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Catch up on North Carolina coastal fishing

Welcome to fishing on the North Carolina coast. The N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries is pleased to introduce the 2018 Coastal Recreational Fishing Digest.

This year's digest features an article about the Division of Marine Fisheries' Recreational Water Quality Program. Fish is not all anglers can catch from coastal waters; there are any number harmful bacteria that inhabit our oceans, rivers and sounds. The N.C. Recreational Water Quality Program offers anglers and beach goers a way to know more about bacteria levels not only at the beach, but also in waters where many popular fishing holes are located.

The digest also features more fish identification diagrams than in the past, illustrating the difference between black drum and sheepshead and between three flounder species.

As always, this year’s digest contains fishing license options, tips for ethical angling, information on how to 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.

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 its 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 its lower jaw to the fork of the tail.

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Total Length

(Fish image with total length measurement)

Curved Fork Length

(Fish image with curved fork length measurement)

Fork Length

(Fish image with fork length measurement)

Lower Jaw Fork Length

(Fish image with lower jaw fork length measurement)
**Spotted Seatrout**

Spotted seatrout season closed Jan. 5 to recreational and commercial harvest in all coastal and joint waters of the state due to widespread cold stun events.

Cold stuns are natural events that occur when there is a sudden drop in water temperature or prolonged periods of cold weather that makes the fish sluggish. Many fish will die from the cold. Others fall prey to birds and other predators. Studies suggest that cold stun events can have a significant impact on spotted seatrout populations.

The intent of the closure is to allow the fish that survive the cold stun event the chance to spawn in the spring before harvest reopens. Peak spawning occurs in May. The spotted seatrout season will reopen June 15.

**Cobia**

Seasons and harvest limits for cobia changed this year. The cobia season will run May 1 to Dec. 31 with a size limit of 36 inches fork length and a bag limit of one per person per day.

The vessel limit for private boats is two fish per vessel per day from May 1 to May 31 and one fish per vessel per day from June 1 through Dec. 31, regardless of the number of anglers on board. For for-hire boats, the vessel limit is four fish per vessel per day from May 1 to Dec. 31 regardless of the number of anglers on board.

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**Recreational Commercial Gear License**

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

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

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

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

You will need this license if you want to use:

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

More information about the license and its requirements can be found on the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries’ website at http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-commercial-gear-license.

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

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**Coastal Recreational Fishing License**

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 http://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.

**Lifetime Unified Sportsman/Coastal Recreational Fishing Licenses**

Infant: younger than one year — $275
Youth: ages 1-11 — $450
Resident Adult*: ages 12-senior** — $675
Nonresident Adult: ages 12 and older — $1550
Resident Senior* ** — $30
Resident Disabled Veteran*: 50 percent or more disabled — $110
Resident Totally Disabled*: Totally and permanently disabled — $110

**Lifetime Unified Inland/Coastal Recreational Fishing License**

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

**Exemptions**

- 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.
- 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.

**Annual Coastal Recreational Fishing Licenses**

State Residents* — $15
Nonresidents — $30

**10-day Coastal Recreational Fishing Licenses**

State Residents* — $5
Nonresidents, ages 16 or older — $10
Blocks of Ten 10-day — $150

**Lifetime Coastal Recreational Fishing Licenses**

Infant: younger than one year — $100
Youth: ages 1-11 — $150
Resident Adult*: ages 12-senior** — $250
Nonresident Adult: ages 12 and older — $500
Resident Senior* **— $15
Resident Disabled Veteran*: 50 percent or more disabled — $10
Resident Totally Disabled*: totally and permanently disabled — $10

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

Resident* — $40

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

Resident* — $65

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

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**Cold Stuns**

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**Notable regulatory changes this year include:**

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

More information about the license and its requirements can be found on the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries’ website at http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-commercial-gear-license.

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State Residents* — $15
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**Annual Unified Inland/Coastal Recreational Fishing License**

Resident* — $40

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

Resident* — $65

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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 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.
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. You may be eligible for a reward. Another good reason is you can help fisheries biologists collect the information needed to understand and assess fish populations. Fish tagged in North Carolina waters include red drum, striped bass, speckled trout, southern flounder, and cobia.

If you turn in a red tag from a fish released by the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries, along with all the required information, you will receive a $100 reward. The tags are marked with a unique tag number. The other side gives the phone number to call “NCDMF.”

If you turn in a yellow tag with all 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.”

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. The N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries’ researchers tag more than 15,000 striped bass, red drum, southern flounder and spotted seatrout 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 catch a tagged fish, please cut off the tag and record the following:
1. Species
2. Tag number
3. Date
4. Location captured (water body and nearest landmark or latitude/longitude)
5. Length (total or fork length)
6. Fate of the fish (kept, released alive, etc.)
7. Gear used for capture

Report the information to 800-682-2632 or 252-726-7021.

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 can lead to tag damage that inhibits the division from recognizing what fish it came from. If you come across algae growth on the tag, either send the tag to the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries or let the tag soak in soapy warm water until the algae comes off.
• 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.

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 trailers 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 Official 2018 North Carolina Saltwater Fishing Tournament Minimum Weights

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPECIES</th>
<th>MINIMUM WEIGHT</th>
<th>SPECIES</th>
<th>MINIMUM WEIGHT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albacore, False</td>
<td>Release Only E</td>
<td>Pompano, Florida</td>
<td>2 lbs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amberjack</td>
<td>50 lbs. H</td>
<td>Porgy (Silver Snapper)</td>
<td>4 lbs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlantic Bonito</td>
<td>8 lbs. B</td>
<td>Sailfish</td>
<td>Release Only A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barracuda</td>
<td>Release Only G</td>
<td>Shark</td>
<td>150 lbs. J</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bass, Black Sea</td>
<td>4 lbs.</td>
<td>Sheepshead</td>
<td>8 lbs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bluefish</td>
<td>15 lbs. E</td>
<td>Spearfish</td>
<td>Release Only A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cobia</td>
<td>40 lbs. D</td>
<td>Spot</td>
<td>1 lb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croaker</td>
<td>3 lbs.</td>
<td>Striped Bass</td>
<td>35 lbs. G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dolphin</td>
<td>35 lbs.</td>
<td>Swordfish</td>
<td>50 lbs. A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drum, Black</td>
<td>35 lbs. F</td>
<td>Tarpon</td>
<td>Release Only A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drum, Red</td>
<td>Release Only F</td>
<td>Tilefish, Gray</td>
<td>10 lbs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flounder</td>
<td>5 lbs.</td>
<td>Triggerfish</td>
<td>5 lbs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grouper</td>
<td>20 lbs.</td>
<td>Trout, Gray</td>
<td>5 lbs. B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack, Crevalle</td>
<td>Release Only C</td>
<td>Trout, Speckled</td>
<td>5 lbs. B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mackerel, King</td>
<td>30 lbs. G</td>
<td>Tuna, Bigeye</td>
<td>100 lbs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mackerel, Spanish</td>
<td>6 lbs.</td>
<td>Tuna, Blackfin</td>
<td>20 lbs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlin, Blue</td>
<td>400 lbs. A</td>
<td>Tuna, Bluefin</td>
<td>200 lbs. I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlin, White</td>
<td>Release Only A</td>
<td>Tuna, Yellowfin</td>
<td>70 lbs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mullet, Sea</td>
<td>1 1/2 lbs.</td>
<td>Wahoo</td>
<td>40 lbs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A = Award for live release of fish, regardless of size
B = Award for live release of fish, 24 inches or longer
C = Award for live release of fish, 32 inches or longer
D = Award for live release of fish, 33 inches or longer
E = Award for live release of fish, 34 inches or longer
F = Award for live release of fish, 40 inches or longer
G = Award for live release of fish, 45 inches or longer
H = Award for live release of fish, 50 inches or longer
I = Award for live release of fish, 70 inches or longer
J = Award for live release of fish, 80 inches or longer

The North Carolina Governor's Cup Billfishing Conservation Series is an annual sport fishing series operating cooperatively with eight major billfish tournaments in the state.

Participating boats or teams earn points cumulatively throughout the series for billfish landed or released. Penalty points are assessed for undersized fish taken. Trophies are awarded at the conclusion of the tournament series for the most points in both the private boat and charter boat categories. Individual awards are given to the outstanding junior boy, outstanding junior girl and lady angler.

Additionally, trophies are awarded for the largest blue marlin, yellowfin tuna, wahoo and dolphin.
Hooked on fishing? Practice ethical angling!

Ethical angling is a set of habits practiced by conservation-minded anglers that aim to protect the well-being of North Carolina’s fisheries.

Ethical anglers go beyond just obeying the regulations. They fish in a way that minimizes harm to the fish and their environment.

For more information on ethical angling, including sample riggings, videos on ethical techniques and habitat protection, see http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/edu/ethical-angling.

Before you go...

Make sure you have a valid Coastal Recreational Fishing License if you are 16 years old or older.


Learn to identify fish commonly caught in North Carolina waters.

Stock your tackle box with a pair of needle-nose pliers or a de-hooking device, a tape measure and a glove or towel.

While you fish...

Practice catch and release.

Use circle hooks to help prevent the fish from swallowing the hook.

Pinch the barb down on circle hooks and J-hooks.

Do not discard a previously caught legal fish for a larger fish to remain within the bag limit.

To release your catch...

Leave the fish in the water while removing the hook. Use a rubber dip net if you must remove the fish from the water.

Handle fish as little as possible. Return it to water as quickly as possible.

Use a de-hooking device or needle-nose pliers to grip the hook and gently pull the hook free. If the hook has been swallowed, cut the fishing line as close to the hook as possible.

Protect the environment...

Never throw trash overboard. Never dump raw sewage, oil or gasoline overboard.

Use fish-cleaning stations and trash receptacles.

Report any pollution or environmental damage to the appropriate authorities.
Coastal Angling Program...
The N. C. Coastal Angling Program is the collective title that encompasses a set of recreational fishing sampling and survey programs run by the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries. It includes mail, telephone and electronic surveys of those who hold a N.C. Coastal Recreational Fishing License. It also includes staff interviewing fishermen at boat ramps, on the beach and at piers, sampling of upper estuarine water species, such as striped bass, and participation in the Marine Recreational Information Program, a federal survey program. Additionally, anglers may use a web-based tool at http://www.ncrecfish.com/ to record their individual fishing trips and monitor their fishing success. Information from the Coastal Angling Journal enables the division to better characterize and assess recreational fisheries. Information gathered through this program is essential for the development of the state’s fisheries management plans.

Carcass Collection Program...
The Carcass Collection Program collects carcasses of 15 species from recreational fishermen. Scientists can determine information, such as age, size and reproductive potential of the fish from the carcass. 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.

Sea Turtles...
All species of sea turtles found in North Carolina waters are protected under the federal Endangered Species Act, and unpermitted interactions with these animals are illegal. This includes interactions that occur with commercial and recreational fishing gears. If you come across a stranded or injured turtle, contact the Sea Turtle Stranding Network at 252-241-7367 or N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries at 252-726-7021. For more information on what to do if you catch a sea turtle, please visit http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/sea-turtle-awareness.

North Carolina Tagging Program...
Division staff tag more than 15,000 striped bass, red drum, southern flounder and spotted seatrout each year. Staff began tagging cobia in the spring of 2017. The information received on tagged fish helps improve management of these fisheries. For information on what to do if you catch a tagged fish, see page 4.
A brief on 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. Additionally, by Summer 2018, anglers and divers will be able to download information about their favorite reef sites in GPX format for use on marine chartplotters. This will eliminate the need to manually enter coordinates.

Recent Enhancements

The Artificial Reef Program recently completed several construction projects. Inshore, it concluded the first year of a three-year project to develop Swan Island Oyster Sanctuary near the mouth of Neuse River. In 2017, the program built 15 acres of habitat using 30,000 tons of marine limestone marl. Year two construction begins in Summer 2018 and will use approximately 25,000 tons of granite rock. Another inshore reef, AR-491, was constructed in the Cape Fear River. This is a unique reef as it is in shallow waters and accessible from shore at Carolina Beach State Park. The reef contains 700 tons of crushed concrete, covering about an acre.

The program recently completed several offshore projects, as well. It deployed nine Eternal Reef balls at AR-360, off Topsail Island. Eternal Reefs is a charitable organization that works with families and friends to encase the ashes of departed loved ones into the concrete used to construct reef balls. The Artificial Reef Program works with Eternal Reefs to deploy these memorials. Also, the program sank a barge and placed 1,606 tons of concrete pipe at AR-430, offshore of Oak Island to provide more nearshore fishing and diving opportunities.

Upcoming Enhancements

In 2018, several reef construction projects are planned, pending permits. The program plans to build two new inshore reefs, AR-380 and AR-381, in sheltered areas of Bogue Sound that are easily accessible by kayaks and small boats. The program plans to deploy a 98-foot tugboat and possibly another vessel, along with some recycled concrete on AR-320, offshore of Pine Knoll Shores. The program also continues to plan for use of materials from the Herbert C. Bonner Bridge demolition at Oregon Inlet. Plans call for placing up to 80,000 tons of concrete from this bridge on four offshore reefs, AR-130, AR-140, AR-145, and AR-160, all offshore of Dare County. Demolition of the bridge and reef construction are scheduled to begin in early 2019.

To learn more about the states artificial reefs, go to http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/artificial-reefs-program. You can also email questions to artificialreefs@ncdenr.gov
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.
To report fisheries violations, or for information on rules and regulations call 252-726-7021 or 800-682-2632.
# 2018 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>Amberjack, Greater</strong></td>
<td>28&quot; FL</td>
<td>1/day</td>
<td>Fishing year runs March 1 - Feb. 28 Season closes when quota is reached.</td>
<td>See <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations</a> Non-stainless steel circle hooks must be used when fishing for snapper-grouper species using natural baits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bass, Black Sea</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></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/species/bbsbass/index.html">http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/sustainable/species/bbsbass/index.html</a>. Non-stainless steel circle hooks must be used when fishing for snapper-grouper species using natural baits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>North of Cape Hatteras</strong></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/species/bbsbass/index.html">http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/sustainable/species/bbsbass/index.html</a>. Non-stainless steel circle hooks must be used when fishing for snapper-grouper species using natural baits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>South of Cape Hatteras</strong></td>
<td>13&quot; TL</td>
<td>7/day</td>
<td>Fishing year runs April 1 - March 31 Season closes if quota is reached.</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> Non-stainless steel circle hooks must be used when fishing for snapper-grouper species using natural baits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bass, Striped</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Roanoke River Management Area</strong></td>
<td>18&quot; TL</td>
<td>2/day, only one may be larger than 27&quot; TL</td>
<td>March 1 - April 30 unless closed by proclamation when quota is reached.</td>
<td>See <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Albemarle Sound Management Area</strong></td>
<td>18&quot; TL</td>
<td>2/day</td>
<td>Open Oct. 1 - April 30 unless closed by proclamation when quota is reached.</td>
<td>See <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cape Fear River</strong></td>
<td>NO POSSESSION</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Includes Cape Fear River and all tributaries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Central Southern Management Area</strong></td>
<td>18&quot; TL</td>
<td>2/day</td>
<td>Oct. 1 - April 30</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></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bluefish</strong></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>15/day, only 5 greater than 24&quot; TL</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>36&quot; FL</td>
<td>1/person/day not to exceed 2/vessel/day</td>
<td>May 1-May 31</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></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.</td>
<td>See <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations</a> 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</td>
<td>1/person/day over 25&quot; TL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**THIS DIGEST IS EFFECTIVE APRIL 1, 2018 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).**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Length TL</th>
<th>Bag Limit</th>
<th>Season</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drum, Red (channel bass, puppy drum)</td>
<td>18” - 27”</td>
<td>1/day</td>
<td>Unlawful to gig, spear or gaff red drum. It is unlawful to use any hook larger than 4/0 from July 1 through Sept. 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 eastly 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>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eel, American</td>
<td>9”</td>
<td>25/day</td>
<td>Open Jan. 1 - Aug. 31</td>
<td>Eel taken by baited pots allowed year round</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flounder</td>
<td>15”</td>
<td>4/day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>24”</td>
<td>1 black or 1 gag/day</td>
<td>Closed Jan. 1 - April 30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blueline tilefish</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gag</td>
<td>24”</td>
<td>1 black or 1 gag/day</td>
<td>Closed Jan. 1 - April 30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golden tilefish</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1/day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goliath</td>
<td>NO POSSESSION</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nassau</td>
<td>NO POSSESSION</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red grouper</td>
<td>20”</td>
<td></td>
<td>Closed Jan. 1 - April 30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sand tilefish</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snowy</td>
<td>20”</td>
<td>1/vessel/day</td>
<td>Open May 1 - Aug. 31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellowfin</td>
<td>20”</td>
<td></td>
<td>Closed Jan. 1 - April 30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellowmouth</td>
<td>20”</td>
<td></td>
<td>Closed Jan. 1 - April 30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herring, Alewife and Blueback</td>
<td>NO POSSESSION</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hogfish (hog snapper)</td>
<td>17”</td>
<td>2/day</td>
<td>Closes when quota is reached.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mackerel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King</td>
<td>24”</td>
<td>3/day</td>
<td>Closes when quota is reached.</td>
<td>Regulations subject to change. See <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>12”</td>
<td>15/day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Highly Migratory Species federal permit is required in state or federal waters. Contact 978-281-9370 or <a href="http://hmspermits.noaa.gov">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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>99”</td>
<td>1 blue or 1 white marlin/vessel/trip</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>66”</td>
<td>1 blue or 1 white marlin/vessel/trip</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mullet, striped and white</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>200/day</td>
<td>(species combined)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**
- Regulations subject to change. See South Atlantic Fishery Management Council regulations page at [http://safmc.net/regulations/regulations-by-species/](http://safmc.net/regulations/regulations-by-species/)
- Non-stainless steel circle hooks must be used when fishing for snapper-grouper species using natural baits.
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**Legal Disclaimer:**
This digest is effective April 1, 2018 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).
<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>Red Porgy (Silver snapper, pinky)</td>
<td>14” TL</td>
<td>3/day or 3/trip whichever is more restrictive</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>
<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> Non-stainless steel circle hooks must be used when fishing for snapper-grouper species using natural baits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sailfish</td>
<td>63” LJFL</td>
<td>1/day</td>
<td></td>
<td>Highly Migratory Species federal permit is required in state or federal waters. Contact 978-281-9370 or <a href="http://hmspermits.noaa.gov">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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scup (North of Cape Hatteras)</td>
<td>8” TL</td>
<td>50/day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seatrout, spotted (Speckled trout)</td>
<td>14” TL</td>
<td>4/day</td>
<td>Opens June 15, 2018</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American shad (All waters except as noted below)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>10/day of American and hickory shad in any combination</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American shad in Cape Fear River and its tributaries</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>5/day as part of 10-fish American and hickory shad aggregate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American shad in Albemarle Sound, Roanoke and Neuse rivers and their tributaries</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1/day as part of 10-fish American and hickory shad aggregate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American shad in Atlantic Ocean NO POSSESSION</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>10/day of American and hickory shad in any combination (see American shad limits above)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hickory shad (all waters)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>10/day of American and hickory shad in any combination</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacknose, blacktip, blue, bull, finetooth, lemon, nurse, oceanic whitetip, porbeagle, shorthin mako, spinner, thrasher, tiger</td>
<td>54” FL</td>
<td>1/vessel/day in any combination</td>
<td></td>
<td>Regulations subject to change. See <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations</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">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, bignose, Caribbean reef, Caribbean sharpnose, dusky, Galapagos, longfin mako, narrownose, night, sand tiger, sandbar, silky, sevengill, sixgill, smalltail, whale, whites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great hammerhead, scalloped hammerhead, smooth hammerhead</td>
<td>78” FL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlantic sharpnose</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1/person/trip in addition to 1/shark/vessel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonnethead</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1/person/trip in addition to 1/shark/vessel</td>
<td></td>
<td></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>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fish</th>
<th>Size Limit</th>
<th>Bag Limit</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sheepshead</td>
<td>10&quot; FL</td>
<td>10/day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snappers</td>
<td>10/day any combination</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lane snapper</td>
<td>8&quot; TL</td>
<td>5/day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutton snapper</td>
<td>18&quot; TL</td>
<td>5/day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarpon</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1/day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuna</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>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 <a href="http://www.orhmspermits.noaa.gov">http://www.orhmspermits.noaa.gov</a> or <a href="http://nmfs.noaa.gov">http://nmfs.noaa.gov</a>) for up-to-date information. Prior to removal from vessel, all bluefin tuna 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 more details.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bigeye</td>
<td>27&quot; CFL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bluefin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellowfin</td>
<td>27&quot; CFL</td>
<td>3/day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weakfish (Gray Trout)</td>
<td>12&quot; TL</td>
<td>1/day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wreckfish</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1/Vessel/Day</td>
<td>Open July 1 - Aug. 31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## 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” carapace width (minimum for males)</td>
<td>50 crabs/day not to exceed 100 crabs/vessel/day</td>
<td></td>
<td>One crab pot may be used without a license from 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/mf/">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/</a>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard Clam</td>
<td>1” thick</td>
<td>100 clams/day not to exceed 200 clams/vessel/day</td>
<td></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/mf/proclamations">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations</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 Oct. 15 - March 31 (<a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf</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/mf/proclamations">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations</a> for seasons, areas, or other restrictions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bay Scallop</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1/2 bushel/day not to exceed 1 bushel/vessel/day</td>
<td>Closed unless opened by proclamation (<a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations</a>)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conchs and Whelks</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>10/day not to exceed 20/vessel/day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mussels</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>100/day not to exceed 200/vessel/day</td>
<td></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/mf/proclamations">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations</a> for seasons, areas, or other restrictions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shrimp</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Closed shrimping area — 4 quarts heads on 2-1/2 quarts heads off/day (Cast net only)</td>
<td>Open shrimping area — 48 quarts heads on, 30 quarts heads off (Per person or vessel)*</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/mf/maps-to-view-and-print">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/maps-to-view-and-print</a>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stone Crabs</td>
<td>2 3/4” propodus (forearm)</td>
<td>No limit on claws</td>
<td>Closed June 15 - Aug. 15</td>
<td>No possession of crab body; no removal of claw from egg-bearing crabs; no gigging.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When it comes to fishing in coastal waters, there's more than meets the eye. Many microorganisms inhabit the ocean, rivers and sounds, and not all of them are good for humans.

The N.C. Recreational Water Quality Program offers anglers and beachgoers a way to know more about bacteria levels not only at the beach, but also in waters where many popular fishing holes are located.

The N.C. Shellfish Sanitation and Recreational Water Quality Section of the Division of Marine Fisheries started monitoring coastal recreational water quality in 1997 with the main goal of protecting public health. The program monitors bacteria levels in coastal waters and notifies the public when those levels exceed what is safe for bodily contact.

The program tests popular recreational areas for a bacteria group called Enterococci, which is found in the guts of humans and other warm-blooded animals. Enterococci bacteria are not known to be harmful themselves, but are associated with other pathogenic organisms that can cause illness.

Illness-causing organisms can come from poorly treated wastewater from sewage treatment plants, malfunctioning septic systems and boat discharges. They can also come from storm water runoff from agricultural and urban areas that deliver pathogens from humans, livestock, wildlife and pets into recreational waters.

Swimming, surf fishing, fishing while wading or having contact with waters that are under a swimming advisory may increase the risk of illness. The most common illnesses associated with polluted water are gastrointestinal diseases caused by bacteria, viruses and parasitic protozoans. Ear, nose, throat, skin and respiratory infections are also commonly associated with swimming in contaminated water.

North Carolina's coastal recreational waters are generally clean — the state repeatedly ranks amongst the highest in the nation in coastal water quality. On average, the Recreational Water Quality Program collects around 6,000 water samples each year, and less than 2 percent of the samples exceed the water quality standard that warrant a swimming advisory. This relatively low number of advisories and total days posted shows that the problems are primarily localized and temporary.

Still, anglers should stay up-to-date on water quality in the areas where they fish. Those who wish to find out about current advisories can visit the program's website at http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-water-quality or follow on Twitter @ncrecpgm.

Don't look to seawater to cure wounds

There's a longstanding myth that seawater cures almost any ill. Don't believe it!

Clean saltwater may help heal wounds, but seawater contains any number of harmful microscopic organisms that can make people sick, and even kill someone who is not healthy. Some of the biggest culprits are Vibrio bacteria. Vibrio are naturally occurring, microscopic organisms, not associated with water pollution. They are abundantly found in North Carolina's coastal waters during the warm water months of May through October, but are also present year-round.

Vibrio vulnificus infections are rare but can be fatal for people with liver disease, diabetes, or otherwise weakened immune systems. More common infections from other Vibrio bacteria, such as Vibrio parahaemolyticus are not as fatal but affect more people — healthy people with healthy immune systems.

Anglers can get these bacteria by ingestion, such as eating undercooked or raw shellfish, or through open wounds on the skin. Any angler stuck by a fish spine, pinched by a crab, or pricked by shrimp or any other saltwater animal needs to take precautions to avoid a Vibrio wound infection. Even insect bites are potential openings for bacteria.

Anglers who have wounds should either stay out of brackish and salt water or cover the wound with a waterproof bandage. If an open wound is exposed to seawater here's what to do:

1. Flush out the wound with sterile water. Those on a boat can use bottled water. Do not try to clean a wound with seawater.
2. As soon as possible, wash the wound with soap and water.
3. Then, flush and clean the wound with hydrogen peroxide and an iodine antiseptic solution (such as Betadine). Both are available at drug stores and should be included in a boat's first aid kit.

Anglers who think they may have developed a skin infection should seek immediate medical attention, and tell the doctor that they have been exposed to seawater, and may have a Vibrio infection.

Fishermen can find more information on Vibrios at the Centers for Disease Control website at https://www.cdc.gov/vibrio/index.html or the University of Southern Mississippi Gulf Coast Research Laboratory website at http://gcrl.usm.edu/microbiology/vibrio.vulnificus.threat.via.wounds.php.
It is arguably the most popular fish species in North Carolina coastal waters. Anglers love to catch a flounder.

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

Three species of flounder are typically caught 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 on fishes 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.

Become fluent in flounder identification

**Southern Flounder:**
- 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
- Non-ocellated spots cover the body
- Ocellated / eye spot (Summer and gulf flounder)
- 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:**
- 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
- At least five ocellated spots on body — five prominent ocelli form the pattern from the five-side of a die
- Nine to 12 short, stubby gill rakers

**Gulf Flounder:**
- 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
- Thirteen or more long, thin gill rakers
- Fish with no ocellated spots, and short, stubby gill rakers are southern flounder

**Gill Rakers**
- Gill filaments
- Gill rakers
- Ocellated or “eye” spots are ringed markings. They are found on summer flounder and gulf flounder. Southern flounder do not have ocellated spots.
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.

**Gig, Spear and Crossbow Fishing**

Individuals need to hold a Coastal Recreational Fishing License to gig, spear or crossbow fish 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).

Recreational harvest limits apply and sale of catch is prohibited.

Other than the activities described above, a Recreational Commercial Gear License is needed to fish for crabs.

## North Carolina Fishing — What’s Hot and When

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Fish</th>
<th>Shellfish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>Black bass, bluefin tuna, striped bass (ocean, coastal rivers). <strong>SHELLFISH:</strong> clams, oysters</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>American and hickory shad (coastal river tributaries), black sea bass, bluefin tuna, striped bass (ocean, coastal rivers). <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>
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<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>
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<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>Bluefish, cobia, croaker, dolphin, flounder, grouper, king mackerel, sea mullet, sharks, sheepshead, Spanish mackerel, spotted seatrout (sounds), striped bass (coastal rivers), wahoo, weakfish, yellowfin tuna. <strong>SHELLFISH:</strong> clams, hard crabs, soft crabs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>Blue marlin, bluefish, cobia, croaker, dolphin, flounder, grouper, king mackerel, sailfish, sharks, sheepshead, Spanish mackerel, spotted seatrout, tuna, weakfish, white marlin. <strong>SHELLFISH:</strong> clams, hard crabs, soft crabs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>Blue marlin, bluefish, cobia, croaker, flounder, dolphin, grouper, sailfish, sea mullet, sheepshead, Spanish mackerel, tarpon, tuna, white marlin. <strong>SHELLFISH:</strong> clams, hard crabs, soft crabs, shrimp.</td>
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<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>Bluefish, cobia, croaker, dolphin, flounder, grouper, red drum, sea mullet, sheepshead, Spanish mackerel, spot, tarpon, tuna, white marlin. <strong>SHELLFISH:</strong> clams, hard crabs, soft crabs, shrimp.</td>
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<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>Bluefish, black drum, cobia, dolphin, false albacore, flounder, grouper, king mackerel, red drum, sea mullet, sheepshead, Spanish mackerel, spot, wahoo, weakfish, white marlin. <strong>SHELLFISH:</strong> clams, hard crabs, soft crabs, shrimp.</td>
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<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>Black drum, black sea bass, bluefish, dolphin, false albacore, flounder, grouper, king mackerel, red drum, sea mullet, sheepshead, spot, spotted seatrout, striped bass (ocean and coastal rivers), wahoo, weakfish, yellowfin tuna. <strong>SHELLFISH:</strong> clams, oysters, shrimp.</td>
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<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), wahoo, yellowfin tuna. <strong>SHELLFISH:</strong> clams, oysters.</td>
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<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>Black sea bass, bluefin tuna, bluefish, grouper, sharks, spotted seatrout, striped bass (ocean and coastal rivers). <strong>SHELLFISH:</strong> clams, oysters.</td>
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Scan this quick response code to get the latest size and bag limits on your mobile phone.

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115,000 copies of this public digest were printed at a cost of $35,000 or 30-cents per copy.