

FREE

North Carolina 2023

Coastal Recreational Fishing Digest

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begins on page 15

Saltwater Regulations and More!



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

Ready to go fishing?



Watch Out for These Changes in 2023:

Flounder

The 2023 recreational flounder season had not been announced when this publication went to press in the spring of 2023. Anglers should check the Division of Marine Fisheries' website for announcements.

Striped Mullet

Draft Supplement A to the Striped Mullet Fishery Management Plan Amendment 1 includes various proposals for a commercial and recreational season closure to end overfishing. The N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission had not approved any of the proposals when this digest went to press,

but anglers should check the recreational size and bag limits on the Division of Marine Fisheries website for any changes.

Black Sea Bass North of Cape Hatteras

The 2023 seasons for black sea bass north of Cape Hatteras will be May 15 to Sept. 30 and Oct. 10 to Dec. 31. The season will be closed Oct. 1-9. The size and bag limit will remain 13 inches total length and 15 fish per day.

Scup

The bag limit for scup north of Cape Hatteras has decreased to 40-fish per day. The size limit remains at 9 inches total length with no closed season.

How to Measure a Fish

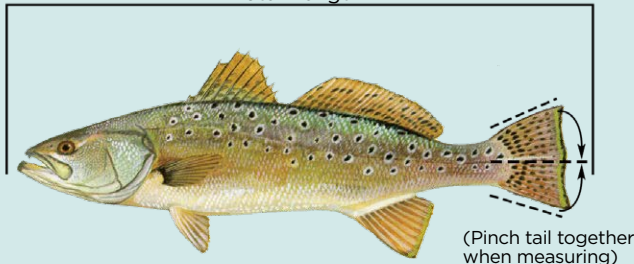
Total Length (TL) – The length of a fish as measured from the tip of the snout to the tip of the tail.

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



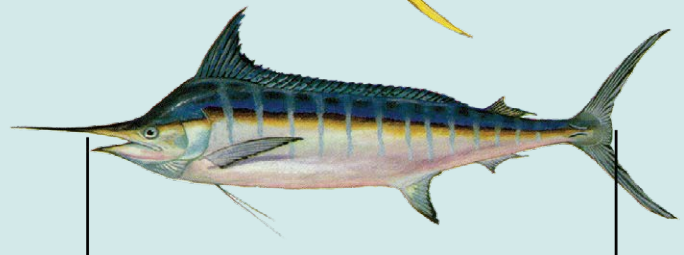
Curved Fork Length



Fork Length



Lower Jaw Fork Length



Happy Anniversary!

That's right, it's time to celebrate 200 years of state marine fisheries management and conservation in North Carolina.

On Dec. 30, 1822, the N.C. General Assembly passed a law titled *An Act to Prevent the Destruction of Oysters, and for Other Purposes, in the State*.

This law, restricting oyster harvest gear and prohibiting the export of North Carolina oysters to other states, was the first statewide law governing marine fisheries in North Carolina. That's a big deal for the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries! It's also a big deal for the fishing public.

North Carolina has a rich marine fisheries resource, from speckled trout at Sunset Beach to striped bass at Oregon Inlet, with red drum of Pamlico Sound in between. North Carolina is where the warm waters of the Gulf Stream meet the cooler waters of the Labrador Current, producing a diversity of catch like no other state.

Managing and conserving this resource is reason to celebrate!

This digest is chock full of ways you,

as an angler, can help conserve the resource, whether it be following best practices while fishing or turning in a tag from a fish. You can also help celebrate, too!

The Division of Marine Fisheries started celebrating with a kickoff meeting in late 2022, and Governor Roy Cooper issued a Proclamation declaring December as Marine Fisheries Management and Conservation Month in North Carolina.

We continued the celebration in early 2023, launching new agency social media sites and partnering with the N.C. Maritime Museum in Beaufort on a series of history presentations.

Coming up on June 10, 2023, the Division of Marine Fisheries will hold a Bicentennial Jamboree at its Headquarters campus in Morehead City. It is free and open to the public.

You can meet the biologists and other technical staff behind the science

and learn how they gather data that is used in stock assessments. Marine Patrol officers will showcase different boats and equipment they use, and their Swift Water Rescue Team will conduct mock water rescues. There will be food trucks and plenty of hands-on activities for children and adults.

The Division of Marine Fisheries also plans to return to the N.C. State Fair in October 2023. If you can't make it to the Jamboree, come celebrate with us at the State Fair.



Scan the QR Code to learn more!

BICENTENNIAL Jamboree

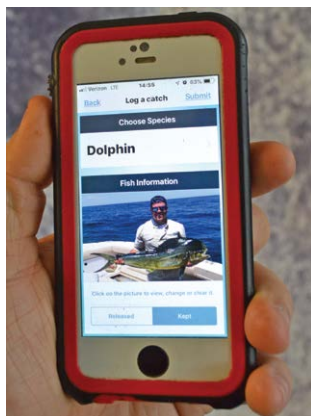
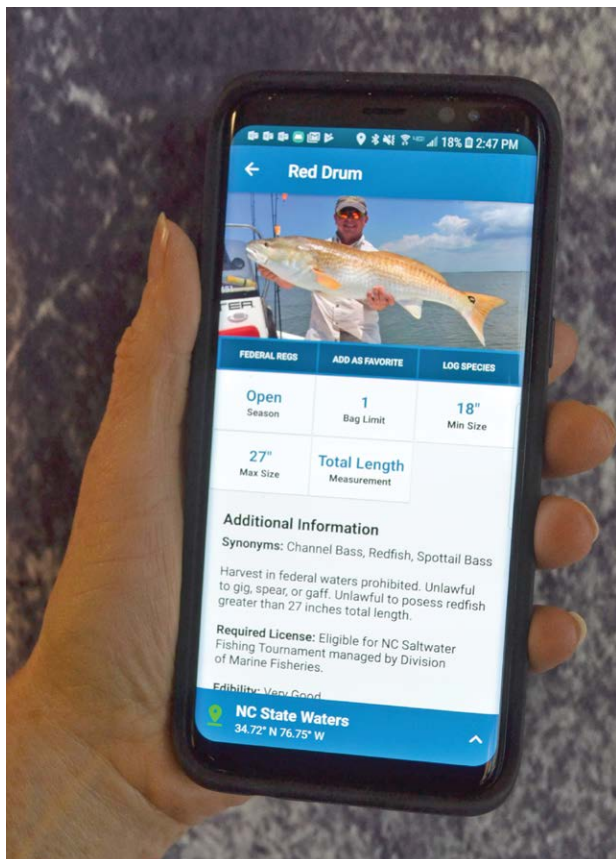
JUNE 10, 2023 · 10 A.M. - 4 P.M.

- Meet the people behind the science**
A diverse group of scientists, managers, technical staff, and vessel captains work to ensure sustainable marine and estuarine fisheries and habitats for the benefit and health of the people of North Carolina.
- Learn how DMF collects your data**
View gear demonstrations and discuss survey techniques with staff. See trawl, gillnet, and electroshocking boats that are used for data collection.
- Watch the Swiftwater Rescue Team**
North Carolina Marine Patrol, the oldest state law enforcement agency, has a new Swiftwater Rescue Team! They'll be conducting mock rescues throughout the day.
- And so much more!**
Win a prize by collecting stamps in your passport, visit fish in the marsh tank, show off your cast net skills, or build your own artificial reef. Food trucks will be on site.

NC Division of Marine Fisheries · Headquarters Office
3441 Arendell Street · Morehead City, NC

Celebrating 200 years of marine fisheries management in North Carolina!

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.

SAFMC Release App

Do you fish for snapper-grouper? The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) has a citizen science project for you!

The number of fish being released in South Atlantic waters is increasing. Gathering information about these fish is important, but difficult to do because traditional sampling methods occur back at the docks. Anglers, like you, hold the key to this on-the-water knowledge.

Through the project SAFMC Release, participants are using the free mobile app, SciFish, to record information on their released Red Snapper and shallow water grouper, which includes species like Scamp and Gag Grouper. Some of the data collected include depth caught, fish length, optional location, occurrence of shark predation, and descending device use. This information is confidential and helps us better estimate the age and survival rates of released fish. With every submission, participants are supporting the informed, long-term management of the snapper grouper fishery. They're also learning from the data! Insights from the data submitted are shared through newsletters and annual reports so participants can benefit from the collective knowledge of the SAFMC Release community.

What is a descending device you ask? When a fish is reeled up quickly from depth, gases in its body expand due to pressure changes, causing it to experience barotrauma. You may be familiar with the symptoms: bulging eyes, stomach protruding from the mouth, bubbling scales, bloated stomach, and anal prolapse. If this fish is released without treatment, it is unable to return to the bottom on its own and will likely die from these injuries or be preyed upon by predators. However, you can help it survive by using a descending device. This weighted tool helps fish return to depth and recompress naturally. If you are fishing for snapper grouper in South Atlantic federal waters, you are required to have a descending device readily available on board your vessel, meaning the device is attached to a minimum of 16 ounces of weight and 60 feet of line. Visit our best fishing practices webpage at <https://safmc.net/best-fishing-practices/> to learn more about these devices, regulations, and additional best fishing practices.

Ready to join SAFMC Release? Scan the QR code to learn more and get started!



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 may not 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 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 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. Anglers may call **800-682-2632** for after-hours reporting, when no other reporting option is available.

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. More recently, a box was added for released, dead bluefin tuna. 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>.

Citation Program

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.

What is a citation?

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

How would I get a citation?

Anglers must land an eligible species with hook-and line, and complete an official citation application. Fish must meet the minimum length or weight requirements listed below. Fish that do not qualify for a release citation must be weighed at an official state partner weigh station.

Where can I find an application?

All applications can be completed online or mailed in using a paper form obtained from a weigh station.

When will I receive my citation?

Most citations are printed and mailed twice a year, once at the end of July, and again after December. However, red drum, black drum, and released speckled trout citations are printed only once a year and will have the angler's yearly released total. For more information, a list of weigh stations, and all tournament rules, visit the program's webpage at <https://deq.nc.gov/nc-saltwater-fishing-tournament>.

Still have questions?

Contact the Sportfishing Specialist at saltwatercitations@ncdenr.gov.



New! Limited edition Division of Marine Fisheries 200-year anniversary citations for 2023

State Record Fish

New! We now have an All-Tackle Length (catch-and-release) state record category for red drum, black drum, tarpon, striped bass, and sharks. Find the rules and application or view current records at <https://deq.nc.gov/saltwater-records>.

If you think you have caught a state record fish, please contact DMF staff at **252-808-8081** or **800-682-2632**.

Scan QR code to submit a citation application online:



The Official 2023 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 reef materials are chosen to replicate the ecological functions of natural hard-bottom habitats. When materials are placed on the sea floor, they soon become encrusted and colonized by marine organisms, such as barnacles, soft corals, sponges, shellfish, and various plants or seaweeds. This provides food and refuge for small baitfish that in turn, provide food for larger predatory fish.

This artificially created habitat provides crucial spawning and foraging habitat while also providing opportunities for fishing and diving throughout coastal North Carolina. Artificial reefs are built with a variety of materials including rock, recycled concrete, reef balls, and ships. They are accessible from every maintained coastal boat ramp and inlet in the state. Reefs are, in part, funded through the purchase of fishing licenses and many reefs are enhanced with the cooperation of local fishing clubs and reef organizations.

Artificial Reef Guide

Information about each reef site is available online in the Interactive Artificial Reef Guide, which allows users to view sidescan sonar images of material, measure distances, and download coordinates for their GPS systems. Want to catch a grouper? View and download coordinates for the center of a specific pile of concrete pipe on your local reef from the Interactive Guide. All the materials shown are derived from high precision, state-of-the-art sidescan

imagery. The reef guide is regularly updated with current information as new enhancements are completed. Visit the website to download a .kml file that can be converted for use in your boat's GPS for the entire NC reef system.

Recent Enhancements

The demolition of the Herbert C. Bonner Bridge that spanned Oregon Inlet was completed in May 2022. The totality of the bridge was deployed as reef material and included 68 barge loads of material weighing over 80,000 tons. The Bonner Bridge deployment was the single largest artificial reef project in North Carolina's history and one of the largest in the country. The bridge material was deployed on 8 reefs — AR-130, AR-140, AR-145, AR-160, AR-250, AR-255, AR-320, and AR-340. These reef sites are prime locations for anglers venturing out to find seabass, triggerfish, grouper, king mackerel, amberjack, and other sought after species.

In Brunswick County, AR-430 and AR-460 each received approximately 1,600 tons of recycled concrete pipe in May 2022. In September 2022, more recycled concrete pipe, along with large reef balls, were deployed at AR-165 and AR-368. This included the three-year enhancement plan at AR-165, near Oregon Inlet, which now contains three tugboats, a caisson door, 7,200 tons of concrete pipe, and 532 supra and goliath reef balls. AR-368, located about 15 miles from Topsail Beach, received approximately 1,000 tons of concrete pipe along with 170 supra and goliath reef balls.

Anglers who fish the rivers and sounds

should not despair, there's plenty of reefs to fish in these waters. In partnership with the Coastal Conservation Association of North Carolina, AR-291 received 100 three cubic-foot concrete reef structures in the Pamlico River. AR-291 is a popular place for anglers targeting red drum, speckled trout, and striped bass.

Cedar Island Oyster Sanctuary is the newest reef built in inside waters. Year 2 of the project, in partnership with the North Carolina Coastal Federation, included 18,000 tons of limestone being added to the site. Located just northwest of Cedar Island in southern Pamlico Sound, the site is home to healthy oyster populations and is a popular site for anglers targeting speckled trout and large red drum.

Current and Upcoming Enhancements

A number of reef enhancements are planned for 2023, which will include ocean reefs AR-305, AR-330, AR-360, AR-372, and AR-420. In inside waters, projects are planned at AR-197 near Roanoke Island and a brand new reef site is being permitted near Pamlico Point. Additionally, year 3 of construction at Cedar Island Oyster Sanctuary will include 18,000 tons of limestone marl and recycled concrete. Check the Division of Marine Fisheries' website and social media for updates.



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 helps ensure 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.

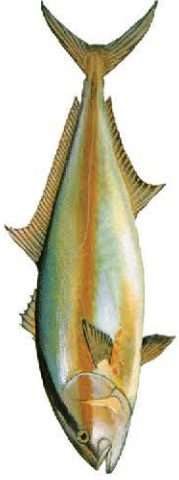
The venting tool should only be inserted deep enough to release the gases. You can hear the gas escaping and will notice the body deflating. Gently press down on the abdomen of the fish to help expel the gas if the fish is extremely bloated.

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> or scan the QR code below 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



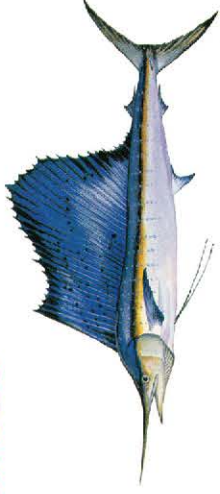
King Mackerel
Scomberomorus cavalla



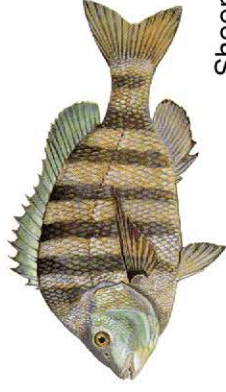
Spanish Mackerel
Scomberomorus maculatus



White Marlin
Tetrapturus albidus



Sailfish
Istiophorus platyterus



Sheepshead
Archosargus probatocephalus



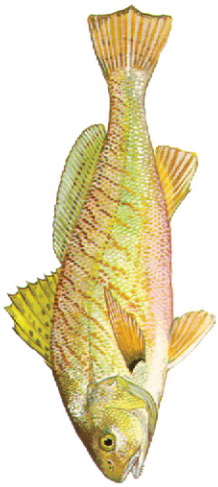
Vermilion Snapper
Rhomboplites aurorubens



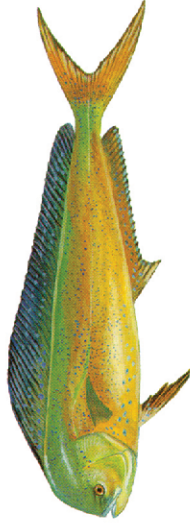
Spadefish
Chaetodipterus faber



Spot
Leiostomus xanthurus



Croaker
Micropogonias undulatus



Dolphin
Coryphaena hippurus



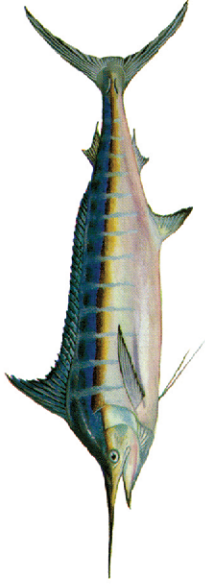
Black Drum
Pogonias cromis



Red Drum
Sciaenops ocellatus



Southern Flounder
Paralichthys lethostigma



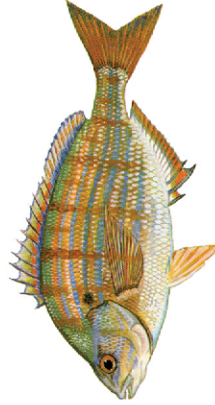
Blue Marlin
Makaira nigricans



Sea Mullet
Menticirrhus americanus



Pigfish
Orthopristis chrysoptera



Pinfish
Lagodon rhomboides



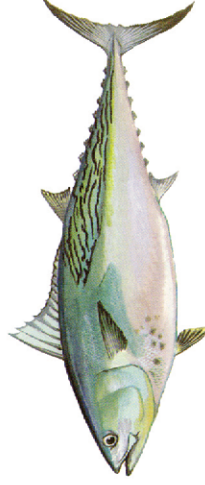
Speckled Trout
Cynoscion nebulosus



Gray Trout
Cynoscion regalis



Yellowfin Tuna
Thunnus albacares



Little Tunny
Euthynnus alleteratus



Wahoo
Acanthocybium solanderi

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

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

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

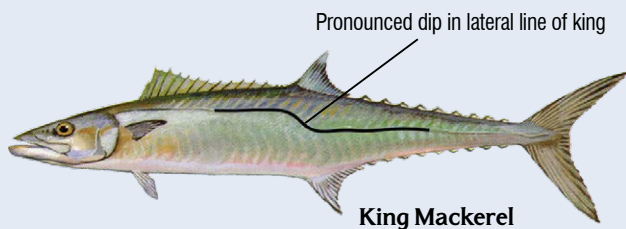
Identifying Mackerels

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 mack-

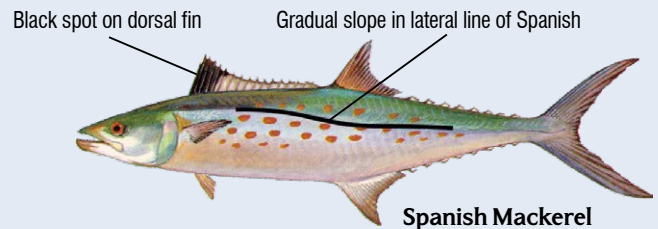
erel features a black spot on the first dorsal fin.

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 one of the top species targeted by recreational fishermen in North Carolina coastal waters.

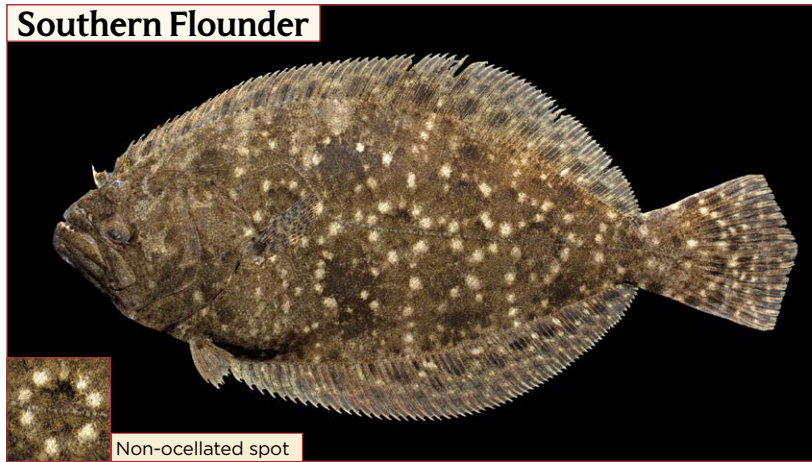
Anglers typically catch three different species of flounder in North Carolina waters: southern, summer, and gulf. While they may look alike to the untrained eye, these species exhibit distinctive markings, and anglers need to know how to distinguish between them.

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.

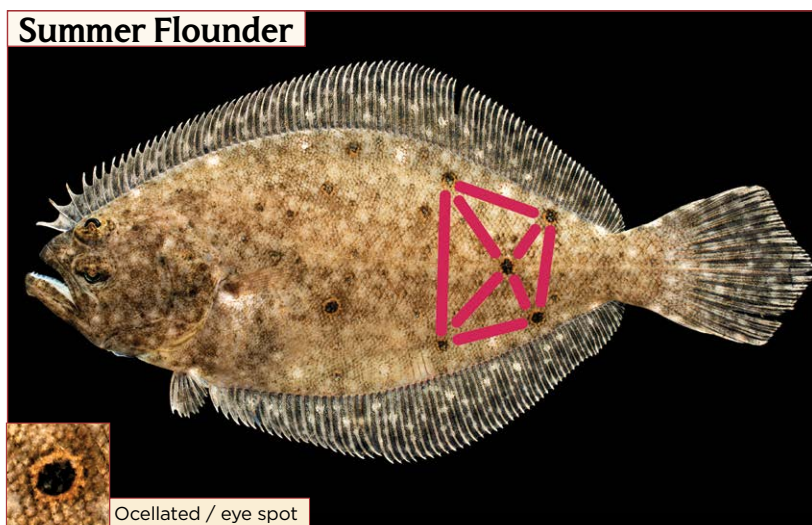
One of the ways the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries does research is by collecting information on recreational fishing catch and effort through in-person and mail surveys. Staff talk to more than 20,000 anglers each year on the beach, at the piers and at boat ramps to find out what they caught, what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



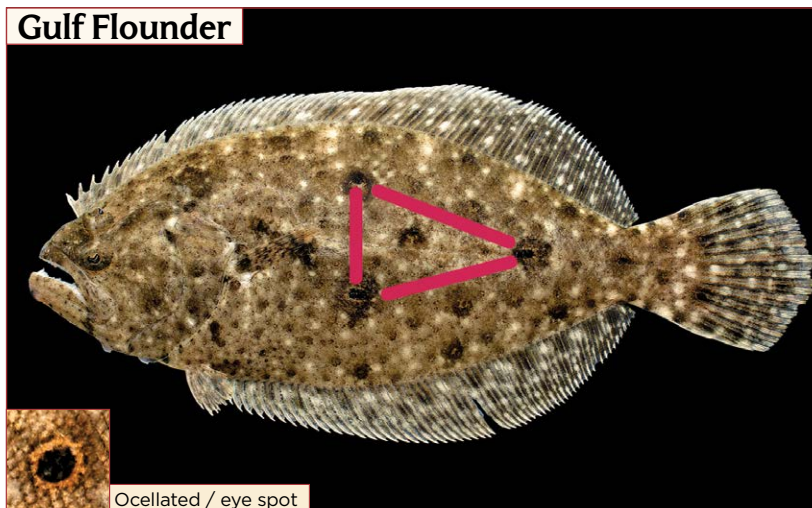
- This is the most common flounder caught in North Carolina, especially in estuarine waters.
- Non-ocellated spots cover the body
- Upper jaw extends to beyond rear margin of eye
- Eight to 11 gill rakers on lower limb of first gill arch
- Sixty-three to 74 anal fin rays

Summer Flounder

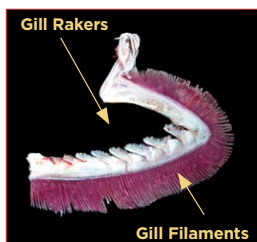


- This species is commonly seen around inlets, in the ocean and in estuarine waters
- At least five ocellated spots on body — five prominent ocelli form the pattern from the five-side of a die
- Upper jaw extends to rear margin of eye
- Thirteen to 18 gill rakers on lower limb of first gill arch
- Sixty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



Each dark band represents one year of growth. This otolith is from an 8 year old Spotted Seatrout.

What we do

Fish carcasses donated by recreational anglers provide important data for the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries. Information such as age, size, and sex is collected from each carcass. Biologists use this information to evaluate the health and size of each species population. Biologists determine age by analyzing otoliths (ear bones), scales, and spines for annual growth rings; like counting the rings of a tree. The Division has convenient carcass donation sites around the state across the coast. Visit <https://deq.nc.gov/carcass-collection-program> or scan the QR code below to locate the nearest freezer.

Anglers who participate in the carcass collection program will receive awards and be entered to win end of year grand-prize drawings.

Donating is as easy as...

- 1 Filleting your fish, or notifying the charter that you would like to donate your catch. Leave the head, tail, and body cavity intact.
- 2 Using the provided materials at the donation site to complete the catch card, providing as much information as possible.
- 3 Placing your fish carcass and completed catch card into the plastic bag, tying the bag closed and placing in the collection freezer.

Scan the QR code to learn more!



Accepted Species	
Almaco Jack	Red Drum
Amberjack	Red Porgy
Atlantic Croaker	Scamp
Black Drum	Sheepshead
Black Sea Bass	Spanish Mackerel
Bluefish	Spot
Blueline Tilefish	Spotted Seatrout
Cobia	Vermilion Snapper
Golden Tilefish	Weakfish (Gray Trout)
Gray Triggerfish	White Grunt
King Mackerel	Misc. Grouper
Kingfishes (Sea Mullet/Whiting)	

Coastal Angling Program

The N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries' Coastal Angling Program collects data on recreational fishing. 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. CAP also sends

out mail surveys every two months to individuals who indicate they participate in the flounder gig, cast net and seine fisheries, as well as the crab and shellfish fisheries when they purchase a Coastal Recreational Fishing License. In addition to MRIP and mail surveys, 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 management areas of the state. 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>.

As part of NOAA Fisheries' recreational data collection program, you may be approached by trained field interviewers with the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries. When you share your information about your saltwater fishing trip, you're playing a key role in supporting the continued health of your fisheries.

countmyfish.noaa.gov

NOAA Fisheries works closely with state partners, regional fishery management councils, and fisheries commissions to help foster healthy, productive, and sustainable marine fisheries.

The team is committed to continually improving recreational fishing data collection to provide the most representative total recreational catch estimates.

Field interviewers play no role in law enforcement.

We value your participation and privacy. Any personal information collected is kept confidential. Also, be on the lookout for a mail-in survey that complements this effort. Both survey methods are important to improve our data quality.

One of America's favorite pastimes, the saltwater recreational fishing industry contributes tens of billions of dollars annually to our nation's coastal economies and working waterfronts.



Photo credits: NOAA Fisheries

2023 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 - Sep 30 Oct 10 - 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 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 14-17 and Apr 22-23 Season closes if quota is reached. See https://deq.nc.gov/proclamations	See NCWRC news release: https://www.ncwildlife.org/Connect-With-Us/2023-harvest-season-announced-for-striped-bass-on-the-roanoke-river
Albemarle Sound Management Area	18-25" TL	1/day	Opened and closed by proclamation based on the amount of available quota. 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				
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 MAY 1, 2023 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 .				

2023 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				Regulations subject to change. See South Atlantic Fishery Management Council regulations page at http://safmc.net/regulations/regulations-by-species/
King	24" FL	3/day	Closes when quota is reached. See https://deq.nc.gov/proclamations	
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 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.
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)	Seasonal closures have been proposed. See https://deq.nc.gov/recreational-size-bag-limits for the most up to date regulations.	
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	40/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		It is unlawful to take American or hickory shad by any method except hook and line, Apr 15 - Dec 31.
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		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
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)

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2023 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 https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/species/atlantic-spiny-dogfish
Spot	None	50/day		
Sturgeon	NO POSSESSION			
Tarpon	NO POSSESSION			
Tuna				
Bigeye	27" CFL			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 nfmis.noaa.gov) for up-to-date information.
Bluefin	See https://hmspermits.noaa.gov or nfmis.noaa.gov			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.
Yellowfin	27" CFL	3/day		
Wahoo	None	2/day		Closes when quota is reached. See https://deq.nc.gov/proclamations
Weakfish (Gray Trout)	12" TL	1/day		Closes when quota is reached. See South Atlantic Fishery Management Council regulations page at http://safmc.net/regulations/regulations-by-species/
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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; may not be taken by spear, gig, or gaff.

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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.

Anglers cannot catch both a federal and state bag limit for the same species on the same trip.

Ocean boundary is defined as water seaward of the COLREGS Demarcation Lines as indicated on National Ocean Service navigation charts.

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.

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



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

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, 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, flounder, 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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