

FREE

North Carolina 2021

Coastal Recreational Fishing Digest

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Product of the
N.C. Department of Environmental Quality
Division of Marine Fisheries

Time for Fishin'



Shake off that Cabin Fever and Go Fishing!

There is no better way to shake off the doldrums than to commune with nature. And one of the best ways to commune with nature is to go fishing. To prepare you for this endeavor, the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries has published this 2021 Coastal Recreational Fishing Digest. Funded by Coastal Recreational Fishing License sales, this digest is meant to give anglers information they need to fish responsibly as well as interesting articles about the division's recreational fishing programs.

New in this digest is an article explaining why fishermen may need to become a little more tech savvy than in previous years. Also, a new article discusses drone fishing. As in the past, this year's digest contains fishing license options, fishing best practices, information on how to identify and measure fish, and a table with recreational size and bag limits and seasons.

Because marine fisheries regulations are subject to change frequently, anglers should check the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries' website at <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-fishing-size-and-bag-limits> for the most up-to-date fishing regulations.

Watch Out for These Changes this Year:

Flounder

The 2021 recreational flounder season will open Aug. 16 and close Sept. 30 for internal and ocean waters of the state.

When the season opens, the minimum size limit will be 15 inches total length, and the creel limit will be four fish per person per day during the open recreational season, but the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission is considering management recommendations for the southern flounder fishery that could result in changes after the recreational season opens.

Anglers should check the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries' website at <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-fishing-size-and-bag-limits> for the most current flounder regulations.

Striped Bass

A circle hook requirement for ocean striped bass fishing and stricter harvest regulations in the Albemarle Sound and Roanoke River Management Areas are in effect this year.

The circle hook requirement pertains to all recreational fishing (including possession) using a hook and line with natural bait for striped bass. The circle hooks must be non-offset and made of a non-stainless-steel material. The circle hook requirement does not apply to recreational striped bass fishing in internal coastal waters.

The spring 2021 recreational harvest season opened with a one-fish per person daily possession limit and with harvest allowed seven days a week in the Albemarle Sound. The recreational spring fishing

season was scheduled to close by April 30. A short season may open in the fall.

A one-week season was held in the upper Roanoke, and a one-week season was held in the lower Roanoke, both in April 2021.

See <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-fishing-striped-bass-information> for further striped bass regulations.

Spot and Atlantic Croaker

The Division of Marine Fisheries has implemented a 50-fish per person per day bag limit for spot and Atlantic croaker. There is no minimum size limit on either species.

The bag limits comply with Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission fishery management plans.

Black Sea Bass North of Cape Hatteras

The recreational black sea bass fishing season will open May 15 and close Dec. 31 in federal and North Carolina waters north of Cape Hatteras.

The minimum size limit will be 12.5 inches total length (tip of the snout to the tip of the tail), and the bag limit will be 15 fish per person, per day.

The recreational black sea bass regulations north of Cape Hatteras comply with the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Management Plan.

Division of Marine Fisheries Goes Paperless with Size and Bag Limits Table

Things change. It is an accepted axiom for many aspects of life, and it is certainly true of fisheries management.

Fishing regulations change, and have been changing with more frequency over the past several years – so much so that the Division of Marine Fisheries will no longer mail out the recreational size and bag limits table that can be found online at <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-fishing-size-and-bag-limits>.

It's no longer a good idea, when by the time a stack of these printed tables reach their destination they could be outdated, leading anglers to unwittingly violate regulations.

Many of these changes are prescribed by federal councils and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, which often manage recreational fisheries with coastwide quotas under plans that require seasons to close when the quota is reached. State fisheries management may be moving more toward this method, as well.

Fortunately, the decision to stop these mailouts comes at a time when the public is becoming more tech savvy. Most people have access to the internet and can download the latest size and bag limits on the day they go fishing.

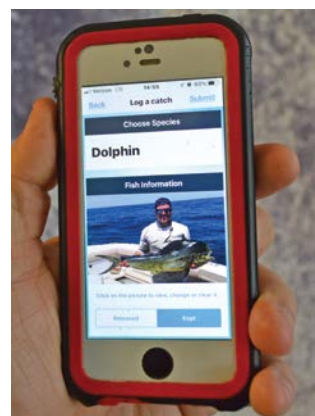
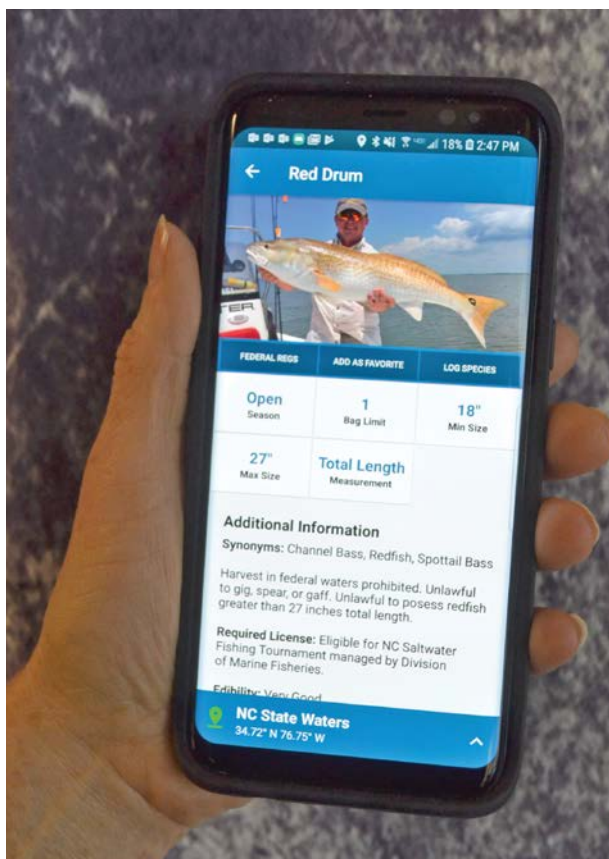
Many also use smartphones and can download the FishRules App discussed in the other article on this page.

There is a regulations table at the back of this digest. While the Division of Marine Fisheries strives to alert anglers to upcoming changes, there is no way to plan for every eventuality. It is imperative that anglers check this table against the online table before they cast their lines.

Scan the QR code to go to the mobile-friendly regulations table!



Fishing Rules: There's an App for That



Anglers gearing up to go out on the water or fish from shore must make decisions about what gear to bring or leave behind for an outing.

More and more frequently, anglers opt to carry their cell phones as another tool in their arsenal of outdoor equipment.

Smartphones can provide anglers with access to current weather, GPS services, and the all-important ability to capture a successful trip with picture and video evidence. They also offer anglers quick access to fishing regulations and identification tools, as well as an avenue for voluntarily reporting capture and release information.

FishRules App

The FishRules mobile app offers anglers state and federal fishery regulations for both recreational and federal commercial harvest and visual fish identification tools. The app utilizes GPS in anglers' mobile

device to provide fishing regulations specific to the area where they are fishing. The location can also be manually set and favorite species selected so an angler can be sure he is viewing the correct species for the location where he is fishing or plans to fish. FishRules updates regulations regularly and automatically to the phone as state and federal agencies adjust management measures. However, it is good practice for anglers to open the app before leaving the house or dock and confirm that you have the most recent update.

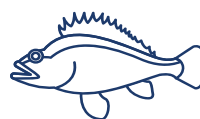
Download the FishRules app at www.fishrulesapp.com.

See *MyFishCount App* article on page 4.

Scan the QR codes to download the FishRules app!



FishRules Android



FishRules iPhone

Recreational Fishing Data Collection



While out fishing, anglers may be approached by employees of the Division of Marine Fisheries who want to ask questions. Also, they may get a survey in the mail asking about their fishing trips.

These are just a couple of the ways that the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries' **Coastal Angling Program** collects data on recreational fishing.

Known by its acronym, the CAP surveys approximately 50,000 anglers annually. The data collected are key components used in stock assessments and fishery management plans. The data are also used to provide stakeholders with information on current regulations, fish identification, and ethical angling practices.

The primary CAP data collection program is a partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) Access Point Angler Intercept Survey. In North Carolina, this survey conducts up to 20,000 in-person angler interviews annually at public boat ramps, marinas, beaches, piers, and other fishing access sites.

Questions asked include where an angler fished, what type of gear they used, how many fish they caught, the size of the fish caught, how many fish they threw back, and socioeconomic characteristics.

Additionally, MRIP conducts biological sampling of bluefin tuna, catch card reporting for highly migratory species such as billfish, and a phone survey of for-hire operators.

CAP also partners with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission to collect recreational data from North Carolina's anadromous fisheries within the coastal rivers of the central and southern areas of the state. Anadromous fish migrate from saltwater to freshwater to spawn.

The survey conducts approximately 5,000 in-person angler interviews per year and uses the collected data to produce estimates of effort and harvest for striped bass and shad.

Despite conducting a tremendous number of in-person interviews, some fisheries have so few participants or they occur in areas where interviewers are not likely to encounter the participants. These fisheries include flounder gig, cast net, and seine harvest, as well as crab and shellfish harvest. To collect data from these fisheries, mail surveys are sent every two months to individuals who indicate they participate in these fisheries when they purchase a Coastal Recreational Fishing License.

Finally, CAP administers a logbook to capture fishing effort on ocean fishing piers.

To learn more about CAP and recreational fishing data collection, visit <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/47>.

MyFishCount App

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council manages all fisheries in federal waters from North Carolina through the Florida Keys. A persistent issue that the council has with management of species which have size and/or possession limits is the mortality of released fish. This can be caused by a multitude of reasons but the primary culprit for fish in the snapper/grouper complex is barotrauma.

Barotrauma occurs when a fish is reeled up from considerable depth and the gasses in its swim bladder expand to the point that the fish's eyes can bulge out and the stomach and intestines can be protruding out of the fish. This obvious trauma can lead to mortality, either directly from the injuries or indirectly by immobilizing the fish and making it more susceptible to predation.

The rate and magnitude of this mortality are difficult to estimate and include in stock assessments for these species, so the council must take a conservative approach when establishing bag limits and size limits to account for the loss of these fish.

To improve the accuracy of estimates for released fish, the council developed and piloted the MyFishCount app for anglers to log their catch and the number of fish they release. The app is now managed by the Angler Action Foundation.

This app provides anglers the ability to log entire trips and record the number of fish they catch; a picture; the size, location, and fate of the fish; and whether the fish was kept or released. Additionally, anglers can record the condition of released fish, which provides vital information to council scientists for improving the estimates of release mortality included in stock assessments.

Anglers can also log on anytime to see past trips, so the app acts as a logbook. The app can be accessed via any device with internet access at any time. Any data entered, including location, is considered confidential and will never be shared at a level that could potentially identify anglers or specific fishing locations.



Scan the above QR code, or visit www.myfishcount.com to download the MyFishCount app to your mobile phone.



Recreational Commercial Gear License

Recreational fishermen who want to use a gill net or other commercial gear in N.C. coastal waters need to purchase a Recreational Commercial Gear License.

The license costs \$70 per year for residents and \$500 per year for nonresidents. It is available at N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries' offices and at many bait and tackle shops.

The license authorizes the holder to use limited amounts of commercial gear to harvest seafood for personal consumption.

Seafood harvested under this license cannot be sold and the license holder must adhere to recreational size and possession limits, as well as other gear restrictions.

You will need this license if you want to use:

- Seine net (30 to 100 feet)
- Shrimp trawl (skimmer or otter)
- Eel, fish, shrimp or crab pots*
- Trotline
- Gill net
- Shrimp pound
- Electronic shocking devices to catch catfish in certain areas of the Cape Fear River

More information about the license and its requirements can be found on the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries' website at

<http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-commercial-gear-license>.

For restrictions on specific gears, call 252-726-7021 or 800-682-2632.

* One crab pot per person may be attached to the shore on privately owned land or to a privately owned pier without a license.

Coastal Recreational Fishing Licenses

North Carolina requires people 16 or older to hold a Coastal Recreational Fishing License to fish in coastal waters of the state. A variety of license options are available and they can be purchased at many tackle shops, at N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries and N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission offices and online at <https://www.ncwildlife.org>. A \$2 transaction fee will be added to the price of all licenses.

Revenues from license sales are used to manage, protect, restore, develop, cultivate, conserve and enhance North Carolina's marine resources.

Annual Coastal Recreational Fishing Licenses

State Residents* — \$16
Nonresidents — \$32

10-day Coastal Recreational Fishing Licenses

State Residents* — \$6
Nonresidents, ages 16 or older — \$11
Blocks of Ten 10-day — \$150

Lifetime Coastal Recreational Fishing Licenses

Infant: younger than one year — \$106
Youth: ages 1-11 — \$159
Resident Adult*: ages 12-senior** — \$265
Nonresident Adult: ages 12 and older — \$530
Resident Senior* ** — \$16
Resident Disabled Veteran*: 50 percent or more disabled — \$11
Resident Totally Disabled*: totally and permanently disabled — \$11

Annual Unified Inland/Coastal Recreational Fishing License

Resident* — \$41

Annual Unified Sportsman/Coastal Recreational Fishing Licenses

Resident* — \$69

Lifetime Unified Sportsman/Coastal Recreational Fishing Licenses

Infant: younger than one year — \$292
Youth: ages 1-11 — \$477
Resident Adult*: ages 12-senior** — \$716
Nonresident Adult: ages 12 and older — \$1,643
Resident Senior* ** — \$32
Resident Disabled Veteran* — 50 percent or more disabled — \$117
Resident Totally Disabled*: Totally and permanently disabled — \$117

Lifetime Unified Inland/Coastal Recreational Fishing License

Resident Legally Blind — No charge
Resident Adult Care Home — No charge

Exemptions and Special Provisions

- N.C. residents serving on full-time active duty in the military or reserves outside of the state are exempt from license requirements while on leave for fewer than 30 days.
- Those who held a Wildlife Resources Commission Lifetime Sportsman License or Lifetime Comprehensive Fishing License prior to Jan. 1, 2006 are exempt from Coastal Recreational Fishing License requirements.
- An eligible member of a volunteer fire

department for five consecutive fiscal years, including the prior fiscal year, may be issued any adult resident lifetime license issued and administered by the Wildlife Resources Commission for fifty percent (50%) of the applicable license fee amount.

- No license is required to fish on July 4 or for children, ages 0-15.
- Annual Resident Subsistence Waivers are available at no charge for qualified individuals through their county Department of Social Services.

* Out-of-state students attending a university, college, or community college in North Carolina are considered residents.

Members of the military stationed in North Carolina and their dependents are considered residents.

** Residents born on or before Aug. 1, 1953 are eligible to purchase a senior lifetime license when they turn 65 years of age.

Those born after Aug. 1, 1953 are eligible to purchase a senior lifetime license when they turn 70 years of age.

These fees are accurate at the time of publication. Check <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-fishing-license-types-and-fees> for the most up-to-date listing of fees.

Tag: You're It!



Ever catch a tagged fish and wonder what it's all about? Why should you report it?

There are several good reasons. For one, you may be eligible for a reward. Another good reason is you can help fisheries biologists collect the information they need to understand and assess fish populations. Fish tagged in North Carolina waters include red drum, striped bass, spotted seatrout, southern flounder and cobia.

If you turn in a yellow tag from a fish released by the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries, along with all the required information, you may choose from a hat, \$5 or other rewards. The tags are marked with a unique tag number and the phone number to call "NCDMF."

If you turn in a red tag with all the required information, you will receive a \$100 reward. The tags are marked on one side: "\$100 REWARD" with a unique tag number. The other side gives the phone number to call "NCDMF."

Be sure to check both sides of the fish because it may have two tags, which means you receive a double reward!

You will also receive a letter and personalized certificate that states where and

when the fish was tagged, the number of days it was at large, and the distance between the original tagging location and where the fish was recaptured.

Additionally, all who turn in tags are entered in an end-of-year cash drawing.

N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries' researchers are tagging more than 15,000 striped bass, red drum, southern flounder, spotted seatrout and cobia per year. The information the division collects through returned tags helps researchers answer some very important questions, such as:

- What are the migration patterns of these fish?
- What kinds of habitat do these fish use?
- What is the population structure of these stocks?
- What is the fishing mortality rate?

If you're fishing and you catch a tagged fish, please cut off the tag and record the following information:

- Species
- Tag number (Ex: G12345)
- Date

- Location captured (water body and nearest landmark or latitude/longitude)
- Length (total or fork length)
- Fate of the fish (kept, released with or without tag, etc.)
- Gear used for capture

Report the information to 800-682-2632 or 252-726-7021. You can also report tags online at <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/report-tag-online> and submit photos of you and your tagged fish at tagrecap@ncdenr.gov.

Red tags must be cut off and returned to the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries, P.O. Box 769, Morehead City, N.C. 28557 to receive the \$100 reward.

Helpful Hints:

- Cut off the tag, do not pull it out.
- If you are releasing the fish, cut the tag as close to the body of the fish as possible.
- Record the tag number in case you misplace the tag before reporting it.
- If the tag has algae growth, do not scrape the algae off. Scraping the algae may damage the text printed on the tag. Instead, let the tag soak in soapy warm water until the algae comes off or send the tag to the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries address above.
- Be careful when handling fish you intend to release. Handle it as little as possible, using wet hands or wet gloves. Return the fish to the water quickly to give the fish the greatest chance of post-release survival.
- Be alert! Tags are designed to be as unobtrusive as possible, so they don't change the fish's behavior. That means that you might not see one if you're not looking. Please report all tag and species information to the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries.
- Some fish will have two tags, so check both sides of the fish and report both tags.

Highly Migratory Species

Vessel owners or operators who recreationally fish for regulated Atlantic tunas (bluefin, yellowfin, bigeye, albacore and skipjack), roundscale spearfish, sharks, swordfish and billfish must obtain a Highly Migratory Species Angling Category Permit or a Highly Migratory Species Charter/Headboat Permit from the National Marine Fisheries Service. This requirement applies even for those who fish exclusively in state waters. Highly Migratory Species Permits may be obtained online at <https://hmspermits.noaa.gov/> or by contacting the Highly Migratory Species customer service representative at 888-872-8862.

Those who land bluefin tuna, blue marlin, white marlin, roundscale spearfish, sailfish or swordfish in North Carolina must participate in a landing tag and reporting procedure. This process takes the place of the National Marine Fisheries Service call-in or website reporting process. Fishermen must stop by one of the Highly Migratory Species Reporting Stations on their way in from fishing, fill out a catch card and receive a landing tag.

The landing tag must be affixed to the fish before it is removed from the vessel. Captains or operators from the trailered vessels must affix the landing tag before the vessel is removed from the water. North Carolina began this reporting program in the mid-1990s when recreational fishermen started landing more bluefin tuna in this state. The number of bluefin tuna landed was so small that the state was unable to estimate the landings through its normal survey process. The state modeled the reporting system after those that wildlife agencies used for big game.

Later, as regulations on billfish became more restrictive, the state added blue marlin, white marlin, roundscale spearfish, sailfish and swordfish to the program. In 2015, sharks were added to the program on a voluntary basis. Anglers may find more information on this reporting system, including a list of reporting stations, on the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries' website at <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/nmfs-highly-migratory-species-permits>.

Fishing Tournament

The North Carolina Saltwater Fishing Tournament

, also known as the Citation Program, recognizes exceptional catches of North Carolina's most popular sport fish.

The tournament runs from Jan. 1 to Dec. 31 each year and is open to any angler, except those who captain or work on a for-hire vessel or those who sell their fish.

To qualify for a citation, the fish must be caught on hook-and-line and landed without the use of electric or hydraulic equipment. The fish must meet program size requirements, be weighed at an official weigh station and then recorded on an official application form. For release citations, an angler or mate must touch the fish or the leader. Applications for release citations may now be submitted fully online. For a list of weigh-stations, tournament rules, and to view current N.C. saltwater fishing records, visit the N.C. Saltwater Fishing Tournament page at <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-fishing-tournaments>.

What is a citation?

A citation is an 8.5 by 11-inch certificate suitable for framing and hanging on the wall. It has the details of your outstanding catch and features an illustration of the species.

North Carolina Saltwater Fishing Citation

Kevin Aman

WHOSE CATCH HAS BEEN JUDGED
EXCEPTIONAL

FISH: RED DRUM WEIGHT: 1 RELEASED DATE: AUG 11, 2019



Roy Cooper
Governor
State of North Carolina



Hyacinth
Director
Division of Marine Fisheries



When will I get it?

Citations are currently only printed one time per year. All of the previous year's citations will be mailed by the following spring.

State Record Fish

If you think you have caught a state record fish, you should contact the division at **252-726-7021** or **800-682-2632**.

Scan the QR code below to submit your release-citation application today!



The Official 2021 North Carolina Saltwater Fishing Tournament Minimum Sizes

SPECIES	MINIMUM WEIGHT (Harvested)	MINIMUM LENGTH (Released)	SPECIES	MINIMUM WEIGHT (Harvested)	MINIMUM LENGTH (Released)
Albacore, False	Release Only	34 inches	Porgy (Silver Snapper)	4 lbs.	N/A
Amberjack	50 lbs.	50 inches	Sailfish	Release Only	Any Length
Barracuda	Release Only	45 inches	Shark	Release Only	80 inches
Bass, Black Sea	4 lbs.	N/A	Sheepshead	8 lbs.	N/A
Bluefish	15 lbs.	34 inches	Spearfish	Release Only	Any Length
Cobia	40 lbs.	36 inches	Spot	1 lb	N/A
Croaker	1.5 lbs.	N/A	Swordfish	50 lbs.	Any Length
Dolphin	35 lbs.	N/A	Tarpon	Release Only	Any Length
Drum, Black	Release Only	40 inches	Tilefish, Gray	12 lbs.	N/A
Drum, Red	Release Only	40 inches	Triggerfish	5 lbs.	N/A
Gag Grouper	20 lbs.	N/A	Trout, Gray	5 lbs.	24 inches
Jack, Crevalle	Release Only	32 inches	Trout, Speckled	5 lbs.	24 inches
Mackerel, King	30 lbs.	45 inches	Tuna, Bigeye	100 lbs.	N/A
Mackerel, Spanish	6 lbs.	N/A	Tuna, Blackfin	25 lbs.	N/A
Marlin, Blue	400 lbs.	Any Length	Tuna, Bluefin	200 lbs.	70 inches
Marlin, White	Release Only	Any Length	Tuna, Yellowfin	70 lbs.	N/A
Mullet, Sea	2 lbs.	N/A	Wahoo	40 lbs.	N/A
Pompano, Florida	2 lbs.	N/A			

North Carolina's Artificial Reefs

Looking for a different, rewarding fishing experience?
Try fishing on one of North Carolina's artificial reefs.



The North Carolina Artificial Reef Program has been creating reefs since the 1970s. Currently, the program maintains 25 estuarine reefs and 43 ocean reefs. Artificial reefs are placed to provide opportunities for fishing, diving and as habitat for fish and shellfish species throughout North Carolina. These reefs contain a variety of materials, including rock, recycled concrete, reef balls, and ships. Reefs are built throughout the coastal rivers, sounds, and from one-half mile to 40 miles offshore and are accessible from every maintained inlet in the state.

Many reefs are enhanced with the cooperation of local fishing clubs and reef organizations. These groups identify

available materials, donate money and provide input on the location for the enhancements.

Artificial Reef Guide

Information about each reef site is available in the Artificial Reef Guide, a spiral bound book which contains coordinates for materials on each reef. All the materials shown are based off high-precision sidescan imagery and corroborated with deployment records. There is also an online Interactive Reef Guide, which contains the same information about material locations, but allows users to view sidescan sonar images of material, measure distances and create custom maps.

Recent Enhancements

North Carolina's newest artificial reef, AR-165, was established offshore of Oregon Inlet. The Artificial Reef Program, in partnership with the Oregon Inlet Artificial Reef Committee, sank two tugboats, the American and the America, and approximately 7,200 tons of concrete pipe in 2020. There are plans to sink a third tugboat, the Valley Forge, in 2021.

Nearby, demolition of the Herbert C. Bonner bridge that spanned Oregon Inlet will continue in 2021. The majority of the material from the bridge demolition was carried offshore to the four other nearby reef sites (AR-130, AR-140, AR-145, and AR-160) in 2020. The remainder of the material will be deployed at AR-250 and AR-255 off Ocracoke Inlet. Once the bridge demolition and reef construction is completed, these sites will join AR-165 as prime locations for anglers on the Outer Banks to find seabass, king mackerel, bluefish, and amberjack.

A bit further south, at AR-368 off Topsail Island, a 180-foot retired USCG vessel was scuttled in memory of Brian Davis, a North Carolina diver and fisherman who passed away in 2017. The deployment was attended by friends, family, fellow spearfishermen, and an active USCG cutter.

Current and Upcoming Enhancements

Several other reef projects are underway in 2021. These include enhancements to offshore reefs AR-165, AR-250, AR-255 and AR-368. Remaining Bonner Bridge material, about 700 large reef balls, concrete pipe, the Valley Forge tugboat, and assorted concrete rubble will be distributed amongst these sites. Concrete pipe will also be deployed at AR-430 and AR-460 off Cape Fear Inlet. Inshore, at AR-380 in Bogue Sound, 200 small reef balls will be deployed in Spring 2021.



To learn more about the state's artificial reefs and to use the Interactive Reef Guide, scan the QR code above, or go to <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/artificial-reefs-program>. Email any questions to Jordan.Byrum@ncdenr.gov.

Best Practices for the Ethical Angler

One of the best ways for anglers to show their love for coastal resources is to help preserve them. Below are several best practices to help anglers do just that.

It is important that anglers employ these practices every time they fish in order to reduce the likelihood of post-release mortality. This ensures that a fish released today can be caught again tomorrow.

Planning

When heading out for a day of fishing, make sure you have the equipment you need to release any fish you may catch. A rubberized landing net, rubber gloves, a pair of needle nose pliers or a dehooking tool, and descending devices or venting tools are items that will help fish have a better chance to survive when released.

Fishing

Select tackle that matches the size of your targeted species. Matching fishing line, rod weight and reel drags to allow for shorter fight times can reduce the added stress angling imparts on a fish by decreasing the amount and intensity of physical activity the fish exerts during a fight.

The type of hooks you use can influence the survival potential of released fish. A fish hooked in the jaw has a better chance of surviving than a fish hooked in the stomach. Circle hooks and barbless hooks increase the likelihood of jaw hooking and aid in quick release once the fish is boated.

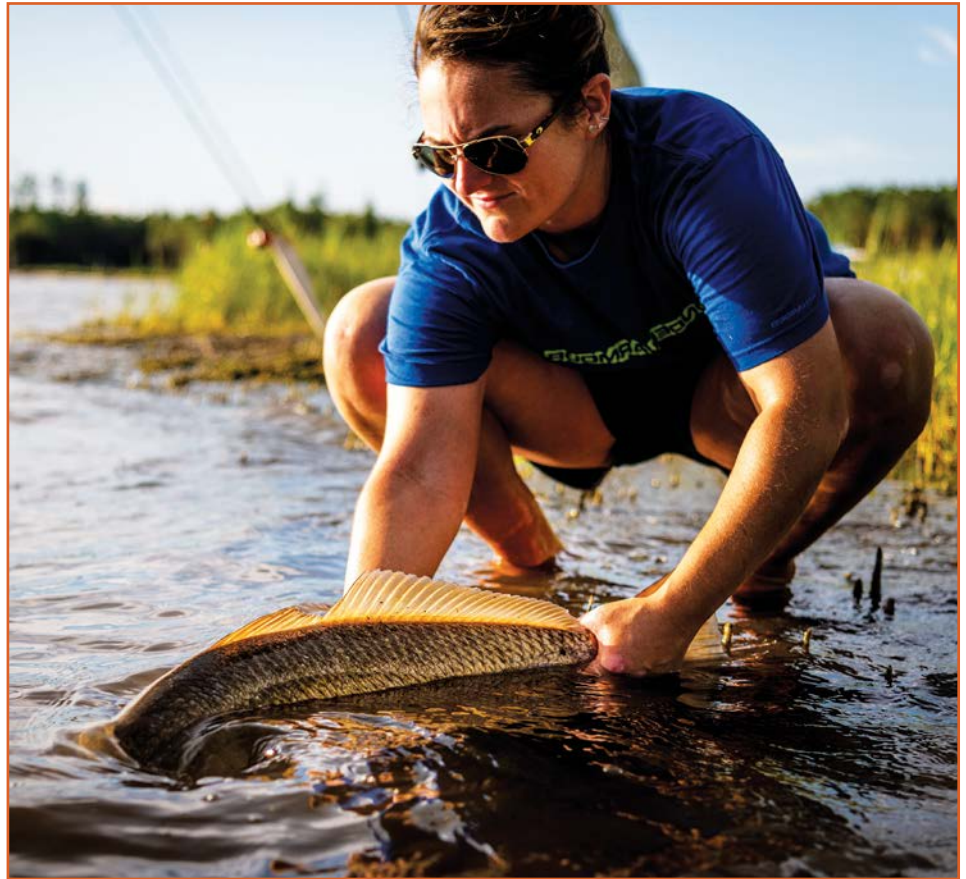
Don't play a fish to exhaustion. This only lessens the chance for survival. Tighten the drag and land it as quickly as possible.

When landing the fish, use a rubberized landing net and rubber gloves to avoid removing the slime layer from the body. When holding the fish, keep the fish underwater as much as possible. If it is a large fish make sure to support the fish's body in a horizontal position.

Keep the fish out of the water for as little time as possible. If taking a picture, have your camera ready before the fish is landed so that you can return the fish to the water with minimal stress.

Use rubber gloves to hold the fish and a dehooker or needle nose pliers to help separate the fish and hook.

Fish can become stressed very quickly in warm summertime waters and any added physical effort, like interacting



with fishing gear, can quickly tip the physiological balance of stress into the lethal range. Anglers can reduce their impact on fishing mortality during these times by using tackle that reduces the likelihood of deep hooking and adjusting fishing practices to allow for quicker retrieves and releases.

Deepwater Fishing

Reeling fish in from deeper water can cause barotrauma to the fish. Barotrauma occurs when a fish is reeled up from a considerable depth and the gasses in its swim bladder expand to the point that the fish's eyes can bulge out and the stomach and intestines can be protruding out of the fish. This obvious trauma can lead directly to mortality from the injuries. It can lead indirectly to mortality by immobilizing the fish and making it more susceptible to predation.

When barotrauma occurs, returning the fish to deeper water rapidly, known as recompression, is the best option, using some type of descender device. Fish descender devices attach to the fish's mouth and descend the fish back to deeper water using a weight. There are several types of fish descender devices on the market or anglers can make their own.

The deeper in water the fish is released, the greater the chance of survival.

If rapid descent is not a possibility, a less preferable option is called venting. Venting releases the gases trapped in the body of deep-water fish, allowing the fish to swim back to its natural habitat depth. You should hold the fish gently, but firmly, on its side. Insert the venting tool at a 45-degree angle approximately one to two inches back from the base of the pectoral fin. Do not puncture the stomach of a fish when venting.

The venting tool should only be inserted deep enough to release the gases. You can hear the gas escaping and will notice the body deflating. Gently press down on the abdomen of the fish to help expel the gas if the fish is extremely bloated.

Hold the fish with the head pointed downward and moving the fish back and forth letting water flow through the mouth and over the gills until the fish is capable of swimming on its own, if necessary.

Visit <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/edu/ethical-angling> to learn more about how to be an ethical angler.

Common N.C. Saltwater Fishes



Amberjack
Seriola dumerilii



Black Sea Bass
Centropristis striata



Striped Bass
Morone saxatilis



Bluefish
Pomatomus saltatrix



Cobia
Rachycentron canadum



Summer Flounder
Paralichthys dentatus



Gag
Mycteroperca microlepis



King Mackerel
Scomberomorus cavalla



Spanish Mackerel
Scomberomorus maculatus



White Marlin
Tetrapturus albidus



Sailfish
Istiophorus platypterus



Sheepshead
Archosargus probatocephalus



Vermilion Snapper
Rhomboplites aurorubens



Spadefish
Chaetodipterus faber



Spot
Leiostomus xanthurus



Croaker
Micropogonias undulatus



Dolphin
Coryphaena hippurus



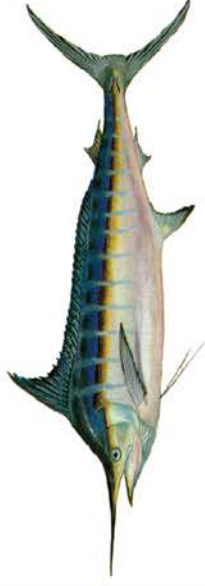
Black Drum
Pogonias cromis



Red Drum
Sciaenops ocellatus



Southern Flounder
Paralichthys lethostigma



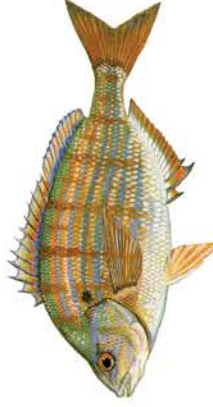
Blue Marlin
Makaira nigricans



Sea Mullet
Mentidarius americanus



Pigfish
Orthopristis chrysoptera



Pinfish
Lagodon rhomboides

**Report fisheries violations or
ask about regulations:
(252) 726-7021 or
1-800-682-2632**

**What is this fish?
NCFishIDHelp@ncdenr.gov**



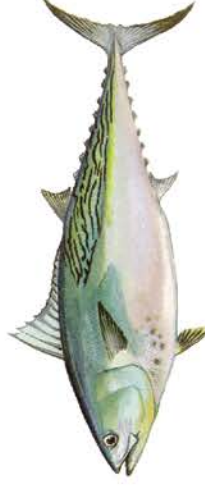
Speckled Trout
Cynoscion nebulosus



Gray Trout
Cynoscion regalis



Yellowfin Tuna
Thunnus albacares



Little Tunny
Euthynnus alletteratus



Wahoo
Acanthocybium solanderi

Know the Difference Between Sheepshead and Black Drum

Sheepshead



Fully connected first and second dorsal fins

Forked tail



Prominent front teeth

Black Drum



First dorsal fin distinct from second dorsal fin

Rounded tail



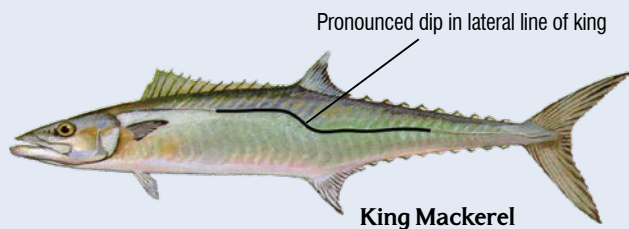
Chin barbels

Identifying Mackerels

They can look a lot alike, but the size limit on king mackerel is twice the length of Spanish, so you need to be able to tell them apart.

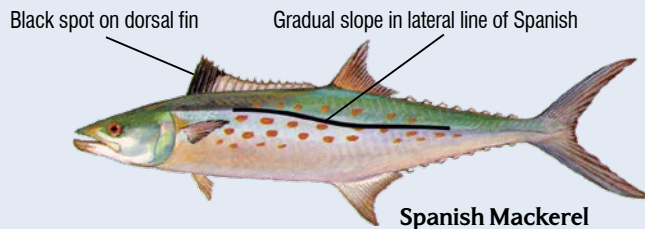
Both the adult Spanish mackerel and a juvenile king mackerel have gold spots on the body. However, the Spanish mackerel features a black spot on the first dorsal fin.

Another difference between the fish is that the king mackerel has a pronounced dip in the lateral line below the second dorsal fin. The lateral line on the Spanish mackerel gently curves to the tail.



Pronounced dip in lateral line of king

King Mackerel



Black spot on dorsal fin

Gradual slope in lateral line of Spanish

Spanish Mackerel

Become Fluent in Flounder Identification

Anglers love to catch a flounder.

In fact, flounder consistently ranks as the top species targeted by recreational fishermen in North Carolina coastal waters.

Anglers typically catch three different species of flounder in North Carolina waters: southern, summer, and gulf. While they may look alike to the untrained eye, these species exhibit distinctive markings, and anglers need to know how to distinguish between them.

Why identify flounder?

The three species don't just vary in appearance, they move in different migration patterns and are managed by separate government fisheries agencies and fishery management plans. This means researchers need to study them independently.

One of the ways the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries does research is by collecting information on recreational fishing catch and effort through in-person and mail surveys. Staff talks to more than 20,000 anglers each year on the beach, at the piers and at boat ramps to find out what they caught, what they threw back, where and how long they fished and other information. Anglers who can identify the species of flounder caught will help scientists better understand the status of these fish stocks and how to manage the recreational flounder fishery.

Southern Flounder

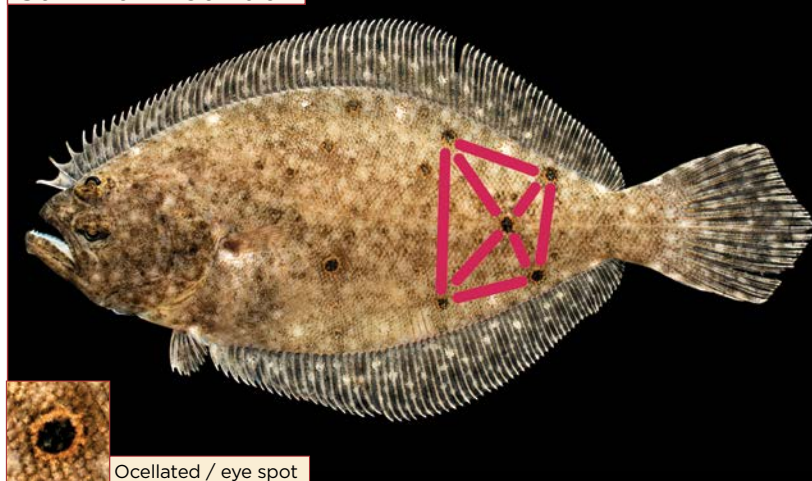


Non-ocellated spot



- This is the most common flounder caught in North Carolina, especially in estuarine waters.
- Non-ocellated spots cover the body
- Upper jaw extends to beyond rear margin of eye
- Eight to 11 gill rakers on lower limb of first gill arch
- Sixty-three to 74 anal fin rays

Summer Flounder

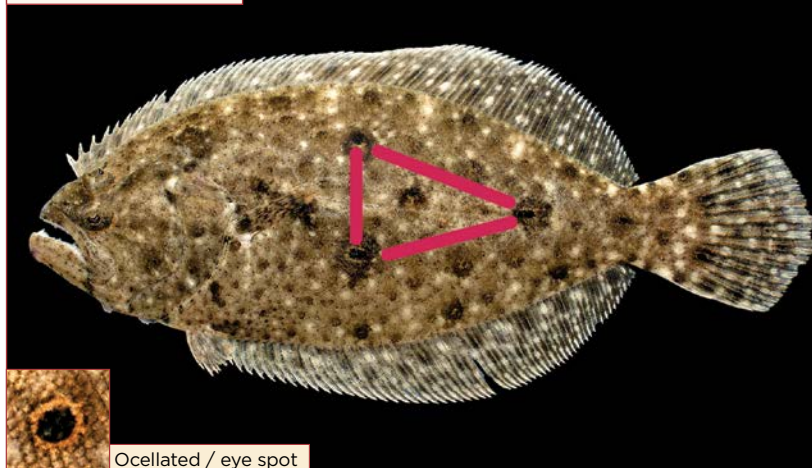


Ocellated / eye spot



- This species is commonly seen around inlets, in the ocean and in estuarine waters
- At least five ocellated spots on body — five prominent ocelli form the pattern from the five-side of a die
- Upper jaw extends to rear margin of eye
- Thirteen to 18 gill rakers on lower limb of first gill arch
- Sixty to 73 anal fin rays

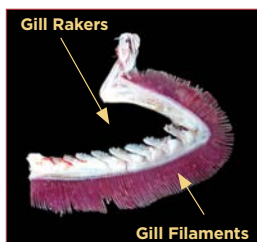
Gulf Flounder



Ocellated / eye spot



- This species is occasionally seen in North Carolina waters, usually in the ocean
- Three prominent ocellated spots form triangle on body, apex towards caudal fin (can have more than three over entire body, but three will be prominent)
- Upper jaw extends beyond rear margin of eye
- Nine to 12 gill rakers on lower limb of first gill arch
- Fifty-six to 63 anal fin rays



What are gill rakers?

Gill rakers are bony protrusions that extend outward from the gill arch. They appear in this image as white finger-like projections on the top of the gill arch. They are used differently in various fish species, depending on their feeding habits. In flounder, they work to guide baitfish into the esophagus and to protect the gill filaments from damage. Gill filaments are the thin, red projections on the bottom of the gill arch. Gill filaments are used in gas exchange and are red with blood.

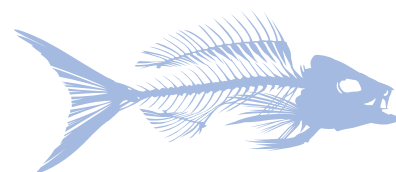


Carcass Collection Program...

The Carcass Collection Program collects carcasses of various species from recreational fishermen. Scientists can determine information, such as age, size and reproductive potential of the fish from the carcass. Age information about fish are collected by analyzing scales or hard body parts, such as otoliths (earbones) and spines, for annual growth rings.

When cleaning a fish, leave the head and tail intact on the carcass and take it to one of the division's freezer locations. Instructions on target species and how to deposit the carcasses are posted on the freezer.

Information gathered through this program is used for stock assessments at the state and federal levels.



For more information about this program, a map of freezer locations, and which species are collected, see <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/carcass-collection>.

Drone Fishing: Not Allowed in North Carolina

Drones have become quite popular for all kinds of recreational and commercial uses in recent years, so it is reasonable for anglers to ask if they can use them for fishing.

The answer is a simple one: No.

North Carolina law (G.S. 14-401.24) makes it a class 1 misdemeanor to fish or hunt with an unmanned aircraft system (a drone).

Specifically defined in state law (G.S. 113-130), fishing includes all operations during, immediately preparatory and immediately subsequent to an attempt, whether successful or not, to capture, kill or otherwise harm any fisheries resource.

This means:

- It is illegal to use a drone as a spotter to look for bait or fish.
- It is illegal to use a drone to carry a baited line out into the water to help you cast.
- It is illegal to use a drone to corral fish closer to the boat where you are fishing.
- It is illegal to use a drone for fishing in any way.

To view the applicable state laws, visit <https://www.ncleg.gov/Laws/GeneralStatutes>.

How to Measure a Fish

Total Length (TL) – The length of a fish as measured from the tip of the snout to the tip of the tail.

Fork Length (FL) – The length of a fish as measured from the tip of the snout to the fork of the tail.

Curved Fork Length (CFL) – The length of a fish as measured on a line tracing the contour of the body from the tip of the upper jaw to the fork of the tail.

Lower Jaw Fork Length (LJFL) – The length of a fish as measured from the tip of the lower jaw to the fork of the tail.

Total Length



Curved Fork Length



Fork Length



Lower Jaw Fork Length



2021 Recreational Size and Bag Limits for N.C. Coastal Waters				
STATE COASTAL WATERS — (Internal and 0 – 3 miles)				
FINFISH SPECIES	Minimum Length	Bag Limits (per person)	Seasons	Comments
Bass, Black Sea				
North of Cape Hatteras	12.5" TL	15/day	May 15 - Dec 31	Regulations subject to change. Contact the National Marine Fisheries Service Greater Atlantic Regional Office (978-231-9315) or http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/sustainable/recfishing/regs/index.html .
South of Cape Hatteras	13" TL	7/day	Fishing year runs Apr 1 - Mar 31; season closes if quota is reached. See http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations-current	Regulations subject to change. See South Atlantic Fishery Management Council regulations page at http://safmc.net/regulations/regulations-by-species/ . Non-stainless steel, non-offset circle hooks must be used when fishing with natural baits.
Bass, Striped				
Atlantic Ocean	28 - less than 35" TL	1/day	Open year round	All striped bass landed from the ocean May 1 - Oct 31 are required to have a landings tag affixed through the mouth and gill cover. Landing tags may be obtained at N.C. Striped Bass Reporting Stations, ocean fishing piers, most tackle shops and from N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries Recreational Port Agents. No gigging allowed. Non-stainless steel, non-offset circle hooks must be used when fishing for striped bass in the ocean with natural baits.
Roanoke River Management Area	18" TL Unlawful to possess between 22" - 27" TL	2/day, only one may be larger than 27" TL	Apr 10-16 in Lower River Zone; Apr 24-30 in Upper River Zone; season closes if quota is reached. See http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations-current	Lower River Zone: downstream of the U.S. Highway 258 bridge at Scotland Neck to the mouth at Albemarle Sound. Upper River Zone: Upstream of the U.S. Highway 258 bridge at Scotland Neck to the base of the Roanoke Rapids Dam.
Albemarle Sound Management Area	18" TL	1/day	Open Jan 1 - Apr 30 unless closed by proclamation when quota is reached. See http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations	
Cape Fear River	NO POSSESSION			Includes Cape Fear River and all tributaries.
Central Southern Management Area (All waters other than above)	NO POSSESSION			The Central Southern Management Area encompasses all waters from just south of Oregon Inlet to the South Carolina line. Major waterbodies and their tributaries include but are not limited to: Pamlico and Core sounds, Tar River downstream of Rocky Mount Mills Dam, Pamlico River, Pungo River, Neuse River downstream of Falls Lake Dam, White Oak River, and New River.
Bluefish	None	3/day for shore, pier, private vessel, or any way other than with a for-hire operation	3/day for shore, pier, private vessel, or any way other than with a for-hire operation; 5/day for-hire operation	Regulations subject to change. Check website at http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/ for updates.
Cobia	See N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries Proclamation: http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations-current			
Croaker, Atlantic	None	50/day		
Dolphin	None	10/day or 60 fish/vessel, whichever is less	Closes when quota is reached. See http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations-current	Regulations subject to change. See South Atlantic Fishery Management Council regulations page at http://safmc.net/regulations/regulations-by-species/
Drum, Black	14" - 25" TL	10/day, only 1/person/day over 25" TL		
Drum, Red (channel bass, puppy drum)	18" - 27" TL (slot)	1/day		Unlawful to gig, spear or gaff red drum. It is unlawful to use any hook larger than 4/0 from Jul 1 through Sep 30 in the internal coastal fishing waters of Pamlico Sound and its tributaries south of the Albemarle Sound Management Area and north of a line beginning at a point 34° 59.7942' N - 76° 14.6514' W on Camp Point; running easterly to a point 34° 58.7853' N - 76° 09.8922' W on Core Banks while using natural bait from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. unless the terminal tackle consists of: (1) A circle hook defined as a hook with the point of the hook directed perpendicularly back toward the shank, and with the barb either compressed or removed; and (2) A fixed sinker not less than two ounces in weight, secured not more than six inches from the fixed weight to the circle hook.
SEE DISCLAIMER, PAGE 17				

2021 Recreational Size and Bag Limits for N.C. Coastal Waters				
STATE COASTAL WATERS — (Internal and 0 – 3 miles)				
FINFISH SPECIES	Minimum Length	Bag Limits (per person)	Seasons	Comments
Eel, American	9" TL	25/day	Jan 1 - Aug 31	Pots closed north of Highway 58 in Jan Pots closed south of Highway 58 Apr 1-15
Flounder	15" TL	4/day	Aug 16- Sep 30	Regulatory changes possible in Aug 2021 (Check http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations-current)
Herring, Alewife and Blueback	NO POSSESSION			No possession from N.C. waters; if other source, must not exceed 6"
Mackerel				
King	24" FL	3/day	Closes when quota is reached. See http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations	Regulations subject to change. See South Atlantic Fishery Management Council regulations page at http://safmc.net/regulations/regulations-by-species/
Spanish	12" FL	15/day		
Marlin				Highly Migratory Species federal permit is required in state or federal waters. Contact 978-281-9370 or hmspermits.noaa.gov . Prior to removal from vessel, all billfish must be reported at NC HMS reporting stations. See http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/ for details. An Atlantic billfish that is caught but not kept must be released immediately without removing it from the water.
Blue	99" LJFL	1 blue or 1 white marlin or 1 roundscale spearfish/vessel/trip		
White/Roundscale Spearfish	66" LJFL			
Mullet, Striped and White	None	200/day (species combined)		
Sailfish	63" LJFL	1/day		Highly Migratory Species federal permit is required in state or federal waters. Contact 978-281-9370 or hmspermits.noaa.gov . Prior to removal from vessel, all billfish must be reported at NC HMS reporting stations. See http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/ for details. An Atlantic billfish that is caught but not kept must be released immediately without removing it from the water.
Scup (North of Cape Hatteras)	8" TL	50/day		
Seatrout, spotted (Speckled trout)	14" TL	4/day		
Shad				
American shad (All waters except as noted below)	None	10/day of American and hickory shad in any combination		
American shad in Cape Fear River and its tributaries	None	5/day as part of 10-fish American and hickory shad aggregate		
American shad in Albemarle Sound, Roanoke and Neuse rivers and their tributaries	None	1/day as part of 10-fish American and hickory shad aggregate		
American shad in Atlantic Ocean	NO POSSESSION			
Hickory shad (all waters)	None	10/day of American and hickory shad in any combination (see American shad limits above)		
Sheepshead	10" FL	10/day		
Snapper-Groupers Complex	See South Atlantic Fishery Management Council website: http://safmc.net/regulations/regulations-by-species/			This complex includes Snappers, Groupers, Porgys, Triggerfish, Jacks, Tilefish, Grunts, Spadefish, Wrasses and Sea Basses (other than black sea bass)
SEE DISCLAIMER, PAGE 17				

2021 Recreational Size and Bag Limits for N.C. Coastal Waters				
STATE COASTAL WATERS — (Internal and 0 – 3 miles)				
FINFISH SPECIES	Minimum Length	Bag Limits (per person)	Seasons	Comments
Sharks				
Sharks (other than spiny dogfish)	See N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries Proclamation: http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations-current			Regulations subject to change. See http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations-current . For more information and to obtain required federal permit, contact NMFS Highly Migratory Species 978-281-9370 or http://hmspermits.noaa.gov .
Dogfish (smooth)	None	None		No possession of great hammerhead, scallop hammerhead, smooth hammerhead or oceanic whitetip while in possession of tunas, billfish or swordfish. Prohibited species: Atlantic angel, basking, bigeye, bigeye sixgill, bigeye thrasher, bignose, Caribbean reef, Caribbean sharpnose, dusky, Galapagos, longfin mako, narrowtooth, night, sand tiger, sandbar, silky, sevengill, sixgill, smalltail, whale, whites.
Dogfish (spiny)	None	None		Non-stainless steel, non-offset circle hooks must be used when fishing for sharks in the ocean with natural bait
Spot	None	50/day		
Sturgeon	NO POSSESSION			
Tarpon	None	1/day		It is unlawful to take tarpon with any gear other than hook and line.
Tuna				
Bigeye	27" CFL	See https://hmspermits.noaa.gov or nmfs.noaa.gov		Highly Migratory Species federal permit is required in state or federal waters. Contact 978-281-9370 or hmspermits.noaa.gov . Regulations are subject to change. Contact NMFS Highly Migratory Species Division (800-894-5528 http://www.hmspermits.noaa.gov or nmfs.noaa.gov) for up-to-date information.
Bluefin	27" CFL			Prior to removal from vessel, all bluefin tuna must be reported at NC HMS reporting stations. See http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/ for more details.
Yellowfin	27" CFL	3/day		Closes when quota is reached. See South Atlantic Fishery Management Council regulations page at http://safmc.net/regulations/regulations-by-species/
Wahoo	None	2/day		
Weakfish (Gray Trout)	12" TL	1/day		
THIS DIGEST IS EFFECTIVE APRIL 1, 2021 AND IS FOR GENERAL INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES AND HAS NO LEGAL FORCE OR EFFECT. FISHERY RULES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE. THESE RESTRICTIONS APPLY TO FISH TAKEN FOR RECREATIONAL PURPOSES AND INCLUDE HOOK AND LINE. Updated State regulations can be found at http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-fishing-size-and-bag-limits and updated Recreational Commercial Gear License information can be found at http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-commercial-gear-license .				

SHELLFISH				
Species	Minimum Length	Bag Limits (Per Person)	Seasons	Comments
Blue Crab	5" spike to spike width males and mature females. No possession of immature females	50 crabs/day not to exceed 100 crabs/vessel/day	Closed Jan 1-31 north of the Highway 58 bridge; Mar 1-15 south of the Highway 58 bridge. Unlawful to possess any crab with brown or black sponge Apr 1-30	One crab pot may be used without a license attached to private property or private pier. Recreational Commercial Gear License required otherwise. See maps for open/closed areas at http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/ . Size limit applies to hard crabs only.
Hard Clam	1" thick	100 clams/day not to exceed 200 clams/vessel/day		Frequent temporary closures due to stormwater runoff and rainfall apply to all shellfish harvest. Contact the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries at 800-682-2632 or visit http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations-current for seasons, areas, or other restrictions.
Oyster	3" shell length	1 bushel/day not to exceed 2 bushels/vessel/day	Open by proclamation See http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations-current	Frequent temporary closures due to stormwater runoff and rainfall apply to all shellfish harvest. Contact the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries at 800-682-2632 or visit http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations-current for seasons, areas, or other restrictions.
Bay Scallop	NO POSSESSION		Closed unless opened by proclamation. See http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations-current	
Conchs and Whelks	None	10/day not to exceed 20/vessel/day		
Mussels	None	100/day not to exceed 200/vessel/day		Frequent temporary closures due to stormwater runoff and rainfall apply to all shellfish harvest. Contact the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries at 800-682-2632 or visit http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations-current for seasons, areas, or other restrictions.
Shrimp	None	Closed shrimping area — 4 quarts heads on 2-1/2 quarts heads off/day (Cast net only) Open shrimping area — 48 quarts heads on, 30 quarts heads off (Per person or vessel)*		Recreational Commercial Gear License required for use of a shrimp trawl, shrimp pound and shrimp pots. *Recreational Commercial Gear License holders may keep two limits of shrimp, when two or more license holders are on board a vessel, using commercial gear, while shrimping in open waters. See maps for open/closed areas at http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/maps-to-view-and-print
Spiny Lobster	3" carapace length	2/Day		The carapace is measured beginning at the forward edge between the rostral horns and eyes, excluding any soft tissue, and proceeding along the middle to the rear edge of the carapace. It is unlawful to possess an egg-bearing spiny lobster or a spiny lobster which eggs have been scrubbed or removed. It is unlawful to possess detached spiny lobster tails, or to use a gaff hook, spear, or similar device to take spiny lobsters.
Stone Crabs	2 3/4" propodus (forearm) length	No limit on claws	Closed Jun 15 - Aug 15	No possession of crab body; no removal of claw from egg-bearing crabs; no gigging.
<p>THIS DIGEST IS EFFECTIVE APRIL 1, 2021 AND IS FOR GENERAL INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES AND HAS NO LEGAL FORCE OR EFFECT. FISHERY RULES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE. THESE RESTRICTIONS APPLY TO FISH TAKEN FOR RECREATIONAL PURPOSES AND INCLUDE HOOK AND LINE. Updated State regulations can be found at http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-fishing-size-and-bag-limits and updated Recreational Commercial Gear License information can be found at http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-commercial-gear-license.</p> <p>Total length (TL) is measured from tip of snout with mouth closed to top of compressed tail. Fork length (FL) is measured from tip of snout to middle of fork in tail. Lower jaw fork length (LJFL) is measured from lower jaw to middle of fork in tail. Curved fork length (CFL) is the measurement of the length taken in a line tracing the contour of the body from the tip of the upper jaw to the fork of the tail.</p> <p>Anglers cannot catch both a federal and state bag limit for the same species on the same trip.</p> <p>Ocean boundary is defined as water seaward of the COLREGS Demarcation Lines as indicated on National Ocean Service navigation charts.</p> <p>No one may possess aboard a vessel or while engaged in fishing any fish subject to limits without head and tail attached, except for alewife and blueback herring used for bait provided not more than two fish per boat/operation may be cut at any one time.</p>				

N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries Telephone Directory				
Morehead City Office (24 hours) 800-682-2632 or 252-726-7021	Elizabeth City Office 800-338-7805 (N.C. only) or 252-381-6000	Manteo Office 252-473-5734	Washington Office 800-338-7804 or 252-946-6481	Wilmington Office 800-248-4536 (N.C. only) or 910-796-7215
Federal and State Agency Telephone Directory				
Federal Regulations National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS): 813-893-3722		State of N.C. — Freshwater Regulations N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission (WRC): 800-662-7137		

Recreational fishing does not always involve a rod-and-reel. Below is some information you need to know if you want to fish with gigs, cast nets or pots.

Gigging, Spearfishing, and Bowfishing

Individuals need to hold a Coastal Recreational Fishing License to gig, spear or use a bowfishing device in North Carolina.

Properly licensed recreational fishermen are allowed to gig or spear any species except red drum, sharks, spiny lobster, stone crabs, tarpon or any species that is not in season.

Recreational size and bag limits apply and sale of catch is prohibited.



Cast Nets

There are no regulations limiting the size of cast nets used in N.C. coastal waters. A cast net may be used year-round in all coastal waters of the state.

Those who target finfish with a cast net need to hold a Coastal Recreational Fishing License. This includes cast netting for minnows or other bait fish.

No license or permit is needed to cast net for shrimp for recreational purposes, but you need a Coastal Recreational Fishing License to keep any finfish you catch.

Recreational size and bag limits apply and sale of catch is prohibited.

Crab Fishing

No license is needed to set one pot per person from a private pier or shoreline. No buoy or identification is required.

No license is needed to use collapsible crab traps as long as the largest open dimension is no larger than 18 inches and the traps are designed to collapse at all times when in the water, except when they are being retrieved from or lowered to the bottom.

No license is needed for chicken necking (using a hand line with chicken as bait).

A Recreational Commercial Gear License is required for more than one pot, pots set in open water, crab trawls and trotlines.

Recreational harvest limits apply and sale of catch is prohibited.



For the most up-to-date recreational size and bag limits, see <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-fishing-size-and-bag-limits>.

North Carolina Fishing — What's Hot and When



Bluefish



Red Drum



Spanish Mackerel



Dolphin (mahi mahi)



Spotted Seatrout

January

FISH: Black sea bass, bluefin tuna, striped bass (ocean, coastal rivers). **SHELLFISH:** clams, oysters

February

FISH: American and hickory shad (coastal river tributaries), black sea bass, bluefin tuna, striped bass (ocean, coastal rivers). **SHELLFISH:** clams, oysters

March

FISH: American and hickory shad (coastal river tributaries), black sea bass, bluefin tuna, bluefish, sea mullet, striped bass (coastal rivers), wahoo, weakfish, yellowfin tuna. **SHELLFISH:** clams, oysters

April

FISH: American shad (coastal rivers), black sea bass, bluefin tuna, bluefish, dolphin, king mackerel, red drum, sea mullet, spotted seatrout, striped bass (coastal rivers), wahoo, weakfish, yellowfin tuna. **SHELLFISH:** clams.

May

FISH: Bluefish, cobia, croaker, dolphin, grouper, king mackerel, sea mullet, sharks, sheepshead, Spanish mackerel, spotted seatrout (sounds), striped bass (coastal rivers), wahoo, weakfish, yellowfin tuna. **SHELLFISH:** clams, hard crabs, soft crabs.

June

FISH: Blue marlin, bluefish, cobia, croaker, dolphin, grouper, king mackerel, sailfish, sharks, sheepshead, Spanish mackerel, spotted seatrout, tuna, weakfish, white marlin. **SHELLFISH:** clams, hard crabs, soft crabs.

July

FISH: Blue marlin, bluefish, cobia, croaker, dolphin, grouper, sailfish, sea mullet, sheepshead, Spanish mackerel, tarpon, tuna, white marlin. **SHELLFISH:** clams, hard crabs, soft crabs, shrimp.

August

FISH: Bluefish, cobia, croaker, dolphin, flounder, grouper, red drum, sea mullet, sheepshead, Spanish mackerel, spot, tarpon, tuna, white marlin. **SHELLFISH:** clams, hard crabs, soft crabs, shrimp.

September

FISH: Bluefish, black drum, cobia, dolphin, false albacore, grouper, king mackerel, red drum, sea mullet, sheepshead, Spanish mackerel, spot, wahoo, weakfish, white marlin. **SHELLFISH:** clams, hard crabs, soft crabs, shrimp.

October

FISH: Black drum, black sea bass, bluefish, dolphin, false albacore, grouper, king mackerel, red drum, sea mullet, sheepshead, spot, spotted seatrout, striped bass (coastal rivers), wahoo, weakfish, yellowfin tuna. **SHELLFISH:** clams, oysters, shrimp.

November

FISH: Black drum, black sea bass, bluefish, false albacore, grouper, king mackerel, red drum, sea mullet, sharks, spotted seatrout, striped bass (coastal rivers), wahoo, yellowfin tuna. **SHELLFISH:** clams, oysters.

December

FISH: Black sea bass, bluefin tuna, bluefish, grouper, sharks, spotted seatrout, striped bass (ocean and coastal rivers). **SHELLFISH:** clams, oysters.



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