting tournaments, and a list of water access sites being used by the tournament for aquatic invasive species watercraft inspections shall be conspicuously displayed during each tournament at a location accessible to all tournament contestants. If tournament permit, rules, and inspection site locations are displayed in an enclosed location (e.g., vehicle window/dash), the enclosed location must be specifically identified by attaching at least one strand of fluorescent biodegradable tape to the exterior of the enclosed location in a manner plainly visible.
9. Tournaments are limited to one watercraft per 35 acres with a maximum of 100 watercraft.
10. Tournaments may be Catch/Measure/Release or Weigh-In.
 - a) For Catch/Measure/Release tournaments in waters managed by MDIFW under the South Zone General Law, all bass caught must be immediately released to the location from which caught. Youth tournaments are to be Catch/Measure/Release only. There will be no application fee for Youth tournament permits.
 - b) For Weigh-In tournaments in waters managed by MDIFW under the South Zone General Law, all bass retained shall be kept in a livewell being operated with the pump(s) in a mode that constantly exchanges livewell water with fresh lake or river water as a flow-through system, except when watercraft are being operated under power of the main outboard while changing locations, or while motoring to shore immediately prior to weigh-in, at which time the pump(s) may be operated in a manner that aerates a fixed volume of water in the livewell. All bass taken shall be returned to the water from which it was caught, unharmed as far as possible, at the conclusion of the tournament day. The daily limit shall be 5 bass per participant with no weight limit.
11. The total cash value of prizes for single-day tournaments shall not exceed \$25,000.
12. The Commissioner has the authority to put any condition necessary on any tournament to assure that appropriate measures are taken to protect biological resources and address social concerns.
13. Weigh-In tournaments are not permitted in Hancock & Washington Counties from May 20 to June 30 (dates inclusive). In all other South Zone counties weigh-in tournaments are not permitted from May 8 to June 14 (dates inclusive).

14. Weigh-in tournaments are not permitted in Maine and New Hampshire Border waters from May 15 to June 30 (dates inclusive).
15. There will be no more than seven weigh-in tournaments per calendar year on any water greater than 500 acres.
16. Bass tournaments are not permitted in any waters managed by MDIFW under North Zone General Law except for the following waters which are exempt due to a history of ongoing bass tournaments:
 - Indian Pond in Saint Albans;
 - Moose Lake (Great) in Athens, Harmony, Hartland, and Saint Albans;
 - Schoodic Lake in Brownville, Lake View Plt, and T4 R9 NWP;
 - Sebec Lake in Bowerbank, Dover-Foxcroft, Sebec, and Willimantic; and
 - Wesserunsett Lake (Hayden Lake) in Madison.

On these five exempt waters, bass tournaments may be permitted as Catch/Measure/Release tournaments or Weigh-In tournaments as above. However, bass tournament participants are not prohibited from harvesting bass during a permitted bass tournament.

17. No bass tournament shall occur at a public water access facility in a manner that prevents non-event participants from launching and retrieving watercraft.