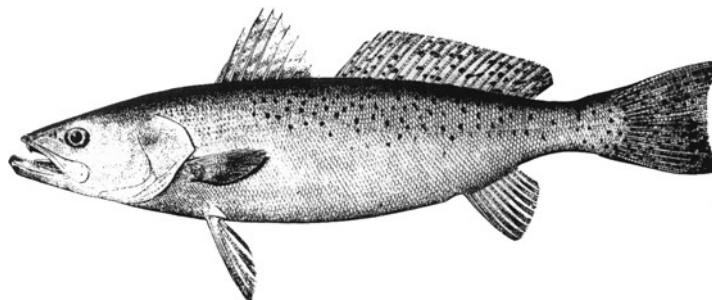


**2002 REVIEW OF THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN  
FOR SPOTTED SEATROUT  
(*Cynoscion nebulosus*)**



Prepared by:

The Spotted Seatrout Plan Review Team

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Approved November 19, 2002

**2002 REVIEW OF THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN**

Project objectives include calculating annual indices of abundance for target species (spotted seatrout included); supplement samples for age, growth and reproductive studies; evaluate catch rates and species distribution for identifying and resolving bycatch problems; and to characterize habitat utilization for Pamlico Sound. Additional areas of the Neuse and Pamlico-Pung Rivers will contribute to the Pamlico Sound area Independent Gill Net Survey with common objectives and sampling design but funded through disaster relief funds, to begin early in 2002.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) implemented a juvenile finfish monitoring program in the northern Indian River Lagoon in the spring of 1990 and in the estuarine reaches of the St. Johns, St. Marys and Nassau Rivers in northeast Florida in the spring of 2001. Florida also initiated a stratified random sampling program in 1997 on the Atlantic coast that utilizes a 183 m haul seine to catch exploitable-sized fishes. This has been conducted in the northern Indian River and southern Indian River since initiation and in northeast Florida since 2001. Florida's fishery-dependent sampling includes commercial trip-ticket information and biostatistical sampling of the commercial and recreational catch.

## **VI. Status of Management Measures and Issues**

All states which declared an interest in spotted seatrout have established a minimum size limit of at least 12 inches total length (TL) as called for in the FMP (Table 4). Collection of improved catch and effort data from the commercial and recreational fisheries has been initiated in all states as recommended in the FMP.

South Carolina has declared spotted seatrout a gamefish, imposed a creel limit of 10 fish per angler per day, a minimum size limit of 13" TL, and fish must be landed with head and fins intact. Florida has a commercial slot limit of 15-24" TL, a June-August open season and a 75 fish daily possession limit; commercial harvest is limited to hook and line and cast nets. Florida has a recreational slot limit of 15 - 20" TL and one fish over 20" may be kept per day. Florida's bag limits and closed seasons for spotted seatrout are regional with a 5-fish bag limit and February closed season north of Volusia county, and a 4-fish bag limit with a November-December closed season from Volusia County south. Georgia has a daily bag limit of 15 fish, a minimum size of 13" TL and fish must be landed with head and fins intact. North Carolina has a 12" TL minimum size limit and a 10 fish recreational possession limit. Current North Carolina regulations require the attendance of small mesh gill nets (<5" stretched mesh) from May 1 through October 31 in primary and secondary nursery areas, areas within 200 yards of any shoreline, and the extensive shallow water grass flat areas located behind North Carolina's Outer Banks. Virginia has a 14" TL commercial and recreational minimum size; recreational possession limit of 10 fish; and a commercial quota. Maryland has a 14" TL minimum recreational size and 10 fish possession limit; a 12" TL minimum commercial size limit and seasonal closures and mesh restrictions.

**Table 4. Summary of current state regulations for spotted seatrout.**

<b>State</b>	<b>Recreational</b>	<b>Commercial</b>	<b>Other</b>
New York	none	none	
New Jersey	14" TL; 10 fish	13" TL; 12" TL when taken by otter trawl 9/1-12/31	weakfish regulations apply to spotted seatrout

Delaware	12" TL	none	
Maryland	14" TL; 10 fish	12" TL	minimum mesh size restrictions for trawl (3-3/8" sq. or 3-3/4" diam.) and gill nets (3")
PRFC	14" TL; 15 fish	14" TL	
Virginia	14" TL; 10 fish	14" TL	commercial quota of 51,104 pounds
North Carolina	12" TL; 10 fish	12" TL	
South Carolina	13" TL; 10 fish	no commercial harvest or sale	gamefish status
Georgia	13" TL; 15 fish	13" TL; 15 fish	
Florida	15-20" TL slot, 1 fish >20"; 5 fish (except South Region limit of 4); regional seasonal closures	15-24" TL; June 1-Aug. 31 season; 75 fish per day; hook & line or cast net only	

## **VII. Implementation of FMP Compliance Requirements as of October 1, 2002**

All states required to implement the minimum size limit of 12 inches total length (TL) have done so.

## **VIII. Recommendations of FMP Review Team**

### **Management and Regulatory Recommendations**

- Develop an amended Spotted Seatrout FMP with objective compliance criteria.
- Efforts should be continued towards achieving full implementation of the FMP.
- Collection of commercial and recreational landings data should be continued, and increased emphasis should be placed on obtaining complimentary effort data.
- Development and implementation of methodologies to monitor stock status such as pre-recruit indices and virtual population analyses should receive more attention as should effort data associated with catches and size composition data on catches.
- The Spotted Seatrout FMP should be reviewed periodically and updated to incorporate new data and research findings and to assess the status of stocks and the fisheries.

### **Prioritized Research Recommendations**

#### High Priority

- State-specific stock assessments should be conducted to determine the status of stocks relative to the plan objective of maintaining a spawning potential of at least 20%.
- Initiate fishery independent surveys of spotted seatrout. These surveys are essential in that they provide an index of abundance to augment traditional assessment approaches.
- Emphasis should be placed on collecting the necessary biological data to be able to conduct stock