2025 NORTH CAROLINA RECREATIONAL COASTAL AND JOINT FISHING WATERS GUIDE FOR SPORTS FISHERMEN

UPDATED 10/24/2025

IMPORTANT CHECK WITH DIVISION OF MARINE FISHERIES FOR MOST CURRENT MINIMUM LENGTHS AND CREEL LIMITS.
252-515-5500 OR 800-682-2632 OR www.ncmarinefisheries.net

You can also download the Fish Rules Mobile App at https://fishrulesapp.com/
Persons engaged in recreational fishing in North Carolina Coastal and Joint Fishing Waters are required to possess a Coastal Recreational Fishing License in accordance with G.S. 113-174.1

FINFISH SPECIES (note symbols) Bluefish (M) Cobia			
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(note symbols) Bluefish (M) Cobia		nd 0-3 miles)	
Bluefish (M) Cobia	Minimum	Bag Limits	
Cobia	Length	(per person)	
	None	3/day (M)	https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/species/bluefish
	See the mos	st recent Cobia	
	·	clamation at	http://www.asmfc.org/species/cobia
	www.ncmari	nefisheries.net	
Wahoo	None	2/Day	
Dolphin (B)	None	10/Day	http://safmc.net/regulations/
King Mackerel (H)	24" FL	3/Day	<u>πιτρ.//samic.nevregulations/</u>
Spanish Mackerel (H)	12" FL	15/Day	
Tuna: Bluefin, Bigeye and Yellowfin (G)	Bigeye and Yellowfin tuna 27" Curved FL	Yellowfin tuna 3/Day	https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/atlantic-highly-migratory-species
Spiny Dogfish	None	None	https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/species/atlantic-spiny-dogfish
	See most recent	DMF proclamation	
Sharks (G)		rinefisheries.net	
Blue Marlin (G)	99" LJFL	1 per vessel per	
` '	-	trip, either blue	https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/atlantic-highly-migratory-species
White Marlin (G)	66" LJFL	marlin or white	
, ,	Ì	marlin	
Sailfish (G)	63" LJFL	1/Day	
Red Drum (Channel Bass,	18" Min – 27"		
Puppy Drum) (C) ▲ ▲	Max TL	1/Day	https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CFR-2017-title50-vol13/pdf/CFR-2017-title50-vol13-sec697-7.pdf
	01.4		https://www.deq.nc.gov/marine-fisheries/fisheries-management-proclamations/2025/flounder-recreational-
Flounder (All Connector)	CLOSED		internal-coastal-and-joint-fishing-waters-and-atlantic-ocean-waters/open
(All Species)		TO POSSESS	
Spotted Seatrout (Speckled	14" Min–20" Max TL, 1	0/1	No. Section 2000 Actions
Trout) ▲	greater than 26"	3/day	No Federal Regulations
Weakfish (Gray Trout) ▲	12" TL	1/Day	https://www.gpo.gov/fdsvs/pkg/CFR-2017-title50-vol13/pdf/CFR-2017-title50-vol13-sec697-7.pdf
Sheepshead	10" FL	10/Day	No Federal Regulations
	14" Min – 25"	·	
Black Drum (C) ▲ ▲	Max TL	10/Day	No Federal Regulations
Tarpon		TO POSSESS	No Federal Regulations
Striped Bass (A)		O POSSESS (A)	https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CFR-2017-title50-vol13/pdf/CFR-2017-title50-vol13-sec697-7.pdf
American Shad (D)	None	(D)	No Federal Regulations
Hickory Shad (D)	None	(D)	No Federal Regulations
Alewife and Blueback	None	(D)	No rederal Negurations
Herring	UNLAWFUL	TO POSSESS	No Federal Regulations
American Eel (E)	9" TL	25/Day	No Federal Regulations
anonour Lor (L)	J 1L	20/Day	https://www.greateratlantic.
Scup (North of Cape	Ì	1	fisheries.noaa.gov/
Hatteras only)	9" TL	30/Day	sustainable/recfishing/reqs/
aordo orny j	Ì	1	index.html
			SEASON OPEN May 15-Sept. 30 & Oct. 10-Dec. 31
	I		https://www.greateratlantic.
Black Sea Bass	13"TL	15/Day	fisheries.noaa.qov/
(North of Canallattana)	1012	lorbay	sustainable/recfishing/regs/
(North of Cape Hatteras)	İ		index.html
(North of Cape Hatteras)	10" =:	7.5	
(North of Cape Hatteras) Black Sea Bass	13" TL	7/Day	http://safmc.net/regulations/
,			
Black Sea Bass	·	nost recent	
Black Sea Bass (South of Cape Hatteras)			
Black Sea Bass (South of Cape Hatteras) Snappers, Groupers,	Snapper/Gro	ouper Complex	http://safmc.net/regulations/
Black Sea Bass (South of Cape Hatteras) Snappers, Groupers, Porgys, Triggerfish, Jacks,	Snapper/Gro recreational DM	IF proclamation at	http://safmc.net/regulations/
Black Sea Bass (South of Cape Hatteras) Snappers, Groupers, Porgys, Triggerfish, Jacks, Tilefish, Grunts,	Snapper/Gro recreational DM	•	http://safmc.net/regulations/
Black Sea Bass (South of Cape Hatteras) Snappers, Groupers, Porgys, Triggerfish, Jacks, Tilefish, Grunts, Spadefishes, Wrasses and	Snapper/Gro recreational DM www.ncmarii	IF proclamation at	http://safmc.net/regulations/ No Federal Regulations
Black Sea Bass (South of Cape Hatteras) Snappers, Groupers, Porgys, Triggerfish, Jacks, Tilefish, Grunts, Spadefishes, Wrasses and Sea Basses (H) Mullet (striped and white) (O) ▲	Snapper/Gro recreational DM www.ncmarii 100/Day (spe	IF proclamation at nefisheries.net	No Federal Regulations
Black Sea Bass (South of Cape Hatteras) Snappers, Groupers, Porgys, Triggerfish, Jacks, Tilefish, Grunts, Spadefishes, Wrasses and Sea Basses (H) Mullet (striped and white) (O)▲ Spot	Snapper/Gro recreational DM www.ncmarii 100/Day (spe	IF proclamation at nefisheries.net	No Federal Regulations http://www.asmfc.org/species/spot
Black Sea Bass (South of Cape Hatteras) Snappers, Groupers, Porgys, Triggerfish, Jacks, Tilefish, Grunts, Spadefishes, Wrasses and Sea Basses (H) Mullet (striped and white) (O) ▲	Snapper/Gro recreational DM www.ncmarii 100/Day (spe	IF proclamation at nefisheries.net	No Federal Regulations

COASTAL AND JOINT FISHING WATERS (Internal waters and Atlantic Ocean out to 3 miles)

Sharks: whale, basking, white, sand tiger, bigeye sand tiger, Atlantic angel shark, bigeye sixgill, bigeye thresher, bignose, Caribbean reef, Caribbean sharpnose, dusky, Galapagos, longfin mako, shortfin mako, narrowtooth, night, sandbar, silky, sevengill, sixgill, and smalltail. Other finfish: river herring, Atlantic sturgeon, shortnose sturgeon, Nassau grouper, Goliath grouper, Warsaw grouper, speckled hind and red snapper.

SHELLFISH and		STATE COASTAL FISHING AND EEZ WATERS (Internal waters and 0-200 miles)		
CRUSTA	CRUSTACEANS Minimum Siz		Bag Limits (per person)	
BLUE CRAB (F) 5		5" Carapace Width	UNLAWFUL TO POSSESS from January 1-31 North of Highway 58 bridge UNLAWFUL TO POSSESS from March 1-15 South of the Highway 58 bridge 50 Crabs/Day not to exceed 100 Crabs/Vessel/Day	
STONE CRAB CLAWS (J)		2 ¾ " Propodus Length	UNLAWFUL TO POSSESS from June 15 – August 15 (no possession limit during open season)	
SPINY LOBSTER (K)		3" Carapace Length (L)	2/Trip	
HARD CLAM (I)		1" Thick	100 Clams/Day not to exceed 200 Clams/Vessel/Day	
OYSTER (I)		3" Shell Length	1 Bushel Oysters/Day not to exceed 2 Bushels Oysters/Vessel/Day	
BAY SCALLOP		SEASON CLOSED	UNLAWFUL TO POSSESS	
CONCHS and WHELKS		None	10/Day not to exceed 20/Vessel/Day	
MUSSELS		None	100/Day not to exceed 200/Vessel/Day	
SHRIMP	Closed Shrimping Area	None	48 quarts (heads on) or 30 quarts (heads off) of shrimp per person per day or if a vessel is used, per vessel per day (Cast Net Only)	
(N)	Open Shrimping Area	None	48 quarts (heads on) or 30 quarts (heads off) of shrimp per person per day or if a vessel is used, per vessel per day (Cast Net Only). Recreational Commercial Gear License (RCGL) holders are allowed up to 96 quarts (heads on) or 60 quarts (heads off) of shrimp if more than one person aboard a vessel possesses a valid RCGL.	

SYMBOLS TO LOOK FOR:

- (A) Albemarle Sound Management Area: SEASON CURRENTLY CLOSED; Central Southern Management Area: Unlawful to possess striped bass (including hybrid bass). Atlantic Ocean year-round: 1 per person per day and a harvest slot limit of 28 inches to 31 inches TL. Unlawful to gig, spear, or gaff striped bass; see the most recent DMF proclamation at www.ncmarinefisheries.ne
- Limit of 10 per person per day or 54 per trip, whichever is less. On head boats, limit is 10 per person per day. No sale of recreational bag limit on vessels operating as charter or head boats. Unlawful to possess red drum greater than 27" TL. Unlawful to gig, spear, or gaff red drum. One black drum per person per day over 25" TL is allowed.
- For aggregate creel limits for American shad and hickory shad, see the most recent DMF proclamation at www.ncmarinefisheries.net. Unlawful to take or possess American shad from the Atlantic Ocean. (D)
- (E) Season open January 1 - August 31, except year-round when taken by baited pots.
- It is illegal to possess immature female crabs at any time and it is illegal to possess dark sponge crabs from April 1 April 30.
- In state or federal waters, federal permit required for Highly Migratory Species, tunas, billfishes, swordfish and sharks (excluding Atlantic bonito, little tunny (false albacore), and blackfin tuna): https://hmspermits.noaa.gov/ 978-281-9370. Prior to removal from vessel, all billfishes, swordfish and bluefin tuna must be reported at NC HMS reporting stations. See the DMF website for more details. For
- seasons, bag limits, size limits or closures for tunas, billfishes, and sharks contact NMFS Highly Migratory Species Division 800-894-5528.

 (H) For seasons, bag limits and size limits on snapper, grouper, and mackerels contact the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council 843-571-4366 or www.safmc.net, and see the most recent Snapper Grouper or Mackerel recreational DMF proclamation at www.ncmarinefisheries
- Contact DMF or visit www.ncmarinefisheries.net to see the most recent DMF shellfish and polluted area proclamations for seasons, areas, or other restrictions. An interactive map of areas closed to the harvest of shellfish due to water quality monitoring by DMF's Shellfish Sanitation section can be viewed at,

- https://ncdenr.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=5759aa19d7484a3b82a8e440fba643aa. Oyster season is October 15 March 31 unless closed earlier by proclamation.

 (J) Propodus (forearm) length is measured by a straight line from elbow to the tip of the lower immoveable finger. The propodus (forearm) is defined as the largest section of the claw assembly that has both a moveable and immovable finger and is located farthest from the body of the crab. Unlawful to possess stone crab bodies or fail to immediately return to the waters from which taken. Unlawful to use a device to take stone crabs that can puncture, crush, or injure the crab body, such as gigs, spears, grabs, hooks, or similar devices. Unlawful to remove, take or possess stone crab claws from June 15 through August 15 (no possession limit during open season).
- See the most recent DMF proclamation at www.ncmarinefisheries.net 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 aboard a vessel or land detached spiny lobster tails, or to use a gaff hook, spear, or similar device to take spiny lobsters.

 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.
- Creel limit for bluefish is set by proclamation see the most recent DMF proclamation at www.ncmarinefisheries.net. The recreational creel limit for bluefish is 3 fish per person per day in all private (non for-hire) recreational fisheries. Recreational anglers engaged on a for-hire vessel can possess up to 5 bluefish per person per day.
- Areas open to the taking of shrimp are set by proclamation, see the most recent DMF proclamation at www.ncmarinefisheries.net
- (0)The recreational individual bag limit for mullet (striped and white combined) is 100 fish per person per day. The recreational vessel limit is 100 fish per angler fishing up to a maximum of 400 fish per vessel. For Hire Operations may possess the 100 fish individual bag limit for all anglers fishing on the boat up to the 400 fish vessel limit, including in advance of a trip.
- Size and creel limits for fish taken in inland waters are the same as the recreational limits for those species in adjacent joint and coastal waters.
- ▲ For size, creel, season, and other requirements for fish taken in inland waters, please see www.ncwildlife.org

Total length (TL) is measured from tip of snout with mouth closed to top of compressed tail. Fork length (FL) is measured from tip of snout to middle of fork in tail. Lower law 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 navigations 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 mullet when used for bait and hickory shad when used for bait provided not more

than two fish per boat/operation may be cut at any one time - Reference 15A NCAC 03M 0101

Morehead City Office (24 hours) 800-682-2632 or 252-515-5500

Elizabeth City Office 800-338-7805 or 252-381-6000

252-473-5734

Washington Office 800-338-7804 or 252-948-3800

Wilmington Office 800-248-4536 or 910-796-7215

NMFS (Fed. Reg.) 301-427-8505

THIS FLYER IS EFFECTIVE October 24, 2025 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 https://deq.nc.gov/recreational-size-baq-limits and updated Recreational Commercial Gear License information can be found at https://deg.nc.gov/recreational-commercia

FOR INLAND WATER FISHING REGULATIONS, CALL WILDLIFE RESOURCES COMMISSION 919-707-0220 OR WWW.NCWILDLIFE.ORG

Effective December 1, 2025, any Red Drum, Flounder, Spotted Seatrout, Striped Bass, and Weakfish harvested must be reported at deq.nc.gov/report-my-fish.







Mandatory Reporting

Proclamations