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Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries

Sport Fisheries Program

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An Overview...

The Division of Marine Fisheries' Sport Fisheries Program works to improve the sport of fishing and promote clean and healthy habitats throughout Massachusetts. Salt water sport fishing is one of the most popular outdoor recreational activities in America. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts plays an important role in supporting much of this activity in the northeast region of the United States, about half of all regional participation occurs here.

An evaluation of the impact recreational fishing has on the Massachusetts economy was sponsored by the Sport Fisheries Program in the late 1980s. It showed that sport fishing activities contributed \$500-800 million annually to the Commonwealths economy. The national value of recreational fishing was recognized by federal legislators decades ago, as evidenced by the Sport Fish Restoration Act of 1950. This law levied a manufacturers excise tax on fishing tackle with revenues earmarked for sport fish restoration. The Act was amended in 1984 by Senator Malcolm Wallop of Wyoming and then Congressman (now Senator) John Breaux of Louisiana. The amendment broadened the list of items that it could tax and allocated a portion of the Highway Trust Fund Fuel Tax to sport fish restoration. Thus was born the Aquatic Resources Trust Fund and popularly called the Wallop-Breaux Program, after its sponsors.

Principal funding for the Sport Fisheries Program comes from an annual apportionment of the Aquatic Resources Trust Fund. In recent years, the Programs annual share has been about \$1 million. The funds are distributed on a reimbursement basis with the states showing their commitment to sport fish restoration by spending money first and then receiving a 75% refund.

The Program's mission is to maintain and enhance the Commonwealths anadromous fish resources, effectively and efficiently manage recreational fisheries for important gamefish, and instill an appreciation in the public for marine fishery resources which serve as a major source of outdoor recreation and wholesome food. This mission is carried out through execution of a multitude of projects that focus on topics that include:

- habitat protection
- resource enhancement and management
- providing technical assistance to cities, towns and other governmental agencies
- providing resource education to the public
- increasing and maintaining public access
- collection and compilation of statistics

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The Sportfishing Program has produced a new and improved version of its popular "Massachusetts Saltwater Sportfishing Guide." With more than 1,900 miles of coastline, the state offers some of the finest saltwater fishing in the country. The diversity of marine habitats supports a fascinating and exciting array of species. Long famous for record-sized striped bass and giant bluefin tuna, the waters of the Commonwealth contain a variety of other highly prized fishes including flounder, cod, bluefish, tautog and scup. Countless tide rips, beaches, embayments, bridges and jetties provide unlimited fishing opportunities for boat and shore-based anglers. Launching sites, tackle shops and charter and party boats are available along Massachusetts' entire coastline to accommodate the resident and visiting fisherman. This booklet is a guide to these activities.

We've arranged the guide geographically. You'll find information listed from Salisbury (at the N.H. border) following the coastline south and west to the towns of Swansea, Somerset and Seekonk along Narragansett Bay. Then the guide takes you east to Cape Cod and the islands. If you would like to receive a guide, visit one of our offices or field stations or write to DMF at 100 Cambridge St. Boston, MA 02202. phone: 617-727-3193.

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Massachusetts Salt Water Fishing Derby

Each year the Division of Marine Fisheries Sportfisheries Program sponsors the annual **Massachusetts Saltwater Fishing Derby**. The contest runs from March 1st to November 30th and is open to men, women and children of all age groups. There are no entry fees and pre-registration is not required. Twenty four coastal gamefish species are eligible for entry in the derby. The fish must meet the minimum weight specifications listed below.

In the following table, each species is linked to a fuller description further down in the document, including location and current state record.

Eligible Species	Minimum WT (lbs.)	Eligible Species	Minimum WT (lbs.)
Bluefish	10	Mako Shark	100
Blue Marlin	250	Pollock	20
Bluefin Tuna	300	Scup	2
Blue Shark	150	Sea Bass	3
Bonito	7	Striped Bass	30
Cod	25	Swordfish	150
Cusk	20	Tautog	8
False Albacore	10	Weakfish	10
Fluke	5	White Marlin	60
Haddock	8	Winter Flounder	2
Halibut	50	Wolffish	20
Mackerel	2	Yellowfin Tuna	50

Fish entered must be caught in a fair and sporting manner on hook and line and must be weighed and measured at an official weigh-station on a certified scale. Weigh-masters can be found at most local marinas and tackle shops. Weigh-masters will provide the official entry form which you should then mail to:

Massachusetts Saltwater Fishing Derby
PO Box 1268, Sandwich, MA 02563

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anglers who landed the heaviest fish in each of the 21 species categories. Winners are chosen in three divisions - men, women, and junior (age fifteen and younger).

All weigh-stations have been provided with a copy of the current list of state-record holders. When applying for a new state record your affidavit must be accompanied by a clear photograph of your catch with your name, address and telephone number on the back. For more information contact Drew Kolek at (508) 563-1779.

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Mass. DMF Saltwater Gamefish Eligibility Requirements

THE CATCH

Billfish: Blue Marlin, White Marlin and Swordfish

Blue marlin, white marlin and swordfish, are highly prized big game fish for the offshore angler. Blue marlin are the monsters of this group and can reach up to 11 ft and have been known to exceed 1,000 lbs. White marlin are similar to blue marlin though they average a smaller size of 5 ft, which is roughly a 50 lb. fish. Not many swordfish have been landed in our offshore waters by recreational anglers in the last decade due to the depleted state of the stocks.

Location: Southern New England, offshore canyons, steep drop-offs on the ocean floor where current boundaries, thermal water fronts and upwellings tend to concentrate schools of bait.

Season: July - September

Baits & Lures: Live or dead baitfish (eg. squid, mackerel, herring, scup) and artificial lures.

Methods and Tackle: Casting from a boat, trolling, medium to heavy tackle.

Restrictions: Rod and Reel only, 1 Marlin per day possession limit. The lower jaw fork length minimum size limits are: blue marlin - 86", white marlin - 62 " , consult the federal marine fisheries service (National Marine Fisheries Service, NMFS) for the current regulations on swordfish.

Massachusetts Saltwater Fishing Derby Minimum Weights: white marlin (60 lbs.), blue marlin (250 lbs.), swordfish (150 lbs.)

State Record: white marlin 131 lbs.; blue marlin 701 lbs.; swordfish 646 lbs.

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Black Sea Bass

The migratory black sea bass is a tasty fish arriving in our near shore waters in the late spring. These fish also have a peculiar life cycle - the majority begin life as females and then change to males at around three years of age. Never a dull moment! Location: South side of Cape Cod, Buzzards Bay to Rhode Island border and a few are found in Cape Cod Bay. Fish for them around bottom structure such as reefs, rocks, and wrecks.

Season: May - September

Baits and Lures: cut squid, clams, green crabs.

Methods and Tackle: bottom fish from a boat

Restrictions: 12" minimum size limit

Mass. Saltwater Fishing Derby Minimum Weight: 3 lbs. State Record: 8 lbs

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lateral line and a silvery belly. **Location:** Southern Cape Cod and the Islands, rarely north of Cape Cod.

Season: Late July - October

Baits and Lures: Strip baits, squid, small jigs, spoons, plugs, flies.

Methods and Tackle: Spinning gear, bait casting, light boat rods, trolling, fly fishing.

Restrictions: None.

Mass Saltwater Fishing Derby Minimum Weight: 7 lbs.

State Record: 12 lbs. - 7 oz.

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Bluefish

Bluefish are usually ravenous and will strike at just about anything you give them. Watch out for those teeth! They average around 3-7 lbs. along the coast and tend to be larger just offshore in the rips. They put up an excellent fight all the way to your boat or shore.

Location: Whole coast surf, inshore bars, tide rips, bays and estuaries.

Season: June-mid October

Baits and Lures: All small bait fish, jigs, spoons, plugs, spinners, flies.

Methods and Tackle: Casting from shore or boat (you may want to use a wire leader) with spin and fly fishing gear, trolling.

Restrictions: 10 fish per day possession limit.

Mass. Saltwater Fishing Derby Minimum Weight: 10 lbs.

State Record: 27 lbs.- 4 oz.

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Cod

Codfish are the deepwater treasures of Massachusetts. Present stock levels are very low, however, with the new fisheries management measures these stocks will rebound.

Location: Whole coast, deepwater, inshore while water is cold.

Season: Year round.

Baits and Lures: Sand eels, clams, mackerel, strips of all fish, crabs, jigs.

Methods and Tackle: Bait fishing from shore and boats, fishing from boats using medium to stiff boat rod, conventional reel and at least 50 lb. test line.

Restrictions: 21" minimum size limit, 10 fish combination possession limit with Haddock per day when fishing from shore or a private vessel.

Mass. Saltwater Fishing Derby Minimum Weight: 25 lbs.

State Record: 92 lbs.

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Cusk

Like the cod, the cusk is a cool water fish and is found on hard, rough bottom habitat. Look for the continuous dorsal fin to assist with identification.

Location: Rocky ledges/hard bottom, moderately deep waters (more than 75 feet).

Season: Year round.

Baits and Lures: Same as cod.

Methods and Tackle: Same as cod.

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False Albacore (Little Tunny)

False albacore are very similar to bonito - fast, fun and sometimes a bit tricky to catch.

Location: Mostly warmer waters of the south side of Cape Cod and the Islands.

Season: Late July - October

Baits and Lures: Same as for bonito

Methods and Tackle: Same as for bonito

Restrictions: None

Mass. Saltwater Fishing Derby Minimum Weight: 10 lbs.

State Record: 19 lbs. - 5 oz.

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Haddock

Haddock is a member of the cod family and is a delicious fish for the dinner table. The black lateral line distinguishes it from the cod and pollock.

Location: Whole coast, cool waters, prefer depths of 140-450 ft., also prefers shell/sand, smooth rock or gravel bottom.

Season: May - November

Baits and Lures: Seaworms, clams

Methods and Tackle: Still fishing from a boat, medium action rod

Restrictions: 21" minimum size limit, 10 fish combination possession limit with Cod per day when fishing from shore or a private vessel.

Mass. Saltwater Fishing Derby Minimum Weights:: 8 lbs

State Record: 20 lbs.

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Halibut

This is the largest of the Atlantic flatfishes, which if you do happen to hook one, can be very challenging to reel up from deep water.

Location: Whole coast, cool and deep waters, preferred bottom type is sand, gravel or clay not soft mud or rock.

Season: Year round

Baits and Lures: Seaworms, clams, strips of fish, sandlance, jigs.

Methods and Tackle: Fishing from a boat with medium to stiff rod.

Restrictions: none

Mass. Saltwater Fishing Derby Minimum Weight: 50 lbs.

State Record: 255 lbs. - 4 oz

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Mackerel

Mackerel are fast swimmers and voracious feeders, which offers the angler many options for catching them. They are also an important food fish for many other species of fish and marine mammals.

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Methods and Tackle: trolling, jugging, casting from shore or boat, light tackle.

Restrictions:

none **Mass. Saltwater Fishing Derby Minimum Weight:** 2 lbs.

State Record: 3 lbs. - 8 oz.

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Pollock

The pollock is more available to the angler than its codfish relative. These aggressive fighters offer the thrills of a bluefish and the flesh of a cod.

Location: Whole coast with more north of Plymouth. Inshore (breakwaters and other structures) and offshore depending on the water temperatures. Inshore, pollock tend to be smaller than those offshore.

Season: May-October with the best runs in May, Oct.

Baits and Lures: In deeper water use the same as for cod (jigs, clams...). Inshore waters try small plugs, Kastmasters, mackerel jigs, metal lures with a strip of squid.

Methods and Tackle: Still fishing, casting, trolling. For deep water use same set up as for cod. Lighter spinning gear can be used for inshore fishing.

Restrictions: none

Mass. Saltwater Fishing Derby Minimum Weights: 20 lbs.

State Record: 48 lbs. - 2 oz.

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Scup

A party boat staple, the scup are easy and fun to catch. Scup are very good eating though be careful of the many bones.

Location: South side of Cape Cod and along coast to Rhode Island

Season: May-October

Baits and Lures: Clams, strips of squid, seaworms.

Methods and Tackle: Light to medium weight tackle, drift fishing, jetties, piers, bridges.

Restrictions: 9" minimum size limit

Mass. Saltwater Fishing Derby Minimum Weights: 2 lbs

State Record: 5 lbs. - 14 oz.

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Sharks

Blue and mako sharks are common to our offshore waters and are sought after by recreational anglers. Makos are the more aggressive of the two fish and will put up an exciting fight. Venture with an experienced shark angler to prevent unexpected surprises and make sure you bleed and ice the shark flesh immediately. Anglers are encouraged to release sharks not intended for consumption.

Location: South of the Islands; East of Cape Cod; off North shore including Cape Cod Bay.

Season: June-September

Baits and Lures: chumming and baited hooks (preferably oily fish)

Methods and Tackle: trolling, drifting; medium to heavy tackle, wire leader.

Restrictions: no sale, (Federal Permit Required).

Mass. Saltwater Fishing Derby Minimum Weights: Blue shark 150 lbs.; Mako shark 100 lbs

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Smelt

This small anadromous fish is a seasonal favorite along the coast. They're accessible during the spawning runs up coastal streams during the late winter and early spring.

Location: Whole coast, estuaries, at the mouths of coastal rivers and within coastal rivers.

Season: Sept-Feb.

Baits and Lures: blood worms, sand worms, grass shrimp, small local bait fish

Methods and tackle: Ice fishing, shore fishing - keep bait moving slowly up and down within the school; light tackle, hand line.

Restrictions: Open season is 6/16-3/14

Mass. Saltwater Fishing Derby Minimum Weights: not an eligible species.

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Striped Bass

Striped bass is our most sought-after species providing great sport through catch and release fishing and great eating when you catch a "keeper". Striped bass is the largest fish available to the nearshore angler. Fish range from 1 pound to over 60 pounds. Overfished during the 1970's, striped bass have rebounded thanks to strict regulations.

Location: Whole coast surf, inshore bars, reefs, tide-rips, bays and estuaries.

Season: Mid April-October

Baits and Lures: Seaworms, eels, squid, herring; jigs, plugs, spinners, spoons.

Methods and Tackle: Casting from shore, boat trolling, light to heavy tackle.

Restrictions: 1 fish per day possession limit, 28" minimum size limit.

Mass. Saltwater Fishing Derby Minimum Weight: 30 lbs.

State Record: 73 lbs.

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Summer Flounder (fluke)

Fighting ability and fine flavor highlight this flat fish. The upper surface of the summer flounder head faces left. They also have prominent teeth to assist with their aggressive predatory behavior. The larger fluke are referred to as "doormats". Target sandy or muddy bottom along with fast moving rips that contain debris and bait fish.

Location: South side of Cape Cod, Islands, Cape Cod Bay, Buzzards Bay.

Season: May-September

Baits and Lures: Minnows, squid strips, clams, shrimp; small jigs, spinners, jigs.

Methods and Tackle: Drift fishing, troll, chum, still fish, casting.

Restrictions: 14 1/2" minimum size limit, 10 fish per day possession limit.

Mass. Saltwater Fishing Derby Minimum Weight: 5 lbs.

State Record: 21 lbs. - 8 oz.

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Tautog

"Tog", "white chin" and "black fish" are all common nicknames for this fish. Tautog are very slow growing compared to most fish and do not migrate far from where they originate but move inshore in the spring and

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Methods and Tackle: Still fishing from boat or shore, medium action spinning or conventional rod, 20-30 lb. test line.

Restrictions: 16" minimum size limit, 6 fish per day possession limit.

Mass. Saltwater Fishing Derby Minimum Weight: 8 lbs.

State Record: 22 lbs. - 9 oz.

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Tunas: Bluefin, Yellowfin, and Bigeye

All the tunas are very swift swimmers, provide a thrilling and sometimes backbreaking fight and are literally hot blooded. The giant bluefin tuna is the biggest and most lucrative of the tunas in our waters and thus creates much competition amongst fishermen. Yellowfin are commonly caught in near offshore waters as are albacore. Bigeye tuna are infrequently caught since they're found far offshore at the canyons (90-100 miles offshore).

Location: Offshore east of North shore, Cape Cod Bay, East of Cape Cod, South of Islands offshore in Canyons

Season: Late June-October

Baits and Lures: bait fish used with chum slick; plastic squids, multi-squid rigs, daisy chains, jigs.

Methods and Tackle: Trolling, chunk baits with chum; medium to heavy tackle

Restrictions: albacore (none), bigeye (none), yellowfin (proposed bag limit and federal permit), bluefin (federal permit needed, bag limits - consult National Marine Fisheries Service).

Mass. Saltwater Fishing Derby Minimum Weight: yellowfin tuna 50 lbs., bluefin tuna 300 lbs.

State Record: yellowfin tuna 187 lbs.; bluefin tuna 1,228 lbs.

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Weakfish (Squeteague)

The weakfish looks like a large trout and is found in Massachusetts waters during the summer months.

Location: Southern Massachusetts sandbars, deep water drop offs, channels, bays and estuaries

Season: Late June-September

Baits and Lures: shrimp, seaworms, tinker mackerel, eels, strips of squid; artificial lures (bright plastic shrimp, worms, bucktails, tubes, jigs, sand eel imitations)

Methods and Tackle: Still fishing, drifting, chumming, casting from shore or boat, trolling; light to medium tackle.

Restrictions: 16" minimum size limit

Mass. Saltwater Fishing Derby Minimum Weight: 10 lbs.

State Record: 18 lbs. - 12 oz.

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Winter Flounder

The winter flounder (black backs) provide good fishing during the cold weather months. They are very accessible and provide the angler with thick fillets to take home.

Location: Whole coast, tidal streams, shallow bays, estuaries.

Season: May-February

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Restrictions: Open season is 3/1-2/28, 12" minimum size limit.

Mass. Saltwater Fishing Derby Minimum Weight: 2 lbs.

State Record: 7 lbs.

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Wolfish

The wolfish are distinguished by their large size, their molar and canine tusks and the lack of ventral fins. They do not school and prefer hard bottom, not mud, in deep waters.

Location: Whole coast, deep water, incidental to codfish

Season: Year round

Baits and Lures: seaworms, shellfish, crustaceans; jigs

Methods and Tackle: Drift or still fishing from a boat

Restrictions: none

Mass. Saltwater Fishing Derby Minimum Weight: 20 lbs.

State Record: 52 lbs.

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Date Last Update: July 9, 1997

Contact: Kevin Creighton, DMF WWW Coordinator at kevin.creighton@state.ma.us

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Mass. Executive Office of Environmental Affairs

Mass. Department of Fisheries, Wildlife and Environmental Law Enforcement

Mass. Division of Marine Fisheries