

# Fishing at Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge



## Can I fish at the refuge?

Yes, fishing and crabbing are permitted at the refuge, but there are restrictions. Maryland State regulations apply while fishing and crabbing on the refuge. No special refuge permits are required; however, a valid state **Chesapeake Bay and Coastal Sport Fishing License** is required to fish in the Blackwater River and the Little Blackwater River. Please check with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources for complete details on fishing and crabbing regulations in Maryland: <http://dnr.maryland.gov/Fisheries/Pages/regulations/index.aspx>

Commercial fishing and crabbing are prohibited on the refuge.

## Where can I fish at the refuge?

Fishing and crabbing in refuge waters are restricted to boats and the Key Wallace Drive causeway across the Little Blackwater River. Fishing from the Key Wallace causeway is open during daylight hours, year round. While fishing on the refuge, anglers must remain in their boat at all times.

**No fishing or crabbing is permitted from any other refuge shoreline, including the Wildlife Drive.**

Most of the shoreline on Blackwater NWR is marsh and is not suitable for shoreline fishing. The only shoreline fishing available is from the causeway over the Little Blackwater River on Key Wallace Drive. Please note that, due to safety concerns, parking along the causeway is no longer allowed. Day use parking is available on the west end of the causeway at the entrance to Wildlife Drive. Trailer parking is not permitted at this location. Anglers are allowed to stop temporarily on the causeway to load/unload gear before parking.

## Are there other restrictions?

Yes, refuge-owned waters include portions of the Blackwater and Little Blackwater Rivers and the associated expansive shallow water marsh areas. These waters are **closed from October 1 through March 31** every year to protect migrating waterfowl. **This closure does not apply to shoreline fishing on the Key Wallace causeway.**

For a map of seasonally closed waters at Blackwater NWR, see [www.fws.gov/refuge/Blackwater/visit/fishing.html](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Blackwater/visit/fishing.html)

Anglers can fish with live bait; however bait cannot be collected from the refuge or released into refuge waters.

Fishing is only during daylight hours.

The Wildlife Drive is closed to fishing as it is dedicated to wildlife watching and photography. This is the only area of the refuge dedicated to these activities from a vehicle. We do not have sufficient parking for anglers, and fishing the banks would disturb the wildlife that viewers have come to see.

## Where can I launch a boat?

The waters in and around the refuge can be accessed at several locations managed by the refuge, Dorchester County Highway Dept., and Maryland DNR. Be aware that navigation can be difficult, especially in the Blackwater River, due to submerged mudflats, a meandering unmarked channel, and shallow water tidal changes. Much of the open water on the Blackwater River is not suitable for water-cooled motors. This area is best suited for canoes or kayaks.

The refuge has a soft launch and parking area on the north side of the Route 335 Bridge at the Blackwater River. Boats can be launched by hand only. Boats can be trailered to the site (there are parking spaces available for trailers), but trailers are not allowed on the launch. Small power boats can be launched here if they are small enough to be carried to the launch. This launch is only open from sunrise to sunset.

There is also a launch on Key Wallace Drive directly adjacent to the Little Blackwater River Bridge. Vehicles are only allowed to park temporarily while loading or unloading watercraft. This launch is closed during the seasonal refuge waters closure October 1 – March 31.

For a map of the refuge water trails please visit our website at:

<https://www.fws.gov/refuge/Blackwater/visit/watertrails.html>

There are two public boat ramps managed by Dorchester County Highway Dept.; Smithville Bridge ramp located at Beaverdam Creek on Smithville Road (west side of refuge), and the Shorters Wharf ramp located at the Blackwater River on Maple Dam Road (southeast side of refuge). Boats can be trailer-launched at both of these sites. Maryland DNR manages the Bestpitch Ferry Boat Ramp at the Transquaking River on Bestpitch Ferry Road (east of the refuge), which has facilities for trailer-launching boats. Maryland DNR also manages a soft launch for the upper Little Blackwater River off of Egypt Road (north of refuge). Be aware that this launch is small, located down a rough dirt road, and closed during the entire Maryland waterfowl season.

For a map and details about all water access in Dorchester County, check out this Maryland DNR web site <https://dnr.maryland.gov/boating/Pages/water-access/dorchester.aspx>. A special permit is NOT required to launch private boats in Dorchester County.

## What species of fish can be caught here?

Fishing on the refuge in the Blackwater River is fair for tidal largemouth bass (black bass), striped bass (rockfish), white and yellow perch, black crappie, and channel catfish. The Little Blackwater River is a very popular spot for the spring run of white perch. Other species available in the waters of the Refuge are carp, bluegill and pickerel, and more recently the invasive snakehead. Information on these fish can be found at Maryland DNR's "Fish Facts" page at <https://dnr.maryland.gov/Fisheries/Pages/fishfacts-index.aspx>.

### Youth Fishing Fun Day:

On the first Saturday in June each year, Blackwater NWR hosts an annual Youth Fishing Fun Day for youths 15 and under, with free loaner equipment, food, prizes and more. Check the website for an upcoming date for this family-friendly, non-competitive event.

### You Can Help Us:

Pack it in, pack it out! Please do not litter, and help pick up trash that others have left behind.