

FREE

North Carolina 2022

Coastal Recreational Fishing Digest

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Saltwater Regulations and More!



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

Fish are Jumpin'



Ready to catch some?

2022 promises to bring another great year of fishing on the North Carolina coast, and the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries is pleased to present the 2022 Coastal Recreational Fishing Digest.

Featured in this year's digest is an article on a new smartphone application, called Catch U Later, that anglers are helping the Division of Marine Fisheries test.

Also contained within is a table with recreational size and bag limits and seasons, licensing information, tips for ethical angling, fish identification guides, and directions for measuring fork length, total length, and curved fork length of a fish.

Fishing regulations can change frequently, so anglers using printed size and bag limit tables should always check for updates on the Division of Marine Fisheries' website at <https://deq.nc.gov/recreational-size-bag-limits>.

Watch Out for These Changes:

Flounder

The 2022 flounder season had not yet been announced when this digest went to press in the spring of 2022. Draft Amendment 3 to the Southern Flounder Fishery Management Plan was scheduled for final adoption by the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission in May 2022, and decisions made by the commission could impact the 2022 season.

The draft flounder amendment tentatively approved in February 2022 included the following management measures impacting the recreational fishery:

- A one-fish per person per day recreational flounder bag limit.
- A recreational flounder season within an Aug. 16 to Sept. 30 window (the season may be shortened depending on available quota).
- A March 1 to April 15 recreational Gulf and summer flounder season for hook-and-line in the ocean (possibly beginning in 2023).
- Prohibit harvest of flounder with a Recreational Commercial Gear License.
- An adaptive management framework with accountability measures to implement paybacks if allowable landings are exceeded.
- Gradually equalizing southern flounder quota allocations from the current 70% commercial/30% recreational to 60% commercial and 40% recreational 2025, and to 50% commercial and 50% recreational 2026.

Shrimp

The N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission adopted Amendment 3 to the Shrimp Fishery Management Plan in February 2022. Changes pertaining to the recreational harvest of shrimp include:

- Simplifying the recreational creel limit for cast nets to a single, state-wide limit (48 quarts, heads on or 30 quarts, heads off).
- Prohibiting trawling in crab sanctuaries.
- Prohibiting trawling in Bogue Sound and the Carolina Beach Yacht Basin, except within the Intracoastal Waterway.

Black Sea Bass North of Cape Hatteras

The 2022 recreational season for Black Sea Bass north of Cape Hatteras will open May 15 and close Dec. 11. The size limit will increase to 13 inches total length. The 15-fish bag limit will remain the same.

The management changes are needed to achieve a 20.7% coastwide harvest reduction target for recreational black sea bass adopted by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission for 2022.

Dolphin

A new federal rule adopted in the Dolphin Wahoo Fishery Management Plan Amendment 10 reduced the recreational vessel limit for dolphin from 60 fish to 54 fish. The change was made to comply with the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's Amendment 10 to the Dolphin Wahoo Fishery Management Plan.

Scup

The size limit for scup has increased to 9 inches. The 50-fish bag limit and year-round season remains the same. The size limit was increased to comply with the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Fishery Management Plan.



Catch U Later app helps fisheries managers learn more about recreational flounder catch

Some anglers are helping the Division of Marine Fisheries study flounder catch in North Carolina by testing a new smartphone application called Catch U Later.

Anglers use the Catch U Later app to record information about the flounder they catch, but throw back, when they are fishing. The anglers answer a few questions about what species of flounder they caught, where, when, and how they caught it, and upload photos of the fish; this information helps fisheries managers better characterize North Carolina's recreational flounder fishery.

About 500 randomly selected anglers participated in the study, which was implemented in August 2021, and they submitted more than 350 records to the Catch U Later app. An additional 10,000 anglers have been randomly selected to participate in the study this year.

At this time, the pilot project is open only to a randomly selected panel of users, but if the project is determined successful, Catch U Later could augment the current Division data collection programs to more accurately determine species composition and length frequency distribution of North Carolina's recreational flounder catch.

Recreational anglers in North Carolina mainly catch three species of flounder - southern, summer, and Gulf. The Division's Coastal Angling Program collects information about flounder catch through various methods, including the Access Point Angler Intercept Survey, which interviews about 20,000 anglers annually at 300 sites across the coast.

This survey collects information to the species level for flounder that anglers keep, but because field staff do not see the flounder that anglers throw back, discarded flounder are conservatively recorded to the left-eye flounder genus level. The genus level encompasses all

three species of flounder but does not break them out by species.

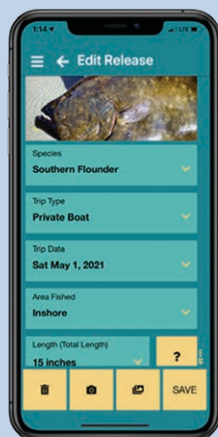
Through the Catch U Later app, fisheries managers hope to learn more about the species-specific makeup of released flounder in North Carolina. They also hope to learn if anglers can tell the difference between North Carolina's flounder species.

Currently, the state manages all three flounder species together as one recreational flounder fishery. This means if a management change is needed for one species, such as a lower bag limit or higher size limit, it is implemented for all flounder species.

In the future, data collected from the app could help determine if the state can manage the recreational flounder fishery by individual species, such as allow harvest of summer and Gulf flounder while keeping the southern flounder season closed.

Additionally, work is underway to expand the Catch U Later app to collect catch information on red drum, kingfish species, spotted seatrout, and weakfish.

The Catch U Later app was developed in partnership with the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program, Harbor Light Software, and the South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council.



Recreational Fishing Data Collection

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 CAP staff routinely provide stakeholders with information on 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 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.

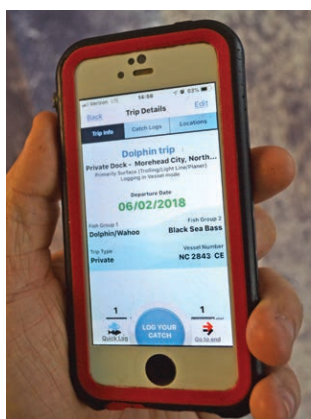
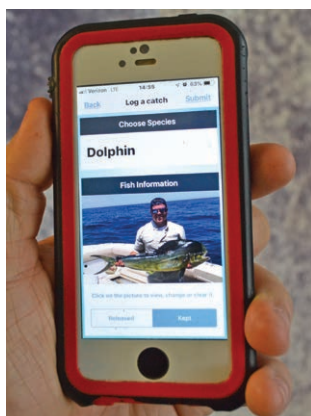
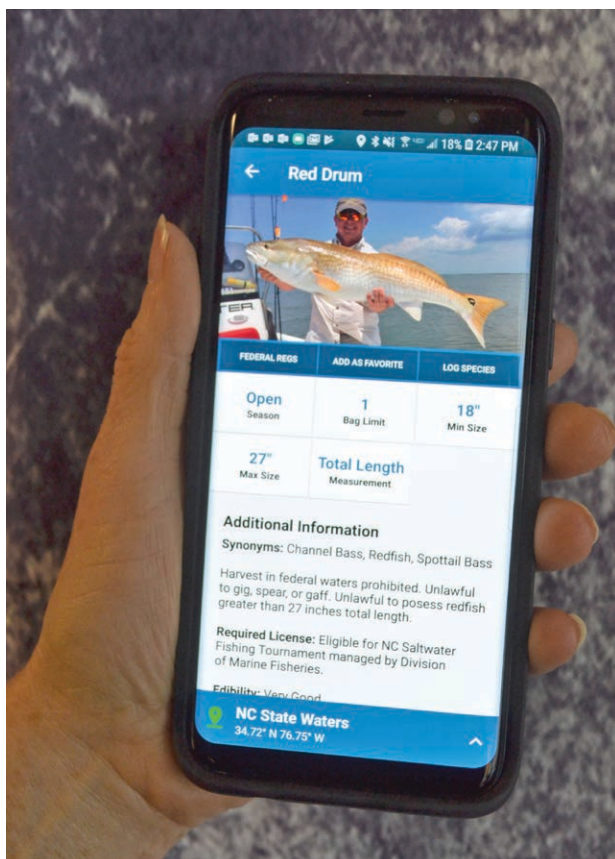
CAP also partners with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission to collect recreational data from North Carolina's anadromous fisheries within the coastal rivers of the central and southern areas of the state. Anadromous fish migrate from saltwater to freshwater to spawn. The survey conducts approximately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

To learn more about recreational fishing data collection, visit <https://deq.nc.gov/coastal-angling-program>.

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.

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.

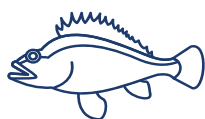


Scan the above QR code, or visit www.myfishcount.com to download the MyFishCount app to your mobile phone.

Scan the QR codes to download the FishRules app!



FishRules Android



FishRules iPhone



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 <https://deq.nc.gov/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 and 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 or volunteer rescue or EMS squad 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. Due to certification requirements these must be purchased at the WRC office in Raleigh or by mail application.

- 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.
- Residents that are 50-69 years old may purchase Lifetime Sportsman for \$265 and Lifetime Unified Sportsman license for \$358 respectively.

* 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 <https://deq.nc.gov/recreational-fishing-licenses> for the most up-to-date listing of fees.

Tagging Program: Catch, cut, report!



Ever wonder what to do if you catch a tagged fish?

It's simple, just remember to catch, cut, report. If you catch a tagged fish, cut off the tag, and report the tag to 800-682-2632 or 252-726-7021. You can also report the tag online at: <https://deq.nc.gov/fish-tagging-program> and email photos of you and your tagged fish to tagrecap@ncdenr.gov.

The N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries tags over 15,000 red drum, striped bass, spotted seatrout, southern flounder and cobia each year. All tags are marked with "NCDMF" and a unique tag number to identify the fish. Tags are also marked with the text "cut off tag - reward" and "call 1-800-682-2632".

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

When reporting a tag, you will need to provide the following information:

- Species of fish
- Tag number (example: G12345)
- Date caught
- Location caught (waterbody/nearest landmark or latitude/longitude)
- Gear used to catch fish
- Total length of fish
- Fate of fish (kept or released)

Tag Rewards

If you report a yellow tag along with all the required information, you may choose a reward of a Tagging Program hat, fish towel, fish pin, or \$5. Red tags are worth a reward of \$100 dollars (the physical tag must be turned in to receive the reward).

When mailing red tags, be sure to tape the tag to a piece of paper with your contact information on it before placing it in an envelope. Mail tags to **N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries, P.O. Box 769, Morehead City, N.C. 28557**.

Along with your reward, you will also receive a personalized letter and certificate containing information about your fish. This information includes 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. The certificate also has a detailed map showing where your fish was originally tagged and the location you recaptured the fish.

Additionally, all participants who report a tagged fish are entered into an end-of-year cash drawing.

Helpful Tips:

- Cut off the tag as close to the body as possible, do not pull it out.
- Record the tag number or take a picture of the tag in case you misplace the tag before reporting it.
- If the tag has algae growth, do not scrape the algae off. Instead, let the tag soak in warm soapy water until the algae comes off.
- Be alert! Tags are designed to be as unobtrusive as possible, so they don't change the fish's behavior. That means you might not see a tag if you're not looking.
- If releasing the fish, return the fish to water as quickly as possible to increase post-release survival.

Why do we tag fish?

Information collected from returned tags helps researchers answer important questions about each species, including:

- 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?

Scan the QR code below to learn more about the Tagging Program or to report your tagged fish online.



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 <https://deq.nc.gov/highly-migratory-species>.

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 be submitted online. For a list of weigh stations, tournament rules, and to view current state saltwater fishing records, visit the N.C. Saltwater Fishing Tournament page at <https://deq.nc.gov/nc-saltwater-fishing-tournament>. All applications are due to the Division of Marine Fisheries by Jan. 15 of the following year. However, citations are printed on a quarterly basis, so early submission will allow you to receive your citation sooner.

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

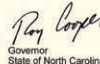
North Carolina Saltwater Fishing Citation

Chris Batsavage

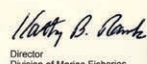
WHOSE CATCH HAS BEEN JUDGED
EXCEPTIONAL

FISH: Sheepshead WEIGHT: 8 lbs 13 oz DATE: July 17, 2021




Governor
State of North Carolina




Director
Division of Marine Fisheries



outstanding catch and features an illustration of the species.

When will I get it?

Citations are printed quarterly. For example, citations received January through March will be printed in May of that year. However, red drum citations represent the angler's total number of eligible red drum for that year, so they are only printed once (in February of the following year).

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 QR code to submit a
release-citation application:



The Official 2022 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 26 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 coastal 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 that contains coordinates for materials on each reef. While this paper guide is accurate up until 2016, there is also an online Interactive Reef Guide, which contains the same information as the paper copy, but also allows users to view sidescan sonar images of material, measure distances, create custom maps, and download coordinates for their GPS systems. All the materials shown are derived from high precision sidescan imagery. Additionally, the online reef guide is regularly updated with current sidescan and material information as Artificial Reef staff deploy and scan new material.

Recent Enhancements

North Carolina's newest offshore artificial reef, AR-165, was established off Oregon Inlet in 2020 and has been a focus of deployment over the last two years. 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. A third tugboat, the 108' Valley Forge, was sunk in May 2021.

Nearby, the demolition of the Herbert C. Bonner Bridge that spanned Oregon Inlet will be completed in 2022. Much of the material from the bridge demolition was carried offshore to four nearby reef sites (AR-130, AR-140, AR-145, and AR-160 in 2020 and 2021). Additionally, barge loads of the deconstructed bridge were taken to AR-250 and AR-255 off Ocracoke Inlet, with the final load planned to deploy at AR-255 in Spring of 2022.

In total, these seven reef sites are prime locations for anglers venturing out of Oregon and Ocracoke Inlets to find seabass, king mackerel, bluefish, amberjack, and other sought after species.

Inshore, 200 reef balls were deployed to AR-380 in Bogue Sound near Morehead City. These joined 96 reef balls that were deployed in 2018. AR-380 sits in approximately 10 feet of water and is an easily accessible site for small boats or kayaks to catch inshore species. It also offers a great opportunity to snorkel and free dive at high tide when the water is clear and the current is slow.

Cedar Island Oyster Sanctuary is the newest inshore reef to be built in North

Carolina. Construction occurred in partnership with the North Carolina Coastal Federation and included 18,000 tons of limestone and crushed concrete deployed in the first year of this project. Located just northwest of Cedar Island in southern Pamlico Sound, the site will be home to healthy oyster populations and will be a popular site for anglers targeting large red drum in the late summer and early fall.

Current and Upcoming Enhancements

Inshore, 2022 will see enhancements at two reefs. The second year of construction at Cedar Island Oyster Sanctuary is planned to begin in May 2022 and includes an additional 18,000 tons of limestone. The Artificial Reef Program, in partnership with the Coastal Conservation Association, will also be deploying up to 100 reef structures on AR-291 in the Pamlico River.

The reef program currently has approximately 2,600 tons of recycled concrete pipe and 700 Reef Balls stockpiled at an offsite facility and scheduled to be deployed at AR-165 off Oregon Inlet and AR-368 off Topsail this year. 3,500 tons of recycled concrete pipe and manhole sections are currently being stockpiled in Wilmington, NC for deployment at AR-430 and AR-460 later this year. Finally, efforts are underway to secure a large vessel to deploy at AR-305, located off Beaufort Inlet.



To learn more about the state's artificial reefs and to use the Interactive Reef Guide, scan the QR code above, or go to <https://deq.nc.gov/artificial-reefs>. 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. Make certain to avoid touching the gills or eyes.

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 move 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 <https://deq.nc.gov/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



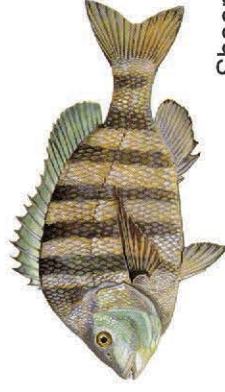
Spanish Mackerel
Scomberomorus maculatus



White Marlin
Tetrapturus albidus



Sailfish
Istiophorus platypterus



Sheepshead
Archosargus probatocephalus



Vermilion Snapper
Rhomboplites aurorubens



Spadefish
Chaetodipterus faber



Spot
Leiostomus xanthurus



Croaker
Micropogonias undulatus



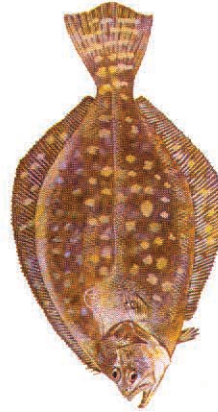
Dolphin
Coryphaena hippurus



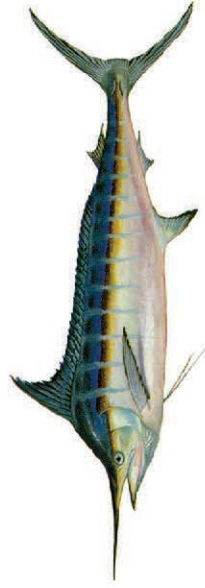
Black Drum
Pogonias cromis



Red Drum
Sciaenops ocellatus



Southern Flounder
Paralichthys lethostigma



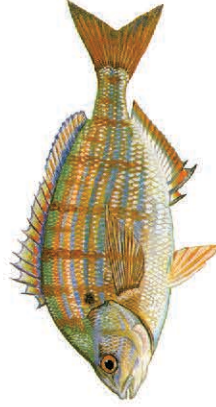
Blue Marlin
Makaira nigricans



Sea Mullet
Mentidarius americanus



Pigfish
Orthopristis chrysoptera



Pinfish
Lagodon rhomboides

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

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



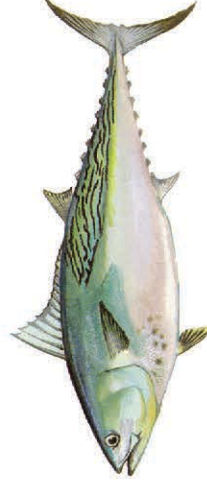
Speckled Trout
Cynoscion nebulosus



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



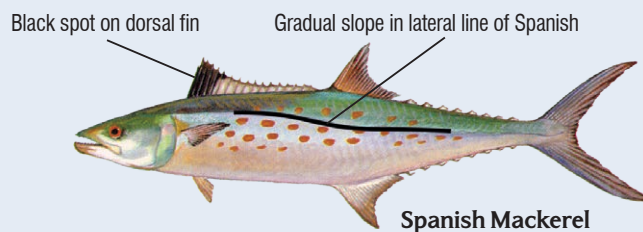
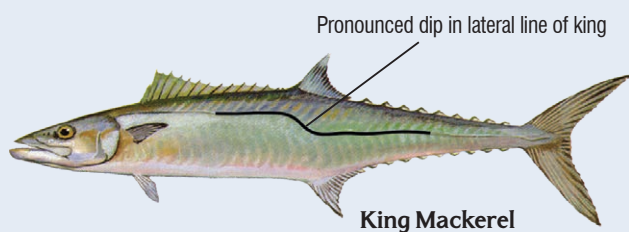
Chin barbels

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.



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.

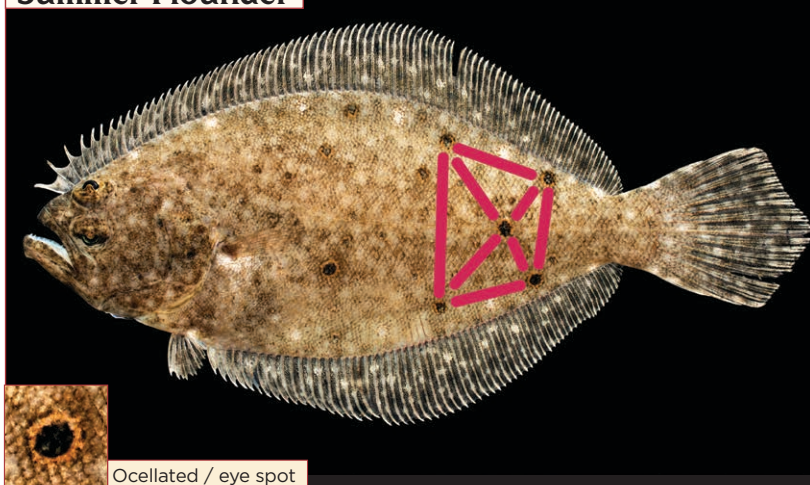
One of the ways the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries does research is by collecting information on recreational fishing catch and effort through in-person and mail surveys. Staff talk to more than 20,000 anglers each year on the beach, at the piers and at boat ramps to find out what they caught, what 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



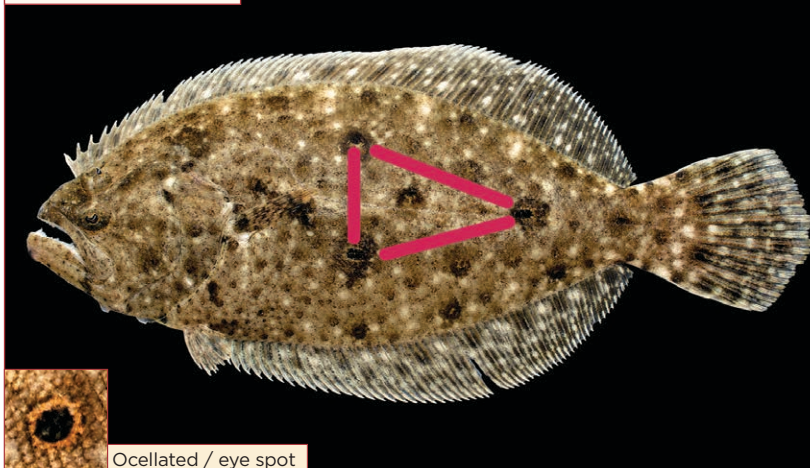
- This is the most common flounder caught in North Carolina, especially in estuarine waters.
- Non-ocellated spots cover the body
- Upper jaw extends to beyond rear margin of eye
- Eight to 11 gill rakers on lower limb of first gill arch
- Sixty-three to 74 anal fin rays

Summer Flounder

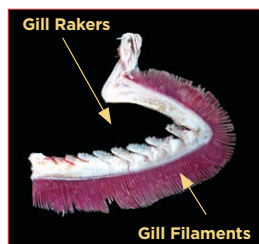


- This species is commonly seen around inlets, in the ocean and in estuarine waters
- At least five ocellated spots on body — five prominent ocelli form the pattern from the five-side of a die
- Upper jaw extends to rear margin of eye
- Thirteen to 18 gill rakers on lower limb of first gill arch
- Sixty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

Gulf Flounder



- 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 sex and maturity of the fish from the carcass. Age information about fish is collected by analyzing scales or hard body parts, such as otoliths (earbones) and spines, for annual growth rings. Information gathered through this program is used for stock assessments at the state and federal levels.

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.



To learn more about the Carcass Collection Program, view a map of freezer locations, and see which species are accepted, scan the QR code above, or go to <https://deq.nc.gov/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.

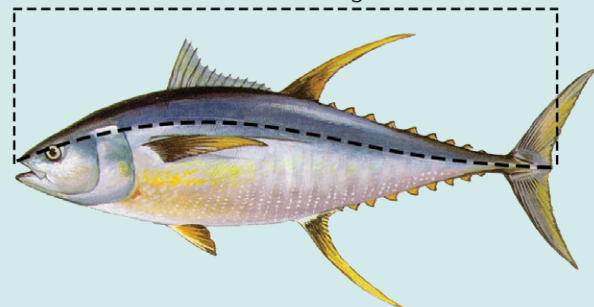
Curved Fork Length (CFL) – The length of a fish as measured on a line tracing the contour of the body from the tip of the upper jaw to the fork of the tail.

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



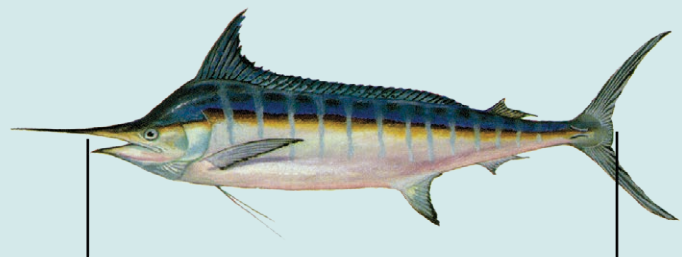
Curved Fork Length



Fork Length



Lower Jaw Fork Length



2022 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	13" TL	15/day	May 15 - Dec 11	Regulations subject to change. Contact the National Marine Fisheries Service Greater Atlantic Regional Office (978-231-9315) or http://www.greateralantic.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 https://deq.nc.gov/proclamations	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 in state waters only. Closed in ocean waters 3-200 miles.	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. Landings 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	1/day	Apr 23-24 and Apr 28-29 Season closes if quota is reached. See https://deq.nc.gov/proclamations	See NCWRC news release: https://www.ncwildlife.org/News/2022-harvest-season-announced-for-striped-bass-on-the-roanoke-river
Albemarle Sound Management Area	18" TL	1/day	Open Oct 1 - Apr 30 unless closed by proclamation when quota is reached. See https://deq.nc.gov/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 https://deq.nc.gov/marine-fisheries for updates.
Cobia	See N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries Proclamation: https://deq.nc.gov/proclamations			
Croaker, Atlantic	None	50/day		
Dolphin	None	10/day or 54 fish/vessel, whichever is less	Closes when quota is reached. See https://deq.nc.gov/proclamations	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.
THIS DIGEST IS EFFECTIVE APRIL 1, 2022 AND IS FOR GENERAL INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES AND HAS NO LEGAL FORCE OR EFFECT. FISHERY RULES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE. See https://deq.nc.gov/recreational-size-bag-limits .				

2022 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	Unlawful to possess Sep 1 - Dec 31 except when taken by baited pots.	Pots closed north of Highway 58 in Jan Pots closed south of Highway 58 Mar 1-15
Flounder	See https://deq.nc.gov/proclamations for seasons and size and bag limits.			
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 https://deq.nc.gov/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				
Blue	99" LJFL			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 https://deq.nc.gov/hms for details. An Atlantic billfish that is caught but not kept must be released immediately without removing it from the water.
White/Roundscale Spearfish	66" LJFL	1 blue or 1 white marlin or 1 roundscale spearfish/vessel/trip		
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 https://deq.nc.gov/hms 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)	9" TL	50/day		See https://deq.nc.gov/scup-federal-regulations for regulations in federal waters.
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			It is unlawful to take American or hickory shad by any method except hook and line, Apr 15 - Dec 31.
Hickory shad (all waters)	None	10/day of American and hickory shad in any combination (see American shad limits above)		It is unlawful to take or possess American shad from the Atlantic Ocean. For seasons and aggregate creel limits for American shad and hickory shad, see most recent Proclamation: https://deq.nc.gov/proclamations
Sheepshead	10" FL	10/day		
Snapper-Grouper 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)
THIS DIGEST IS EFFECTIVE APRIL 1, 2022 AND IS FOR GENERAL INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES AND HAS NO LEGAL FORCE OR EFFECT. FISHERY RULES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE. See https://deq.nc.gov/recreational-size-bag-limits .				

2022 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: https://deq.nc.gov/proclamations	Regulations subject to change. See https://deq.nc.gov/proclamations . 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	NO POSSESSION			
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. Prior to removal from vessel, all bluefin tuna must be reported at NC HMS reporting stations. See https://deq.nc.gov/hms for more details.
Bluefin	See https://hmspermits.noaa.gov or nmfs.noaa.gov			
Yellowfin	27" CFL			
Wahoo	None	2/day	Closes when quota is reached. See https://deq.nc.gov/proclamations	Closes when quota is reached. See South Atlantic Fishery Management Council regulations page at http://safmc.net/regulations/regulations-by-species/
Weakfish (Gray Trout)	12" TL	1/day		
THIS DIGEST IS EFFECTIVE APRIL 1, 2022 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 https://deq.nc.gov/recreational-size-bag-limits and updated Recreational Commercial Gear License information can be found at https://deq.nc.gov/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; Closed 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 https://deq.nc.gov/marine-fisheries .
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 https://deq.nc.gov/proclamations for seasons, areas, or other restrictions.
Oyster	3" shell length	1 bushel/day not to exceed 2 bushels/vessel/day	Oct 15- Mar 31 unless closed earlier by proclamation. See https://deq.nc.gov/proclamations	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 https://deq.nc.gov/proclamations for seasons, areas, or other restrictions.
Bay Scallop	NO POSSESSION		Closed unless opened by proclamation. See https://deq.nc.gov/proclamations	
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 https://deq.nc.gov/proclamations for seasons, areas, or other restrictions.
Shrimp	None	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 https://deq.nc.gov/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, 2022 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 https://deq.nc.gov/recreational-size-bag-limits and updated Recreational Commercial Gear License information can be found at https://deq.nc.gov/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. The below information applies to the recreational use of gigs, cast nets and crab pots in North Carolina coastal waters.

Gigging, Spearfishing, and Bowfishing

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

North Carolina prohibits gigging or spearing 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 North Carolina 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 a Coastal Recreational Fishing License is needed to keep any finfish caught.

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 or other bait).

A Recreational Commercial Gear License (see page 5) 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 <https://deq.nc.gov/recreational-size-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



Scan this quick response code to get the latest size and bag limits on your mobile phone.



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