

NC Marine Patrol & The NC Coastal Fisheries



NC Division of Marine Fisheries

- The North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) is responsible for the management of the state's marine and estuarine resources.
- The division's jurisdiction encompasses all coastal waters and extends to 3 miles offshore.
- Agency policies are established by the 9-member Marine Fisheries Commission and the Secretary of the Department of Environmental Quality.
- The Division of Marine Fisheries is dedicated to ensuring sustainable marine and estuarine fisheries and habitats for the benefit and health of the people of North Carolina through fisheries management and habitat enhancement.

NC Marine Patrol

- Founded in 1822 to impose gear restrictions on oyster harvest, and has since had their jurisdiction expanded legislatively to encompass the harvest of finfish and shellfish, both recreationally and commercially.
- Today, the mission of the Marine Patrol is to ensure sustainable marine and estuarine fisheries for the benefit of the people of North Carolina.
- Their jurisdiction includes all coastal waters, extends to 3 miles offshore, and ranges to 200 miles offshore for some federally regulated species. Officers monitor 2.5 million acres of water and over 4,000 miles of coastline.
- Currently in North Carolina, there is roughly 2 million recreational anglers, 9,000 RCGL holders and 4,000 commercial fisherman and who's responsibility it is of the Marine Patrol to ensure all fisherman comply with statutes and rules that are developed for protecting and regulating the harvest of the state's fisheries.



NC Marine Patrol

- Currently, the Marine Patrol has 58 officers that work in three law enforcement districts along the coast.
- In addition to checking commercial and recreational fishermen, officers patrol waterways, piers, and beaches in coastal areas.
- We also inspect seafood houses, vehicles transporting seafood, and restaurants all over the state to make sure everyone is complying with fisheries rules.
- Officers use a variety of different size boats, aircraft, drones and patrol vehicles to accomplish these tasks.



Rule Changes & Upcoming Seasons

- Mandatory harvest reporting for these 5 species
 - Report at point of landing through QR code or Go Outdoors NC App
 - Began December 1, 2025
- Sheepshead - 5 per person/per day at 14" Total Length Min
- Speckled Trout – 3 per person/per day at 14" - 20" with 1 allowed above 26"
- Blue fish – 5 per person per day, no size limit
- Oyster season opens October 15 – March 31
- American Red Snapper
 - Withdrawn due to Federal injunction leading to NC pulling its permit
 - NC to consider reapplying for the 2027 season with revised data

Report What You Keep



RED DRUM



STRIPED BASS



FLOUNDER



SPOTTED SEATROUT
(SPECKLED TROUT)



WEAKFISH
(GRAY TROUT)

Common Species for Fly Fishing

- Red Drum (Puppy Drum, Channel Bass, Spot tail Bass)
- Speckled Trout (Spotted Sea Trout)
- Sheepshead
- Spanish Mackerel
- Striped Bass
- Bluefish
- False Albacore





All other
people

Up to
4
servings
per week

Up to
1
servings
per week

NC Statewide Mercury Advisory

ocean fish

- | | | | |
|---------------------|---------------|--------------|---------------------|
| • Black drum | • Herring | • Oysters | • Skate |
| • Canned light tuna | • Jacksmelt | • Polluck | • Southern Kingfish |
| • Cod | • Halibut | • Pompano | • Spot |
| • Crab | • herring | • Red drum | • Speckled Trout |
| • Croaker | • Jacksmelt | • Salmon | • Tripletail |
| • Flounder | • Lobster | • Scallops | • Whitefish |
| • Haddock | • Mahi-mahi | • Sheepshead | • White grunt |
| • Halibut | • Ocean perch | • Shrimp | |

freshwater fish

- | | | |
|------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| • Farm-raised crayfish | • Bluegill sunfish | • Farm-raised catfish |
| • Tilapia | • Trout | • Farm-raised trout |

ocean fish

- | | | |
|--|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| • Albacore (white) tuna,
fresh or can | • Greater amberjack | • Orange roughy |
| • Almaco jack | • South Atlantic grouper | • Shark |
| • Banded rudderfish | • King mackerel | • Swordfish |
| • Cobia | • Ladyfish | • Tilefish |
| • Crevalle jack | • Little tunny | • Tuna, fresh or
frozen |
| | • Marlin | |

freshwater fish

- | | | | |
|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| • Blackfish | • Catfish (wild) | • Largemouth bass | • Warmouth |
| • Black crappie | • Jack fish | • Walleye | • Yellow perch |



People who are
pregnant, nursing, or
may become pregnant

Children under 15

Up to
2
servings
per week

**Do Not
Eat**

Ethical Angling

- Match your gear size to the fish you are targeting. This will reduce fight times so the fish is able to swim away and recover more quickly. Long fight times increase the chances of break offs or predation.
- Use barbless or compressed barb circle hooks.
- Modify hard plastics with multiple hooks to single inline hooks.
- Use knotless rubber nets to land fish.
- Have dehooking devices out and ready for use.
- Leave fish in the water when possible.
- Wet your hands before handling.
- Do NOT hang fish from lip grips or scales.
- Harvest only what you will use or consume.
- Avoid contact with dry, rough surfaces such as towels, sand, coolers, boat gunwales, or deck.
- Remove all gear when possible. If the hook is swallowed, cut the line as close as possible to the hook.
- Let fish go quickly, to minimize handling and air exposure to the fish, have a cameraman ready before removing the fish from water.
- Support, move, and release fish horizontally. Support the weight of the fish under the head and supporting the entire body.
- Do not hold fish by their gills
- Revive fish that do not swim away.
 - Submerge fish headfirst.
 - Move fish in a continuous forward motion in the water.
 - Support the fish as needed under the head and tail until the fish swims off.

Common Coastal Habitats

Shell Bottom

- Shell bottom habitat exists in areas of bottom composed of living or dead oysters, hard clams and other shellfish
- Common Species
 - o Red & Black Drum
 - o Blue & Stone Crabs
 - o Sea Bass
 - o Flounder
 - o Sheepshead

Submerged Aquatic Vegetation

- Submerged aquatic vegetation functions as habitat for many fish and aquatic animals as long grasses create a forest that shelters fish and invertebrates from water currents and predators.
- Common Species
 - o Sea Trout
 - o Red & Black Drum
 - o Flounder
 - o Blue Crabs
 - o Shrimp

Licensing & Common Violations

Common License Types

- Coastal Recreational Fishing License (CRFL)
 - Allows a recreational fisherman to fish for and harvest finfish.
 - Required by anyone 16 years or older
 - Can be purchased for 10 days, annually, or as a lifetime license.
- Recreational Commercial Gear License (RCGL)
 - Annual license that allows the holder to use limited commercial gear to obtain their recreational limit of seafood for personal consumption.
- For-Hire Fishing Licenses (Charter Fishing)
 - Allows the license holder to take paying passengers fishing in coastal waters and certain types will cover the passengers fishing license.

Common Violations

- Fishing without a CRFL
- Possession of Out of Season, Under or Oversized, Over the Limit of the species.
- Possession of Shellfish from a **Polluted Area**
- Lack of safety equipment on board the vessel: Life Jackets, Fire extinguisher, Sound Producing Devices.



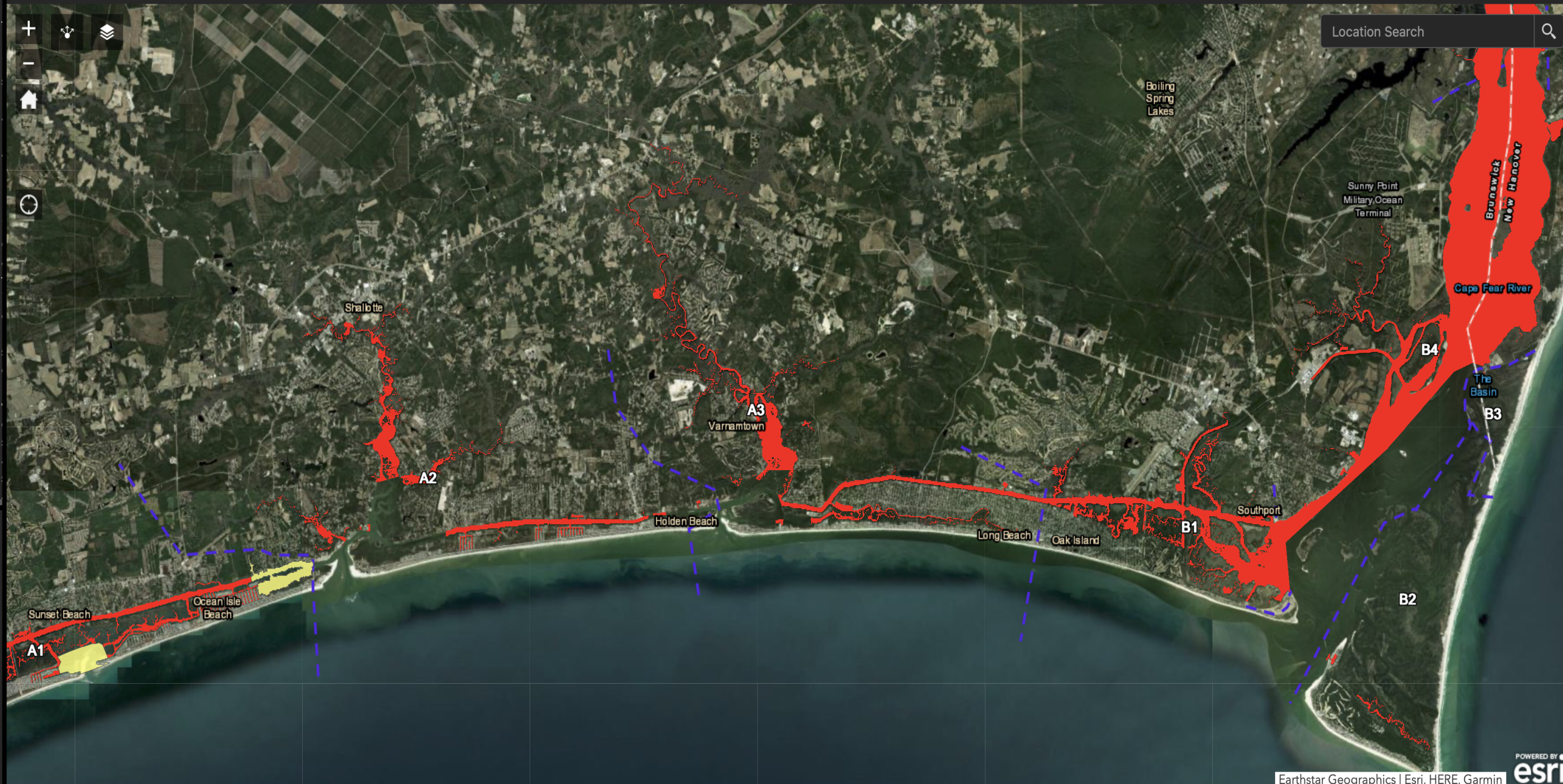
Shellfish Sanitation Temporary Closure Public Viewer

Supplemental Viewer. Official Docs on proclamation website

NC Environmental Quality

Marine Fisheries

Shellfish Sanitation



Know Before You Go

- Make sure you have a valid Coastal Recreational Fishing License.
- Have reference materials such as species ID guides or regulatory information to take with you, such as the Fish Rules App to better understand your target species rules and regulations.
- Understand your target species. Know where, when, and how to fish for them.
- Avoid targeting fish when they are spawning, during extreme weather events, or when the water is extremely warm and depleted of oxygen (anoxic) or extremely cold when fish are susceptible to cold stuns.
- Ensure all fishing and safety gear, and your tackle is operational before leaving the house.
- Create and share a float plan for your trip.
- Monitor the environment you plan on fishing in
 - o Check the weather before and throughout the trip
 - o Check the tide charts
 - o Know the hazards of what's in and around the water body as well as the temperature of the water.
- **Triple check your safety gear!!!**



Find a species

ALL SALTWATER FRESHWATER



Home

Trip Logs

News

Conservation

Print Regs.

Contact

ACCOUNT

Drum, Red

Open
Seasons

1
Bag Limit

18"
Min Size

27"
Max Size

Total Length
Measurement

Gigging

Spears

Additional Information

Regulation Boundary:
NC North Carolina State Waters

Required License(s):
Eligible for NC Saltwater Fishing Tournament managed by Division of Marine Fisheries.

Synonyms:
Channel BassRedfishSciaenops ocellatusSpottail Bass

Harvest in federal waters prohibited. Unlawful to gig, spear, or gaff. Unlawful to possess redfish greater than 27 inches total length.

Mandatory Harvest Reporting Requirement: All red drum that are kept must be reported to the Division of Marine Fisheries through an [online form](#) or iPhone App.

[Learn more.](#)

1 to many spots @ tail base

Big
Scales

Horizontal mouth opens downward



How to Measure a Fish

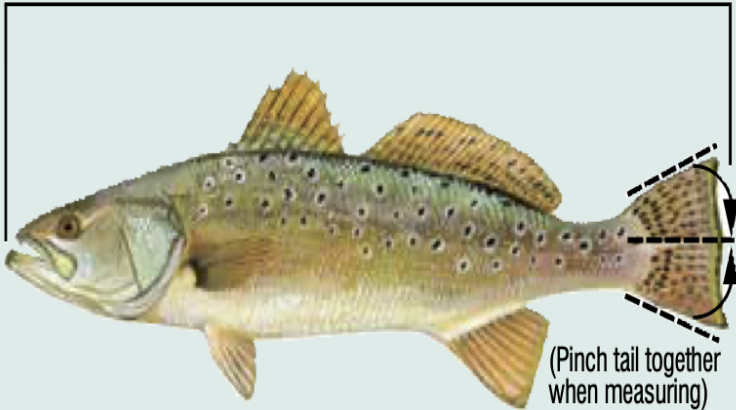
Total Length (TL) - The length of a fish as measured from the tip of the snout to the tip of the tail.

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

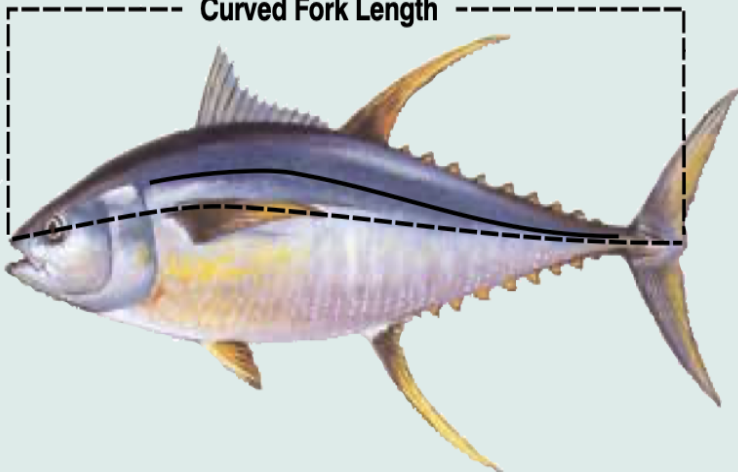


(Pinch tail together when measuring)



Fork Length

Curved Fork Length



Lower Jaw Fork Length

- Total Length
 - o Red & Black Drum
 - o Speckled and Grey Trout
 - o Snapper & Grouper
 - o Sheepshead
- Fork Length
 - o Spanish & King Mackerel
 - o Cobia
- Curved Fork Length
 - o Tunas
- Lower Jaw Fork Length
 - o Marlin
 - o Sailfish
 - o Swordfish

NC Saltwater Fishing Tournament

- 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 January 1 to December 31 each year and is open to any recreational angler and must be submitted by January 15 of the following year.
- The fish must meet program size requirements, be weighed at an official weigh station and then recorded on an official application form.
- Fish shall be caught in accordance with North Carolina State and Federal laws and regulations as well as the N.C. Saltwater Fishing Tournament rules.
- The tournament is free to enter and to submit a catch at a weigh station or online.

North Carolina Saltwater Fishing Citation

Kevin Aman

WHOSE CATCH HAS BEEN JUDGED
EXCEPTIONAL

FISH: RED DRUM WEIGHT: 1 RELEASED DATE: AUG 11, 2019



Roy Cooper
Governor
State of North Carolina



Hyman
Director
Division of Marine Fisheries



Weigh Stations

Brunswick

- Clem's Seafood (OKI)
- OKI & Ocean Crest Piers
- OKI Sporting Goods
- Rigged & Ready (Holden)
- Holden Beach Marina
- Sheffield's Grocery (OIB)
- Ocean Isle Fishing Center

New Hannover

- Island True Value Tackle & Hardware (Carolina Beach)
- Kure Beach Pier
- Intercoastal Angler (Wilm)
- Seaview Crab Company (Wilm)
- Johnnie Mercers Fishing Pier
- Motts Channel Seafood
- Wrightsville Beach Marina

<u>Species</u>	<u>Min. Weight (lbs)</u>	<u>Min. Length (inches)</u>	<u>Species</u>	<u>Min. Weight (lbs)</u>	<u>Min. Length (inches)</u>
Amberjack	50	53	Pigfish	1.5	14
Atlantic Bonito	8	24	Red Drum	Release only, 43 inches	
Atlantic Croaker	1.5	14	Red Porgy (Silver Snapper)	4	20
Barracuda	20	45	Sailfish	Release only, any length	
Bigeye Tuna	100	54 (FL)	Sharks	Release only, 80 inches	
Black Drum	30	40	Sheepshead	8	23
Black Sea Bass	4	18	Spadefish	4	16
Blackfin Tuna	25	32 (FL)	Spanish Mackerel	6	25
Blue Marlin	Release only, any length		Spearfish		
Bluefin Tuna	200	70 (FL)	Spot	1	12
Bluefish	15	34	Spotted Seatrout (Speckled Trout)	6	26
Blueline Tilefish (Gray)	10	28	Swordfish	50	70
Cobia	40	50	Tarpon	Release only, any length	
Crevalle Jack	15	32	Triggerfish	5	20
Dolphin (Mahi)	35	57	Vermilion Snapper (Beeliner)	3	19
False Albacore	20	34	Wahoo	40	56
Florida Pompano	2	17	Weakfish (Gray Trout)	5	24
Flounder	6	24	White Grunt	2	16
Kingfish (Sea Mullet)	1.5	15	White Marlin	Release only, any length	
King Mackerel	30	54	Yellowfin Tuna	70	50 (FL)

Tagged Fish

- Reporting the tagged fish you catch is one of the easiest and best ways to get involved in N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries' tagging programs.
- The division is tagging striped bass, red drum, spotted seatrout, southern flounder and cobia throughout the estuarine and ocean waters of North Carolina.
- Tagging programs play a vital role in assessing fish populations by providing information about migration patterns, habitat use, growth rates, mortality rates, and population structure of fish.
- The program asks that you report the following
 - o Fish Species
 - o Color of Tag
 - o Tag Number
 - o If there is a 2nd tag
 - o Date of Catch
 - o Location of Catch (GPS)
 - o Gear Type
 - o Length of the Fish
 - o The Fate of the Fish
 - o Your Information

Tagged Fish Rewards

- Alongside a memorable catch, the tagged fish will also land you a few rewards
 - o \$5 or \$100 depending on the tag color, hats and other DMF swag
 - o A letter and a certificate that includes information about when and where your fish was tagged, days since tagging, distance traveled and how much the fish grew.
 - o Entrance into an end-of-year-drawing for more rewards



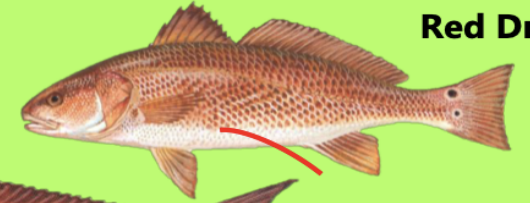
\$100 REWARD



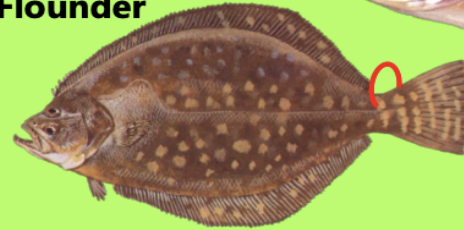
Striped Bass



Red Drum



Southern Flounder



Cobia



Spotted Seatrout



CUT OFF TAG

TAG #

CALL 1-800-682-2632

ANGLERS, LOOK FOR TAGS IN YOUR CATCH!

Rewards given for tag & fish recapture information.

CUT OFF TAG

TAG #

CALL 1-800-682-2632

CHECK BOTH SIDES OF THE FISH!

Some fish may have more than one tag. To receive a reward you must report the tag number (or numbers), the fish species, length, date & location of catch.

Mail Tags to:

N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries
Attn: Tagging Program
P.O. Box 769
Morehead City, N.C. 28557

REWARDS FOR REPORTING TAGS

Red Tag: \$100 Reward - Tag must be cut off fish & returned to the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries.

Yellow Tag: Hat, towel, \$5 or other reward, & one entry into the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries end-of-year drawing.

Report Tagged Fish To:
1-800-682-2632