

FREE

NORTH CAROLINA 2017

# COASTAL RECREATIONAL FISHING DIGEST

Saltwater Regulations and More

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# Nothin' Finer than Fishing in Coastal North Carolina

Welcome to fishing on the North Carolina coast. The N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries is pleased to introduce the 2017 *Coastal Recreational Fishing Digest*.



New to this year's digest is an article on fishing in the coastal rivers, creeks and sounds. North Carolina's estuaries are home to a host of fish species that can keep anglers busy year-round.

As in the past, this year's digest contains fishing license options, tips for ethical angling, information on how to identify and measure fish, and a table with recreational size and bag limits and seasons.

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

## How to Measure a Fish

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

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

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

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

Total Length



Fork Length

Curved Fork Length



Lower Jaw Fork Length



## Notable regulatory changes this year include:

### Flounder

The recreational flounder bag limit has decreased from six fish to four fish per person, per day in North Carolina waters. The recreational size limit remains at 15 inches.

This change applies to all recreational flounder fishing in estuarine and ocean waters.

### Cobia

The minimum size limit for cobia has increased to 36 inches fork length (measured from the tip of snout to the fork in the tail) and the bag limit has decreased to one fish per-person per-day, (maximum of four fish per-vessel per-day, if four or more people are on board a vessel).

The federal government has closed federal waters (ocean waters beyond 3 miles from shore) north of the Georgia-Florida line to recreational cobia harvest for the rest of 2017.

In addition to the regulatory changes, the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission has asked anglers to report the length and weight of all cobia harvested in state waters on a catch card, which can be found at official North Carolina Citation Weigh Stations or online at <http://www.ncrcfish.com/cobia>. A list of participating weigh stations can be found at <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-fishing-tournaments>.

The recreational cobia season closes in state waters at 12:01 a.m. Sept. 1.

## 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 License

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

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

### Annual Coastal Recreational Fishing Licenses

State Residents\* — \$15  
Nonresidents — \$30

### 10-day Coastal Recreational Fishing Licenses

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

### Lifetime Coastal Recreational Fishing Licenses

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

### Annual Unified Inland/Coastal Recreational Fishing License

Resident\* — \$40

### Annual Unified Sportsman/Coastal Recreational Fishing Licenses

Resident\* — \$65

### Lifetime Unified Sportsman/Coastal Recreational Fishing Licenses

Infant: younger than one year — \$275

Youth: ages 1-11 — \$450

Resident Adult\*: ages 12-senior\*\* — \$675

Nonresident Adult: ages 12 and older — \$1550

Resident Senior\* \*\* — \$30

Resident Disabled Veteran\* — 50 percent or more disabled — \$110

Resident Totally Disabled\*: Totally and permanently disabled — \$110

### Lifetime Unified Inland/Coastal Recreational Fishing License

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

### Exemptions

- N.C. residents serving on full-time active duty in the military or reserves outside of the state are exempt from license requirements while on leave for fewer than 30 days.
- Those who held a Wildlife Resources Commission Lifetime Sportsman License or Lifetime Comprehensive Fishing License prior to Jan. 1, 2006 are exempt from Coastal Recreational Fishing License requirements.
- No license is required to fish on July 4 or for children, ages 0-15.
- Annual Resident Subsistence Waivers are available at no charge for qualified individuals through their county Department of Social Services.

\* Out-of-state students attending a university, college, or community college in North Carolina are considered residents.  
Members of the military stationed in North Carolina and their dependents are considered residents.

\*\* Residents born on or before Aug. 1, 1953 are eligible to purchase a senior lifetime license when they turn 65 years of age.  
Those born after Aug. 1, 1953 are eligible to purchase a senior lifetime license when they turn 70 years of age.

# Tag: You're It!



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

There are several good reasons. You may be eligible for a reward. Another good reason is you can help fisheries biologists collect the information needed to understand and assess fish populations.

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

If you turn in a yellow tag with all required information you may choose from a hat, \$5 or other rewards. The tags are marked with a unique tag number and the phone number to call "NCDMF."

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

between the original tagging location and where the fish was recaptured.

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

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

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

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

1. Species
2. Tag number

3. Date
4. Location captured (water body and nearest landmark or latitude/longitude)
5. Length (total or fork length)
6. Fate of the fish (kept, released alive, etc.)
7. Gear used for capture

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

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

## Helpful Hints

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

## Highly Migratory Species

Vessel owners or operators who recreationally fish for regulated Atlantic tunas (bluefin, yellowfin, bigeye, albacore and skipjack), 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, sailfish or swordfish in North Carolina must participate in a landing tag and reporting procedure that 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 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, sailfish and swordfish to the program. In 2015, sharks were added to the program on a voluntary basis.

More information on this reporting system, including a list of reporting stations, can be found 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 fish or 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 billfish landed or released. Penalty points are assessed for undersized fish taken.

Trophies are awarded at the conclusion of the tournament series for the most points in both the private boat and charter boat

categories. Individual awards are given to the outstanding junior boy, outstanding junior girl and lady angler.

Additionally, trophies are awarded for the largest blue marlin, yellowfin tuna, wahoo and dolphin.

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 2017 North Carolina Saltwater Fishing Tournament Minimum Weights

SPECIES	MINIMUM WEIGHT	SPECIES	MINIMUM WEIGHT
Albacore, False	Release Only E	Pompano, Florida	2 lbs
Amberjack	50 lbs H	Porgy (Silver Snapper)	4 lbs
Atlantic Bonito	8 lbs B	Sailfish	Release Only A
Barracuda	Release Only G	Shark	150 lbs J
Bass, Black Sea	4 lbs.	Sheepshead	8 lbs
Bluefish	15 lbs E	Spearfish	Release Only A
Cobia	40 lbs D	Spot	1 lb
Croaker	3 lbs	Striped Bass	35 lbs G
Dolphin	35 lbs	Tarpon	Release Only A
Drum, Black	35 lbs F	Tilefish, Gray	10 lbs
Drum, Red	Release Only F	Triggerfish	5 lbs
Flounder	5 lbs	Trout, Gray	5 lbs B
Grouper	20 lbs	Trout, Speckled	5 lbs B
Jack, Crevalle	Release Only C	Tuna, Bigeye	100 lbs
Mackerel, King	30 lbs G	Tuna, Blackfin	20 lbs
Mackerel, Spanish	6 lbs	Tuna, Bluefin	200 lbs I
Marlin, Blue	400 lbs A	Tuna, Yellowfin	70 lbs.
Marlin, White	Release Only A	Wahoo	40 lbs.
Mullet, Sea	1 1/2 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, 33 inches or longer  
 E = Award for live release of fish, 34 inches or longer

F = Award for live release of fish, 40 inches or longer  
 G = Award for live release of fish, 45 inches or longer  
 H = Award for live release of fish, 50 inches or longer  
 I = Award for live release of fish, 70 inches or longer  
 J = Award for live release of fish, 80 inches or longer

# Be An Ethical Angler ...

## Hooked on fishing? Practice ethical angling!

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

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

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



## Protect the environment...

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

Use fish-cleaning stations and trash receptacles.

Report any pollution or environmental damage to the appropriate authorities.

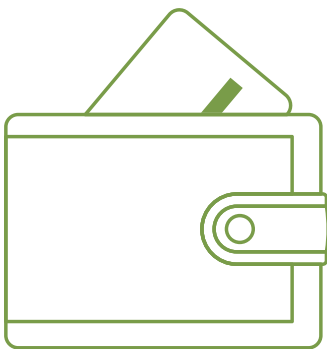
## While you fish...

Practice catch and release.

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

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

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



## Before you go...

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

Check N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries website, <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-fishing-size-and-bag-limits>. Size and bag limits change frequently.

Learn to identify fish commonly caught in North Carolina waters.

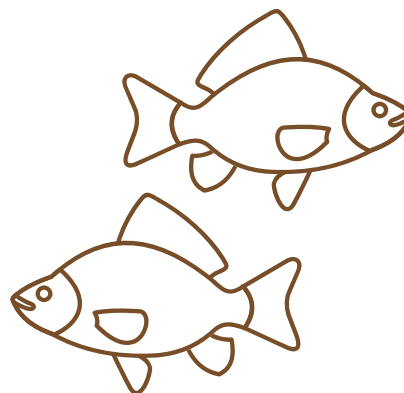
Stock your tackle box with a pair of needle-nose pliers or a de-hooking device, a tape measure and a glove or towel.

## To release your catch...

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

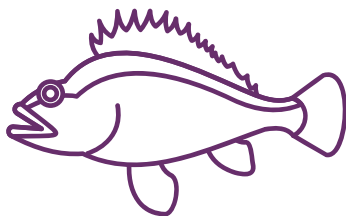
Handle fish as little as possible. Return it to water as quickly as possible.

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





# Hook, Line and Sinker

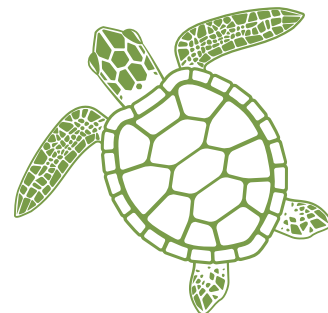


## North Carolina Tagging Program...

Division staff tag more than 15,000 striped bass, red drum, southern flounder and spotted seatrout each year. Staff will begin tagging cobia in the spring of 2017.

The information received on tagged fish helps improve management of these fisheries.

For information on what to do if you catch a tagged fish, see page 4.

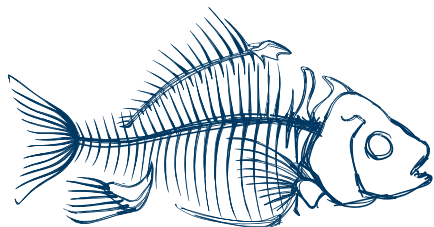


## Sea Turtles...

All species of sea turtles found in North Carolina waters are protected under the federal Endangered Species Act, and unpermitted interactions with these animals are illegal. This includes interactions that occur with commercial and recreational fishing gears.

If you come across a stranded or injured turtle, contact the Sea Turtle Stranding Network at 252-241-7367 or N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries at 252-726-7021.

For more information on what to do if you catch a sea turtle, please visit <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/sea-turtle-awareness>.



## Carcass Collection Program...

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

When cleaning a fish, leave the head and tail intact on the carcass and take it to one of the division's freezer locations. Instructions on target species and how to deposit the carcasses are posted on the freezer.

Information gathered through this program is used for stock assessments at the state and federal levels.

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

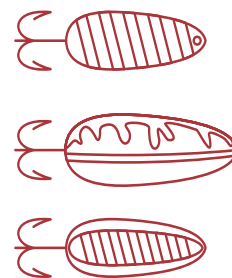


## Coastal Angling Program...

The N. C. Coastal Angling Program is the collective title that encompasses a set of recreational fishing sampling and survey programs run by the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries. It includes mail, telephone and electronic surveys of those who hold a N.C. Coastal Recreational Fishing License. It also includes staff interviewing fishermen at boat ramps, on the beach and at piers, sampling of upper estuarine water species, such as striped bass, and participation in the Marine Recreational Information Program, a federal survey program.

Additionally, anglers may use a web-based tool at <http://www.ncrecfish.com/> to record their individual fishing trips and monitor their fishing success. Information from the Coastal Angling Journal enables the division to better characterize and assess recreational fisheries.

Information gathered through this program is essential for the development of the state's fisheries management plans.



# How to Fish on North Carolina's Artificial Reefs



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

An artificial reef is a manmade structure built to enhance fisheries habitat and improve fishing opportunities. Artificial reefs attract every type of fish from bottom dwellers to pelagic fish (those that mostly swim in mid-water or near the surface), sharks and baitfish. Depending on the reef, fishing technique, and time of year, a wide assortment of popular fish can be caught.

Peak fishing activity occurs on the reefs from May through November, but excellent fishing can occur year-round, weather permitting.

During the spring, bluefish, cobia, amberjack, Spanish mackerel and king mackerel are among the more popular pelagic species targeted at nearshore reefs. Bottom fish caught during this same period include black sea bass, gray triggerfish, flounder, sheepshead, weakfish, red drum and black drum.

In the winter, nearshore artificial reefs serve as a popular haven for large black sea bass, sheepshead, weakfish and red drum. Farther offshore, artificial reefs attract warm water species year-round, such as snapper, grouper, dolphin fish, wahoo, tuna, sailfish and marlin.

Keep in mind that North Carolina reefs are popular. Watch out for scuba divers in the water, and give them plenty of room. As for other anglers, it's always best to work together so everyone gets a chance at the big one.

## Fishing the reefs

Any successful fishing trip begins with a good game plan. When planning, first consider your limitations. North Carolina's artificial reefs are found in a wide range of locations and environments, so be safe and do not exceed your capabilities. Only experienced crew with larger vessels should attempt to fish on offshore reefs. In many cases, nearshore reefs are just as productive as offshore reefs. Nearshore reefs can also be extremely dangerous in hazardous weather, so plan accordingly.

Once you have considered safety and limitations, the fun part begins. First, learn about the reef site by visiting the online guide, found at <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/artificial-reefs-program>. It will also help to pay attention to fishing reports and stop by local tackle shops to see what's biting. From there, select the fish you'd like to catch and how you'd like to catch it.

While there are many ways to catch fish on artificial reefs, here are some of the most effective:

### Trolling

Trolling is the preferred method for targeting large pelagic fish such as tuna, billfish, dolphin fish, king mackerel, Spanish mackerel and bluefish. If done correctly, trolling can be very easy and effective. Typically, one or more fishing lines, baited with lures, bait fish or spoons are dragged through the water while the boat travels around and across the reef structure.

For this type of fishing, anglers use heavier rods and conventional-type reels designed to hold the resistance weight of lures in the water and battle the powerful fish that may take the bait. There are many ways to rig up for trolling, but in most cases, a snap swivel links to a trolling sinker or small planer, followed by some length of leader line and connected to the bait or lure. When trolling, be certain to set the drag on your reel so that the fish has an opportunity to run when it strikes. It may take some patience, but you'll surely feel the thrill when the reel screams from that first bite.

### Drift fishing

Drift fishing is another fishing method used on artificial reefs. With drift fishing, live baits or artificial lures are drifted through the water column. Depending on the weight of your lure and type of bait, drifting can be excellent for catching bottom dwelling species, such as flounder or pelagic fish, like Spanish or king

mackerel. Another plus of drift fishing is that you can drift over many fish targets in one pass, increasing your chances of success. When your target species hits, it's frequently explosive.

If planning to drift fish, look closely at your reef guide for details of the reef you want to drift over. At the reef site, set up a search pattern using your fish finder, and mark points where you see fish targets. Knowing the current and wind direction will also be important to help you determine how the boat will drift. Start 20 to 50 yards up wind or up current (whichever is prevailing) from your target location, drop your bait to whatever depth you picked, idle your motor and start drifting across the reef. The first drift will often be a bit of a guess, taking into consideration the direction of the wind and current. After a few tries, you should have a better idea of where and how your boat will drift across the reef, which will allow you to reposition your drifts each time.

### Bottom fishing

Bottom fishing is the most common way to fish reefs. Bottom fishing can lure any of the local bottom fish species, including black sea bass, sheepshead, porgy, flounder, red drum, black drum, grouper, snapper and gray triggerfish. Anglers usually rely on a one- or two-hook bottom rig with cut bait (especially squid) or live bait.

While seemingly easy, bottom fishing can take a bit of practice to be successful. The key is positioning. When you arrive at the reef, explore the area with a fish finder, looking for fish hovering above structure in the water column. Reef fish do not stray far away from structure, so anchor your boat to hover just above the reef. Pay attention to the wind and current to help set your anchor course.

Tackle is another important consideration. When you have hooked a fish in deep waters and near a structure, the first thing the fish will try to do is escape into the reef. Too many fish stories end this way. Be certain to match your equipment to the type of fish you are targeting. Grouper, for example, are powerful fighters, so stout tackle is required. In any case, braided line can be a good way to resist breaking your line on the reef, but it is also less forgiving with snags.

To learn more about the states artificial reefs, go to <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/artificial-reefs-program>. You can also email questions to [artificialreefs@ncdenr.gov](mailto:artificialreefs@ncdenr.gov).



# Fishing North Carolina's Coastal Creeks, Rivers and Sounds

There are 2.3 million acres of coastal waters in North Carolina, and 95 percent of them are in the rivers, creeks and sounds.

These estuaries are home to a host of fish species to satisfy the eager angler's soul, but fishing in the estuaries is different from fishing in the ocean, said Doug Mumford, who recently retired from the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries' Recreational Statistics Program.

"The primary difference revolves around the species that you target and how you fish for them," Mumford said. "In our estuaries, anglers primarily target flounder, spotted seatrout, red drum, spot, Atlantic croaker and striped bass."

North Carolina has a year-round estuarine recreational fishery, said Brandon Rice, port agent in the central coastal area.

Anglers begin fishing for sea mullet, puffers and gray trout in the early spring, Rice said.

"They're kind of your first fish of the year," he said. "They show up as the water warms up."

Later in the spring, bluefish, Spanish mackerel, black drum and red drum begin to show up, he said.

In the summertime, the fish are jumping. "Sheepshead, they're caught pretty much on any type of structure," Rice said.

The top-water bite for striped bass picks up around New Bern and Washington in the summer and lasts until winter.

Then there is what's known as the Neuse River Slam: Speckled trout, red drum and flounder can all be found around the mouth of the Neuse River and creeks that run into the lower Neuse.

You can't talk about estuarine fishing in North Carolina without mentioning the big red drum night time fishery. Large schools of big red drum gang up to spawn in Pamlico Sound around the mouths of Neuse and Pamlico Rivers in June and stay until September.

"It looks like a small city at the mouth of the Neuse River on a summer night when the big drum are around," Mumford said.

Of course, nearly everyone wants to catch a flounder.

"In all but a few years, anglers target flounder more than any other species," Mumford said.

In the fall, anglers chase speckled trout as they transit up into the rivers and creeks where some overwinter, Rice said. Spot is another species anglers target in the fall.



In the winter, fishing slows a bit, but the shad fishery makes a lovely Valentine's Day gift for anglers fishing in the upper creeks in brackish waters managed jointly between the Division of Marine Fisheries and Wildlife Resources Commission.

"It pulls anglers from all over the place," Rice said. "It's the first thing that happens every year."

Then the cycle starts over again in the spring.

"We really do have a year-round fishery for those willing to get outside," Rice said. "When it's cold, hot or in between, there are fish to be caught in eastern North Carolina."

How do you catch these fish?

Recreational fishing techniques vary a great deal from area to area. There are as many different fishing techniques as there are species to catch.

For example, some anglers catch flounder by drift fishing with the tide around ocean inlets using traditional flounder rigs, Mumford said. Others prefer casting along the shoreline or marsh bank with soft bodied jigs tipped with natural bait. Still, others use live bait.

"It all depends on where you are and the species you're targeting," Mumford said. "Techniques change from one end of the state to the other."

Many other popular species such as red drum and spotted seatrout can be caught using similar methods, he said.

While everyone has his or her favorite techniques, fishing with the new scented jigs and soft baits can greatly improve the chances of catching many of the popular estuarine species.

Fishing in North Carolina's rivers and sounds can be very specialized, like fishing for large red drum and even tarpon. Or, it can be as simple as using basic bottom rigs with shrimp or cut bait for spot and croaker.

Regardless of what an angler is targeting, there are two simple rules to fishing, Mumford said:

1. Go where the fish live.
2. Show the fish something they want to eat.

"If you follow those two rules, you catch fish," Mumford said.

## Find out What's Biting

If you want to know what's biting on the North Carolina coast, there's an easy way to find out:

Read the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries' recreational fishing reports.

The reports are posted online at <http://ncmarinefisheries.net/recreational-fishing-reports1>.

Each spring, the division begins posting weekly recreational fishing reports, and continues through autumn. Three reports, one each for the northern, central and southern coastal areas, are posted on Mondays (or Tuesdays, if Monday is a holiday).

The reports review the previous week's catches from the ocean, from the coastal rivers and sounds and from the piers and shore.

The reports are written by division staff in the Coastal Angling Program. Staff in this program interview more than 20,000 anglers per year at boat ramps, on the beach and on the piers to find out what the fishermen caught, what they threw back, where and how long they fished and other information.

The statistics are used to estimate the recreational catch to determine the health of fish populations and what size and bag limits and fishing seasons are needed.

# Common N.C. Saltwater Fishes



**Amberjack**  
*Seriola dumerili*



**Black Sea Bass**  
*Centropristis striata*



**Striped Bass**  
*Morone saxatilis*



**Bluefish**  
*Pomatomus saltatrix*



**Cobia**  
*Rachycentron canadum*



**Summer Flounder**  
*Paralichthys dentatus*



**Gag**  
*Mycteroperca microlepis*



**King Mackerel**  
*Scomberomorus cavalla*



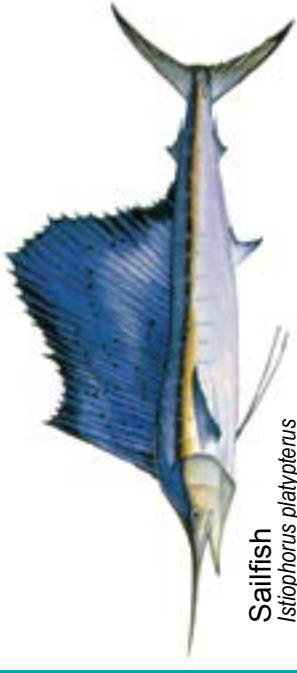
**Spanish Mackerel**  
*Scomberomorus maculatus*



**White Marlin**  
*Tetrapturus albidus*



**Puffer**  
*Sphoeroides maculatus*



**Sailfish**  
*Istiophorus platypterus*



**Sheepshead**  
*Archosargus probatocephalus*



**Vermilion Snapper**  
*Rhomboplites aurorubens*



**Spadefish**  
*Chaetodipterus faber*





**Croaker**  
*Micropogonias undulatus*



**Dolphin**  
*Coryphaena hippurus*



**Black Drum**  
*Pogonias cromis*



**Red Drum**  
*Sciaenops ocellatus*



**Southern Flounder**  
*Paralichthys lethostigma*



**Blue Marlin**  
*Makaira nigricans*



**Sea Mullet**  
*Menticirrhus americanus*



**Pigfish**  
*Orthopristis chrysoptera*



**Pinfish**  
*Lagodon rhomboides*



**Red Porgy**  
*Pagrus pagrus*

To report fisheries violations, or for  
information on rules and regulations call  
(252) 726-7021 or 1-800-682-2632.



**Spot**  
*Leiostomus xanthurus*



**Speckled Trout**  
*Cynoscion nebulosus*



**Gray Trout**  
*Cynoscion regalis*



**Yellowfin Tuna**  
*Thunnus albacares*



**False Albacore**  
*Euthynnus alletteratus*



**Wahoo**  
*Acanthocybium solanderi*



## 2017 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
<b>Amberjack, Greater</b>	28" FL	1/day	Fishing year runs March 1 - Feb.28 Season closes when quota is reached. See <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations</a>
<b>Bass, Black Sea</b>			
North of Cape Hatteras	12 .5" TL	15/day	Open May 15 - Sept. 21 and Oct. 22 - Dec. 31
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">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations</a>
<b>Bass, Striped</b>			
Ocean	28" TL	1/day	Open year round
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="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations</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>	
Central Southern Management Area (All waters other than above)	18" TL and in joint and inland waters, unlawful to possess between 22"-27" TL	2/day	Oct.1-April 30
<b>Bluefish</b>	None	15/day, only 5 greater than 24" TL	
<b>Cobia</b>	36" FL	1/day maximum 4/vessel	May 1 - Aug. 31 (seven days a week)
<b>Dolphin</b>	None	10/day or 60 fish/day/vessel maximum, whichever is less	Closes when quota is reached. See <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations</a>
<b>Drum, Black</b>	14" - 25" TL (slot) 1/day > 25" TL may be kept	10/day	
<b>Drum, Red (channel bass, puppy drum)</b>	18" - 27" TL (slot)	1/day	
<b>Eel, American</b>	9" TL	25/day	Open Jan. 1 - Aug. 31
<b>Flounder</b>	15" TL	4/day	
<b>Groupers</b>		3/day in any combination, including:	Closes when quota is reached. See <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations</a>
Black	24" TL	1 black or 1 gag/day	Closed Jan. 1 - April 30
Blueline tilefish	None		Open May 1 - Aug. 31
Gag	24" TL	1 black or 1 gag/day	Closed Jan. 1 - April 30
Golden tilefish	None	1/day	

## 2017 Recreational Size and Bag Limits for N.C. Coastal Waters

**EXCLUSIVE ECONOMIC ZONE-EEZ (3-200 miles) EEZ restrictions noted in italic are federal rules**

Minimum Length	Bag Limits (per person)	Seasons	Comments
28" FL	1/day	<i>Fishing year runs March 1 - Feb.28 Season closes when quota is reached. See <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations</a></i>	
12.5" TL	15/day	<i>Open May 15 - Sept. 21 and Oct. 22 - Dec. 31</i>	Regulations subject to change. Contact the National Marine Fisheries Service Greater Atlantic Regional Office (978-231-9315) or <a href="http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/sustainable/species/bsbass/index.html">http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/sustainable/species/bsbass/index.html</a> .
13" TL	7/day	<i>April 1 - March 31. Season closes if quota is reached. See <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations</a></i>	Regulations subject to change. Contact the South Atlantic Council (843-571-4366 or <a href="http://www.safmc.net">http://www.safmc.net</a> ) See N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries website at <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-fishing-size-and-bag-limits">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-fishing-size-and-bag-limits</a> for up-to-date information.
			All striped bass landed May 1 - Oct. 31 are required to have a landings tag affixed through the mouth and gill cover. Landing tags may be obtained at N.C. Striped Bass Reporting Stations, ocean fishing piers, most tackle shops and from N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries Recreational Port Agents. No gigging allowed.
	<b>NO POSSESSION</b>		
			Includes Cape Fear River and all tributaries
None	15/day		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>NO POSSESSION</b>	The N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission is asking anglers to report the length and weight of all cobia harvested in state waters on a catch card, which can be found at official North Carolina Citation Weigh Stations or online at <a href="http://www.ncrecfish.com/cobia">http://www.ncrecfish.com/cobia</a> . A list of participating weigh stations can be found at <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-fishing-tournaments">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-fishing-tournaments</a>	
None	10/day or 60/day/vessel maximum, whichever is less	<i>Closes when quota is reached.</i>	See website for details <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations</a>
	<b>NO POSSESSION</b>		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. No gigging allowed.
9" TL	25/day	<i>Open Jan. 1 - Aug. 31</i>	Eel taken by baited pots allowed in closed season
15" TL	4/day		
	3/day, any combination, including:	<i>Closes when quota is reached.</i>	
24" TL	1 black or 1 gag/day	<i>Closed Jan. 1 - April 30</i>	Seasons and size and bag limits subject to change. Contact the South Atlantic Council (843-571-4366 or <a href="http://www.safmc.net">http://www.safmc.net</a> ) or see the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries website at <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-fishing-size-and-bag-limits">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-fishing-size-and-bag-limits</a>
None		<i>Open May 1 - Aug. 31</i>	
24" TL	1 black or 1 gag/day	<i>Closed Jan. 1 - April 30</i>	
None	1/day		

## 2017 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
<b>Groupers (continued)</b>		3/day in any combination, including:	Closes when quota is reached.
Goliath		<b>NO POSSESSION</b>	
Nassau		<b>NO POSSESSION</b>	
Red grouper	20" TL		Closed Jan. 1 - April 30
Sand tilefish	None		
Scamp	20" TL		Closed Jan. 1 - April 30 See <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations</a>
Snowy	None	1/vessel/day	Open May 1 - Aug. 31
Yellowfin	20" TL		Closed Jan. 1 - April 30
Yellowmouth	20" TL		Closed Jan. 1 - April 30
<b>Herring, Alewife and Blueback</b>		<b>NO POSSESSION</b>	
<b>Hogfish (hog snapper)</b>	12" FL	5/day	Closes when quota is reached.
<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>
King	24" FL	3/day	
Spanish	12" FL	15/day	
<b>Marlin</b>			
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>		200/day (species combined)	
<b>Red Porgy (Silver snapper, pinky)</b>	14" TL	3/day or 3/trip whichever is more restrictive	Closes when quota is reached. See <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations</a>
<b>Snapper-Grouper Complex</b>			Closes when quota is reached.
Almaco jack, banded rudderfish, gray triggerfish, jolthead porgy, knobbed porgy, lesser amberjack, margate, scup (south of Hatteras), spadefish, whitebone porgy, white grunt, saucereye porgy, sailor's choice and bar jack	Gray triggerfish 12" FL	20/day in any combination	See <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations</a>
<b>Sailfish</b>	63" LJFL	1/day	
<b>Scup (North of Cape Hatteras)</b>	8" TL	50/day	
<b>Seatrout, spotted (Speckled trout)</b>	14" TL	4/day	
<b>Shad</b>			
American (All waters except as noted below)	None	10/day of American and hickory shad in any combination	
Cape Fear River and its tributaries	None	5/day as part of 10-fish American and hickory shad aggregate	
Albemarle Sound, Roanoke and Neuse rivers and their tributaries	None	1/day as part of 10-fish American and hickory shad aggregate	
Ocean		<b>NO POSSESSION</b>	
Hickory (all waters)	None	10/day of American and hickory shad in any combination (see American shad limits above)	



## 2017 Recreational Size and Bag Limits for N.C. Coastal Waters

**EXCLUSIVE ECONOMIC ZONE-EEZ (3-200 miles) EEZ restrictions noted in italic are federal rules**

Minimum Length	Bag Limits (per person)	Seasons	Comments
	<i>3/day in any combination</i>		
	<b>NO POSSESSION</b>		
	<b>NO POSSESSION</b>		
20" TL			Seasons and size and bag limits subject to change. Contact the South Atlantic Council (843-571-4366 or <a href="http://www.safmc.net">http://www.safmc.net</a> ) or see the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries website at <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-fishing-size-and-bag-limits">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-fishing-size-and-bag-limits</a>  Non-stainless steel circle hooks must be used when fishing for snapper-grouper species using natural baits.
None			
20" TL		<i>Closed Jan. 1 - April 30</i>	
None	<i>1/vessel/day</i>	<i>Open May 1 - Aug. 31</i>	
20" TL		<i>Closed Jan. 1 - April 30</i>	
20" TL		<i>Closed Jan. 1 - April 30</i>	
	<b>NO POSSESSION</b>		
12" FL		<i>Closes when quota is reached.</i>	
		<i>Closes when quota is reached. See <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations</a></i>	Seasons and size and bag limits subject to change. Contact the South Atlantic Council (843-571-4366 or <a href="http://www.safmc.net">http://www.safmc.net</a> ) or see the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries website at <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/</a> for up-to-date information.
24" FL	<i>3/day</i>		
12" FL	<i>15/day</i>		
99" LJFL	<i>State rules apply when landing</i>		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.
66" LJFL			
14" TL	<i>3/day or 3/trip whichever is more restrictive</i>	<i>Closes when quota is reached. See <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations</a></i>	
	<i>20/day in any combination</i>	<i>Closes when quota is reached. See <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations</a></i>	Seasons and size and bag limits subject to change. Contact the South Atlantic Council (843-571-4366 or <a href="http://www.safmc.net">http://www.safmc.net</a> ) or see the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries website at <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-fishing-size-and-bag-limits">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-fishing-size-and-bag-limits</a> Non-stainless steel circle hooks must be used when fishing for snapper-grouper species using natural baits.
63" LJFL			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.
9" TL	<i>50/day</i>		
14" TL	<i>4/day</i>		
	<b>NO POSSESSION</b>		
	<b>NO POSSESSION</b>		
	<b>NO POSSESSION</b>		
	<b>NO POSSESSION</b>		
None	<i>10/day</i>		

## 2017 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
<b>Sharks</b>			
Blacknose, blacktip, blue, bull, finetooth, lemon, nurse, oceanic whitetip, porbeagle, shortfin mako spinner, thresher, tiger	54" FL	1/vessel/day in any combination	
Great hammerhead, scalloped hammerhead, smooth hammerhead	78" FL		
Atlantic sharpnose	None		
Bonnethead	None		
Dogfish (smooth)	None		
Dogfish (spiny)	None		
<b>Sheepshead</b>	10" FL	10/day	
<b>Snappers</b>			
Blackfin, cubera, gray, queen, silk, yellowtail	12" TL	10/day any combination.	Closes when quota is reached. See <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mt/proclamations">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mt/proclamations</a>
Lane snapper	8" TL		
Mutton snapper	16" TL		
Red snapper		<b>NO POSSESSION</b>	
Vermilion snapper	12" TL	5/day in addition to the 10 snapper limit	Closes when quota is reached. See <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mt/proclamations">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mt/proclamations</a>
<b>Spearfish</b>			
<b>Sturgeon</b>			
<b>Tarpon</b>			
<b>Tuna</b>			
Bigeye	27" CFL	See Federal guidelines (at right)	
Bluefin			
Yellowfin	27" CFL		
<b>Wahoo</b>	None	2/day	Closes when quota is reached. See <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mt/proclamations">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mt/proclamations</a>
<b>Weakfish (Gray Trout)</b>	12" TL	1/day	
<b>Wreckfish</b>	None	1/Vessel/Day	Open July 1 - Aug. 31

## 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.

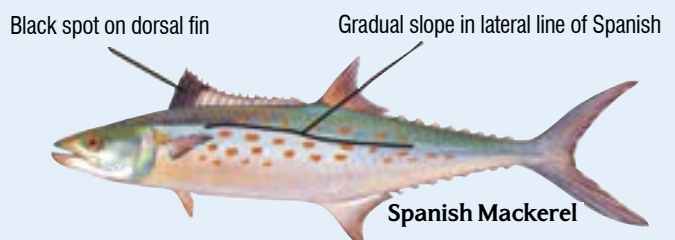
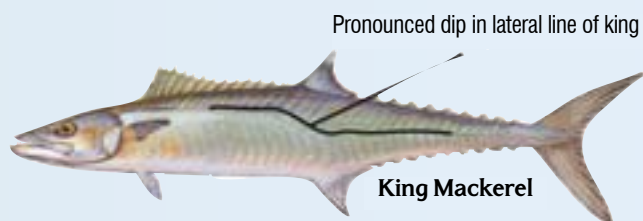
Both the adult Spanish mackerel and a juvenile king mackerel have gold spots on the body. However, the Spanish mackerel features a black spot on the first dorsal fin.

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.

## 2017 Recreational Size and Bag Limits for N.C. Coastal Waters

**EXCLUSIVE ECONOMIC ZONE-EEZ (3-200 miles) EEZ restrictions noted in italic are federal rules**

Minimum Length	Bag Limits (per person)	Seasons	Comments
54" FL	1/vessel/trip in any combination		<p>Seasons and bag and size limits subject to change. See <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations</a></p> <p>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>.</p> <p>No possession of great hammerhead, scallop hammerhead, smooth hammerhead or oceanic whitetip while in possession of tunas, billfish or swordfish.</p> <p>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.</p>
78" FL			
None	1/vessel/trip		
None	1/vessel/trip		
None	None		
None	None		
State rules apply when landing	State rules apply when landing		
12" TL	10/day any combination.	Closes when quota is reached. See <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations</a>	<p>Seasons and size and bag limits subject to change. Contact the South Atlantic Council (843-571-4366 or <a href="http://www.safmc.net">http://www.safmc.net</a>) or see the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries website at <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-fishing-size-and-bag-limits">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/recreational-fishing-size-and-bag-limits</a></p> <p>Non-stainless steel circle hooks must be used when fishing for snapper-grouper species using natural baits.</p>
8" TL			
16" TL			
	<b>NO POSSESSION</b>		
12" TL	5 in addition to the 10 snapper limit	Closes when quota is reached. See <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations</a>	
	<b>NO POSSESSION</b>		
	<b>NO POSSESSION</b>		
None	1/day		
27" CFL	3/day		<p>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="http://www.orhmspermits.noaa.gov">http://www.orhmspermits.noaa.gov</a> or <a href="http://nmfs.noaa.gov">nmfs.noaa.gov</a>) for up-to-date information.</p> <p>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.</p>
27" CFL			
None	2/day	Closes when quota is reached. See <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations</a>	
12" TL	State rules apply when landing		
None	1/Vessel/Day	Open July 1 - Aug. 31	





SHELLFISH				
Species	Minimum Length	Bag Limits (Per Person)	Seasons	Comments
<b>Blue Crab</b>	5" carapace width (minimum for males)	50 crabs/day not to exceed 100 crabs/vessel/day		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> .
<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/">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/</a> proclamations 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/">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/</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/">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/</a> proclamations for seasons, areas, or other restrictions.
<b>Bay Scallop</b>	None	1/2 bushel/day not to exceed 1 bushel/vessel/day	Closed unless opened by proclamation. ( <a href="http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/proclamations</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/">http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/</a> proclamations 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>Stone Crabs</b>	2 3/4" propodus (forearm)	No limit on claws	Closed June 15 - Aug. 15	No possession of crab body; no removal of claw from egg-bearing crabs; no gigging.

THIS DIGEST IS EFFECTIVE MAY 1, 2017 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 top of compressed tail. Fork length (FL) is measured from tip of snout to middle of fork in tail. Lower jaw fork length (LJFL) is measured from lower jaw to middle of fork in tail. Curved fork length (CFL) is the measurement of the length taken in a line tracing the contour of the body from the tip of the upper jaw to the fork of the tail.

Anglers cannot catch both a federal and state bag limit for the same species on the same trip.

Ocean boundary is defined as water seaward of the COLREGS Demarcation Lines as indicated on National Ocean Service navigation charts.

No one may possess aboard a vessel or while engaged in fishing any fish subject to limits without head and tail attached, except for alewife and blueback herring used for bait provided not more than two fish per boat/operation may be cut at any one time.

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

**Morehead City Office**  
(24 hours)  
800-682-2632 or  
252-726-7021

**Elizabeth City Office**  
800-338-7805 (N.C. only) or  
252-264-3911

**Manteo Office**  
252-473-5734

**Washington Office**  
800-338-7804 or  
252-946-6481

**Wilmington Office**  
800-248-4536 (N.C. only) or  
910-796-7215

### Federal and State Agency Telephone Directory

**Federal Regulations**  
National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS): 813-893-3722

**State of N.C. — Freshwater Regulations**  
N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission (WRC): 800-662-7137

**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

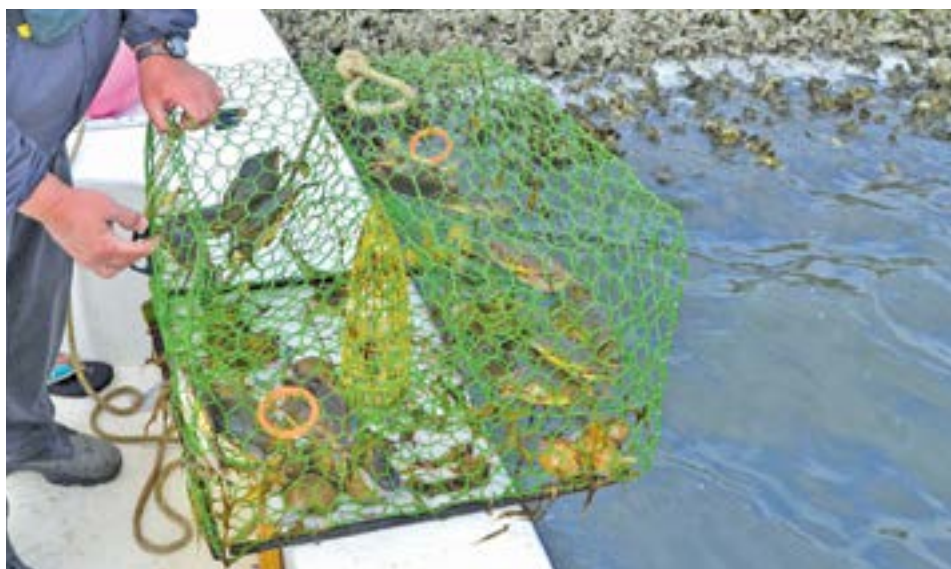
No license is needed to set one pot per person from a private pier or shoreline. A private pier or shoreline means there is no public access and does not apply to fishing piers where the public pays for fishing privileges. No buoy or identification is required.

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

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

Recreational harvest limits apply and sale of catch is prohibited.

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



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



Southern Flounder



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, flounder, grouper, king mackerel, sea mullet, sharks, sheepshead, Spanish mackerel, spotted seatrout (sounds), striped bass (coastal rivers), wahoo, weakfish, yellowfin tuna  
SHELLFISH: clams, hard crabs, soft crabs

## June

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

## July

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

## August

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

## October

FISH: Black drum, black sea bass, bluefish, dolphin, false albacore, flounder, 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 and 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

3441 Arendell Street  
Morehead City, NC 28557  
<http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/>  
252-726-7021 | 800-682-2632



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