

NORTH CAROLINA 2020

FREE

# COASTAL RECREATIONAL FISHING DIGEST

Saltwater Regulations and More

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# The angle on North Carolina coastal recreational fishing



## ***Welcome to a new decade of fishing on the North Carolina coast!***

The N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries is pleased to introduce the 2020 Coastal Recreational Fishing Digest, an annual magazine funded by Coastal Recreational Fishing License sales.

This year's digest features an article focusing on circle hooks – why anglers should use them, and how to fish with them. It also features an update on artificial reef construction in North Carolina.

As always, the digest contains information on fishing license options, fish identification drawings and photos, 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 always check the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries' website at <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-fishing-size-and-bag-limits> or download the FishRules App for the most up-to-date fishing regulations. (See page 14 for QR codes).

## **Notable regulatory changes this year include:**

### **Flounder**

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

The minimum size limit will remain at 15 inches total length, and the creel limit will remain at four fish per person per day during the open recreational season.

Since all species of flounder are managed under the same recreational regulations, the recreational season applies to all recreational flounder fishing.

### **Bluefish**

The creel limit for recreationally-caught bluefish has decreased to three fish per person, per day for recreational fishermen fishing from the shore, pier, private vessel, or in any way other than with a for-hire operation.

Recreational fishermen fishing on for-hire vessels (charter boats, head boats, guide boats) can possess up to five bluefish per person, per day.

### **Striped Bass (Atlantic Ocean)**

A new slot limit and circle hook requirement is in place for striped bass caught in the Atlantic Ocean.

The bag limit is still one fish per person per day, but the size limit is now a minimum of 28 inches to less than 35 inches total length (fishermen may not keep a 35-inch fish).

Additionally, anglers are required to use non-offset, corrodible circle hooks when using natural bait to fish for striped bass in the Atlantic Ocean.

### **Blue crab**

New size limits, seasons and other regulations are in place for blue crab. The changes include:

- A closed season (which will replace the current pot closure period)
  - Jan. 1-31 north of the Highway 58 bridge
  - March 1-15 south of the Highway 58 bridge; and
- A 5-inch minimum size limit for mature female crabs statewide.

# Why use circle hooks?

## Circle hooks are not new

Archeological records show that Polynesian peoples were fashioning circle hooks from wood, bone and stone when they began populating New Zealand a thousand years ago. But with the introduction of metals, these circle hooks went out of style.

Today, circle hooks are back in vogue with conservation-minded fishermen.

A circle hook is a hook with the point turned perpendicularly back to the shank to form a generally circular or oval shape.

Because of the curved shape, a fish is less likely to swallow a circle hook than a traditional J-hook. Instead, it hooks the corner of the fish's mouth, where it can be easily removed with less life-threatening damage to the fish. Deep-hooked fish are more likely to die when released than lip-hooked fish.

In one study of red drum caught in North Carolina waters, mortality rates of lip hooked fish were zero percent, compared to 16 percent for deep-hooked fish.

Numerous studies have looked at the effectiveness of circle hooks using one of two methods: observational and tagging.

The observational method involves capturing fish using different types of hooks, then releasing them in tanks where the mortality is observed.

The tagging method involves capturing the fish with different hook types, tagging the fish, and releasing it back into the wild.

Survival rates are calculated based on the proportion of fish that are re-captured by fishermen or determined from the fish's activity, if tagged with electronic tags.

Studies have shown that using circle hooks can reduce release mortality to less than 10% for some species.

However, studies have also shown that the size and shape of the mouth, feeding behavior and bait type can change circle hook effectiveness.

For this reason, circle hooks may not be effective for species such as sheepshead or flounder.

Additionally, offset circle hooks do not have the same benefits as non-offset circle hooks. An offset circle hook has a point that is angled sideways, away from the shank.

Some research shows the greater the degree of the offset, the less effective the hook is at reducing gut-hooking.

Regardless of the type of hook used or the species caught, angler skill in handling the fish plays a big role in catch-and-release survival. Anglers should follow the best practices from the ethical angler guide on page four of this digest.

In recent years, fisheries managers have adopted more circle hook regulations:

- The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission requires use of non-offset, corrodible circle hooks when fishing for sharks in all state waters and when using natural bait to fish for striped bass in the Atlantic Ocean.



Non-offset circle hook



Offset circle hook

- The South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council requires use of circle hooks when in possession of snapper/grouper species in the South Atlantic.
- The N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission requires seasonal use of circle hooks in areas of the Pamlico Sound for red drum.

As this trend continues, anglers will need to know how to use circle hooks.

## How to fish with a circle hook

Anglers can use circle hooks when fishing for any species with live or cut bait, but especially when fishing with a bottom rig or float rig.

The techniques of fishing with circle hooks differs from fishing with J-hooks in a few ways.

First, when baiting the hook, the angler should make sure the point of the hook is exposed through the bait so that it can easily catch the fish's mouth.

Second, anglers should not set the hook, but let the fish swim so that the line tightens and the fish hooks itself. Yanking on the line like you do to set a J-hook will pull the circle hook out of the fish's mouth.

Also, as with any hook, always bend down the barb to facilitate easy release of the fish.

# Best practices for the ethical angler



**One of the best ways for anglers to show their love for coastal resources is to help preserve them. Below are several best practices to help anglers do just that.**

It is important that anglers employ these practices every time they fish to reduce the likelihood of post-release mortality so 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, needle nose pliers or 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 increase the likelihood of jaw hooking. Circle hooks and barbless hooks aid in the 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.

## Deep-water Fishing

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

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

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

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

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



## 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.

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

## COASTAL RECREATIONAL FISHING LICENSES

North Carolina requires people 16 or older to hold a Coastal Recreational Fishing License to fish in coastal waters of the state. A variety of license options are available and they can be purchased at many tackle shops, at N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries and N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission offices and online at <https://www.ncwildlife.org>. A \$2 transaction fee will be added to the price of all licenses.

Revenues from license sales are used to manage, protect, restore, develop, cultivate, conserve and enhance North Carolina's marine resources.

### Annual Coastal Recreational Fishing Licenses

State Residents\* — \$16  
Nonresidents — \$32

### 10-day Coastal Recreational Fishing Licenses

State Residents\* — \$6  
Nonresidents, ages 16 or older — \$11  
Blocks of Ten 10-day — \$150

### Lifetime Coastal Recreational Fishing Licenses

Infant: younger than one year — \$106  
Youth: ages 1-11 — \$159  
Resident Adult\*: ages 12-senior\*\* — \$265  
Nonresident Adult: ages 12 and older — \$530  
Resident Senior\* \*\*\* — \$16  
Resident Disabled Veteran\*: 50 percent or more disabled — \$11  
Resident Totally Disabled\*: totally and permanently disabled — \$11

### Annual Unified Inland/Coastal Recreational Fishing License

Resident\* — \$41

### Annual Unified Sportsman/Coastal Recreational Fishing Licenses

Resident\* — \$69

### Lifetime Unified Sportsman/Coastal Recreational Fishing Licenses

Infant: younger than one year — \$292  
Youth: ages 1-11 — \$477  
Resident Adult\*: ages 12-senior\*\* — \$716  
Nonresident Adult: ages 12 and older — \$1,643  
Resident Senior\* \*\*\* — \$32  
Resident Disabled Veteran\* — 50 percent or more disabled — \$117  
Resident Totally Disabled\*: Totally and permanently disabled — \$117

### Lifetime Unified Inland/Coastal Recreational Fishing License

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

## Exemptions

- 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.

\* 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. 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 marine and estuarine 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 to [tagrecap@ncdenr.gov](mailto:tagrecap@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 rubber 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>.

# Fishing Tournaments

## The N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries manages two recreational fishing tournament programs

**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 leader. The angler and a witness must fill out and sign an application at an official weigh station. For a list of weigh stations, see the link on this page <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-fishing-tournaments>.



**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 landed or released fish. 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.

More information about the Governor's Cup and Saltwater Fishing tournaments can be found online at <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-fishing-tournaments>

## The Official 2020 North Carolina Saltwater Fishing Tournament Minimum Weights

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

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, 36 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

# An update 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 structures placed on the sea bottom to provide habitat for fish and shellfish, as well as, fishing and diving opportunities throughout North Carolina. Artificial reefs are built with a variety of materials including rock, recycled concrete reef balls, and ships. North Carolina has built reefs in coastal rivers, in the sounds, and in the ocean up to 40 miles offshore. Artificial reefs 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 on an Interactive Reef Guide on the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries' Artificial Reef webpage. The interactive guide allows the user to find specific locations of material, view sidescan surveys, measure distances, and print custom maps. This interactive map is updated periodically and contains the newest material location information and sidescan imagery.

## 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*, in early 2020 and plans to sink a third tugboat, the *Valley Forge*, and approximately 7,200 tons of recycled concrete pipe in the summer of 2020.

Nearby, demolition of the Herbert C. Bonner bridge that spanned Oregon Inlet will continue in 2020. Nearly half the material from the bridge demolition was carried offshore to four other nearby reef sites (AR-130, AR-140, AR-145 and AR-160) in the spring. Once the bridge demolition and reef construction is complete, these sites will join AR-165 as prime locations for anglers on the Outer Banks to find seabass, king mackerel, bluefish and amberjack.

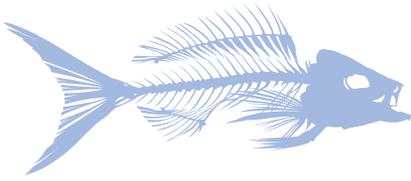
The Oyster Sanctuary Program completed construction on the Swan Island Oyster Sanctuary near the mouth of the Neuse River in the spring of 2020. This oyster reef now spans 65 acres and contains 90,000 tons of rock. In addition to providing oyster habitat, oyster sanctuaries make great places to fish. The Swan Island Oyster Sanctuary is already attracting speckled trout and sheephead, and it is a very popular place to fish for large red drum in late summer and early fall.

Just north of Roanoke Island, AR-197 received approximately 1,500 tons of small granite rock in the spring of 2020. This site last received material in the late 1980s. Refreshing the site with new material nearly quadrupled the amount of habitat on the reef. This site will likely be a popular spot for striped bass and speckled trout fishing.

## Current and Upcoming Enhancements

Several other reef projects are underway in 2020. These include enhancements to offshore reefs AR-250, AR-255 and AR-368. About 700 large reef balls, concrete pipe and assorted concrete rubble will be distributed among these sites. A large vessel will also be sunk on AR-368.

To learn more about the state's artificial reefs, go to <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/artificial-reefs-program> or email questions to [Jordan.Byrum@ncdenr.gov](mailto:Jordan.Byrum@ncdenr.gov).



### Carcass Collection Program...

The Carcass Collection Program collects carcasses of 22 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.

For more information on this program and what species are collected, see <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/carcass-collection>.

### Coastal Angling Program...

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 salt-water to freshwater to spawn.

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

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

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

## HOW TO MEASURE A FISH

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

**Fork Length (FL)** – The length of a fish as measured from the tip of the snout to the fork of the tail.

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

**Lower Jaw Fork Length (LJFL)** – The length of a fish as measured from the tip of the lower jaw to the fork of the tail.

**Total Length**

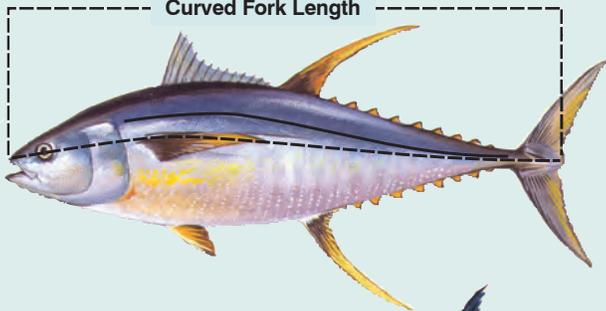


(Pinch tail together when measuring)

**Fork Length**



**Curved Fork Length**



**Lower Jaw Fork Length**



# Common N.C. Saltwater Fishes



**Amberjack**  
*Seriola dumerilii*



**Black Sea Bass**  
*Centropristis striata*



**Striped Bass**  
*Morone saxatilis*



**Bluefish**  
*Pomatomus saltatrix*



**Cobia**  
*Rachycentron canadum*



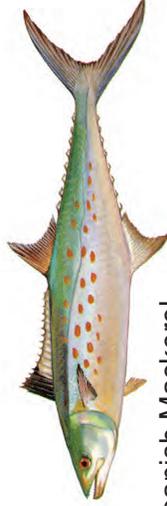
**Summer Flounder**  
*Paralichthys dentatus*



**Gag Grouper**  
*Mycteroperca microlepis*



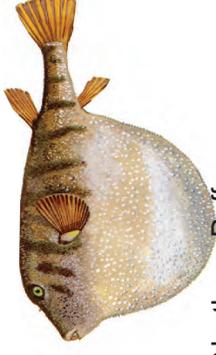
**King Mackerel**  
*Scomberomorus cavalla*



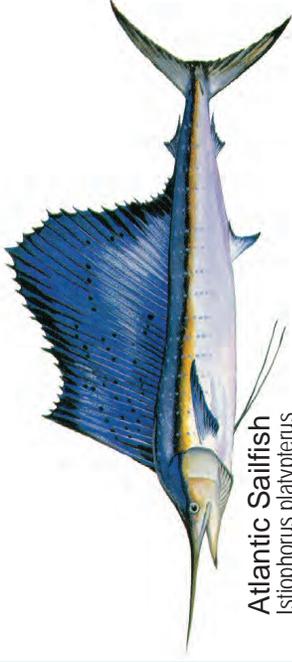
**Spanish Mackerel**  
*Scomberomorus maculatus*



**White Marlin**  
*Tetrapturus albidus*



**Northern Puffer**  
*Sphoeroides maculatus*



**Atlantic Sailfish**  
*Istiophorus platypterus*



**Sheepshead**  
*Archosargus probatocephalus*



**Vermilion Snapper**  
*Rhomboplites aurorubens*



**Spadefish**  
*Chaetodipterus faber*



**Atlantic Croaker**  
*Micropogonias undulatus*



**Dolphin**  
*Coryphaena hippurus*



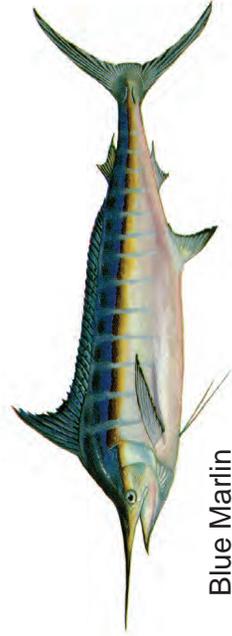
**Black Drum**  
*Pogonias cromis*



**Red Drum**  
*Sciaenops ocellatus*



**Southern Flounder**  
*Paralichthys lethostigma*



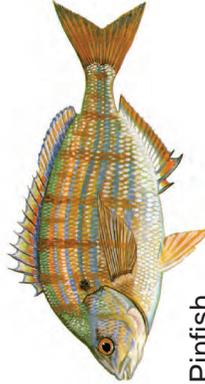
**Blue Marlin**  
*Makaira nigricans*



**Kingfish (Sea Mullet)**  
*Menticirrhus americanus*



**Pigfish**  
*Orthopristis chrysoptera*



**Pinfish**  
*Lagodon rhomboides*



**Red Porgy**  
*Pagrus pagrus*



**Spot**  
*Leiostomus xanthurus*



**Spotted Seatrout (Speckled Trout)**  
*Cynoscion nebulosus*



**Weakfish (Gray Trout)**  
*Cynoscion regalis*



**Yellowfin Tuna**  
*Thunnus albacares*



**False Albacore**  
*Euthynnus alletteratus*



**Wahoo**  
*Acanthocybium solanderi*

**To report fisheries violations, or for information on rules and regulations call 252-726-7021 or 800-682-2632.**

# Know the Difference Between Sheepshead and Black Drum

## Sheepshead



Fully connected first and second dorsal fins

Forked tail



Prominent front teeth

## Black Drum



First dorsal fin distinct from second dorsal fin

Rounded tail



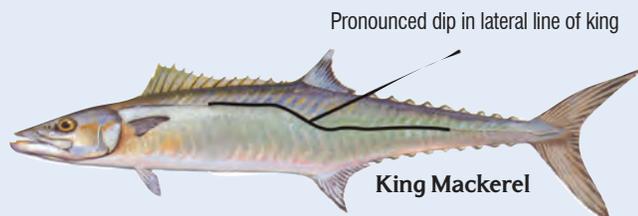
Chin barbels

## Identifying Mackerels

They can look a lot alike, but the size limit on king mackerel is twice the length of Spanish, so you need to be able to tell them apart.

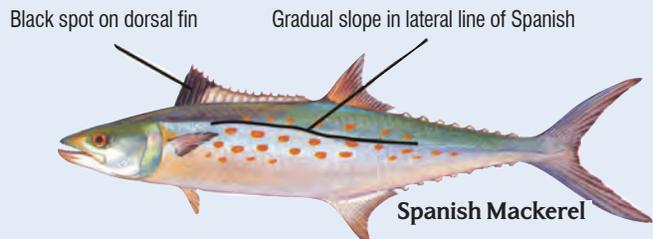
Both the adult Spanish mackerel and a juvenile king mackerel have gold spots on the body. However, the Spanish mackerel features a black spot on the first dorsal fin.

Another difference between the fish is that the king mackerel has a pronounced dip in the lateral line below the second dorsal fin. The lateral line on the Spanish mackerel gently curves to the tail.



Pronounced dip in lateral line of king

King Mackerel



Black spot on dorsal fin

Gradual slope in lateral line of Spanish

Spanish Mackerel

# Become fluent in flounder identification

## Anglers love to catch a flounder.

In fact, flounder historically has ranked as one of the top species targeted by recreational fishermen in North Carolina coastal waters. But not all flounders are the same.

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.

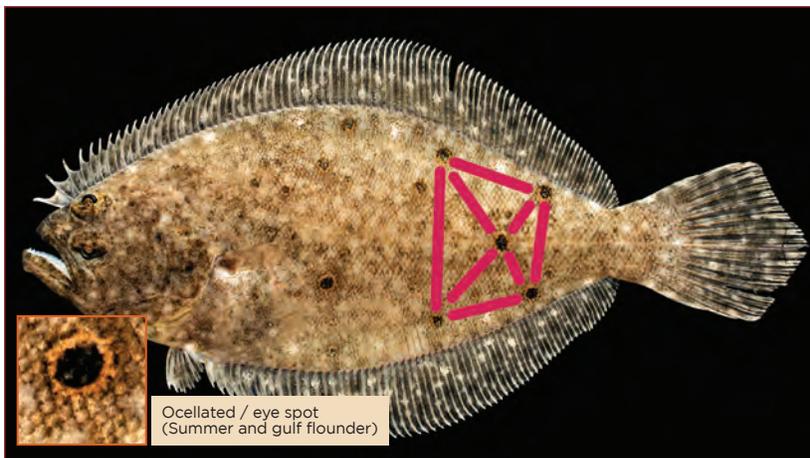
One of the ways the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries does research is by collecting information on recreational fishing catch and effort through in-person and mail surveys. Staff talks to anglers on the beach, at the piers and at boat ramps to find out what they caught, what they threw back, where and 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.

Additionally, there is now a recreational season on flounder designed to, along with harvest reductions in the commercial fishery, end overfishing and rebuild the southern flounder



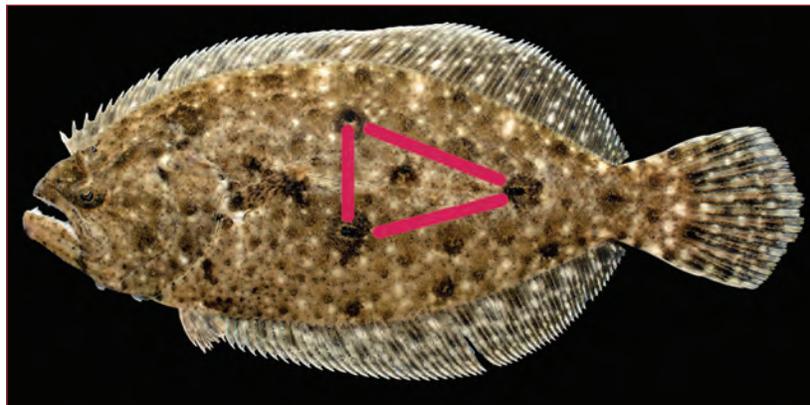
**SOUTHERN FLOUNDER:**  
This is the most common flounder caught in North Carolina, especially in estuarine waters.  
Non-ocellated spots cover the body

Upper jaw extends to beyond rear margin of eye  
Eight to 11 gill rakers on lower limb of first gill arch  
Sixty-three to 74 anal fin rays



**SUMMER FLOUNDER:**  
This species is commonly seen around inlets, in the ocean and in estuarine waters  
At least five ocellated spots on body — five prominent ocelli form the pattern from the

five-side of a die  
Upper jaw extends to rear margin of eye  
Thirteen to 18 gill rakers on lower limb of first gill arch  
Sixty to 73 anal fin rays

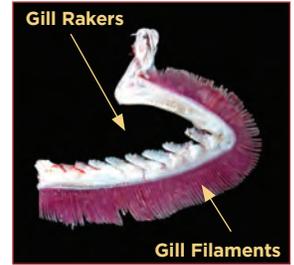


**GULF FLOUNDER:**  
This species is occasionally seen in North Carolina waters, usually in the ocean  
Three prominent ocellated spots form triangle on body, apex towards caudal fin (can have more than three over entire

body, but three will be prominent)  
Upper jaw extends beyond rear margin of eye  
Nine to 12 gill rakers on lower limb of first gill arch  
Fifty-six to 63 anal fin rays

fish stocks. Since all species of flounder are managed under the same recreational regulations, the recreational season applies to all recreational flounder fishing.

The ability of recreational fishermen to accurately identify flounder either by species or by ocellated/non-ocellated could result in greater recreational harvest opportunities for these fish in the future.



**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.



**Southern Flounder**  
Eight to 11 short, stubby gill rakers  
Fish with no ocellated spots, and short, stubby gill rakers are southern flounder

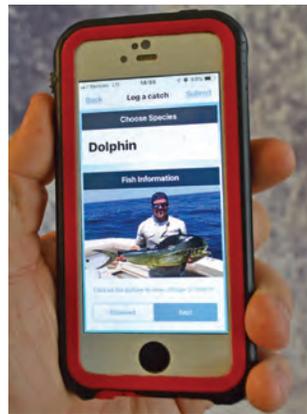
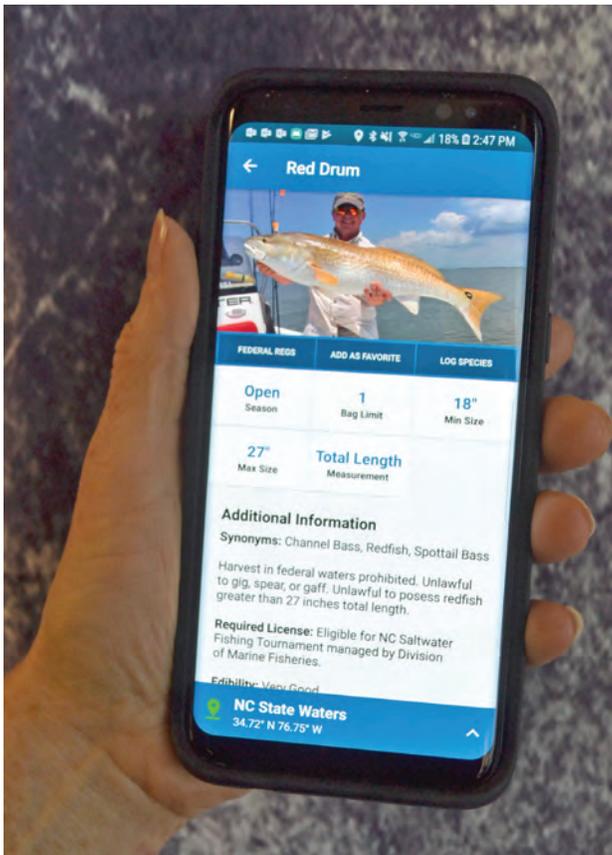


**Summer Flounder**  
Thirteen or more long, thin gill rakers  
Fish with ocellated spots and long, thin gill rakers are summer flounder



**Gulf Flounder**  
Nine to 12 short, stubby gill rakers  
Fish with ocellated spots and short, stubby gill rakers are gulf flounder.  
Ocellated or "eye" spots are ringed markings. They are found on summer flounder and Gulf flounder. Southern flounder do not have ocellated spots.

# Fishing regulations and reporting: There's an app for that



## 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 have a multitude of causes 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 gases in its swim bladder expand to the point that the fish's eyes can bulge out and the stomach and intestines can be protruding out of the fish. This obvious trauma can lead to mortality, either directly from the injuries or indirectly by immobilizing the fish and making it more susceptible to predation. The rate and magnitude of this mortality are difficult to estimate and include in stock assessments for these species so the council must take a conservative approach when establishing bag limits and size limits to account for the loss of these fish.

To improve the accuracy of estimates for released fish, the council developed the MyFishCount app for anglers to log their catch and the number of fish they release. 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 scientist for improving the estimates of release mortality included in stock assessments. Anglers can also log on anytime to see past trips, thus acting as a log book. 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.

## 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 the

angler's 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 through your iPhone App Store or Android Google Play Store or at [www.fishrulesapp.com](http://www.fishrulesapp.com).

Download the MyFishCount app through your iPhone App Store or Android Google Play Store or at [www.myfishcount.com](http://www.myfishcount.com).



FishRules Android



FishRules iPhone



MyFishCount Android



MyFishCount Apple

## 2020 Recreational Size and Bag Limits for N.C. Coastal Waters

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

FINFISH SPECIES	Minimum Length	Bag Limits (per person)	Seasons	Comments
<b>Bass, Black Sea</b>				
North of Cape Hatteras	12.5" TL	15/day	May 17 - Dec. 31	Regulations subject to change. Contact the National Marine Fisheries Service Greater Atlantic Regional Office (978-231-9315) or <a href="http://www.greateralantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/sustainable/species/bsbass/index.html">http://www.greateralantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/sustainable/species/bsbass/index.html</a> .
South of Cape Hatteras	13" TL	7/day	Fishing year runs April 1 - March 31 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>	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-groupers species using natural baits.
<b>Bass, Striped</b>				
Atlantic Ocean	28" - less than 35" TL	1/day	Open year round	All striped bass landed from the ocean May 1 - Oct. 31 are required to have a landings tag affixed through the mouth and gill cover. Landings tags may be obtained at N.C. Striped Bass Reporting Stations, ocean fishing piers, most tackle shops and from N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries Recreational Port Agents. No gigging allowed. Non-offset, corrosion resistant circle hooks required when using natural bait.
Roanoke River Management Area	18" TL Unlawful to possess between 22"-27" TL	2/day, only one may be larger than 27" TL	March 1 - April 30 unless closed by proclamation when quota is reached. See <a href="https://www.ncwildlife.org/Fishing/Seasons-Limits">https://www.ncwildlife.org/Fishing/Seasons-Limits</a>	
Albemarle Sound Management Area	18" TL	2/day	Open Oct. 1 - April 30 unless closed by proclamation when quota is reached. See <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations</a>	
Cape Fear River	<b>NO POSSESSION</b>			Includes Cape Fear River and all tributaries.
Central Southern Management Area (All waters other than above)	<b>NO POSSESSION</b>			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.
<b>Bluefish</b>	None		3/day, shore, pier, private vessel, or in any way other than with a for-hire operation; 5/day, for-hire operation	Regulations subject to change. Check website at <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/</a> for updates.
<b>Cobia</b>	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>			
<b>Dolphin</b>	None	10/day or 60 fish/vessel, whichever is less	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>	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>
<b>Drum, Black</b>	14" - 25" TL	10/day   1/person/day over 25" TL		
<b>Drum, Red</b> (channel bass, puppy drum)	18" - 27" TL (slot)	1/day		Unlawful to gig, spear or gaff red drum. It is unlawful to use any hook larger than 4/0 from 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 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.
<b>Eel, American</b>	9" TL	25/day		Eel taken by baited pots allowed year round

SEE DISCLAIMER, PAGE 17

## 2020 Recreational Size and Bag Limits for N.C. Coastal Waters

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

FINFISH SPECIES	Minimum Length	Bag Limits (per person)	Seasons	Comments
<b>Flounder</b>	15" TL	4/day	Open Aug. 16 - Sept. 30	
<b>Herring, Alewife and Blueback</b>	<b>NO POSSESSION</b>			
<b>Mackerel</b>			Closes when quota is reached. 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>
King	24" FL	3/day		
Spanish	12" FL	15/day		
<b>Marlin</b>				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. An Atlantic billfish that is caught but not kept must be released immediately without removing it from the water.
Blue	99" LJFL	1 blue or 1 white marlin/vessel/trip		
White	66" LJFL	1 blue or 1 white marlin/vessel/trip		
<b>Mullet, striped and white</b>	None	200/day (species combined)		
<b>Sailfish</b>	63" LJFL	1/day		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. An Atlantic billfish that is caught but not kept must be released immediately without removing it from the water.
<b>Scup (North of Cape Hatteras)</b>	8" TL	50/day		
<b>Seatrot, spotted (Speckled trout)</b>	14" TL	4/day		
<b>Shad</b>				
American shad (All waters except as noted below)	None	10/day of American and hickory shad in any combination		It is unlawful to take American or hickory shad by any method except hook and line, Apr. 1 - Dec. 31  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>
American shad in Cape Fear River and its tributaries	None	5/day as part of 10-fish American and hickory shad aggregate		
American shad in Albemarle Sound, Roanoke and Neuse rivers and their tributaries	None	1/day as part of 10-fish American and hickory shad aggregate		
American shad in Atlantic Ocean	<b>NO POSSESSION</b>			
Hickory shad (all waters)	None	10/day of American and hickory shad in any combination (see American shad limits above)		
<b>Sheepshead</b>	10" FL	10/day		
<b>Snapper-Groupers Complex</b> Snappers, Groupers, Porgys, TrIGGERFISH, JACKS, TILFISH, GRUNTS, SPADEFISH, WRASSES and Sea basses (other than black sea bass)				See South Atlantic Fishery Management Council website: <a href="http://safmc.net/regulations/regulations-by-species/">http://safmc.net/regulations/regulations-by-species/</a>

## 2020 Recreational Size and Bag Limits for N.C. Coastal Waters

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

FINFISH SPECIES	Minimum Length	Bag Limits (per person)	Seasons	Comments
<b>Sharks</b>				
Sharks (other than dogfish)	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>			
Dogfish (smooth)	None	None		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> .
Dogfish (spiny)	None	None		No possession of great hammerhead, scallop hammerhead, smooth hammerhead or oceanic whitetip while in possession of tunas, billfish or swordfish. Prohibited species: Atlantic angel, basking, bigeye, bigeye sixgill, bigeye thrasher, bignose, Caribbean reef, Caribbean sharpnose, dusky, Galápagos, longfin mako, narrowtooth, night, sand tiger, sandbar, silky, sevengill, sixgill, smalltail, whale, whites.
<b>Sturgeon</b>	<b>NO POSSESSION</b>			
<b>Tarpon</b>	None	1/day		It is unlawful to take tarpon with any gear other than hook and line.
<b>Tuna</b>				
Bigeye	27" CFL			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> . Regulations are subject to change. Contact NMFS Highly Migratory Species Division (800-894-5528 <a href="https://hmspermits.noaa.gov/">https://hmspermits.noaa.gov/</a> or <a href="http://nfmfs.noaa.gov">nfmfs.noaa.gov</a> ) for up-to-date information.
Bluefin	See: <a href="https://hmspermits.noaa.gov/">https://hmspermits.noaa.gov/</a> or <a href="http://nfmfs.noaa.gov">nfmfs.noaa.gov</a>			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.
Yellowfin	27" CFL	3/day		
<b>Wahoo</b>	None	2/day		Closes when quota is reached. 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>
<b>Weakfish (Gray Trout)</b>	12" TL	1/day		

THIS DIGEST IS EFFECTIVE APRIL 1, 2020 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> and updated Recreational Commercial Gear License information can be found at <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-commercial-gear-license>.

## SHELLFISH

Species	Minimum Length	Bag Limits (Per Person)	Seasons	Comments
<b>Blue Crab</b>	5" carapace width males and mature females. No possession of immature females	50 crabs/day not to exceed 100 crabs/vessel/day	Closed Jan. 1-31 north of the Highway 58 bridge; March 1-15 south of the Highway 58 bridge. Unlawful to possess any crab with brown or black sponge April 1-30	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> . Size limit applies to hard crabs only.
<b>Hard Clam</b>	1" thick	100 clams/day not to exceed 200 clams/vessel/day		Frequent temporary closures due to stormwater runoff and rainfall apply to all shellfish harvest. Contact the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries at 800-682-2632 or visit <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations-current">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations-current</a> for seasons, areas, or other restrictions.
<b>Oyster</b>	3" shell length	1 bushel/day not to exceed 2 bushels/vessel/day	Open by proclamation Oct. 15 - March 31 ( <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations-current">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations-current</a> )	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-current">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations-current</a> for seasons, areas, or other restrictions.
<b>Bay Scallop</b>	None	<b>NO POSSESSION</b>	Closed unless opened by proclamation. ( <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations-current">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations-current</a> )	
<b>Conchs and Whelks</b>	None	10/day not to exceed 20/vessel/day		
<b>Mussels</b>	None	100/day not to exceed 200/vessel/day		Frequent temporary closures due to stormwater runoff and rainfall apply to all shellfish harvest. Contact the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries at 800-682-2632 or visit <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations-current">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations-current</a> for seasons, areas, or other restrictions.
<b>Shrimp</b>	None	Closed shrimping area — 4 quarts heads on 2-1/2 quarts heads off/day (Cast net only) Open shrimping area — 48 quarts heads on, 30 quarts heads off (Per person or vessel)*		Recreational Commercial Gear License required for use of a shrimp trawl, shrimp pound and shrimp pots *Recreational Commercial Gear License holders may keep two limits of shrimp, when two or more license holders are on board a vessel, using commercial gear, while shrimping in open waters. See maps for open/closed areas at <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>
<b>Spiny Lobster</b>	3" carapace length	2/Day		The carapace is measured beginning at the forward edge between the rostral horns and eyes, excluding any soft tissue, and proceeding along the middle to the rear edge of the carapace. It is unlawful to possess an egg-bearing spiny lobster or a spiny lobster which eggs have been scrubbed or removed. It is unlawful to possess detached spiny lobster tails, or to use a gaff hook, spear, or similar device to take spiny lobsters.
<b>Stone Crabs</b>	2 3/4" propodus (forearm) length	No limit on claws	Closed June 15 - Aug. 15	No possession of crab body; no removal of claw from egg-bearing crabs; no gigging.

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

<b>Morehead City Office</b> (24 hours) 800-682-2632 or 252-726-7021	<b>Elizabeth City Office</b> 800-338-7805 (N.C. only) or 252-264-3911	<b>Manteo Office</b> 252-473-5734	<b>Washington Office</b> 800-338-7804 or 252-946-6481	<b>Wilmington Office</b> 800-248-4536 (N.C. only) or 910-796-7215
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### Federal and State Agency Telephone Directory

<b>Federal Regulations</b> National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS): 813-893-3722	<b>State of N.C. — Freshwater Regulations</b> N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission (WRC): 800-662-7137
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THIS DIGEST IS EFFECTIVE APRIL 1, 2020 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> and updated Recreational Commercial Gear License information can be found at <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-commercial-gear-license>. Total length (TL) is measured from tip of snout with mouth closed to tip 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.

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).

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.



For the most up-to-date recreational size and bag limits, see <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-fishing-size-and-bag-limits>

# North Carolina Fishing — What's Hot and When



Bluefish



Red Drum



Spanish Mackerel



Dolphin (mahi mahi)



Spotted Seatrout

## January

**FISH:** Black sea bass, bluefin tuna, striped bass (ocean, coastal rivers) **SHELLFISH:** clams, oysters

## February

**FISH:** American and hickory shad (coastal river tributaries), black sea bass, bluefin tuna, striped bass (ocean, coastal rivers) **SHELLFISH:** clams, oysters

## March

**FISH:** American and hickory shad (coastal river tributaries), black sea bass, bluefin tuna, bluefish, sea mullet, striped bass (coastal rivers), wahoo, weakfish, yellowfin tuna **SHELLFISH:** clams, oysters

## April

**FISH:** American shad (coastal rivers), black sea bass, bluefin tuna, bluefish, dolphin, king mackerel, red drum, sea mullet, spotted seatrout, striped bass (coastal rivers), wahoo, weakfish, yellowfin tuna **SHELLFISH:** clams

## May

**FISH:** Bluefish, cobia, croaker, dolphin, grouper, king mackerel, sea mullet, sharks, sheepshead, Spanish mackerel, spotted seatrout (sounds), striped bass (coastal rivers), wahoo, weakfish, yellowfin tuna **SHELLFISH:** blue crabs, clams

## June

**FISH:** Blue marlin, bluefish, cobia, croaker, dolphin, grouper, king mackerel, sailfish, sharks, sheepshead, Spanish mackerel, spotted seatrout, tuna, weakfish, white marlin **SHELLFISH:** blue crabs, clams

## July

**FISH:** Blue marlin, bluefish, cobia, croaker, dolphin, grouper, sailfish, sea mullet, sheepshead, Spanish mackerel, tarpon, tuna, white marlin **SHELLFISH:** blue crabs, clams, shrimp

## August

**FISH:** Bluefish, cobia, croaker, dolphin, flounder, grouper, red drum, sea mullet, sheepshead, Spanish mackerel, spot, tarpon, tuna, white marlin **SHELLFISH:** blue crabs, clams, shrimp

## September

**FISH:** Bluefish, black drum, cobia, dolphin, false albacore, flounder, grouper, king mackerel, red drum, sea mullet, sheepshead, Spanish mackerel, spot, wahoo, weakfish, white marlin **SHELLFISH:** blue crabs, clams, shrimp

## October

**FISH:** Black drum, black sea bass, bluefish, dolphin, false albacore, grouper, king mackerel, red drum, sea mullet, sheepshead, spot, spotted seatrout, striped bass (coastal rivers), wahoo, weakfish, yellowfin tuna **SHELLFISH:** clams, oysters, shrimp

## November

**FISH:** Black drum, black sea bass, bluefish, false albacore, grouper, king mackerel, red drum, sea mullet, sharks, spotted seatrout, striped bass (coastal rivers), wahoo, yellowfin tuna **SHELLFISH:** clams, oysters

## December

**FISH:** Black sea bass, bluefin tuna, bluefish, grouper, sharks, spotted seatrout, striped bass (ocean, coastal rivers) **SHELLFISH:** clams, oysters



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



### N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries

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