

New Jersey Marine Digest

May 2024



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Coastal Environment**

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A Summary of Recreational Regulations and
Marine Fish and Shellfish Management Information

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Hotlines

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NOAA Fisheries Office of Law

Enforcement — Northeast Enforcement Division HQ

(978) 281-9249

Federal Fisheries Law

Enforcement Field Offices

Wall: (732) 280-6490
Northfield: (609) 415-2941

On the cover: Atlantic Cod, *Gadus morhua* © Mirecca.



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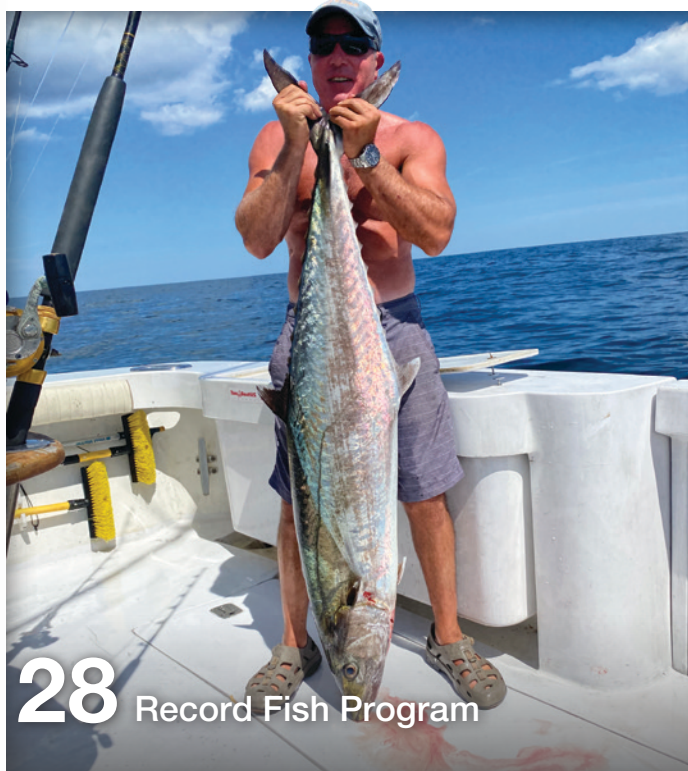
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Assistant Commissioner's Message

DAVE GOLDEN




With another great fishing season upon us, I want to share my enthusiasm for fishing and the outdoors and remind everyone of the importance of responsible fishing practices. Our love of fishing not only brings us excitement and fulfillment but also carries with it the responsibility to protect and preserve our marine resources for future generations.

New Jersey's waters offer a diverse range of fish species and habitats, making our coast, bays, and open waters a prime destination for anglers of all levels. Whether you prefer casting a line from the shore, heading out on your boat, or jumping aboard a charter or party boat, there's something for everyone to enjoy in New Jersey. From striped bass and bluefish to fluke and black sea bass, the opportunities for a memorable fishing experience are many.

We all lead busy lives, but it's important to make time for the outdoors and enjoy the natural beauty surrounding us. Fishing provides the perfect opportunity to unwind, relax, and connect with nature. Whether fishing solo, with friends, or with family, the time spent outdoors is always rewarding.

The "saltwater experience" is also a great way to introduce youth to the joys of fishing. Taking kids fishing not only creates lasting memories but also helps instill a love and respect for our marine environment. It's important to provide children with the opportunity to experience the thrills of fishing and introducing them to the outdoors helps foster a conservation ethic that has long-lasting benefits.

While catching fish is always the goal of any fishing trip, remember the importance of following regulations and practicing responsible fish-handling techniques. By adhering to the regulated size limits, bag limits, and seasons, we can ensure that New Jersey's fish populations remain healthy and sustainable. Additionally, practicing proper handling and release methods can reduce unintended fish mortality and help protect fragile fish populations. The use of circle hooks to reduce deep hooking will also increase the survival rates of released fish. These simple practices can make a big difference in our collective management of fish populations in New Jersey's waters.

As we gear up for another exciting fishing season, let's remember that our actions today will shape the future of fishing in New Jersey. By working together, we can ensure that our waters remain abundant and vibrant for years to come. So, grab your gear, head out to the water, enjoy the outdoors, and catch some fish! 

Dave Golden is the Assistant Commissioner of New Jersey DEP Fish & Wildlife.



Williamstown, MA | Birmingham, AL

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Mark Your Calendar for the Governor's Surf Fishing Tournament!

May 19, 2024

Island Beach State Park, Seaside Park, NJ

Come celebrate the 33rd year of the Governor's Surf Fishing Tournament! Enjoy a great day of surf fishing with family and friends.

The individual who catches the overall largest fish wins the "Governor's Award" and will have their name engraved on the Governor's Cup, which is permanently displayed at Island Beach State Park. Prizes are awarded to winners in a variety of age group and fish species categories.

All funds raised by the tournament go toward improving beach access, surf fishing instruction programs and equipment, plus marine education and restoration projects.

The tournament is sponsored by NJDEP's Fish & Wildlife and State Park Service, New Jersey State Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs, Jersey Coast Anglers Association and New Jersey Beach Buggy Association.

For more information visit: dep.nj.gov/njfw/fishing/marine/governors-surf-fishing-tournament/ or email Karen.Byrne@dep.nj.gov.



Jonathan Carlucci/NJDEP Fish & Wildlife

David Koenigstein of Toms River won the 2023 Governor's Cup with a 37 1/2" Striped Bass!

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New Jersey Marine Digest

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New Jersey DEP Fish & Wildlife Our Mission

To protect and manage the state's fish and wildlife to maximize their long-term biological, recreational and economic value for all New Jerseyans.

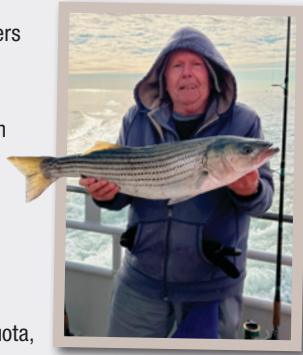
Our Goals

- To maintain New Jersey's rich variety of fish and wildlife species at stable, healthy levels and to protect and enhance the many habitats on which they depend.
- To educate New Jerseyans on the values and needs of our fish and wildlife and to foster a positive human/wildlife co-existence.
- To maximize the recreational and commercial use of New Jersey's fish and wildlife for both present and future generations.

Striped Bass Bonus Program

The Striped Bass Bonus Program will continue in 2024, where anglers possessing a Bonus permit may keep a striper at 24 inches or less than 28 inches. The open season for this program is May 15 through December 31. Check website for updates at dep.nj.gov/njfw/fishing/marine/stripped-bass-bonus-program/

The current allocation from the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission is 200,798 pounds. Should New Jersey exceed this quota, any overage would be subtracted from the following year's quota.



Striper caught on the Queen Mary.

Application Process: To apply and for regulation or program updates, please visit <http://dep.nj.gov/njfw/fishing/marine/stripped-bass-bonus-program/>. Applications are only accepted online and permits will be mailed. The permit is non-transferable and valid for the current calendar year. Only one fish can be harvested per permit. Fishing logs must be kept and harvest reporting is mandatory.

Striped Bass Bonus Permit Harvest Reporting: The Striped Bass Bonus Permit must be securely attached to the fish through the mouth and gill immediately upon capture and prior to transportation. **Harvest reporting is mandatory and must be reported online or by leaving a message at (609) 748-2074.**

Fishing Logs: A log of striped bass fishing activity must be kept and submitted by January 15, 2025 in order to remain eligible for 2025.

Striped Bass Bonus Program Harvest 1996–2023

Harvest Year	# Fish Harvested	Weight Harvested (lbs)	Mean Length (inches)	Mean Weight (lbs)	% of Quota
1996	233	4,050	35.7	17.4	1.8
1997	344	7,678	36.8	22.3	3.4
1998	473	11,149	37.2	23.6	5.0
1999	574	13,174	36.2	23.1	5.9
2000	2,488	42,794	33.7	17.2	19.0
2001	4,583	79,774	33.5	17.4	35.5
2002	4,855	82,050	33.0	16.9	36.5
2003	6,101	121,410	35.0	20.0	37.7
2004	4,602	81,870	32.8	17.8	25.4
2005	2,047	29,866	31.7	14.6	9.3
2006	1,127	23,656	34.9	21.0	7.4
2007*	708	13,615	34.0	19.2	4.2
2008	367	7,345	34.3	20.0	2.3
2009	526	10,330	34.2	19.3	3.2
2010	728	12,833	34.5	17.6	4.0
2011	916	16,332	34.0	17.8	5.1
2012*	325	6,285	34.3	19.3	2.0
2013	404	6,096	33.4	15.1	1.9
2014	178	3,653	35.0	20.5	1.1
2015*	3,301	21,479	25.8	6.5	9.9
2016	3,686	24,963	25.9	6.8	11.6
2017	2,161	14,602	25.9	6.8	6.8
2018	1,101	6,786	25.3	6.2	3.1
2019	5,558	32,000	26.0	5.8	14.9
2020*	5,746	36,865	25.5	6.4	17.1
2021	6,457	41,867	25.7	6.5	19.4
2022	5,742	36,807	25.8	6.4	17.0
2023**	9,613	61,662	25.8	6.4	28.6

* Significant administrative or regulatory changes to the SBBP took place.

** Preliminary

Using Circle Hooks

When Fishing with Bait for Striped Bass

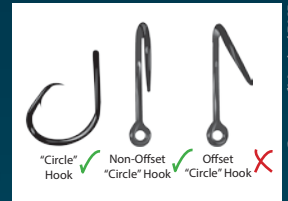
Striped bass caught by Wayne Hummel on the Mad Hatter.

Regulations require using inline (non-offset) circle hooks when fishing for striped bass with bait. Bait is defined as any marine or aquatic organism live or dead, whole or parts thereof. This does not apply to artificial lures with bait attached. Striped bass caught using an unapproved method of take must be returned to the water immediately, without unnecessary injury. (See striped bass regulations, page 17.)

Using non-offset circle hooks significantly increases survival of released fish. From 2017 to 2021, more striped bass were estimated to have died from catch and release than were harvested - highlighting the importance of switching to circle hooks and improving fish handling practices.

What is a Circle Hook?

A circle hook is defined as a non-offset hook where the point curves back perpendicularly towards the shank. The term *non-offset* means the point and barb are in the same plane as the shank. When the hook is laying on a flat surface, the entire hook and barb should lay flat.



Non-offset (inline) circle hooks must be used when fishing for striped bass with bait.

How Do Circle Hooks Increase Survival of Released Striped Bass?

Using circle hooks reduce occurrences of gut-hooking which can cause injuries to internal organs of the fish. If a striped bass swallows the bait, the circle hook is designed to slide out from its throat and catch on the corner of its jaw. When a fish is hooked in the corner of its jaw, this also leads to shorter de-hooking times and less overall stress on the fish.

Tips for Using Circle Hooks

When a fish takes your bait, do not sweep the rod upward to set the hook. The circle hook sets itself when the fish tries to swim away. Simply let the line come tight, then fight the fish.

Added Tips for the Survival of Released Fish

Tackle Recommendations

- Use barbless hooks or bend barbs down.
- Use non-stainless steel hooks. If gut-hooked, leave the hook in the fish and cut the line as close to the hook as possible. The hook will rust away.
- Replace treble hooks on artificial lures with single hooks.
- Use appropriate tackle suited to the size of the fish; don't fight the fish to exhaustion.

Fish Handling Best Practices

- Keep the fish in the water when de-hooking.
- If you must take the fish out of the water, use a rubber or soft-mesh landing net.
- Avoid handling fish with dry hands.
- Avoid dragging fish across dry sand or rocks.
- Hold fish horizontally with support.
- Avoid touching the fish's gills or eyes.
- Return the fish to the water as soon as possible.
- When reviving fish, hold fish headfirst into the current so water flows through the mouth and over the gills.

New Jersey's Evolving Coastal Environment

The environment around us is constantly evolving. Varying environmental conditions lead to changes in the surrounding ecosystems. Factors such as warming ocean temperatures, sea level rise, ocean acidification and many others contribute to changes in the spatial distribution and stock status of many marine species' populations.



A catch is sorted during the Delaware River Seine Survey.



Recently, these changes have brought non-native species into New Jersey's coastal waters and NJDEP Fish & Wildlife's Marine Resources Administration (MRA), comprised of the Bureau of Habitat and Shellfisheries and the Bureau of Marine Fisheries (BMF), conducts many scientific surveys studying various species populations within New Jersey. These surveys are conducted in the State's rivers, bays and in the Atlantic Ocean, and are good indicators of the environmental evolution occurring around us and its impact on marine species coastwide. The data collected provides information about species interactions and environmental impacts and are an important part of ecosystem management. Survey longevity is beneficial to species population studies, development of fishery management plans and projections of sustainable harvest levels.

Read on to learn about the many surveys conducted by the MRA and BMF and look ahead to page 12 for profiles of some non-native fish that are becoming increasingly prevalent in New Jersey's waters.

Delaware River Striped Bass Recruitment Survey

In 1980, the Bureau of Marine Fisheries developed a seine survey in the Delaware River targeting young of year striped bass. As the Bureau of Marine Fisheries' longest running survey, it not only provides a juvenile abundance estimate for striped bass, but also for many other ecologically and economically important species in New Jersey.

After each seine haul, species are sorted, counted and a subsample of lengths are collected. Data provides information about species interactions and environmental impacts. The total number of fish collected over the years varies without trend. Environmental impacts such as floods or droughts cause the salt line to move up and down the river. During periods of drought, saltwater fish move farther into freshwater regions, while during flood events freshwater species move into the lower portions of the river.

The Delaware River is also a success story with respect to water quality improvements. In the 1940's, the river was considered "grossly polluted."

The Federal Clean Water Act was enacted in 1972 and water quality levels in the river began to improve. By the late 1980's, major improvements were being seen throughout the river. Several water quality parameters are collected during seine surveys at each station: water temperature, dissolved oxygen (DO), salinity and pH. Over the years, the average water temperature has fluctuated but is trending upwards. Average DO and pH have remained relatively constant over the years with slight annual fluctuations. Salinity is the most variable parameter collected because it is most easily influenced by outside forces, however, it trends downward during the survey months (June through October).

Dramatic environmental events such as 100-year floods, hurricanes and nor'easters are occurring more frequently and more intensely and each one affects the ecosystems around us. This ever-changing environment is one reason why the number of fish and the number of species caught during this survey varies from year to year. Over 100 unique species have been collected since 1980, with an

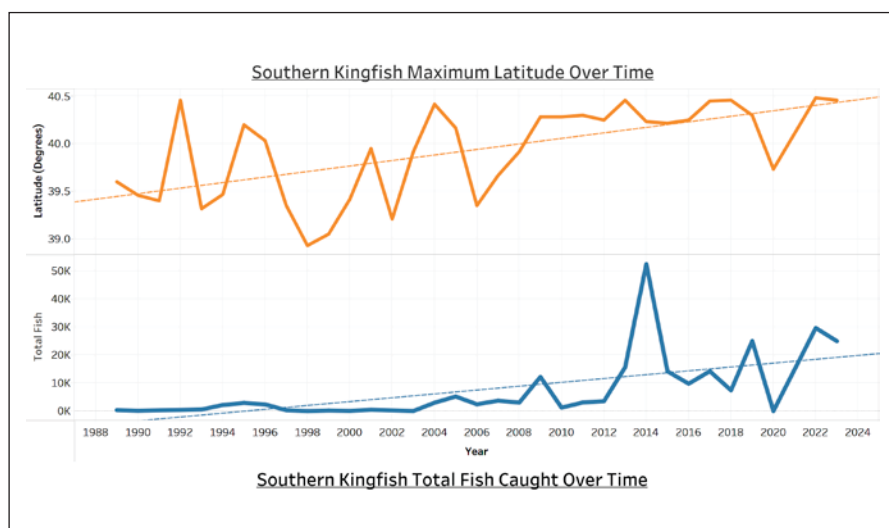
average year identifying over 40 different species. Due to higher water temperatures, species that typically prefer warmer water have begun to show up in the survey's catches, including gray snapper, threadfin shad, horse-eye jack, and Southern kingfish. With consistent monitoring, BMF is hopeful that future population trends and harvest potential within the Delaware River can be predicted.

Ocean Stock Assessment Survey

New Jersey's Ocean Stock Assessment Survey began on August 20, 1988. Lead biologist, Don Byrne, set out to develop a comprehensive baseline of data for coastal recreational fish and their prey. In the first year, over 110 species were recorded, and as many as 144 species were documented in 2018. Overall, the survey has encountered nearly 300 distinct fish and invertebrate species and continues to observe species never seen in previous survey years.

One of the primary objectives of the survey is to track changes in relative abundance of recreational species. A notable trend is the high rates of fluctuation of many species, which is not uncommon. In other words, seeing low numbers of a species one year can often be followed by large numbers the next year. When interpreting data collected by a survey with so many variables, the big picture matters!

Another interesting trend that survey data can indicate is a change in a particular species' range. One example is the increasing occurrence of Southern kingfish and its expanding range northward. In the first years of the survey, encountering Southern kingfish was relatively uncommon, but that occurrence has become increasingly more frequent over the years and has shown its range expanding nearly 2 NM northward every year.



Data from the Ocean Stock Assessment Survey indicates that both occurrence and Northern expansion of Southern kingfish are trending upwards.

Surf Clam Stocks

At one time, the surf clam fishery was the largest molluscan fishery in New Jersey accounting for as much as 60% (by weight) of New Jersey's total reported molluscan commercial landings. While most of these landings have typically come from federal waters, New Jersey's inshore fishery had, at one time, contributed between 500,000 to 700,000 bushels to the total landings, and accounted for over 17% of the total landings for the entire Mid-Atlantic and New England regions combined.

The development and future success of this fishery was dependent on accurate and up to date survey information on the status of this resource, which was initiated by Rutgers University in the 1970s and continued by the Bureau of Marine Habitat and Shellfisheries from 1987 to 2019. During this time, stocks had reached an all-time high of 26.3 million bushels in 1997, with substantial recruitment events (i.e., juvenile surf clams entering the fishery). However, recruitment began to decline, and this was reflected in steep drops in the estimated standing stocks with a steady increase in the average size of the surf clams. While one might think that fishing pressure had something to do with it, the harvest in New Jersey's territorial waters had noticeably decreased and eventually ceased altogether around 2003. At that time, the offshore federal waters fishery began shifting to deeper waters farther offshore (Weinberg, 2005) and north toward New England waters. This decline was also documented across the Mid-Atlantic region.

The last New Jersey surf clam survey performed in 2019, estimated the entire stock to be 26.7 thousand bushels, only 0.1 % of the historic high. Studies conducted by Rutgers University (Kim and Powell, 2004) found that clams analyzed along what was known as the "mortality line" had low condition

indices (an indicator of health) and tissue disorders indicative of malnutrition. A supporting theory points towards a warm water intrusion over the Mid-Atlantic Shelf. Water temperatures above the surf clam tolerance range could cause respiratory rates to increase and a decline in filtration rate, which would compromise their ability to acquire food and reduce energy used for maintenance and reproduction. In addition, temperature variations could also have shifted food supplies or caused a direct reduction on food source availability. These environmental factors most likely induced thermal stress and low condition indices that caused mortality within shallower waters and in the southern limits of the surf clam range (Weinburg, 2005).

A recent study conducted by Powell, et al., (2020) documented the range expansion of surf clams in response to the post-2000 warming of the North Atlantic northward to east of Nantucket, MA. At the same time, there was an increase in the harvest of surf clams within the deeper ocean quahog beds in cooler waters (MAMFC, 2022). Surf clam distribution correlates directly to shifts in environmental changes that have been observed over the last several decades and serves as a reminder of the sensitivities that contribute to how species respond to rapid changes to their environment.

River Herring Monitoring Survey

As part of the MRA's on-going efforts to monitor populations of ecologically and economically important fish species, MRA staff conduct a multifaceted population survey for blueback and alewife herring. Collectively known as "river herring," these two species were a staple subsistence and commercial fishery target since before colonialization and continue to be a vital link in the food chain for



A seine net is hauled onto the beach during the River Herring Survey.

many freshwater and marine gamefish species. Over the last century, overharvesting and dams preventing access to their historical freshwater spawning grounds have led to a dramatic decrease in river herring populations along the east coast. In response to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (ASMFC) 2008 River Herring Stock Assessment, which determined river herring stocks to be depleted on a coastwide and regional basis, New Jersey closed the harvest of river herring in both fresh and marine waters in 2012 and initiated the River Herring Monitoring Survey.

The goals of the survey are to collect adult and young of year river herring to determine adult run strength and spawning success, and to gather data needed to support fishery management plans and coastwide stock assessments. Gillnet sampling for adult river herring undertaking their annual spawning run takes place on the Maurice and Great Egg Harbor Rivers from March through May. Young of year herring spawned in the spring are sampled in a seine net survey on the same rivers from July through the end of October. When considered together, these facets create a holistic picture of the current health of river herring populations in both target rivers.

Among the most important signals that fisheries managers pay attention to when analyzing data from long term monitoring surveys, is changes in catch over time. While still a relatively young survey, fisheries managers can still glean preliminary trends in changes in catches of river herring over time. Adult river herring catches in both rivers have remained relatively stable over the survey years with young of year river herring catches significantly varying year to year with no real trend. One trend that is apparent in the summer and fall portion of the seine survey is the increasing frequency of catches of species which have previously been thought of as "occasional southern visitors." Species that were an infrequent occurrence during the early years of the survey are now commonly encountered on a yearly basis. Young of year permit, Florida pompano, grey snapper, and large mullet (a.k.a. "corn cob" sized) are now seen quite often from July through the end of October. These catches mirror a regional trend from other state surveys along the mid-Atlantic bight up through the New England states as water temperatures along the east coast continue to rise and species ranges continue to shift northward. The MRA will continue to monitor these changes in species assemblages throughout our long-term surveys for potential new fisheries and interactions with native species.



Surf clams are processed by Shellfisheries staff during sampling.

Submerged Aquatic Vegetation Mapping

Lying just beneath the waves, New Jersey is home to a critical habitat – submerged aquatic vegetation. Submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) refers to rooted, vascular plants that grow completely underwater, except for periods of brief exposure at low tides. SAV mapping efforts in New Jersey focus on the two dominant seagrass species, eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) and widgeon grass (*Ruppia maritima*).

Seagrasses provide food, energy, and habitat for many commercially and recreationally important species like shellfish, crustaceans, finfish, and waterfowl. Seagrasses are a sensitive indicator of water quality and can also improve water quality by storing and processing nutrients and trapping suspended sediments. Large, dense seagrass beds can even dampen waves and currents, which helps to protect our shorelines.

SAV are an important climate change mitigator, as they are capable of storing atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂) and buffering ocean acidification. In the process of carbon sequestration, seagrass beds will trap large amounts of carbon in their plant stems and store it over long periods of time in the sediments where they grow. Seagrasses' role in carbon sequestration has been termed 'blue carbon' and the full potential of carbon storage in seagrass species are still being explored.

Seagrasses, like other marine habitats, are threatened by climate change impacts, such as sea level rise, increasing temperatures, and coastal development resulting in the introduction of excess nutrients (eutrophication). They require sufficient light, making them sensitive to changes in water quality, clarity, and depth. Certain species also require specific temperature ranges, impacting their ability to grow and thrive as temperatures increase. Seagrasses also face several biotic (living) and abiotic (non-living) threats unrelated to climate change, and a significant loss of seagrass beds have been documented within the state. In addition to documented losses, seagrasses are known to move in and out of a particular area over time due to certain influences and species habitat preferences, and mapping can document changes in their distribution.

As climate change and other threats continue to result in the loss of seagrass beds, it is important to understand the current status and extent of beds throughout New Jersey. This can be accomplished by conducting new, routine mapping to compare with maps dating back to the late 1970's.

In the summer of 2023, staff from the Bureau of Marine Habitat & Shellfisheries collaborated with Stockton University, Rutgers University's Center for Remote Sensing and Spatial Analysis, and the Barnegat Bay Partnership on a project to map SAV throughout the Barnegat Bay and Little Egg Harbor estuarine systems. The next survey, which is currently being planned, will focus on the State's northern coastal rivers.

Once mapping has been conducted statewide, consistent monitoring will be essential in understanding the status and trends of seagrass beds in the years to come. Monitoring will include continued mapping with field validation, as well as health parameter assessments. In efforts to reduce atmospheric carbon dioxide, seagrasses are recognized globally for their blue carbon potential. Continued mapping and monitoring will allow biologists to take important next steps in conserving New Jersey's seagrass species and mitigating climate change impacts.



An eelgrass meadow in Barnegat Bay.

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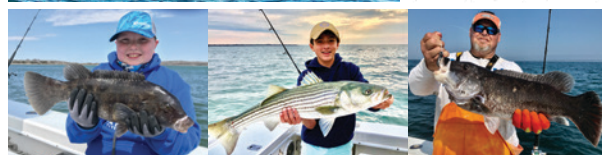
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Species Variety

Spotted Seatrout (*Cynoscion nebulosus*) & Weakfish (*Cynoscion regalis*)

Spotted seatrout are a mostly non-migratory species that can be found throughout the Atlantic coast but are most abundant south of the Chesapeake Bay. They spend most of their time in estuaries, and colder months in deeper nearshore waters. Due to their preference of warmer waters, it is not common to see spotted seatrout in New Jersey waters. However, with climate change continuing to alter our ocean temperatures, they have been known to show up throughout the Bureau of Marine Fisheries' sampling efforts. With climate change as a major influence, it is likely that we will see more spotted seatrout as the water continues to get warmer.

Spotted seatrout are often misreported (both recreationally and commercially) due to their similarities to weakfish. Far more prominent in New Jersey waters, weakfish are similar to spotted seatrout in body shape and coloring. The two species can be difficult to discern, but a few key differences can help to tell them apart. The easiest way to distinguish a weakfish from a spotted seatrout is to look at the spots. On the weakfish (below left), the spots never extend to the fins. On the spotted seatrout (below right), you can see how the spots along the body extend into the dorsal and caudal fins.

Weakfish are a more migratory species that span the Atlantic coast but are most prominent from New York southward to North Carolina. Similar to spotted seatrout, adult weakfish spawn in bays and estuaries during the warmer months and migrate south in the fall as water temperatures begin to decline. The two species also share similar habitat and food sources. Weakfish grow rapidly and mature at a young age, but their stock has faced a severe decline since the late 1990's.

With little to no catch, New Jersey is a *de minimis* state for spotted seatrout and is therefore not required to implement any monitoring requirements. Because of this, regulations are based on current weakfish management. With the increasing occurrence of spotted seatrout in New Jersey waters, New Jersey's Marine Fisheries Council has proposed separating the regulations and the

BMF is in the process of creating those species-specific regulations.

Atlantic Cobia (*Rachycentron canadum*)

Atlantic cobia are large, fast growing, pelagic predators, common to the southeast Atlantic coastal states and, up until recently, only an occasional visitor to the ocean waters off of New Jersey. As ocean water temperatures in the Northwest Atlantic continue to rise at one of the highest rates on the globe, the Atlantic Migratory Group of cobia have begun to expand their native range northward into New Jersey waters. New Jersey fishermen are starting to encounter these strong fighting game fish with more and more regularity, providing new opportunities for both hook and line and spearfishermen to add a new species to their catch list and bring home a fresh dinner.



An Atlantic cobia caught during the Ocean Stock Assessment Survey.

Cobia are becoming a frequent occurrence in recreational fishing surveys such as the Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (APAIS) and are more commonly being reported as landings by New Jersey's commercial fishermen. As the species' range continues to expand and fishing pressure increases within this expanded range, fisheries managers need to consider the impacts to ensure that the cobia population can continue to be harvested in a sustainable way that will not negatively impact the future health of cobia stocks.

In order to address these concerns, the ASMFC's Cobia Management Board has initiated a Benchmark Stock Assessment for Atlantic Cobia to better understand the biological and fisheries characteristics for this species. Based off the findings and recommendations from the Benchmark Stock Assessment, anticipated to be completed in early 2025, the Board can potentially initiate changes to the Atlantic Cobia Fishery Management Plan that will benefit both the fish and the fishermen as the species expands its range and becomes available to more fisheries in the mid-Atlantic up through New England.

Atlantic cobia could potentially serve as a test case for new management measures going forward as more game fish species from the south Atlantic expand their range northward into our waters. In the meantime, keep an eye out for these voracious predators as they swarm schools of bait alongside New Jersey's more commonly seen species such as bluefish and striped bass. They put up a great fight and make excellent table fare.

Atlantic Cod (*Gadus morhua*)

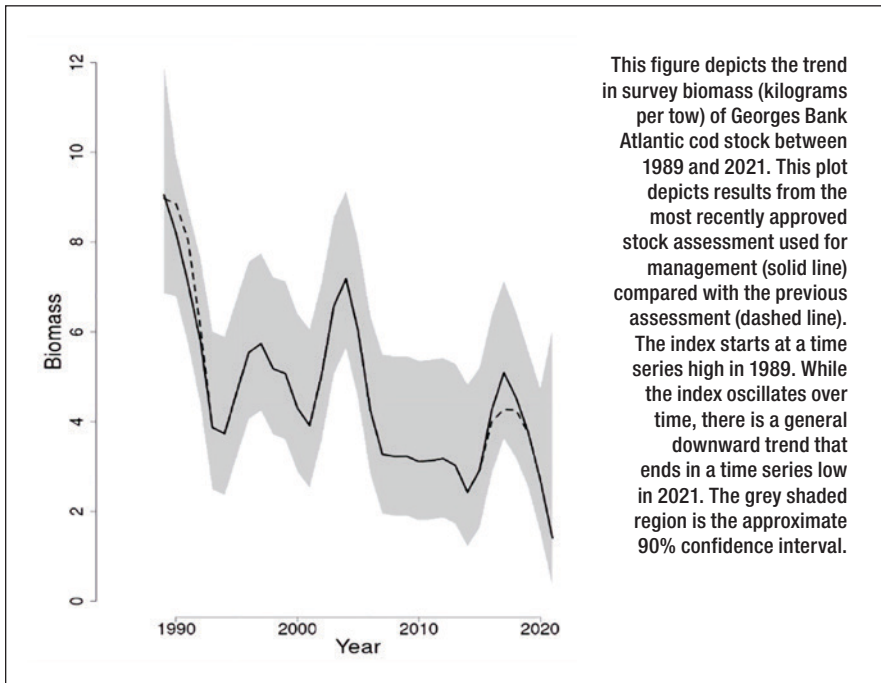
Atlantic cod are heavy bodied fish with a large head and distinct whisker-like structure (barbel) under their lower jaws that live near the ocean floor. They can live for more than 20 years, grow to over 50 inches, and weigh over 75 pounds! Cod is currently managed as two distinct stocks: Gulf of Maine and Georges Bank (GB); New Jersey is part of the GB stock. Recent research however suggests that there are actually four Atlantic Ocean stocks.

In 2023, New Jersey changed cod regulations, so they were identical in state (shore to 3 miles) and federal (greater than 3 miles from shore) waters in an effort to reduce fishing mortality and help rebuild the GB stock's abundance. In New Jersey, Atlantic cod landings generally tend to be low and variable, relative to other states, with most harvest occurring from federal waters in some years, and state waters in others. Historically, most harvest in New Jersey occurs between March and June.

According to the most recent stock assessment used for management, the GB stock is at abundance levels that are too low relative to where we want abundance, and fishing levels that are too high. Cod population declines have been attributed



Comparison of a weakfish (left) and spotted seatrout (right).



An Atlantic cod caught off the coast of New Jersey.

to fishing pressure, low recruitment, environmental conditions (climate change), predator and prey composition, and broadscale atmospheric conditions (NOAA 2023). A stock assessment scheduled for June 2024 will update the model used

for management advice and for providing stock status. Whether this assessment results in additional management changes for 2024 remains to be seen — please check our website for updates.

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Conclusion

Environmental changes in New Jersey's coastal waters serve as an important means to estimate the future stock status of local marine species. As the world around us continues to change, it is important for scientists to continue to monitor these species on a state- and coast-wide level. New Jersey works closely with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) and other east coast states to assess the stocks of many species and make management decisions when necessary. Recently, fishery management organizations from along the coast, including ASMFC and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC), have been exploring effective ways to manage issues related to climate change and shifts in fishery stock distribution. Changes in the environment have a significant impact on our ocean ecosystems and coastlines. Planning for the future is one of the best ways to prepare for these changes. For more information on this initiative, please visit: <https://www.mafmc.org/climate-change-scenario-planning>

By combining data collected from recreational and commercial stakeholders and scientists, New Jersey is prepared to manage any new species. Sound data collection pertaining to these species is important and the Marine Resources Administration is prepared to take on any challenges, if and when they come their way. 

Evolving Coastal Environment Contributors

Michael Celestino (Research Scientist), Nina Colagiovanni (Assistant Biologist), Greg Hinks (Principal Biologist), Samantha MacQuesten (Assistant Biologist), Brian Neilan (Principal Biologist), Jeff Normant (Supervising Biologist) and Jen Pyle (Senior Biologist)

Species Introductions: Evidence of an Evolving Coastline

Permit (*Trachinotus falcatus*)

Features: Gray, dark or iridescent blue back, shading to silver sides, possible golden tints on belly. Dorsal fin begins over anal fin. Dorsal, anal and caudal fins long and sloped back. Forehead sharply rises to a "hump" then slopes back. Compressed body that is deeper than Florida pompano. Caudal fin has a narrow fork. Small permit have teeth on their tongue (absent in pompano). Up to 2.6 feet in length.

Habitat: Massachusetts to Brazil, Gulf of Mexico, Bahamas, Antilles and Bermuda. In coastal waters. Adults are pelagic or near bottom in channels and over seagrass flats, reefs or mud bottoms.

Behavior: Spawn primarily in early summer and again in fall. Have a specialized plate at the back of their mouth that helps them crush hard-shelled animals such as clams and crabs. Feed on small fish and invertebrates.



Florida Pompano (*Trachinotus carolinus*)

Features: Dark greenish gray on back, shading to silver sides and yellowish coloration on belly. Dorsal fin begins in front of anal fin. Dorsal, anal and caudal fins are short and upright. Forehead slopes gently backward. Deep, compressed body with a small mouth. Caudal fin with a wider fork than permit. Up to 2 feet in length.

Habitat: Massachusetts to Florida, Gulf of Mexico to Brazil. Along sandy beaches and in brackish bays and inlets. Adults are pelagic.

Behavior: Spawn offshore March to September. Feed on mollusks and crustaceans, especially sand fleas.



Crevalle Jack (*Caranx hippos*)

Features: Back bluish green to greenish-gold, belly silver or yellowish. Prominent black spot on gill cover. Black spot at the base of each pectoral fin. Second dorsal fin and anal fin almost identical in size. No scales on throat. Body deep, front of head steep. Up to 5 feet in length.

Habitat: Nova Scotia to Florida, Gulf of Mexico, Bahamas, Greater Antilles to Uruguay. In brackish to marine waters.

Behavior: Peak spawning occurs offshore March through September. Tolerate a wide range of salinities. Feed mainly on small fish.



Gray (Mangrove) Snapper (*Lutjanus griseus*)

Features: Dark brown or gray in color, with red-orange spots in bars along the sides. Two large canine teeth near front of upper jaw. Anchor-shaped vomerine tooth patch. Dorsal fins with dark or reddish borders. Young have dark stripe from snout, through eye, to upper edge of gill cover. Juveniles have blue line below eyes. Up to 2 feet in length.

Habitat: Massachusetts to Florida, Gulf of Mexico, Bahamas, Caribbean Sea to Brazil. Around mangroves, rocky areas, coral reefs, estuaries, tidal creeks and river mouths.

Behavior: Spawn June through August. Feed on crustaceans and small fish.



Southern Kingfish (*Menticirrhus americanus*)

Features: Back is grayish brown, fading to silvery sides and belly. 7 to 8 indistinct diagonal dark blotches on sides. Scales on underside are nearly the same size as body scales. Barbel on lower jaw. Similar to Northern kingfish, which has a distinct "V" mark above pectoral fins. Up to 2 feet in length.

Habitat: Massachusetts to Southern Florida, Gulf of Mexico, Western Caribbean Sea to Brazil. Over sandy mud to hard sand bottoms in shallow coastal waters.

Behavior: Thought to prefer high wave action areas such as sand bars where the crashing waves dislodge and suspend small crabs and other small crustaceans. Feed on fish and invertebrates.



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Regulations in **red** are new this year.

Regulations remain in effect until changed. For the most current regulations, go to dep.nj.gov/njfw/fishing/marine/seasons-and-regulations/.

Highlights of Regulation Changes:

- The recreational summer flounder regulations have been modified to include an open season May 4 - September 25. The possession limit for all marine waters is 3 fish at 18 inches, with the exception of the following areas: Delaware Bay and Tributaries is 3 fish at 17 inches; Island Beach State Park is 2 fish at 16 inches.
- The recreational scup regulations have been modified to include an open season Jan. 1 - June 30 and Sept. 1 - Dec. 31 with a thirty-fish possession limit. The minimum size limit remains 10 inches.

New Jersey recreational marine regulations apply to all fish species when they are possessed in state waters or landed in New Jersey regardless of where they are caught. Saltwater anglers must comply with the requirements of the New Jersey Saltwater Recreational Registry Program. See page 22.

Resource Information

Anyone who takes fisheries resources may be required to provide information on the species, number, weight or other information pertinent to management of resources. Anglers are encouraged to report all fishing activity after each trip. Visit NJDEP Fish & Wildlife's Volunteer Angler Survey at dep.nj.gov/njfw/fishing/marine/volunteer-angler-survey/.

Methods of Recreational Fishing

No person shall take, catch, kill or attempt to take, catch or kill any fish within the marine waters of the state by any means except in the manner commonly known as angling with hand line or rod and line unless specifically provided for by statute or regulation.

Delaware Fishing License Requirement

A Delaware fishing license is required for all non-resident anglers aged 16 and over fishing either fresh or tidal waters of Delaware. Delaware fishing license information can be found at <https://dnrec.alpha.delaware.gov/fish-wildlife/licenses/>.

New York Fishing Registry Requirement

New York offers a free registry to all marine anglers fishing in New York. Visit dec.ny.gov/permits/54950.html.

Bait Fish

No license is required to take bait fish for personal use with the following gear:

1. Dip nets 24 inches diameter or less for taking Atlantic herring only for live bait. The taking or possession of river herring (alewife and blueback herring) is prohibited.
2. Bait seines 50 feet long or less.
3. Cast nets 20 feet in diameter or less.
4. Lift or umbrella nets four feet square or less.
5. Not more than five killipots.
6. Not more than two miniature fykes or pots for the taking of eels for bait.

Fish taken in this manner may not be sold or used for barter unless the angler is in possession of a commercial bait net license.

No person shall take or attempt to take fish by any means from the Deal Lake flume, Lake Takanassee spillway or Wreck Pond spillway on any Monday, Wednesday or Friday during the months of April and May.

Wanton Waste Prohibited

Fish of any species which are purposely killed shall become part of the angler's daily possession limit and shall not be returned to the water from which they were taken. This does not apply to fish which are released alive and subsequently die, but does apply even to species without size/possession limits.

Spearfishing

Spearfishing may be conducted by means of a spear, harpoon or other missile while completely submerged in the marine waters of the state for any species, except lobster.

Persons who fish with a spear for species with size limits are reminded that it is their responsibility to ensure the fish meets the minimum size limits before being killed or injured.

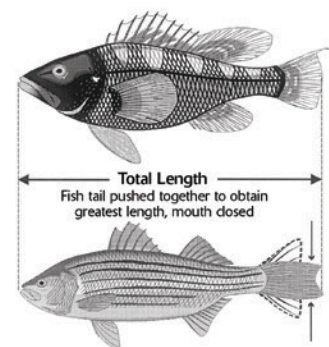
Filleting

The filleting at sea of all fish with a size limit, or any species of flatfish, is prohibited except for summer flounder; see *Summer Flounder*, page 18. Anglers shall possess no parts of any fish caught on a previous fishing trip. Party boats may fillet fish at sea if they obtain a Special Fillet Permit available from NJDEP Fish & Wildlife's Marine Resources Administration.

Be the First to Know! Get on the List

The Marine Fisheries and Shellfish e-mail lists, that is. Get the latest information on NJDEP Fish & Wildlife events, public hearings and other marine resource issues. Our ten other lists help you get the most out of New Jersey's fish and wildlife resources. Sign up today at: dep.nj.gov/njfw/education/email-lists/

Fish Measurement



1. Lay fish flat on top of, or alongside a measuring rule, not measured over the body.
2. Fish are measured from the tip of the snout (mouth closed) to the longest part of the tail.

Prohibited Species

It is illegal to take, possess, land, purchase, or sell any of the following species:

- Atlantic sturgeon
- Diamondback terrapin
- Shortnose sturgeon
- River herring (alewife and blueback herring; see herring illustrations, page 15)
- Various shark species (See Sharks on page 19)

Horseshoe Crabs

The harvest of horseshoe crabs is prohibited. Possession of horseshoe crabs is also prohibited except for those individuals holding a scientific collecting permit for research and education and those fishermen that can provide suitable documentation that the horseshoe crabs in their possession were harvested outside of New Jersey.

Sea Turtles & Marine Mammals

It is illegal to intentionally molest, kill or possess sea turtles, including terrapins, or marine mammals, or to possess any part thereof.

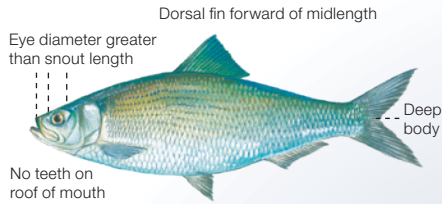
Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact

Beware!

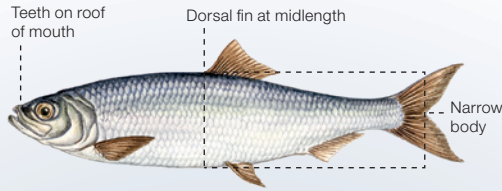
New Jersey participates in the Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact which means that a violator with repeat convictions of New Jersey marine fishing laws may face license suspensions in participating states.



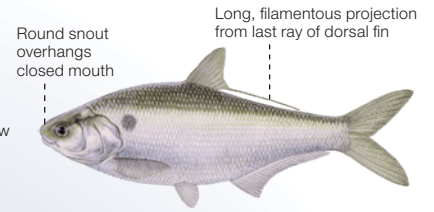
Herring



Alewife (a river herring)



Atlantic Herring



Gizzard Shad



American Shad



Blueback Herring (a river herring)



Hickory Shad

Alewife, American Shad, Blueback Herring and Hickory Shad illustrations ©Duane Raver; Atlantic Herring illustration ©Victor Young/NH. Fish and Game Department; Gizzard Shad illustration courtesy of Texas Parks and Wildlife Department ©2012.



Atlantic Bonito



Atlantic Mackerel



Northern Kingfish



Northern Puffer



Northern Seabroin



Oyster Toadfish



Spot



White Perch







State Size and Possession Limits








FINFISH

Regulations in **red** are new this year.

2024 New Jersey Recreational Fishing Seasons, Minimum Size and Possession Limits

Regulations remain in effect until changed. For the most current regulations, go to NJFishandWildlife.com. Regulations in **red** are new this year. See page 14 for how to measure fish. **Note:** No species of fish with a minimum size limit listed below may be filleted or cleaned at sea. Party boats licensed to carry 15 or more passengers may apply for a permit to fillet these species. See also *Summer Flounder*, page 18.




		Open Season	Minimum Length (total length except sharks)	Harvest & Possession Limit (per person unless noted)	Remarks
AMERICAN EEL					
		No Closed Season	9"	25 ^a	a: Except 50 fish harvest/possession limit for party/ charter boat employees.
BLACK DRUM					
		No Closed Season	16"	3	
BLACK SEA BASS					
		May 17–June 19	12.5"	10	Black sea bass are measured along the midline from the snout to the end of the central portion of the tail, not to include the tail filament.
		July 1–Aug 31	12.5"	1	
		Oct 1–Oct 31	12.5"	10	
		Nov 1–Dec 31	12.5"	15	
BLUEFISH					
		No Closed Season	None	5 fish per person while fishing from a party/charter vessel ^b 3 fish per person for all other anglers	b: vessel must have a valid federal party/charter permit and be captained by a properly credentialed operator with a valid US Coast Guard endorsement. More information at dep.nj.gov/wp-content/uploads/njfw/bluefish4hire.pdf
COBIA					
		No Closed Season	37"	1 fish per vessel	
COD, ATLANTIC					
		Jan 1–May 31 and Sept 1–Dec 31	23"	5	Please check website for possible Atlantic cod regulation changes during 2024: dep.nj.gov/njfw/fishing/marine/ seasons-and-regulations/
HADDOCK					
		No Closed Season	18"	No Limit	
POLLOCK					
		No Closed Season	19"	No Limit	

		Open Season	Minimum Length (total length except sharks)	Harvest & Possession Limit (per person unless noted)	Remarks
RED DRUM					
		No Closed Season	18" to less than 27"	1	
RIVER HERRING					
	Blueback Herring	No Open Season	None	0	The taking or possession of any river herring in New Jersey is prohibited.
	Alewife				
SCUP (PORGY)					
		Jan 1–June 30 Sept 1–Dec 31	10"	30	
SHAD					
	Delaware River & tributaries	No Closed Season	None	6 (maximum of 2 American shad)	
	American Shad	No Closed Season	None	6 (no American shad may be harvested or possessed)	
	Hickory Shad				
SPANISH MACKEREL					
		No Closed Season	14"	10	
STRIPED BASS OR HYBRID STRIPED BASS					
	Delaware River & tributaries (Calhoun St. Bridge to Salem River & tributaries)	March 1–March 31 and June 1–Dec 31	28" - 31"	1	No person may take, attempt to take, or have in possession any striped bass from closed waters. Anglers participating in the Striped Bass Bonus Program may harvest one striped bass per permit at 24" to less than 28" in length from May 15 to December 31. It is illegal to take, attempt to take, catch or kill any striped bass from or in any marine waters of this state, by means of a net of any description, or by any methods other than angling with a hook and line or by spear fishing. Sale of striped bass in New Jersey is prohibited.
	Delaware River & tributaries (upstream of Calhoun St. Bridge)	March 1–Dec 31	28" - 31"	1	
	Atlantic Ocean (0–3 nautical miles from shore)	No Closed Season	28" - 31"	1	
	All other marine waters	March 1–Dec 31	28" - 31"	1	
	3–200 nautical miles (Federal waters)	Prohibited	X	0	Note: It is illegal to gaff or attempt to gaff, any striped bass at any time. Non-offset circle hooks are required when fishing with bait. See page 5 for more information.

State Size and Possession Limits

FINFISH

Regulations in **red** are new this year.

		Open Season	Minimum Length (total length except sharks)	Harvest & Possession Limit (per person unless noted)	Remarks
SUMMER FLOUNDER (FLUKE)					
	All waters except those mentioned below	May 4—Sept 25	18"	3	c: Applies to Delaware Bay and tributaries, west of COLREGS line delineating Delaware Bay from Atlantic Ocean but does not include waters of Cape May Canal east of Cape May Ferry Terminal. Transport of summer flounder caught in Delaware Bay, greater than or equal to 17" but less than 18", may occur in waters east of Cape May Ferry Terminal to George Redding Bridge (Route 47) located at entrance of Wildwood provided all fishing gear aboard the vessel is stowed with rigs removed; vessel may not stop to fish for any species. d: Shore-based fishing is defined as fishing from a pier, jetty, beach, bank or marsh. Note: Anglers may fillet one legal-sized summer flounder from their daily possession limit catch for use as bait. This carcass, commonly known as the rack, shall be kept intact so it can be measured for compliance with the minimum size limit. Anglers shall not be in possession of any parts of any summer flounder caught on a previous fishing trip; only fish just caught on the current outing.
	Delaware Bay & tributaries ^c	May 4—Sept 25	17"	3	
	Island Beach State Park, shore fishing ^d	May 4—Sept 25	16"	2	
TAUTOG (BLACKFISH)					
		Jan 1—Feb 28	15"	4	
		April 1—April 30	15"	4	
		Aug 1—Nov 15	15"	1	
		Nov 16—Dec 31	15"	5	
WEAKFISH					
		No Closed Season	13"	1	
WINTER FLOUNDER					
		March 1—Dec 31	12"	2	

Quick Reference for Popular Fish!

For New Jersey’s most popular recreational species, see the quick reference chart of open seasons and regulations: dep.nj.gov/njfw/wp-content/uploads/njfw/2024-recreational-seasons-summary-chart.pdf



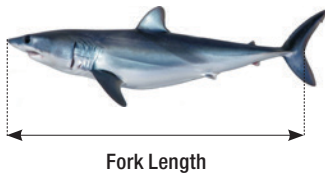


DEP Action Line, 24 Hrs.

The Department has a toll-free telephone hotline number you can use to report environmental incidents, abuses, and complaints in New Jersey.

(877) WARN-DEP
(877) 927-6337

SHARKS



Fork Length

Shark image courtesy of
Dr. William Driggers, III/NMFS

	Open Season	Minimum Length (fork length)	Harvest & Possession Limit (per person unless noted)	Remarks
Aggregated large coastal group Hammerhead group	Jan 1–May 14 and July 16–Dec 31	Atlantic sharpnose, bonnethead, and smoothhound: None Hammerheads 78" All other retainable sharks: 54"	Prohibited sharks: Zero allowed possession Shortfin mako: Zero allowed possession Smoothhound: No limit All others: One per person per trip	Use of non-offset, corrodible, non-stainless steel circle hooks is required, except when fishing with flies or artificial lures. Does not include dogfish. See below for a list of prohibited species.
Non-blacknose small coastal group	No Closed Season			
Blacknose group	No Closed Season			
Pelagic group	No Closed Season			

Sharks

Some species of sharks may be harvested by recreational fishermen from the shore or from a boat only by hand line or rod and reel. If a shark is caught but not kept, it must be released immediately. Anglers should access the following National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration website, [fisheries.noaa.gov/resources/outreach-materials](https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resources/outreach-materials), to download helpful materials such as the NOAA Fisheries *Shark Identification Placard* and the *Careful Catch and Release Brochure*, which provide a pictorial guide to identifying sharks and tips on handling and releasing large saltwater pelagic fish.

All sharks harvested must have heads, tails and fins attached naturally to the carcass until landed, although anglers may still gut and bleed the carcass. Filleting sharks at sea is prohibited. Refer to the illustration, above, for the proper measurement of fork length.

The 2024 shark regulations complement existing federal shark regulations. However, the following additional measures are required for state waters:

- In state waters, there is no minimum size limit for non-blacknose small coastal sharks and blacknose sharks in the recreational fishery, but federal regulations include a 54-inch minimum size limit for blacknose and finetooth small coastal sharks.
- All sharks within the Aggregated Large Coastal and Hammerhead groups will have a closed season within state waters from May 15 through July 15 to protect spawning female sharks during the pupping season.

It is required to use non-offset, corrodible, non-stainless steel circle hooks, except when fishing with flies or artificial lures, when fishing for sharks recreationally.

Note: To differentiate sharks from dogfish—dogfish have flat, tiny teeth; spiny dogfish have dorsal spines in front of the dorsal fins. Neither are present in other sharks.

Shark Species That May Be Kept (Authorized Species): **Aggregated Large Coastal Shark**—blacktip, bull, lemon, nurse, tiger, spinner; **Hammerhead Shark**—scalped hammerhead, smooth hammerhead, great hammerhead; **Non-Blacknose Small Coastal Shark**—Atlantic sharpnose, bonnethead, finetooth; **Blacknose Shark**—blacknose; **Pelagic Shark**—blue, porbeagle, and common thresher.

Shark Species That MUST Be Released (Prohibited Species): Atlantic angel, basking, bigeye sand tiger, bigeye sixgill, bigeye thresher, bignose, Caribbean reef, Caribbean sharpnose, dusky, Galapagos, longfin mako, narrowtooth, night, oceanic whitetip, sandbar, sand tiger, sevengill, silky, sixgill, smalltail, whale and white.

Federal Recreational Fishing Regulations

For current federal waters regulations (3–200 nautical miles), refer to the following agencies:

- NOAA Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Information: [fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/atlantic-highly-migratory-species](https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/atlantic-highly-migratory-species)
- NOAA Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Permit Shop: hmspermits.noaa.gov/
- Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council: [mafmc.org/regulations](https://www.mafmc.org/regulations)
- South Atlantic Fishery Management Council: [safmc.net/regulations/](https://www.safmc.net/regulations/)

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State Size and Possession Limits

CRUSTACEANS & MOLLUSKS

Regulations in *red* are new this year.

		Open Season	Minimum Length (total length except sharks)	Harvest & Possession Limit (per person unless noted)	Remarks
LOBSTER, AMERICAN					
		See below for closed seasons	3 3/8"	6	A person shall not use any spear, gig, gaff or other penetrating device as a method of capture of lobsters.
BLUE CRAB					
	peeler or shedder	No Closed Season ^e	3"	1 Bushel	e: Unless using non-collapsible, Chesapeake-style crab pots, trot lines or crab dredges — see below for additional information.
	soft	No Closed Season ^e	3 1/2"		
	hard	No Closed Season ^e	4 1/2"		
HARD CLAM					
		No Closed Season ^f	1 1/2"	150 clams	f: Non-resident license valid only June–Sept. See water classification chart information at https://www.state.nj.us/dep/wms/bmw/nssphome.html

Crustaceans

American Lobster

The legal possession size limit of whole lobsters, measured from the rear of the eye socket along a line parallel to the center line of the body shell to the rear of the body shell, shall be not less than 3 3/8 inches nor greater than 5 1/4 inches. Lobster parts may not be possessed at sea or landed. There is no harvest or possession of lobster in Lobster Management Area 4 from April 30–May 31 and Lobster Management Area 5 from February 1–March 31.

The possession limit is six lobsters per person. No person shall possess any lobster with eggs attached or from which eggs have been removed or any female lobster with a v-notched tail, as illustrated below.

Special Lobster Restrictions:

No person shall use, leave, deploy, or tend any lobster, fish or conch pot within an artificial reef located in state waters except in areas designated as a full access zones. Within these designated full access zones lobster, fish and conch pots shall be used, left, deployed or tended only between sunrise and sunset.

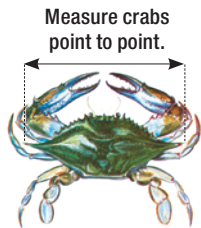
For information about lobster pot deployment and New Jersey Reef Full Access Zone Locations, go to dep.nj.gov/wp-content/uploads/njfw/marine-letter-lobster.pdf

The use of spears, gigs, gaffs or other penetrating devices as a method of capture for lobsters is prohibited. A recreational lobster pot license is required to use pots or traps to capture lobsters. For details call (609) 748-2020. Lobsters taken recreationally may not be sold or offered for sale.



Blue Crabs

- Crabs may be taken recreationally with hand lines, manually operated collapsible traps or scoop nets without a license. A non-commercial crab pot license is required for the use of not more than two non-collapsible Chesapeake-style crab pots (see illustration on page 21) or two trot lines to harvest crabs. See page 21 for the non-commercial crab pot license information.
- It is illegal to harvest or possess more than one bushel of crabs per day per person or offer for sale any crabs without having in your possession a valid commercial crabbing license.
- Minimum size for crabs that may be harvested (measured from point to point of shell) are as follows:
 - Peeler or shedder crab: 3 inches
 - Soft crab: 3 1/2 inches
 - Hard crab: 4 1/2 inches
- All female crabs with eggs attached and all undersized crabs shall be returned to the water immediately.
- Recreational trot lines shall not exceed 150 feet in length with a maximum of 25 baits.
- All pots and trot lines shall be marked with the 9-digit identification number (CID) of the owner.
- All crab pots must be tended at least once every 72 hours.
- No floating line may be used on any crab pot or crab pot buoy.
- No crab pot shall be placed in any area that would obstruct or impede navigation or in any creek less than 50 feet wide.
- Only the owner or a law enforcement officer may raise or remove contents of a legally set fishing device.



- Crabs taken with a bait seine may be retained for personal use only if the angler possesses a bait net license, and may not be bartered or sold unless the fisherman possesses a commercial crab license.
- No crabs may be harvested from the Newark Bay Complex. For more information, see *Health Advisory* on page 30.
- Crab Pot/Trot Line seasons:** Delaware Bay and tributaries: April 6–Dec. 4. All other waters: March 15–Nov. 30. The following waters, **and their tributaries**, are **closed** to the use of crab pots and trot lines: Cumberland Co.: Cohansey River and creeks named Back, Cedar, Nantuxent, Fortescue, Oranoken and Dividing; Cape May Co.: West and Bidwell Creeks and the Cape May Canal; Atlantic Co.: Hammock Cove (Dry Bay); Ocean Co.: on east shore of Barnegat Bay, that area of Sedge Islands Wildlife Management Area enclosed by a line drawn from the northern bank of Fishing Creek on Island Beach State Park to the northern tip of the Sedge Islands (Hensler Island), then south from point to point along the western side of the Sedge Islands WMA and terminating on the most southwestern point of Island Beach State Park.
- Crab Dredge Seasons:** Delaware Bay and tributaries: Jan. 1 through April 15 and Nov. 15 through Dec. 31. All other waters: Jan. 1 through March 31, Dec. 1 through Dec. 31. Fish and Wildlife will issue a non-commercial crab dredge license for the harvest of not more than one bushel of crabs per day during the crab dredge season. Crabs so taken may not be sold or offered for barter. There is a fee of \$15 for this non-commercial crab dredge license. See page 21 for details on purchasing a non-commercial crab dredge license.

Notice: All non-collapsible Chesapeake-style crab pots (see illustration on page 21) must be constructed to include a biodegradable panel designed to create an opening to allow crabs and

other organisms to escape if the pot is lost or abandoned. All non-collapsible Chesapeake-style crab pots set in any manmade lagoon or any water body less than 150 feet wide must also include a turtle excluder device inside all pot entrance funnels.

Crab Pot License Information

Recreational Crab Pot/Trot Line Licenses and Non-Commercial Crab Dredge Licenses are available for purchase online at: <https://nj.aspirafocus.com/internetsales> or at any NJDEP Fish & Wildlife-certified license agent including those license agents listed below. For the most current list of NJDEP Fish & Wildlife-certified license agents, go to dep.nj.gov/njfw/licenses-and-permits/license-agents/.

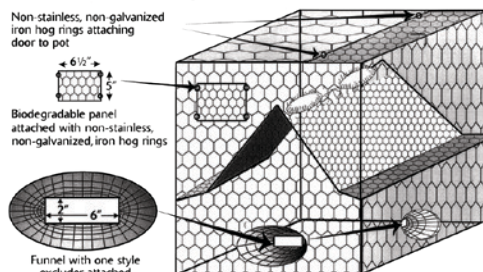
- **Recreational crab pot/trot line license:** \$2
Harvest limit: one bushel per day. Refer to the shellfish regulations on page 20 for all recreational crabbing regulations.
- **Non-commercial crab dredge license:** \$15
Harvest limit: one bushel per day during the crab dredge season. See page 20 for recreational crab regulations.

Terrapin Excluders and Biodegradable Panels Are Required on Chesapeake-Style Crab Pots

NOTE: It is illegal to catch or take diamondback terrapins in New Jersey. Users of non-collapsible, Chesapeake-style crab pots note: all pots set in any body of water less than 150-feet wide at mean low tide or in any manmade lagoon **MUST** include diamondback terrapin excluder devices. Non-collapsible, Chesapeake-style crab pots set in any body of water **MUST** include biodegradable panels.

These crab pot modifications will help reduce the unintentional drowning of terrapins allowing these and other species to escape in the event that pots are lost or abandoned. Terrapin excluder devices must be no larger than 2-inch high by 6-inch wide and securely fastened inside each funnel entrance. Biodegradable panels must measure at least 6½-inch wide by 5-inch high and be located in the upper section of the crab pot. The panel must be constructed of, or fastened to the pot with, wood lath, cotton, hemp, sisal or jute twine not greater than ⅜" diameter, or non-stainless steel, uncoated ferrous metal not greater than ⅜" diameter. The door or a side of the pot may serve as the biodegradable panel **ONLY** if it is fastened to the pot with any of the material specified above. Crabbers should note: **ALL** non-collapsible, Chesapeake-style crab pots **MUST** be licensed and marked with the 9-digit identification number (CID) of the owner.

Chesapeake-Style Crab Pot

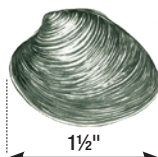


Mollusks

1. All persons must be licensed to harvest any shellfish. See *Shellfish License Information*. Shellfish means any species of benthic mollusks (except conch) including hard and soft clams, oysters, surf clams, bay scallops and mussels.
2. It is illegal to harvest shellfish from condemned waters, even for bait purposes. It is also illegal to harvest shellfish including surf clams from beaches adjacent to water classified as condemned. Shellfish water classification charts are available from license agents or any state shellfish office. Charts are updated annually.
3. Shellfish harvesting is prohibited before sunrise and after sunset. Shellfish harvest is also prohibited on Sundays except in the seasonally approved areas of the Navesink and Shrewsbury rivers, when harvesting is permitted between Nov. 1 and April 30.
4. Harvesting shellfish on public grounds is restricted to the use of hand implements.
5. It is illegal to harvest shellfish from leased grounds. These grounds are delineated by stakes or buoys set by the lease holder. Charts of the leases may be examined at NJDEP Fish & Wildlife's Nacote Creek or Delaware Bay shellfish offices during regular business hours. Invasion onto leased grounds is punishable by penalties up to \$3,000 and loss of all equipment.

Recreational Shellfishing

1. No holder of any recreational shellfish license may take more than a total of 150 shellfish (in aggregate) per day. See *Shellfish License Information*.
2. It is illegal to dredge shellfish on public grounds. Use of hand implements are the only legal harvest methods.
3. The minimum size of hard clams that may be harvested is 1½ inches in length. Clams less than 1½ inches in length must immediately be returned to the bottom from which they were taken. Specific seasons, regulations and size limits exist for oyster beds in Great Bay, Delaware Bay, plus the Mullica, Great Egg Harbor and Tuckahoe rivers. Check with the nearest shellfish office (Nacote Creek or Delaware Bay) for these detailed regulations.
4. Shells taken in the process of harvesting oysters must be culled from the live oysters and returned immediately to the area from where they were taken.




Shellfish License Information

A shellfish license (formerly called clamming license) is required for harvesting all species of benthic mollusks (except conchs, addressed in the commercial marine fisheries regulations), including, but not limited to, hard and soft clams, surf clams, oysters, bay scallops and mussels. Other specific commercial shellfish licenses exist such as surf clam dredge, Delaware Bay oyster dredge boat and Delaware Bay licenses to harvest in Areas 1, 2 and 3.

Anyone engaged in any shellfish harvesting activity with someone holding a commercial shellfish license must also possess their own commercial shellfish license.

For shellfishing regulations, see page 20. **Prior to harvesting any shellfish, you must consult the Shellfish Growing Water Classification Charts** published by DEP's Bureau of Marine Water Monitoring, available at shellfish license agents, state shellfish offices, online at nj.gov/dep/bmw/nssphome.html#charts or call Marine Water Monitoring at (609) 748-2000. Purchase shellfish licenses online at nj.aspirafocus.com/internetsales.

Shellfish License Fees

- **Resident recreational shellfish:** \$10
Harvest limit: 150 shellfish (in aggregate) per day. Sale of catch prohibited.
- **Non-resident recreational shellfish:** \$20
Harvest limit: 150 shellfish (in aggregate) per day. Sale of catch prohibited. License valid only during June, July, August and September.
- **Juvenile recreational shellfish:** \$2
For persons under 14 years of age. Subject to same restrictions as resident or nonresident adult recreational license holders.
- **Resident commercial shellfish:** \$50
Unlimited harvest. Shellfish may be sold only to certified dealers.
- **Non-resident commercial shellfish:** \$250
Unlimited harvest. Shellfish may be sold only to certified dealers.
- **Resident senior citizen recreational shellfish license:** FREE lifetime license (\$2 application fee). NJ residents age 62 years or older. Harvest limit: 150 shellfish (in aggregate) per day. Sale of shellfish prohibited.
- **Disabled veterans:** Fish and Wildlife-certified disabled veterans are eligible for free shellfish license at any shellfish license agent location. To become certified, call (609) 984-6213. 

Shellfish and Non-Commercial Crab Pot License Agents

Current listing now available online at dep.nj.gov/njfw/licenses-and-permits/license-agents/

Note: All license agents statewide can now sell all license and permit privileges.

Tips for Releasing Fish Unharmed

Proper handling and releasing techniques reduce fish mortality.

- Land fish quickly, except when retrieving from depths of 40-feet or more. Fighting a fish to exhaustion increases mortality as does rapidly bringing fish up through the changing water pressure and temperature gradients.
- Minimize the effect of barotrauma, which occurs when gases expand faster than they can diffuse due to decreasing pressure during ascent through the water column. For more information about barotrauma and how to release fish safely visit: fisheries.noaa.gov/national/resources-fishing/catch-and-release-best-practices.
- Keep fish to be released in the water as much as possible. Plan ahead with tools and camera.
- Minimize physical injury. Do not touch gills or eyes. Support the weight of the fish along the length of its body. Do not allow fish to flop around on deck.
- Carefully remove hooks using a dehooker or needle-nose pliers.
- Use non-stainless hooks, which rust away quickly if one must be left in a gut-hooked fish. Be prepared with a long-reach tool to cut the leader at the hook, close to the hook's eyelet.
- To bring a fish out of the water momentarily, use a neoprene net or one of knotless nylon. Handle the fish carefully using wet hands, wet cotton gloves or similar material to minimize loss of the fish's protective slime layer.
- To revive lethargic fish, hold in a normal, upright position. Move the fish forward in an "S" or figure-8 pattern so that water flows over the gills only from front to back.
- Use circle hooks (non-offset) for species that bite and flee, such as striped bass, weakfish or sea bass. Consider pinching hook barbs with pliers.

New Jersey Saltwater Recreational Registry Program (NJSRRP)

ATTENTION: Recreational Saltwater Anglers

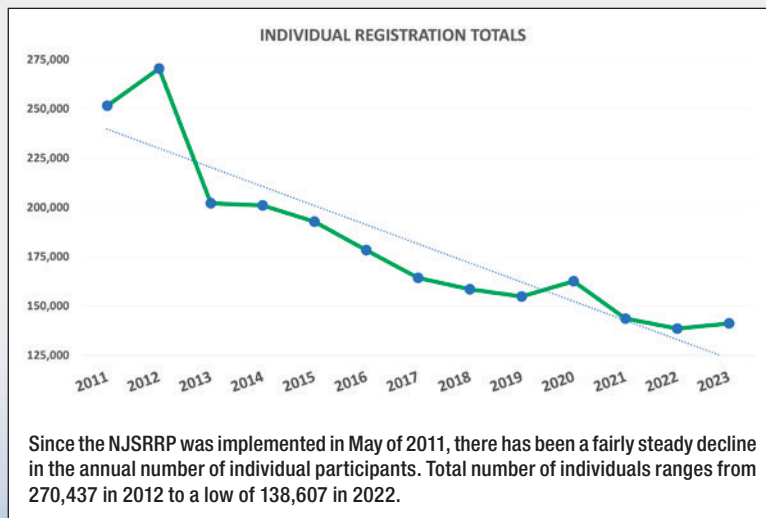
Register. It's free and required!

New for 2024: Saltwater Registrations can now be obtained and reprinted online at NJFishandWildlife.com/licensesalesite.htm, where all other Fish and Wildlife licenses and permits are available.

The saltwater registry acts as a current contact list for mail and telephone surveys. Participation in the New Jersey Saltwater Recreational Registry Program (NJSRRP) is vital in achieving accurate recreational fishing estimates, helping to ensure healthy fisheries for future generations.

Do your part to help maintain sustainable fisheries and join the thousands of other anglers who have already registered with the New Jersey Saltwater Recreational Registry Program. In 2023, the NJSRRP had 141,216 individual registrants and 677 for-hire vessels. The total number of individuals registered was at an all-time low in 2022, with a slight uptick in 2023. The number of registered for-hire vessels decreased by 55 in 2023.

* Anglers are reminded that registrations expire at the end of each calendar year and must be renewed annually. For more information on the **NJ Saltwater Recreational Registry Program** and to register, visit saltwaterregistry.nj.gov.



Marine Fisheries: Recreational Surveys

Be Counted...

You may see NJDEP Fish & Wildlife interviewers at marine public access fishing sites conducting the Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (APAIS). The survey targets marine recreational anglers to obtain information about their fishing effort and catch. The more data collected, the more successful the survey becomes for estimating overall catch, which is an integral factor for managing fisheries.

Marine Fisheries staff are eager to speak with fishing clubs/groups about the importance of the APAIS. We rely heavily on our valued anglers, creating a joint effort to preserve the state's natural resources. Invite us to a group meeting or event. Contact Maryellen Gordon at Maryellen.Gordon@dep.nj.gov. We look forward to meeting you!

NJDEP Fish & Wildlife staff continue to conduct the For-Hire Telephone Survey annually from March through December. Weekly calls are made to vessel operators regarding the previous week's trips. This data is used to estimate fishing effort in the for-hire sector and is combined with APAIS data. 2,132 vessels were contacted averaging approximately 50 vessels per week with just over a 47% response rate during 2023.

If you're not contacted directly while out fishing, you can submit an easy, online fishing report after each saltwater trip to the Recreational Saltwater Volunteer Angler Survey at dep.nj.gov/njfw/fishing/marine/volunteer-angler-survey/. Your reports have a *real* impact on how our oceans are managed.

APAIS Totals 2023

Month	Site Assignments	Charter Intercepts	Private/Rental Intercepts	Shore Intercepts	Total Intercepts
March	60	0	15	19	34
April	91	51	340	187	578
May	177	92	474	283	849
June	176	127	540	477	1,144
July	182	108	554	370	1,032
August	181	211	591	394	1,196
September	167	42	306	207	555
October	167	41	322	219	582
November	154	95	543	259	897
December	141	45	153	153	351
	1,496	812	3,838	2,568	7,218

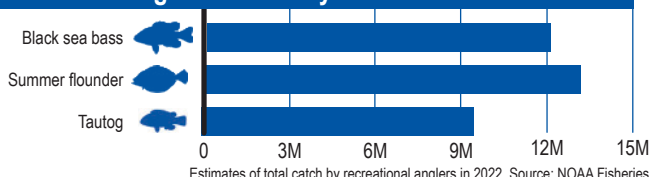
* Out of 1496 assignments, NJ completed 1466. There were 30 cancelled assignments due to weather emergencies and/or lack of availability.

Your Fishing Counts!

When you **share information** about your saltwater fishing trip with NOAA Fisheries through NJDEP Fish & Wildlife field interviewers, you play a **key role** in supporting **sustainable fisheries**.

Please note: Field interviewers play no role in law enforcement. We value your participation and privacy. Any personal information collected is kept confidential.

What's biting in New Jersey?



We are committed to continually evaluating and improving our data collection methods to provide the most representative estimates.

One of America's favorite pastimes, saltwater recreational fishing contributes **hundreds of millions of dollars annually** to New Jersey's coastal economies and working waterfronts:

\$724
million
sales



\$296
million
income



NOAA
FISHERIES

countmyfish.noaa.gov

Sales and income: NOAA Fisheries' Fisheries Economics of the U.S.
Photo: NOAA Fisheries



New Jersey: Stock Status & Management Updates

Species	Status	Next or Recent Action
American Lobster	SNE stock depleted; Not overfishing	Benchmark assessment 2025
American Shad	Depleted; Overfishing status unknown	Benchmark assessment 2020
Atlantic Croaker	Overfished and overfishing status unknown	Benchmark assessment 2024
Atlantic Striped Bass	Overfished; Not overfishing	Update assessments 2024 & 2026
Black Drum	Not overfished; Not overfishing	Benchmark assessment 2022
Black Sea Bass	Not overfished; Not overfishing	Management assessment 2024
Bluefish	Not overfished; Not overfishing	Update assessment 2025
Coastal Sharks	Varies by species	asmfc.org/species/coastal-sharks
Cobia	Not overfished; Not overfishing	Benchmark assessment 2025
Horseshoe Crab	Status unknown; Moratorium since 2008	Update assessment 2024
Scup	Not overfished; Not overfishing	Update assessment 2025
Spanish Mackerel	Not overfished; Not overfishing	Update assessment 2022
Spiny Dogfish	Not overfished; Not overfishing	Update assessments 2023 & 2026
Summer Flounder	Not overfished; Overfishing	Update assessment 2025
Tautog	NJ-NY Bight stock overfished; Not overfishing	Update assessment 2025
Weakfish	Depleted; Not overfishing	Update assessment 2025
Winter Flounder	SNE/Mid-Atlantic stock not overfished; Not overfishing	Update assessment 2024

For updates or more information, please visit asmfc.org.

Motor Boat Registration & Title Requirements NJ Motor Vehicle Commission (MVC)

Registration

Most boats must be registered to operate on New Jersey waterways.

- All titled boats must be registered.
- **Any boat (including jet skis and non-titled watercraft), mechanically propelled (including electric motors), regardless of length, must be registered.**
- Boats greater than 12 feet in length, regardless of propulsion means, must be titled and registered at an MVC office.

Boats and marine equipment which need not be registered:

- Those not based in New Jersey or operating here less than 180 consecutive days that are operating under a federally approved numbering system from another state
- Ship's lifeboats
- Non-motorized vessels used exclusively on small lakes and ponds on private property

- Racing vessels with New Jersey State Marine Police permit
- Non-motorized inflatable device, surfboard, racing shell, dinghy, canoe or kayak
- Non-motorized vessel less than 12 feet in length

Title

For use on New Jersey waterways, all boats more than 12 feet in length must be titled, with the exception of ship's lifeboat, canoe, kayak, inflatable, surfboard, rowing scull, racing shell, tender/dinghy used for direct transportation between a vessel and shore for no other purposes.

Boat Safety Certificate (NJSP)

A boat safety certificate (from an **approved** boat safety course; see NJSP website, below) is **required** to operate a personal watercraft or power vessel, including electric motors, in NJ waters (tidal and non-tidal).

Boat Operator License (MVC)

An operator license is required to operate power vessels on fresh, non-tidal waters such as lakes, creeks and rivers. (Minimum age 16 years; with certain exceptions.)

For More Information:

New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission
(888) 486-3339 toll free in NJ or (609) 292-6500 from out-of-state
nj.gov/mvc/vehicles/boating.htm

New Jersey State Police (NJSP)
(609) 882-2000
njsp.org/marine-services

NJDEP Fish & Wildlife Website

Visit the NJDEP Fish & Wildlife Website to access saltwater fishing regulations, management updates, public hearing information, data collected from field surveys and more:

dep.nj.gov/njfw/fishing/marine



YOUR DOLLARS MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

State and Federal partnership improves NJ's fishing opportunities



Your fees and Sport Fish Restoration dollars produce the following benefits:

- Management of public waters
- Artificial reef development
- Marine sport fish research
- Development and management of public fishing areas
- Creation of aquatic education programs
- Development and maintenance of boating-associated access facilities throughout the state



When you purchase fishing equipment, motors, sonar and motorboat fuel in New Jersey, excise tax dollars – paid by manufacturers of that equipment – come back to New Jersey to support marine fisheries!

This is the federal **Sport Fish Restoration Program!**



Interactive Map Tools

NJDEP Fish & Wildlife's **Office of Fish and Wildlife Information Systems** develops and maintains geographic information systems (GIS) data, produces web mapping applications and provides GIS/IT assistance to support fish and wildlife management throughout New Jersey. Below is a listing of the online interactive mapping tools that allow access to spatial information, and in some cases, the ability to submit data or observations directly to NJDEP Fish & Wildlife.

Saltwater Fishing Explorer Application

Provides interactive maps and more information on artificial reef sites and other saltwater fishing opportunities in New Jersey.
njfishandwildlife.com/saltwaterfishing



Artificial Reef Deployments Application

Allows users to identify artificial reefs and individual deployments present on reef sites providing excellent fishing and diving opportunities. This application includes nearly 4,000 publicly accessible artificial reef deployments ranging from ships, barges and military vehicles to concrete habitats and dredge rock. These deployments provide areas for the public to engage in reef fishing and diving. Information includes type of deployment, the material it was made from, who sponsored the deployment, the date it was deployed, along with the location and volume of the deployment.



NJFishandWildlife.com/reefdeployments

Reef Deployment Feedback Form

Allows users to submit single or multiple corrections to deployments. Each advised correction will be reviewed by staff and included in the next revision.

Reef Deployment Feedback Form NJFishandWildlife.com/reeffeedback



Saltwater Fishing Opportunities Application



Provides the public with key information of areas to fish throughout New Jersey for saltwater species like striped bass, bluefish, and summer flounder. Includes both ocean prime fishing grounds and shore-based fishing access sites.

NJFishandWildlife.com/primesaltwaterfishing

HUNTERS and ANGLERS: Know Before You Go!

Two separate fish and wildlife convictions for violating any New Jersey saltwater, freshwater, trapping or hunting law within a five-year period will cause you to lose your hunting and fishing privileges for two to five-years! This means convictions for taking under-sized striped bass or over limit striped bass in marine waters can prevent you from hunting!

Wildlife management area violations such as possession of alcohol, swimming, ATV use and illegal dumping also fall under fish and wildlife offenses and can result in license revocation.

Don't take a chance on losing your license because you heard the wrong information! If you have any questions regarding hunting or fishing regulations, please call your regional Fish and Wildlife Law Enforcement office before going in the field.

The overwhelming majority of New Jersey hunters, trappers and anglers are ethical, law-abiding citizens with a low tolerance for those not willing to follow the laws. If you see a violation occurring, report it immediately by calling 1-(877) WARN-DEP.



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Skillful Angler Program

RECOGNITION PROGRAMS

New Jersey Skillful Angler Program

The Skillful Angler Program is designed both to supplement the New Jersey Record Fish Program and to acknowledge that many anglers catch freshwater and marine fish that are not record size but are still worthy of recognition because the size and weight of the fish sufficiently tested the angler's skill. Open to resident and non-resident anglers. All fish must be caught in New Jersey waters using a hook and line during legally open seasons.

Saltwater species taken from a boat must have been caught from a boat that left from, and returned to, a New Jersey port during the same trip. Anglers can now submit their application and photo(s) electronically! Program rules and steps to enter are found here dep.nj.gov/njfw/fishing/freshwater/skillful-angler-program/. Anglers qualifying for a Skillful Angler award receive a certificate along with a **Skillful Angler patch** as a testament to their achievement.

The Program has three main divisions: **Adult** (for anglers age 16 and older), **Junior** (under age 16) and **Catch and Release** (based on length). **A clear, side-view photo that allows accurate species identification must be included with each application.** Additional good quality (and high resolution) photos with the angler are welcome and appreciated.

The Skillful Angler Program recognizes different levels of fishing expertise. An angler who submits five applications of qualifying size for the same species will receive a Specialist Certificate. An angler who submits five applications of qualifying fish of different species will receive a Master Certificate. Catch 10 or more qualifying fish within the year, and the angler will earn an Elite Angler Certificate.

For new anglers, the Program also recognizes your first fish caught no matter the age of the angler.

Minimum Entry Requirements:

Species	Adult Weight (lbs., oz.)	Junior Weight (lbs., oz.)	Catch & Release (inches)
Black Sea Bass	4	3	20
Striped Bass	40	36	42
Black Drum	70	63	46
Bluefish	18	16	33
Cod	30	27	42
Dolphin	30	27	n/a
Winter Flounder	2	1 lb., 8 oz.	16
Fluke	8	7	27
Kingfish	1	8 oz.	13
Mako Shark	250	225	n/a
Blue Marlin	400	360	n/a
White Marlin	60	54	n/a
Pollock	25	22 lbs., 8 oz.	41
Tautog	8	7	22
Albacore Tuna	50	45	n/a
Big Eye Tuna	200	180	n/a
Bluefin Tuna	500	450	n/a
Yellowfin Tuna	120	108	n/a
Tuna (other)	250	225	n/a
Weakfish	10	9	30

The New Jersey State Record Fish Program (see page 28) requires a different application and is based on weight alone. Scale certification documentation and a weighmaster's signature are required for State Record Fish entries. Other rules apply. Visit Fish and Wildlife's website at dep.nj.gov/njfw/fishing/freshwater/new-jersey-state-record-fish-program/ for a complete list of current state records.

Qualified anglers will receive a First Fish certificate. Four additional categories may bring out your competitive nature. Personalized certificates are also awarded for the Slam Series which includes:


- **Inshore Slam I** — catch one each qualifying Striped Bass, Bluefish and Fluke
- **Inshore Slam II** — catch one each qualifying Black Sea Bass, Tautog and Weakfish
- **Offshore Pelagic Slam** — catch one each qualifying Bluefin Tuna, Bigeye Tuna, Yellowfin Tuna and Dolphin
- **Marlin Slam** — catch one each qualifying White and Blue Marlin

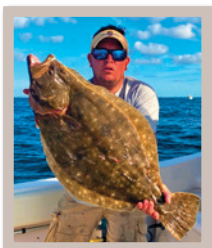
Each month, the leaders of each category and species will be posted on our Skillful Angler Leader Board webpage — dep.nj.gov/njfw/fishing/freshwater/skillful-angler-leaderboards/. At the end of the year, special recognition is given to anglers who catch the largest fish in each species category. The winner of each category is sent a special certificate recognizing his/her accomplishment along with a **winner's patch** as the best of New Jersey's Skillful Anglers.

Fish must be measured from the tip of the nose (with mouth closed) to the tip of the tail. For catch

and release categories, the fish must be measured and photographed alongside a ruler. For Adult/Junior Division, fish must be weighed and measured by a fishing license agent, tackle shop or authorized Fish and Wildlife fisheries biologist.

Anglers must submit a photograph of the fish caught, alongside a ruler, for clear identification and measurement verification. Be sure the ruler markings are legible. Please also include an attractive, well-composed, high-resolution (large file size) photo to be considered for printing in this Digest. *Smile!* All photos become the property of NJDEP Fish & Wildlife and may be used for promotional purposes.

To apply, go to: dep.nj.gov/njfw/fishing/freshwater/skillful-angler-program/ 



Skillful angler
Ed Braunsdorf hooked this 10 lbs., 14 oz. fluke measuring 29 inches with a 25-inch girth. He was using a Spro jig with Gulp and Spearing as bait while fishing the Sea Girt Reef.

Trevor Sherwood

Did You Know?

Email your entry and photo from any device!

NJSkillfulAngler@dep.nj.gov

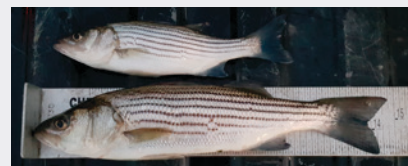
Operation Game Thief — Over the Limit & Undersized Striped Bass

On the evening of April 2, 2023, Conservation Police Officers assigned to the Marine Region responded to an Operation Game Thief complaint in South Amboy, Middlesex County.

The complaint stated two fishermen were keeping undersized and over limit striped bass and putting them into trash bags, which they were then hiding in the brush. Upon inspection, the fishermen were found in possession of

several undersized striped bass. The two men were issued summonses for over limit and undersized striped bass.

Calls to (855) OGT-TIPS can be about any violation of NJ's laws protecting wildlife. Through the Operation Game Thief program, you can help NJ's Conservation Police Officers defend our living natural resources, and if the information you provide results in a conviction, you may earn a reward too.



**Operation Game Thief:
(855) OGT-TIPS**

New Jersey State Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs

If you care about...

- Wise management of fish and wildlife populations
- Protection and enhancement of natural lands and waters
- Preservation of traditional outdoor sports



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Accessible Fishing Sites



For people with disabilities, visit: dep.nj.gov/njfw/wp-content/uploads/njfw/wcaccesslist.pdf

An Accessible Fishing Sites list is available to assist anglers whose mobility is impaired.


All sites are wheelchair-accessible except for the Musconetcong River in Morris County, where vehicle access is to the shoreline.



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State Record Marine Sport Fish

RECOGNITION PROGRAMS



Dominic Vricella was fishing east of the Manasquan Inlet where he landed the new state record King Mackerel on July 30, 2023. The fish weighed 67-pounds, 7.2-ounces, replacing the previous record of 54-pound, 0-ounce from 1998. Dominic was trolling in his boat using a trolling rod and conventional reel with 20-pound braided line and a spoon for the lure when the new record King Mackerel hit.

NJDEP Fish & Wildlife's Record Fish Program honors anglers who catch the largest of select species of freshwater and saltwater fish. Record size is based on weight alone; there are no line classes. Currently there are 75 marine species eligible for entry into the program, which includes a new spearfishing category with 16 additional species.


Anglers are reminded that the objective of the Record Fish Program is to increase awareness of fishing opportunities for species that are regularly sought and routinely found on or off the coast of New Jersey.

Fourteen species are now retired from the list of program-eligible fish, but remain on a separate list posted on NJDEP Fish & Wildlife's website. One historical catch is also retired and posted on the list.

Anglers should be aware of the procedure in effect for entering the Record Fish Program. First, separate applications are required for freshwater and saltwater species. Second, for saltwater entries, it is now mandatory that a marine biologist inspect any

potential record fish, as identification solely by photo is not always accurate. Anglers must call NJDEP Fish & Wildlife's Nacote Creek Research Station at (609) 748-2020 to make arrangements for inspection. In most instances, the fish must be transported to this office in Port Republic. However, in the case of extremely large fish (i.e., shark and tuna), a biologist should be available to travel for dockside inspection. Note that all scale certification requirements still apply, including a valid Certificate of Inspection/Test Report and current Registration Certificate issued by the County Office of Weights and Measures.

The entry deadline is now no later than one month after the date of catch. Please include an attractive, well-composed, high-resolution (large file size) photo to be considered for printing in this *Digest*. **Smile!**

For a complete list of state record fish, including retired species, or to print an application with complete program rules, visit NJDEP Fish & Wildlife's website at dep.nj.gov/njfw/fishing/freshwater/new-jersey-state-record-fish-program/ 

New Jersey State Record Marine Fish

New records shown in red. * Fish was certified by the IGFA as a world record.

Species	Lbs.	Oz.	Year	Angler	Where Caught
Amberjack, greater	85	0	1993	Edwin Metzner	Off Cape May
Bass, black sea	9	0	2015	Steve Singler	Atlantic Ocean
Bass, striped	See retired species list: NJFishandWildlife.com/recfish-salt.htm				
Bluefish	27	1	1997	Roger Kastorsky	5 Fathom Bank
Bonito, Atlantic	13	8	1945	Frank Lykes, Jr.	Off Sandy Hook
Cobia	90	6	2019	Len Andalis	McCries Shoal
Cod	81	0	1967	Joseph Chesla	Off Brielle
Crab, blue	8¾" pt. to pt.		2008	Raymond Ponik	Bayonne
Croaker, Atlantic	5	8	1981	Frederick Brown	Delaware Bay
*Cunner	3	8.8	2019	John Zema	Atlantic Ocean
Dogfish, smooth	22	0	2020	Ed DiMarcantonio	Strathmere (Beach)
Dogfish, spiny	15	12	1990	Jeff Pennick	Off Cape May
Dolphin	63	3	1974	Scott Smith, Jr.	Baltimore Canyon
Drum, black	109	0	2008	Nick Henry	Delaware Bay
Drum, red	55	0	1985	Daniel Yanino	Great Bay
Eel, American	9	13	1988	Warren Campbell	Atlantic City
Fluke	19	12	1953	Walter Lubin	Off Cape May
Flounder, winter	5	11	1993	Jimmy Swanson	Off Barnegat Light
Hake, red (Ling)	12	13	2010	Billy Watson	Off Manasquan
Hake, white	41	7	1989	Wayne Eble	Off Barnegat Light
Kingfish, Northern	2	8	2004	Chester Urbanski	Barnegat Bay
Mackerel, Atlantic	4	1	1983	Abe Elkin	Manasquan Ridge
Mackerel, king	67	7.2	2023	Dominic Vricella	Manasquan Inlet
*Mackerel, Spanish	9	12	1990	Donald Kohler	Off Cape May
Marlin, blue	1,046	0	1986	Phil Infantolino	Hudson Canyon
Marlin, white	137	8	1980	Mike Marchell	Hudson Canyon
Perch, white	2	12	1998	Michael King	Little Beach Creek
*Pollock	46	7	1975	John Holton	Off Brielle
Porgy	5	14	1976	Victor Rone	Delaware Bay
Sailfish	43	4	2006	Dr. John Tallia	Linden Kohl Canyon
Seatrout, spotted	11	2	1974	Bert Harper	Holgate Surf

Species	Lbs.	Oz.	Year	Angler	Where Caught
Shad, American	7	0	1967	Rodger West	Great Bay
Shad, hickory	2	13	2011	Robert Macejka	Mantoloking
Shark, blue	366	0	1996	William Young, Jr.	Mud Hole
Shark, bull	Vacant (Minimum Weight 150 lbs.)				
Shark, dusky	530	0	1987	Brian Dunlevy	Off Great Egg Inlet
Shark, hammerhead	365	0	1985	Walter Thackara	Mud Hole
Shark, porbeagle	Vacant (Minimum Weight 100 lbs.)				
Shark, shortfin mako	856	0	1994	Christopher Palmer	Wilmington Canyon
Shark, thresher	683	0	2009	Bennett Fogelberg	Fingers
Shark, tiger	880	0	1988	Billy DeJohn	Off Cape May
Sheepshead	19	3	2014	William Catino	Longport
Spadefish	11	6	1998	Cliff Low	Delaware Bay
Spearfish, longbill	42	0	1989	George Algard	Poor Man's Canyon
	42	0	1997	Joseph Natoli	Hudson Canyon
Spot	0	13	2003	Robert Belsky, Jr.	Little Sheepshead Creek
Swordfish	530	0	1964	Edmund Levitt	Wilmington Canyon
Tautog	25	13	2020	Chris Sullivan	Atlantic Ocean
Tilefish, golden	63	8	2009	Dennis Muhlenforth	Linden Kohl Canyon
Tilefish, blueline (gray)	23	8	2021	George Hanakis	Wilmington Canyon
Triggerfish, gray	6	11	2016	James Massimino	Sea Girt Reef
Tuna, albacore	78	2.4	2022	Matthew Florio	Hudson Canyon
Tuna, big-eye	364	14	1984	George Krenick	Hudson Canyon
Tuna, bluefin	1,030	6	1981	Royal Parsons	Off Pt. Pleasant
Tuna, skipjack	13	4	1999	Craig Eberbach	Wilmington Canyon
Tuna, yellowfin	290	0	1980	Wayne Brinkerhoff	Hudson Canyon
Tunny, little	24	15	1977	Mark Niemczyk	Off Sea Bright
Wahoo	123	12	1992	Robert Carr	28-Mile Wreck
Weakfish	18	8	1986	Karl Jones	Delaware Bay
Whiting (silver hake)	Vacant (Minimum Weight 2.5 lbs.)				

For information concerning the New Jersey State Record Fish or Skillful Angler programs, visit NJDEP Fish & Wildlife's website at NJFishandWildlife.com.

New Jersey State Record Marine Fish — Spearfishing Category

In 2014, the NJ Record Fish Program expanded with the addition of a Spearfishing category for saltwater. Sixteen species commonly sought after by spearfishers are part of the Program. Spearfishers now have a unique opportunity to be recognized in New Jersey's Record Fish Program. Anglers are reminded that the objective of the Record Fish Program is to increase the awareness of fishing opportunities for species that are regularly sought and routinely found in or off the coast of New Jersey.

New records shown in **red**.

Species	Lbs.	Oz.	Year	Angler	Where Caught
Amberjack, greater	Min. Wt. 60 pounds			VACANT	
Bass, black sea	Min. Wt. 5 pounds			VACANT	
Bluefish	22	2	2017	Igor Kotov	Shark River Reef, USS Algot
Cobia	74	5	2019	Joe Cunningham	Off Sea Isle City
Cod	Min. Wt. 50 pounds			VACANT	
Dolphin	Min. Wt. 40 pounds			VACANT	
*Fluke	15	5	2014	Robert A. Davis	Off Barnegat Lighthouse
Flounder, winter	3 pounds	7	2018	Jim Oriscak	Shark River "back bay"
Hake, red (ling)	Min. Wt. 9 pounds			VACANT	
Pollock	Min. Wt. 30 pounds			VACANT	
Porgy	Min. Wt. 4 pounds			VACANT	
Sheepshead	13 pounds	3 oz.	2022	Dan Street	Atlantic Ocean
Spadefish	Min. Wt. 9 pounds			VACANT	
*Tautog	23	14	2007	Luke Dylan Hickey	Off Cape May
Triggerfish, gray	5	5	2019	Kevin Cavanagh	Off Monmouth Beach
Weakfish	11.8	n/a	2009	Tai Menz	Off Cape May

* Fish was recognized by the International Underwater Spearfishing Association as a world record.



Dan Street of Hainesport made his way to the top of the state spearfishing record list by landing a new state record Sheepshead on July 15, 2022 while free diving in the Atlantic Ocean. The fish weighed 13 pounds, 3 ounces, beating the old record by 11 ounces. It measured 26 inches in length and had a girth of 23 7/8 inches.




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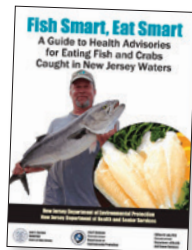
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Eating Fish and Crabs Caught In New Jersey Waters

Fishing provides enjoyable and relaxing recreation. Fish are an excellent source of protein and other nutrients and play a role in maintaining a healthy, well-balanced diet. Many anglers enjoy cooking and eating their own catch. However, elevated levels of potentially harmful chemical contaminants such as dioxin, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), pesticides and mercury have been found in certain fish and crabs in some New Jersey waters. Fish consumption advisories have been adopted to guide citizens on safe consumption practices.

To reduce exposure to harmful chemical contaminants when preparing and eating the fish species taken from the identified waters, it is essential to follow the guidelines provided. The DEP encourages you to consult the Fish Smart-Eat Smart Fish Advisory Guide or, for a complete list of state and federal marine fish consumption advisories visit FishSmartEatSmartNJ.org for making decisions about eating recreationally caught fish and crabs. 



Try the Interactive Map!

One click on the waterbody where you fish takes you to any current health advisories.

FishSmartEatSmartNJ.org



Attention Boaters

Keep Our Water Clean—Use Pumpouts

Ready To Serve Boaters! Visit marina pumpout facilities or contact one of the pumpout boats. A complete listing of operational pumpout facilities at marinas and detailed information on the pumpout boats can be found at NJBoating.org.

Proper maintenance and operation of your on-board toilet and holding tank are critical to ensure they function properly.

- Always use sufficient water when flushing.
- Use toilet paper designed for use in marine/RV systems
- Have your marina inspect your onboard toilet system to make sure it is operating properly

NJBoating.org

New Jersey pumpouts, boat ramps and more!



This project is funded in part by the New Jersey Coastal Waste Act program



Sheet Pan Dinner: Baked Cod with Vegetables

Ingredients

- 1 pound thin asparagus, ends trimmed, cut into 2-inch pieces
- 1 pint cherry tomatoes, halved
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 4 four-ounce skinless cod fillets, rinsed and patted dry
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon lemon zest
- 1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1/4 teaspoon onion powder
- salt and pepper, to taste

Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Lightly coat a 15x10-inch rimmed baking sheet with nonstick spray.
2. Toss asparagus and cherry tomatoes with the olive oil; spread on the baking sheet. Place cod fillets on top.
3. Brush the fish with the lemon juice; sprinkle with the lemon zest. Sprinkle everything with Parmesan, onion powder, and a little salt and pepper.
4. Place in the oven and cook until fish flakes easily with a fork, about 12-15 minutes.
5. Serve the fish with the roasted vegetables and lemon wedges on the side, if desired.

Variations

- Substitute any white fish or other thin green vegetables, like green beans.
- Add a couple pinches of red pepper flakes for a hint of spice.



2024 Sedge Island Summer Programs

Sedge Island Natural Resource Education Center is offering a variety of programs in the summer of 2024 for students, adults and families. Come connect with the beauty of Barnegat Bay while learning about salt marsh ecology through fishing, clamming, and discovering what's edible in the bay!

Visit dep.nj.gov/njfw/education/sedge-island-natural-resource-education-center for details, date and cost or contact Karen Byrne at Karen.Byrne@dep.nj.gov.



Conservation Police and Regulation Information



Contact a NJDEP Fish & Wildlife Conservation Police office that serves the county where you hunt or fish.

- **Northern Region — (908) 735-8240**
(Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Hunterdon, Morris, Passaic, Somerset, Sussex, Union and Warren counties)
- **Central Region — (609) 259-2120**
(Burlington, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth and Ocean counties)
- **Southern Region — (856) 629-0555**
(Atlantic, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester and Salem counties)
- **Marine Region — (609) 748-2050**
(coastal and bay areas)
- **To report violations anonymously call Operation Game Thief — (855) OGT-TIPS**

Become a Wildlife Habitat Supporter!

Did you know that NJDEP Fish & Wildlife manages more than 360,000 acres in 122 wildlife management areas throughout the state?

These spaces protect and conserve fish and wildlife habitat while providing opportunities for outdoor recreation such as fishing, hunting, birding, wildlife viewing, hiking and more! You can help to ensure the conservation of these natural treasures for the enjoyment of generations to come by becoming a Wildlife Habitat Supporter and making a donation. Donations will be used to:

- Manage and restore fish and wildlife habitat.
- Enforce fish and wildlife regulations.
- Restore and protect endangered and nongame species.
- Fund fish and wildlife educational programs and more.
- Improve public access to recreational facilities on WMAs.



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New Jersey Marine Digest

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 DEP ACTION LINE—24 HOURS (877) 927-6337 — (877) WARN-DEP

Marine Conservation Police (609) 748-2050
 Automated Harvest Report System (855) 448-6865 — (855) I-HUNT-NJ
 Commercial Preserves and Semi-Wild Preserves (609) 984-6213
 Exotic & Nongame Captivity Permits (609) 984-6213
 Falconry Permits (908) 735-8793
 Field Trial Permits (609) 259-2132
 Freshwater Fisheries NJFWFish@dep.nj.gov

Lebanon Field Office (North)
 P.O. Box 394, 1255 County Rt. 629,
 Lebanon, NJ 08833 (908) 236-2118
(Central & Southern Region Fisheries Offices listed under Regional Offices below)
 Horseback Riding Group Permits (609) 259-2132
 Hunter Education (856) 629-0552 or NJHunterEd@dep.nj.gov
 Hunting, Fishing and Duplicate Licenses (609) 292-2965
 Hunting and Trapping Permit Hotline (609) 292-9192
 License Sales (888) 773-8450
 Operation Game Thief (855) OGT-TIPS
 Outstanding Deer Program NJDeerClassic@dep.nj.gov
 Pheasant and Quail Stocking (609) 984-0547
 Trout Stocking Hotline (609) 322-9524
 Wildlife Conservation Corps (908) 735-7040
 Wildlife Control (908) 735-8793
 Wildlife Education (908) 637-4125
 Wildlife Management Areas (609) 984-0547

Trenton Office

Mail Code 501-03, P.O. Box 420, Trenton, NJ 08625-0420
 Endangered and Nongame Species (609) 292-9400
 Land Management (609) 984-0547
 Marine Fisheries (609) 748-2020
 Marine Habitat and Shellfisheries (609) 748-2040
 Wildlife Management (609) 292-6685

Northern Region Office

26 Route 173 W., Hampton, NJ 08827
(Serving Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Hunterdon, Morris, Passaic, Somerset, Sussex, Union, and Warren counties)
 Wildlife Management (908) 735-7040
 Endangered and Nongame Species (908) 638-4127
 Hunter Education (908) 637-4125 x 123
 Wildlife Control (908) 735-8793
 Land Management (973) 383-0918
 Conservation Police (908) 735-8240

Central Region Office

1 Eldridge Rd., Robbinsville, NJ 08691
(Serving Burlington, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, and Ocean counties)
 Freshwater Fisheries (609) 223-6076
 Land Management (609) 259-6969
 Wildlife Management (908) 223-6072
 Conservation Police (609) 259-2120

Southern Region Office

220 Blue Anchor Rd., Sicklerville, NJ 08081
(Serving Atlantic, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester and Salem counties)
 Freshwater Fisheries (856) 629-4950
 Hunter Education (856) 629-0552
 Land Management (856) 629-5006
 Conservation Police (856) 629-0555
 Wildlife Management (856) 875-6418

Pequest Natural Resource Education Center (908) 637-4125

Pequest Trout Hatchery (908) 637-4173
 605 Pequest Rd., Oxford, NJ 07863

For questions concerning state stocking programs or comments call (908) 236-2118

Nacote Creek Research Station

P.O. Box 418, 360 Rt. 9 N. (Milepost 51) Port Republic, NJ 08241
 Marine Fisheries (609) 748-2020 or NJMarineFisheries@dep.nj.gov
 Marine Habitat and Shellfisheries (609) 748-2040
 Marine Education (609) 748-4347

Delaware Bay Office (Marine Habitat and Shellfisheries)

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