

GEAR – Projectile Gear

What is being considered?

The department is considering adding residences to the safety zone list for projectile gears, reducing the safety zone from 100 yards to 50 yards, and establishing that the length of retrieval lines may not exceed 35 yards.

Why is this change necessary?

Recreational bowfishing for Northern snakehead has become a popular activity in recent years. Many individuals who participate in this activity find snakeheads in small creeks and coves and fish for them at night. The increase in calls to department staff and Natural Resources Police has made the department aware of potential conflicts.

Currently, an individual who uses a projectile gear, as referenced in COMAR 08.02.25.02, .03, and .05, such as a bow and arrow or crossbow, must stay 100 yards away from a human being, a private or public swimming area, an international diving flag, an occupied duck blind, or another vessel, unless you first have permission from all people in those locations. Homes are not included in this list. Especially when fishing at night, it is difficult to know if a person is present in a house or on their property. By adding dwellings to the safety zone, the potential for an individual being present on the property is addressed. In conjunction with adding dwellings to the safety zone list, the department is considering reducing the safety zone from 100 yards to 50 yards and requiring that retrieval lines not be longer than 35 yards. Fifty yards is the minimum safety zone for archery hunting on land in many counties in the state. Additionally, retrieval lines currently in use are between 25 and 35 yards, meaning that a projectile would not be able to go past 35 yards. These three changes would result in enhanced public safety by including dwellings in the safety zone list and by limiting the maximum length of the retrieval line. The changes would also ensure that individuals engaged in the legal harvest of fish with projectile gear – typically invasive species such as Northern snakehead and blue catfish – will continue to be able to access waters and habitat types in which those species are found.

Who will this affect?

This change would affect commercial harvesters and recreational anglers who use projectile gears.

When would this be effective?

The department projects that this change could be effective in the winter of 2022-2023. However, the exact date cannot be determined. The department will follow our normal proposal procedures if this concept moves forward.

Has this change been discussed with stakeholders?

The concept of adding dwellings to the safety zone was previously scoped with the Sport Fisheries Advisory Commission and Tidal Fisheries Advisory Commission at their July 2022 meetings. The idea was subsequently scoped with the public in August 2022. Based on public feedback, the department has revised the original concept.