

# Recreational Crab Fishing in Coastal Waters\*

N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries



## Recreational harvest limits\*\*

- 5-inch minimum size limit for males and mature females
- Immature females are unlawful to possess
- Mature female hard crabs with a dark (brown or black) sponge are unlawful to possess from April 1 - April 30
- 50 crabs per day per person, not to exceed 100 crabs per vessel per day
- Possession of blue crabs is prohibited north of the Highway 58 bridge to Emerald Isle January 1 - January 30 & south of the Highway 58 bridge March 1 - March 15
- Size limit measured from tip-to-tip of the carapace
- Sale of catch is prohibited

\*\*Regulations are subject to change. Check <https://deq.nc.gov/fisheries-management-proclamations> for the most current proclamations.

Information on how to identify male and female crabs can be found at: <https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/marine-fisheries/public-information-and-education/kids-educational-pages/crustaceans#blue-crabs>

## No License Requirements

Individuals do not need a license to set one pot per person from a private pier or shoreline. A private pier or shoreline means there is no public access and does not apply to fishing piers where the public pays for fishing privileges.

Recreational harvest limits apply. No buoy or identification required.

Individuals do not need a license for chicken necking or legging. Recreational harvest limits apply.

Individuals do not need a license to use collapsible crab traps so 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. Recreational harvest limits apply.

OTHERWISE, a Recreational Commercial Gear License (RCGL) is required.

<https://deq.nc.gov/recreational-commercial-gear-license>. A RCGL is an annual license which allows recreational fishermen to use a limited amount of commercial gear to harvest seafood for personal consumption.

## License cost

- \$70.00 for N.C. Residents
- \$500.00 for non-residents
- A person who is under 16-years of age may fish with authorized gear without a license if accompanied by a licensed parent, grandparent, or guardian
- Recreational harvest limits apply

## RCGL crab pot requirements

- Maximum of 5 crab pots, with or without a vessel
- Pots must be marked with one hot pink buoy, attached to a non-floating line, that identifies the owner. Identification must be either engraved on the buoy or on engraved metal or plastic tags attached to the buoy. **Identification must include:** owner's last name and initials and owner's current motor boat registration number or owner's US vessel documentation name.

## **Regulations pertaining to all crab pots (except collapsible crab traps)**

- Pots must contain 3 cull rings (minimally 2 5/16-inches), one of which must be placed within one mesh of the corner and one mesh of the bottom of the divider in the upper chamber of the pot. <https://files.nc.gov/ncdeq/Marine-Fisheries/public-info-education/Crab-pot-diagram-flyer-color-FINAL.pdf>
- Pots must be fished at least every 5 days
- Pots must be removed from North Carolina coastal waters:
  - North of the Highway 58 bridge January 1 - January 30
  - South of the Highway 58 bridge March 1 - March 15
- Pots may not be set in prohibited pot areas. Maps may be downloaded at <https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/marine-fisheries/rules-proclamations-and-size-and-bag-limits/rules/maps-current-rules#designated-pot-areas>
- Pots may not be set in Crab Spawning Sanctuaries during set times of the year. Maps of new sanctuaries may be downloaded at <https://deq.nc.gov/marine-fisheries/fisheries-management-proclamations/2022/m-12-2022-map-package/open>
- Pots may be required to use diamondback terrapin excluders. Check current proclamations for Diamondback Terrapin Management Areas.

## **A RCGL is required to use a multi-bait or multi-hook trotline**

- Maximum one line per person
- Line may be no longer than 100-feet

For information on North Carolina's marine resources, check the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries' website at <https://deq.nc.gov/marine-fisheries> or contact the Division by telephone at (800) 682-2632 or by mail to P.O.Box 769, Morehead City, NC 28557.

Crabbing is allowed in coastal and joint waters, there is no crabbing in inland waters. More information on coastal waters can be found at: <https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/marine-fisheries/rules-proclamations-and-size-and-bag-limits/rules/maps-current-rules#descriptive-boundaries-for-coastal-joint-inland-waters>

January 6, 2025