Shake off that Cabin Fever and Go Fishing!

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

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

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

Watch Out for These Changes this Year:

**Flounder**

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

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


**Striped Bass**

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

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

The spring 2021 recreational harvest season opened with a one-fish per person daily possession limit and with harvest allowed seven days a week in the Albemarle Sound. The recreational spring fishing season was scheduled to close by April 30. A short season may open in the fall.

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


**Spot and Atlantic Croaker**

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

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

**Black Sea Bass North of Cape Hatteras**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Fishing Rules: There’s an App for That

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

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

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

FishRules App

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

Download the FishRules app at www.fishrulesapp.com.

See MyFishCount App article on page 4.
Recreational Fishing Data Collection

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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.

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 data from these fisheries, mail surveys are sent every two months to individuals who indicate they participate in these fisheries when they purchase a Coastal Recreational Fishing License.

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

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


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

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**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](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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>License Type</th>
<th>Resident*</th>
<th>Nonresident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State Residents*</td>
<td>$16</td>
<td>$32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonresidents, ages 16 or older</td>
<td>$6</td>
<td>$11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blocks of Ten 10-day</td>
<td>$150</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 10-day Coastal Recreational Fishing Licenses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>License Type</th>
<th>Resident*</th>
<th>Nonresident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State Residents*</td>
<td>$6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonresidents, ages 16 or older</td>
<td>$11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blocks of Ten 10-day</td>
<td>$150</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Lifetime Coastal Recreational Fishing Licenses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>License Type</th>
<th>Resident*</th>
<th>Nonresident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infant: younger than one year</td>
<td>$106</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth: ages 1-11</td>
<td>$159</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resident Adult*: ages 12-senior**</td>
<td>$265</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonresident Adult: ages 12 and older</td>
<td>$530</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resident Senior* **</td>
<td>$16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resident Disabled Veteran*: 50 percent or more disabled</td>
<td>$11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resident Totally Disabled*: totally and permanently disabled</td>
<td>$11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Exemptions and Special Provisions

- **Lifetime Unified Inland/Coastal Recreational Fishing License**
  
  Resident* — $41

- **Annual Unified Inland/Coastal Recreational Fishing License**
  
  Resident* — $69

- **Lifetime Unified Sportsman/Coastal Recreational Fishing License**
  
  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

- **Annual Unified Sportsman/Coastal Recreational Fishing Licenses**

  Resident* — $41

- **Annual Unified Inland/Coastal Recreational Fishing License**

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

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* 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 70 years of age.

** Those born after Aug. 1, 1953 are eligible to purchase a senior lifetime license when they turn 65 years of age.

These fees are accurate at the time of publication. Check [http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-fishing-license-types-and-fees](http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-fishing-license-types-and-fees) for the most up-to-date listing of fees.
Tag: You’re It!

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

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

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

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

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

You will also receive a letter and personalized certificate that states where and when the fish was tagged, the number of days it was at large, and the distance between the original tagging location and where the fish was recaptured.

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

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

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

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

• Species
• Tag number (Ex: G12345)
• Date
• Location captured (water body and nearest landmark or latitude/longitude)
• Length (total or fork length)
• Fate of the fish (kept, released with or without tag, etc.)
• Gear used for capture

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

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

Helpful Hints:

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

Highly Migratory Species

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

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

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

Later, as regulations on billfish became more restrictive, the state added blue marlin, white marlin, roundscale spearfish, sailfish and swordfish to the program. In 2015, sharks were added to the program on a voluntary basis. Anglers may find more information on this reporting system, including a list of reporting stations, on the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries’ website at http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/nmfs-highly-migratory-species-permits .
**The North Carolina Saltwater Fishing Tournament**, also known as the Citation Program, recognizes exceptional catches of North Carolina’s most popular sport fish.

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

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

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

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**When will I get it?**
Citations are currently only printed one time per year. All of the previous year’s citations will be mailed by the following spring.

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

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### The Official 2021 North Carolina Saltwater Fishing Tournament Minimum Sizes

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

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**Submit your release-citation application today!**

Scan the QR code below to submit your release-citation application today!
North Carolina’s Artificial Reefs

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

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

Many reefs are enhanced with the cooperation of local fishing clubs and reef organizations. These groups identify available materials, donate money and provide input on the location for the enhancements.

**Artificial Reef Guide**

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

**Recent Enhancements**

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

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

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

**Current and Upcoming Enhancements**

Several other reef projects are underway in 2021. These include enhancements to offshore reefs AR-165, AR-250, AR-255 and AR-368. Remaining Bonner Bridge material, about 700 large reef balls, concrete pipe, the Valley Forge tugboat, and assorted concrete rubble will be distributed amongst these sites. Concrete pipe will also be deployed at AR-430 and AR-460 off Cape Fear Inlet. Inshore, at AR-380 in Bogue Sound, 200 small reef balls will be deployed in Spring 2021.
One of the best ways for anglers to show their love for coastal resources is to help preserve them. Below are several best practices to help anglers do just that.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Fish can become stressed very quickly in warm summertime waters and any added physical effort, like interacting with fishing gear, can quickly tip the physiological balance of stress into the lethal range. Anglers can reduce their impact on fishing mortality during these times by using tackle that reduces the likelihood of deep hooking and adjusting fishing practices to allow for quicker retrieves and releases.

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

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

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

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

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

Visit http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/edu/ethical-angling to learn more about how to be an ethical angler.
Common N.C. Saltwater Fishes

Saltfish
Ixodophorus platypleurus

Sheephead
Archaeosargus probatocephalus

Vermillion Snapper
Rhombopterus aurorubens

Spadefish
Chaetodipterus faber

Lobsterfish
Eurypegasus vanicolensis

Summer Flounder
Paralichthys dentatus

Gag
Mycteroperca microlepis

King Mackerel
Scomberomorus cavalla

Spanish Mackerel
Scomberomorus maculatus

White Marlin
Tetrapturus alibax

Amberjack
Seriola dumerili

Black Sea Bass
Centropristes striatus

Striped Bass
Morone saxatilis

Bluefish
Pomatomus saltatrix

Cobia
Rachycentron canadum
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.
Anglers love to catch a flounder.

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

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

**Why identify flounder?**

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

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

**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.
The Carcass Collection Program collects carcasses of various species from recreational fishermen. Scientists can determine information, such as age, size and reproductive potential of the fish from the carcass. Age information about fish are collected by analyzing scales or hard body parts, such as otoliths (earbones) and spines, for annual growth rings. When cleaning a fish, leave the head and tail intact on the carcass and take it to one of the division’s freezer locations. Instructions on target species and how to deposit the carcasses are posted on the freezer.

Information gathered through this program is used for stock assessments at the state and federal levels. For more information about this program, a map of freezer locations, and which species are collected, see http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/carcass-collection.

Carcass Collection Program...

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.

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

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.
## 2021 Recreational Size and Bag Limits for N.C. Coastal Waters

### STATE COASTAL WATERS — (Internal and 0 – 3 miles)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FINFISH SPECIES</th>
<th>Minimum Length</th>
<th>Bag Limits (per person)</th>
<th>Seasons</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bass, Black Sea</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North of Cape Hatteras</td>
<td>12.5&quot; TL</td>
<td>15/day</td>
<td>May 15 - Dec 31</td>
<td>Regulations subject to change. Contact the National Marine Fisheries Service Greater Atlantic Regional Office (978-231-9315) or <a href="http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/sustainable/recfishing/regs/index.html">http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/sustainable/recfishing/regs/index.html</a>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bass, Striped</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlantic Ocean</td>
<td>28 - less than 35&quot; TL</td>
<td>1/day</td>
<td>Open year round</td>
<td>All striped bass landed from the ocean May 1 - Oct 31 are required to have a landings tag affixed through the mouth and gill cover. Landing tags may be obtained at N.C. Striped Bass Reporting Stations, ocean fishing piers, most tackle shops and from N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries Recreational Port Agents. No gigging allowed. Non-stainless steel, non-offset circle hooks must be used when fishing for striped bass in the ocean with natural baits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roanoke River Management Area</td>
<td>18&quot; TL</td>
<td>2/day, only one may be larger than 27&quot; TL</td>
<td>Apr 10-16 in Lower River Zone; Apr 24-30 in Upper River Zone; season closes if quota is reached. See <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations-current">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations-current</a>.</td>
<td>Lower River Zone: downstream of the U.S. Highway 258 bridge at Scotland Neck to the mouth at Albemarle Sound. Upper River Zone: Upstream of the U.S. Highway 258 bridge at Scotland Neck to the base of the Roanoke Rapids Dam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albemarle Sound Management Area</td>
<td>18&quot; TL</td>
<td>1/day</td>
<td>Open Jan 1 - Apr 30 unless closed by proclamation when quota is reached. See <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations-current">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations-current</a>.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Fear River</td>
<td>NO POSSESSION</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Includes Cape Fear River and all tributaries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Southern Management Area (All waters other than above)</td>
<td>NO POSSESSION</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bluefish</strong></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>3/day for shore, pier, private vessel, or any way other than with a for-hire operation; 5/day for-hire operation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Regulations subject to change. Check website at <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/</a> for updates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cobia</strong></td>
<td>See N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries Proclamation: <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations-current">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations-current</a>.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Croaker, Atlantic</strong></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>50/day</td>
<td></td>
<td>Regulations subject to change. See South Atlantic Fishery Management Council regulations page at <a href="http://safmc.net/regulations/regulations-by-species/">http://safmc.net/regulations/regulations-by-species/</a>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dolphin</strong></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>10/day or 60 fish/vessel, whichever is less</td>
<td>Closes when quota is reached. See <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations-current">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations-current</a>.</td>
<td>Regulations subject to change. See South Atlantic Fishery Management Council regulations page at <a href="http://safmc.net/regulations/regulations-by-species/">http://safmc.net/regulations/regulations-by-species/</a>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Drum, Black</strong></td>
<td>14&quot; - 25&quot; TL</td>
<td>10/day, only 1/person/day over 25&quot; TL</td>
<td></td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Drum, Red</strong> (channel bass, puppy drum)</td>
<td>18&quot; - 27&quot; TL (slot)</td>
<td>1/day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SEE DISCLAIMER, PAGE 17**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FINFISH SPECIES</th>
<th>Minimum Length</th>
<th>Bag Limits (per person)</th>
<th>Seasons</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eel, American</td>
<td>9&quot; TL</td>
<td>25/day</td>
<td>Jan 1 - Aug 31</td>
<td>Pots closed north of Highway 58 in Jan Pots closed south of Highway 58 Apr 1-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herring, Alewife and Blueback</td>
<td>NO POSSESSION</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No possession from N.C. waters; if other source, must not exceed 6&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mackerel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Regulations subject to change. See South Atlantic Fishery Management Council regulations page at <a href="http://safmc.net/regulations/regulations-by-species/">http://safmc.net/regulations/regulations-by-species/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King</td>
<td>24&quot; FL</td>
<td>3/day</td>
<td></td>
<td>Highly Migratory Species federal permit is required in state or federal waters. Contact <a href="978-281-9370">978-281-9370</a> or <a href="http://safmc.net/regulations/regulations-by-species/">hmspermits.noaa.gov</a> Prior to removal from vessel, all billfish must be reported at NC HMS reporting stations. See <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/</a> for details. An Atlantic billfish that is caught but not kept must be released immediately without removing it from the water.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>12&quot; FL</td>
<td>15/day</td>
<td></td>
<td>Highly Migratory Species federal permit is required in state or federal waters. Contact <a href="978-281-9370">978-281-9370</a> or <a href="http://safmc.net/regulations/regulations-by-species/">hmspermits.noaa.gov</a> Prior to removal from vessel, all billfish must be reported at NC HMS reporting stations. See <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/</a> for details. An Atlantic billfish that is caught but not kept must be released immediately without removing it from the water.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sailfish</td>
<td>63&quot; LJFL</td>
<td>1/day</td>
<td></td>
<td>Highly Migratory Species federal permit is required in state or federal waters. Contact <a href="978-281-9370">978-281-9370</a> or <a href="http://safmc.net/regulations/regulations-by-species/">hmspermits.noaa.gov</a> Prior to removal from vessel, all billfish must be reported at NC HMS reporting stations. See <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/</a> for details. An Atlantic billfish that is caught but not kept must be released immediately without removing it from the water.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scup (North of Cape Hatteras)</td>
<td>8&quot; TL</td>
<td>50/day</td>
<td></td>
<td>It is unlawful to take American or hickory shad by any method except hook and line, Apr 1 - Dec 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seatrout, spotted (Speckled trout)</td>
<td>14&quot; TL</td>
<td>4/day</td>
<td></td>
<td>It is unlawful to take or possess American shad from the Atlantic Ocean. For aggregate creel limits for American shad and hickory shad, see most recent Proclamation: <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations-current">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations-current</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>This complex includes Snappers, Groupers, Porgys, Triggerfish, Jacks, Tilefish, Grunts, Spadefish, Wrasses and Sea Basses (other than black sea bass)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SEE DISCLAIMER, PAGE 17
# 2021 Recreational Size and Bag Limits for N.C. Coastal Waters

## STATE COASTAL WATERS — (Internal and 0 – 3 miles)

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<tr>
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<th>Seasons</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sharks</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharks (other than spiny dogfish)</td>
<td>See N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries Proclamation: <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations-current">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations-current</a></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Regulations subject to change. See <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations-current">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations-current</a>. For more information and to obtain required federal permit, contact NMFS Highly Migratory Species 978-281-9370 or <a href="http://hmspermits.noaa.gov">http://hmspermits.noaa.gov</a>. 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, bigeye sixgill, Caribbean reef, Caribbean sharpnose, dusky, Galápagos, longfin mako, narrowtooth, night, sand tiger, sandbar, silky, seven gill, sixgill, smalltail, whale, whites. Non-stainless steel, non-offset circle hooks must be used when fishing for sharks in the ocean with natural bait.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dogfish (smooth)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dogfish (spiny)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spot</strong></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>50/day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sturgeon</strong></td>
<td><strong>NO POSSESSION</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tuna</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bigeye</td>
<td>27” CFL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bluefin</td>
<td>See [<a href="https://hmspermits.noaa.gov">https://hmspermits.noaa.gov</a> or nmfs.noaa.gov](<a href="https://hmspermits.noaa.gov">https://hmspermits.noaa.gov</a> or nmfs.noaa.gov)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellowfin</td>
<td>27” CFL</td>
<td>3/day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wahoo</strong></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>2/day</td>
<td></td>
<td>Closes when quota is reached. See <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weakfish (Gray Trout)</strong></td>
<td>12” TL</td>
<td>1/day</td>
<td></td>
<td>Closes when quota is reached. See <a href="http://safmc.net/regulations/regulations-by-species/">South Atlantic Fishery Management Council regulations page at http://safmc.net/regulations/regulations-by-species/</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**THIS DIGEST IS EFFECTIVE APRIL 1, 2021 AND IS FOR GENERAL INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES AND HAS NO LEGAL FORCE OR EFFECT. FISHERY RULES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE. THESE RESTRICTIONS APPLY TO FISH TAKEN FOR RECREATIONAL PURPOSES AND INCLUDE HOOK AND LINE. Updated State regulations can be found at [http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-fishing-size-and-bag-limits](http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-fishing-size-and-bag-limits) and updated Recreational Commercial Gear License information can be found at [http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-commercial-gear-license](http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-commercial-gear-license).**
**SHELLFISH**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Minimum Length</th>
<th>Bag Limits (Per Person)</th>
<th>Seasons</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blue Crab</td>
<td>5” spike to spike width males and mature females. No possession of immature females</td>
<td>50 crabs/day not to exceed 100 crabs/vessel/day</td>
<td>Closed Jan 1-31 north of the Highway 58 bridge; Mar 1-15 south of the Highway 58 bridge. Unlawful to possess any crab with brown or black sponge Apr 1-30</td>
<td>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 <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/ml/">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/ml/</a>. Size limit applies to hard crabs only.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard Clam</td>
<td>1” thick</td>
<td>100 clams/day not to exceed 200 clams/vessel/day</td>
<td>Open by proclamation</td>
<td>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 <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/ml/proclamations-current">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/ml/proclamations-current</a> for seasons, areas, or other restrictions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oyster</td>
<td>3” shell length</td>
<td>1 bushel/day not to exceed 2 bushels/vessel/day</td>
<td>Open by proclamation</td>
<td>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 <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/ml/proclamations-current">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/ml/proclamations-current</a> for seasons, areas, or other restrictions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conchs and Whelks</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>10/day not to exceed 20/ vessel/day</td>
<td>Closed unless opened by proclamation. See <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/ml/proclamations-current">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/ml/proclamations-current</a></td>
<td>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 <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/ml/proclamations-current">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/ml/proclamations-current</a> for seasons, areas, or other restrictions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mussels</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>100/day not to exceed 200/ vessel/day</td>
<td>Open shrimping area — 4 quarts heads on 2-1/2 quarts heads off/day (Cast net only)</td>
<td>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 <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/ml/maps-to-view-and-print">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/ml/maps-to-view-and-print</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shrimp</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Closed shrimping area — 48 quarts heads on, 30 quarts heads off (Per person or vessel) *</td>
<td>No limit on claws</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiny Lobster</td>
<td>3” carapace length</td>
<td>2/Day</td>
<td>Closed Jun 15 - Aug 15</td>
<td>No possession of crab body; no removal of claw from egg-bearing crabs; no gigging.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stone Crabs</td>
<td>2 3/4” propodus (forearm) length</td>
<td>No limit on claws</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**THIS DIGEST IS EFFECTIVE APRIL 1, 2021 AND IS FOR GENERAL INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES AND HAS NO LEGAL FORCE OR EFFECT. FISHERY RULES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE. THESE RESTRICTIONS APPLY TO FISH TAKEN FOR RECREATIONAL PURPOSES AND INCLUDE HOOK AND LINE. Updated State regulations can be found at [http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/ml/recreational-fishing-size-and-bag-limits](http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/ml/recreational-fishing-size-and-bag-limits) and updated Recreational Commercial Gear License information can be found at [http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/ml/recreational-commercial-gear-license](http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/ml/recreational-commercial-gear-license).

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.

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**N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries Telephone Directory**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Office</th>
<th>Phone Numbers</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morehead City Office</td>
<td>800-682-2632 or 252-726-7021</td>
<td>(24 hours)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth City Office</td>
<td>800-338-7805 (N.C. only) or 252-381-6000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manteo Office</td>
<td>252-475-5734</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington Office</td>
<td>800-338-7804 or 252-946-6481</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilmington Office</td>
<td>800-248-4536 (N.C. only) or 910-796-7215</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Federal and State Agency Telephone Directory**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Federal Regulations</th>
<th>State of N.C. — Freshwater Regulations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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18 N.C. Coastal Recreational Fishing Digest — 2021
Recreational fishing does not always involve a rod-and-reel. Below is some information you need to know if you want to fish with gigs, cast nets or pots.

**Gigging, Spearfishing, and Bowfishing**

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

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

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

**Cast Nets**

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

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

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

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

**Crab Fishing**

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

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

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

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

Recreational harvest limits apply and sale of catch is prohibited.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Fish</th>
<th>Shellfish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>Black sea bass, bluefin tuna, striped bass (ocean, coastal rivers). <strong>Shellfish:</strong> clams, oysters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>American and hickory shad (coastal river tributaries), black sea bass, bluefin tuna, striped bass (coastal rivers), wahoo, weakfish, yellowfin tuna. <strong>Shellfish:</strong> clams, oysters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>American and hickory shad (coastal river tributaries), black sea bass, bluefin tuna, bluefish, sea mullet, striped bass (coastal rivers), wahoo, weakfish, yellowfin tuna. <strong>Shellfish:</strong> clams, oysters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>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. <strong>Shellfish:</strong> clams.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>Bluefish, cobia, croaker, dolphin, grouper, king mackerel, sea mullet, sharks, sheephead, Spanish mackerel, spotted seatrout (sounds), striped bass (coastal rivers), wahoo, weakfish, yellowfin tuna. <strong>Shellfish:</strong> clams, hard crabs, soft crabs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>Blue marlin, bluefish, cobia, croaker, dolphin, grouper, king mackerel, sailfish, sharks, sheephead, Spanish mackerel, spotted seatrout, tuna, weakfish, white marlin. <strong>Shellfish:</strong> clams, hard crabs, soft crabs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>Blue marlin, bluefish, cobia, croaker, dolphin, grouper, sailfish, sea mullet, sheephead, Spanish mackerel, tarpon, tuna, white marlin. <strong>Shellfish:</strong> clams, hard crabs, soft crabs, shrimp.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>Bluefish, cobia, croaker, dolphin, flounder, grouper, red drum, sea mullet, sheephead, Spanish mackerel, spot, tarpon, tuna, white marlin. <strong>Shellfish:</strong> clams, hard crabs, soft crabs, shrimp.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>Bluefish, black drum, cobia, dolphin, false albacore, grouper, king mackerel, red drum, sea mullet, sheephead, Spanish mackerel, spot, wahoo, weakfish, white marlin. <strong>Shellfish:</strong> clams, hard crabs, soft crabs, shrimp.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>Black drum, black sea bass, bluefish, dolphin, false albacore, grouper, king mackerel, red drum, sea mullet, sheephead, spot, spotted seatrout, striped bass (coastal rivers), wahoo, weakfish, yellowfin tuna. <strong>Shellfish:</strong> clams, oysters, shrimp.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>Black drum, black sea bass, bluefish, false albacore, grouper, king mackerel, red drum, sea mullet, sharks, spotted seatrout, striped bass (ocean and coastal rivers). <strong>Shellfish:</strong> clams, oysters.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries**
3441 Arendell Street
Morehead City, NC 28557
http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/
252-726-7021 | 800-682-2632

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