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HOUSE BILL NO. 2335

Offered January 13, 2025

Prefiled January 8, 2025

A *BILL to amend the Code of Virginia by adding a section numbered 29.1-302.04, relating to free fishing license program; blue catfish; sunset.*

Patron—Simonds

Referred to Committee on Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That the Code of Virginia is amended by adding a section numbered 29.1-302.04 as follows:

§ 29.1-302.04. *Special fishing license for blue catfish program.*

The Department shall establish a program that allows a person to obtain a digital fishing license at no cost through the Department's Go Outdoors Virginia mobile application to catch blue catfish. Such mobile application shall list blue catfish as an invasive species and allow the program participant to log the weight, total number, and location of blue catfish. To be eligible for the digital fishing license, the Department shall require such person to (i) watch a video created by the Department that provides (a) the requirements for the digital fishing license; (b) best practices in terms of rigs and techniques for catching blue catfish; (c) a description of how to upgrade the blue catfish digital fishing license to another license, if a person catches another species of fish, other than a blue catfish, and wants to keep such species of fish; and (d) a statement requiring a person to release any non-invasive fish species and (ii) agree to the terms and conditions established by the Department. The Department shall establish guidelines for the administration of the program, including incorporating an incentive program to recognize program participants that catch the most blue catfish by size, length, or number.

2. That the provisions of the first enactment of this act shall expire on July 1, 2029.

3. That, at the expiration of the digital fishing license program created by this act, the Department of Wildlife Resources shall review the program to examine its effectiveness in reducing the population of blue catfish in the waters of the Commonwealth and report its findings to the Chairmen of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Natural Resources and House Committee on Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources.

INTRODUCED

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