

Virginia Marine Resources Commission



RECREATIONAL FISHING REGULATIONS FOR VIRGINIA'S MARINE WATERS

★ ALL REGULATIONS ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE
MONTHLY ★

It is the angler's responsibility to know and abide by all current regulations and laws. Individuals must obtain a saltwater recreational fishing license which entitles them to use rod and reel (hook & line), spear or gig, hand line, cast net, dip net or two eel pots; other rules may apply to these specific gears.

[Click here](#) for more on license requirements.

Regulation Cards are available at most tackle/bait shops. [Click here](#) to download printable cards.

Note: click on the name of the fish to view more information on a particular fish. These links will take you to other web sites on the Internet. Some pages require that you scroll through to the actual fish you wish to see. Please be aware that the images provided do not constitute a legal description of the species, if you have a question about the identification of a fish contact the Fisheries Management Division or a Marine Patrol Officer.

Revised January 2012. Fish illustrations courtesy [Duane Raver](#) (may not be reproduced without permission).









[AMBERJACK](#)

[\[Regulation 4 VAC 20-510-10 et seq.\]](#)

Minimum Size Limit.....32 inches

Possession Limit.....2 per person

[AMERICAN EEL](#)

	<p><u>BLACK DRUM</u> (DRUM, DRUMFISH)</p> <p>[Regulation 4 VAC 20-320-10 et seq.]</p> <p>Minimum Size Limit.....16 inches Possession Limit.....1 per person</p>
	<p><u>BLACK SEA BASS</u> (state water; federal rules apply 3-200 miles)</p> <p>[Regulation 4 VAC 20-950-10 et seq.]</p> <p>Minimum Size Limit.....12 1/2 inches Possession Limit.....25 per person Open season.....May 22-October 11; November 1-Decmeber 31</p>
	<p><u>BLUE CATFISH</u> - [Click here for applicable DGIF regulations]</p> <p>No minimum size or daily limit, except only one blue catfish per day per person longer than 32 inches.</p>
	<p><u>BLUEFISH</u></p> <p>[Regulation 4 VAC 20-450-10 et seq.]</p> <p>Minimum Size Limit.....none Possession Limit.....10 per person</p>
	<p><u>COBIA</u></p> <p>[Regulation 4 VAC 20-510-10 et seq.]</p> <p>Minimum Size Limit.....37 inches Possession Limit.....1 per person</p>
	<p><u>GREY TROUT</u> (WEAKFISH)</p> <p>[Regulation 4 VAC 20-380-10 et seq.]</p> <p>Minimum Size Limit..... 12 inches Possession Limit.....1 per person</p>

**GROUPERS**[\[Regulation 4 VAC 20-1120-10 et seq.\]](#)

Any private recreational fishing vessel, charter boat or head boat, must obtain a Tilefish and Grouper Landing Permit, for that vessel, from the Marine Resources Commission in order to possess aboard, or land any tilefish or grouper, harvested recreationally. If the vessel is USCG or DGIF registered this no- cost permit can be obtained at a [MRC Licensing Agent](#).

Possession Limit.....1 per person

**KING MACKEREL**[\[Regulation 4 VAC 20-540-10 et seq\]](#)

Minimum Size Limit.....27 inches

Possession Limit.....3 per person

**RED DRUM** (CHANNEL BASS, REDFISH)[\[Regulation 4 VAC 20-280-10 et seq.\]](#)

Minimum Size Limit.....18 inches

Maximum Size Limit.....26 inches

Possession Limit.....3 per person

**SCUP (PORGY)**[\[Regulation 4 VAC 20-910-10 et seq.\]](#)

Minimum Size Limit.....8 inches

Possession Limit.....50 per person

**AMERICAN SHAD**[\[Regulation 4 VAC 20-530-10 et seq.\]](#)

Illegal to possess American shad.

[Click here](#) to go to a MD web site showing differences between



RIVER HERRINGS

[[Regulation 4 VAC 20-1260-10 et seq.](#)]

Illegal to possess river herrings (blueback herring and alewife herring)

[Click here](#) to go to a MD web site showing differences between shad and river herring.



SHARKS (All species except smooth and spiny dog sharks)*

[[Regulation 4 VAC 20-490-10 et seq.](#)]

Minimum Size Limit ♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦ 54 inches fork length **

Possession Limit ♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦ 1 per vessel ***

A non-boat assisted shore angler is entitled to a vessel possession limit

Season Closed ♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦ May 15 - July 15

(Includes Blacktip, Bull, Great Hammerhead, Lemon, Nurse, Scalloped Hammerhead, Smooth Hammerhead, Spinner, and Tiger Shark)

Federal waters, beyond the Three Mile Limit governed by different regulations set by the Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Management Council.

*Recreationally Prohibited Species ♦ It is illegal to take, catch or possess any shark from the ♦ Recreationally Prohibited Species ♦ list, as defined in [Regulation 4 VAC 20-490-10 et seq.](#), including but not limited to the following species commonly encountered in Virginia: Atlantic Angel, Dusky, Sand Tiger, Sandbar, White, and Bigeye Thresher Sharks. No size or possession limits apply to Dog Sharks.

**All sharks (All species except Spiny Dog Sharks) must be landed with head and fins attached; no minimum size applies to Atlantic Sharpnose, Bonnethead, Blacknose, and Finetooth Sharks.

***Possession limit for Atlantic Sharpnose and Bonnethead Sharks is 1 per person.

Sharks may only be taken by handline or rod and reel; Spearing and bowfishing illegal.

SHEEPSHEAD

[[Regulation 4 VAC 20-1110-10 et seq.](#)]

256 captures

14 Nov 2005 - 28 Feb 2019



SPADEFISH

[[Regulation 4 VAC 20-970-10 et seq.](#)]

Possession Limit.....4 per person

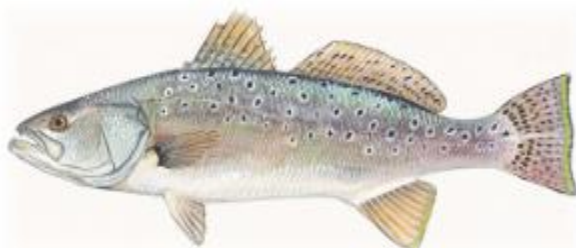


SPANISH MACKEREL

[[Regulation 4 VAC 20-540-10 et seq.](#)]

Minimum Size Limit.....14 inches

Possession Limit.....15 per person



SPECKLED TROUT (SPOTTED SEATROUT)

[[Regulation 4 VAC 20-280-10 et seq.](#)]

Minimum Size Limit.....14 inches

Possession Limit (April 1 - November 30).....10 per person

Possession Limit (Dec 1 - March 31).....5 per person

Only one speckled trout may be 24 inches or greater Dec - March



STRIPED BASS (ROCKFISH, STRIPED)

[[Regulation 4 VAC 20-252-10 et seq.](#)]

Virginia Coastal SeasonsJanuary 1 through March 31 &
.....May 16 through December 31
.....Minimum Size Limit.....28 inches
.....Possession Limit.....2 per person

Note that there is a coastal trophy season from May 1 to May 15; the regulations summarized below for Virginia Trophy Seasons apply to the coastal trophy season.

Coastal regulations apply in Virginia's Territorial Sea, plus all of the creeks, bays, inlets, and tributaries on the seaside of Accomack County, Northampton County (including areas east of the causeway from Fisherman Island to the mainland) and the City of Virginia Beach (including federal areas and state parks fronting on the Atlantic Ocean and east and south of the point where the shoreward boundary of the Territorial Sea joins the mainland at Cape Henry). [Click here for map of coastal boundary near the CBBT.](#)

.....Possession Limit.....1 per person

Additional Trophy Season Regulations: [Catch Report Required](#); no possession of 32" or greater striped bass in the [Spawning Reaches](#) May 1 through June 15. Trophy Season regulations apply in Virginia's Territorial Sea and the Chesapeake Bay and its Virginia tributary rivers, **except for the tributary rivers emptying into the Potomac River (see note below for more information on Potomac River striper regulations).**

Chesapeake Bay Spring SeasonMay 16 through June 15

.....Minimum Size Limit.....18 inches

.....Maximum Size Limit *28 inches

.....Possession Limit2 per person

* 1 fish of the 2 fish possession limit may be larger than 32 inches ([catch report required if striped bass 32" or greater is kept](#)); No possession of 32" or greater striped bass in the [Spawning Reaches](#) May 1 through June 15.

Chesapeake Bay Fall SeasonOctober 4 through December 31

.....Minimum Size Limit.....18 inches

.....Maximum Size Limit *28 inches

.....Possession Limit - October 4 through December 31.....2 per person

* 1 fish of the 2 fish possession limit may be 34 inches or larger; no fish may be kept between 28 and 34 inches.

Chesapeake Bay regulations for both the Spring and Fall seasons described above apply in the main stem of the Chesapeake Bay and Virginia's Chesapeake Bay tributary rivers, **except for the tributary rivers emptying into the Potomac River (see note below for more information on Potomac River striper regulations).**

Other Virginia restrictions: You may not combine possession limits when seasons overlap or you fish in multiple jurisdictions. Gaffing striped bass or attempting to gaff striped bass is illegal in Virginia marine waters.

Federal water striped bass regulations: Atlantic Ocean waters beyond the 3 mile limit are closed to the taking and possession of striped bass all year.

Potomac River striped bass regulations: Different regulations apply in the Potomac River. These areas are subject to the rules and regulations of the Potomac River Fisheries Commission, P.O. Box 9, Colonial Beach, VA 22443, (804) 224-7148; (800) 266-3904; <http://www.prfc.state.va.us>. For further information on PRFC rules contact PRFC directly.



STURGEON [Code Section 28.2-303]

.....illegal to possess



SUMMER FLOUNDER

[Regulation 4 VAC 20-620-10 et seq.]

Minimum Size Limit.....16.5 inches

Possession Limit.....4 per person

The above flounder restrictions apply to Virginia tidal waters, except that in Virginia's Potomac River tributaries the minimum size limit, closed season, and possession limit will be the same as established by [PRFC](#) for the mainstem Potomac River.

[256 captures](#)

14 Nov 2005 - 28 Feb 2019



Minimum Size Limit.....16 inches
 Possession Limit..... 3 per person

Closed Season: April 16 through September 23



TILEFISH

[[Regulation 4 VAC 20-1120-10 et seq.](#)]

Any private recreational fishing vessel, charter boat or head boat, must obtain a Tilefish and Grouper Landing Permit, for that vessel, from the Marine Resources Commission in order to possess aboard, or land any tilefish or grouper, harvested recreationally. If the vessel is USCG or DGIF registered this no- cost permit can be obtained at a [MRC Licensing Agent](#).

Possession Limit.....7 per person

Click on the following PDF link to get a printable, condensed version of the regulations summarized above: [Size/Possession Limits Summary Sheet](#)

[Click here](#) for a summary of recreational spearfishing size and possession limits

ADDITIONAL REGULATIONS:

[Saltwater Recreational Fishing License Requirements](#).....Individual license required in Chesapeake Bay, and its tributaries, and Virginia ocean waters unless fishing on licensed pier, licensed charter boat or licensed private boat; or specifically exempted. Click on link to see specific information on licensing requirements, license fees, or license agents.

Cast Net.....License required to use cast net, except to catch small quantities of mullet, menhaden, or minnows.

Measurements.....Size limits are total length measurements; fish must be measured tip of nose to tip of tail, except black sea bass, which are measured from tip of nose along the centerline of the body, to the center of the tail.

Altering fish while on board boat.....alteration of fish such that the fish can not be identified or properly measured may not be legal. Consult [Regulation 4 VAC 20-580](#) for more information.

Snagging.....Illegal to snag, or attempt to snag, any fish.

No Sale.....Sale or barter of recreationally caught fish is prohibited.

★ **ALL REGULATIONS are Subject to Change**; Regulations affecting Virginia fishermen are established by the Commonwealth of Virginia, Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and federal management agencies; these regulations are subject to review and change throughout the calendar year. **For more information on the most current regulations, contact: Virginia Marine Resources Commission, 2600 Washington Ave., Newport News, VA 23607 (757) 247-2200. This web page will be updated with the most recent rule changes within a week of rule adoption.**



