

New Jersey Marine Digest

May 2025

Coastal Habitats of New Jersey

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Shell Recycling Program Update

page 12



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

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Hotlines

New Jersey DEP Fish & Wildlife

Report Marine, Shellfish and Finfish Violations

(609) 748-2050 or call the 24-hour DEP Hotline: 877-WARNDEP

Violators of the Marine Fisheries laws are subject to a \$30–\$100 per fish or \$300 to \$3,000 fine.

Federal Marine Fisheries Contacts

NOAA Fisheries

Enforcement Hotline

24-hour non-emergency tipline
(800) 853-1964

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: Great Bay Boulevard Wildlife Management Area in Ocean County, NJ.
Photo by Matthew Hencheck, NJDEP Fish & Wildlife.



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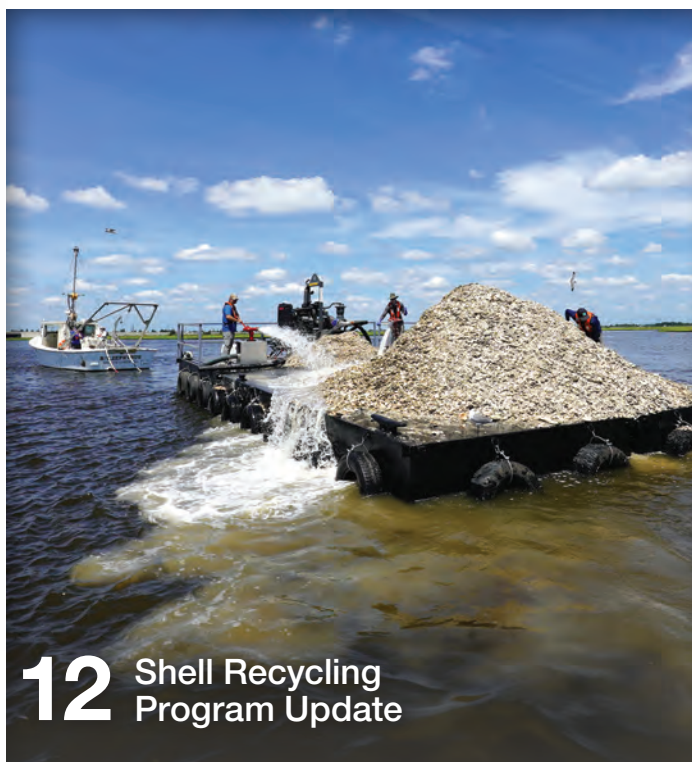
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Assistant Commissioner's Message

DAVE GOLDEN



With the 2025 fishing season upon us, I am filled with excitement and gratitude for the incredible opportunities that New Jersey's waters offer. Our coastline, bays, and open waters are a haven for anglers of all skill levels, providing a diverse range of fish species and habitats. Whether you're a seasoned pro or a newcomer to fishing in the Garden State, there's something extraordinary waiting for you offshore.

Fishing in New Jersey is more than just a pastime; it's a gateway to nature, relaxation, and adventure. It's a chance to immerse yourself in the beauty of our coastal environment. Whether you are casting a line from shore, navigating our waters in your boat, or joining a charter or party boat, each fishing expedition promises unique memories and the thrill of the catch.


This season, we are excited to announce the expansion of the Delaware Bay Reef, where 7,000 tons of concrete have been deployed to create nearly an acre of new habitat for marine life. This initiative repurposes former concrete pilings into a vibrant ecosystem that attracts popular fish species like flounder and black sea bass. Located just northwest of Cape May Point, this reef is a prime spot for fishing and diving. I encourage everyone to get out and experience the excitement of this new marine habitat—fish this part of the bay and enjoy a day out on the reef!

Our coastal waters boast a diverse array of species, from striped bass to bluefish and fluke. There also are abundant recreational clamming opportunities. These activities not only bring the joy of catching fresh seafood but also serve as a reminder of our responsibility to preserve and protect these vital marine resources. As stewards of our environment, we must ensure that our actions today contribute to the sustainability of our fisheries and shellfish populations for future generations.

Introducing children to the joys of fishing is one of the most rewarding aspects of our angling adventures. Taking young ones out for a day on the water can create lasting memories and foster a deep appreciation for our marine ecosystems. These early experiences can instill a conservation ethic that benefits both the individual and our community. By sharing our love and respect for the natural world, we can inspire the next generation to embrace conservation.

While the thrill of the catch is undeniable, we must also remember the importance of responsible fishing practices. Following size and bag limits and seasonal regulations and practicing proper fish-handling techniques are essential for protecting our fish populations. Using circle hooks allows us to reduce deep hooking and increase the survival rates of released fish, which supports the health and abundance of our fish populations.

As we gear up for the 2025 fishing season, I invite you all to embrace the spirit of adventure and stewardship. Let's work together to ensure New Jersey's waters remain vibrant and abundant. By practicing responsible fishing, we can safeguard these precious resources and enjoy the bounties of our marine environment for generations.

So, gather your gear, set your sights on the horizon, and prepare for an unforgettable season of fishing in New Jersey. Let the thrill of the catch, the serenity of the sea, and the camaraderie of fellow anglers inspire you to make the most of the season. Here's to fantastic days outside and on the water, filled with excitement, discovery, and respect for our treasured resources. Tight lines and happy fishing! 

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



About This Guide

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Mark Your Calendar for the 34th Annual Governor's Surf Fishing Tournament!

May 18, 2025

Island Beach State Park, Seaside Park

Come celebrate the 34th year of the Governor's Surf Fishing Tournament! Celebrating the Legacy of Frank Dara. 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 groups 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 Fish & Wildlife, NJDEP 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.



Matthew Hencheck/NJDEP Fish & Wildlife

Jonathan Dziekan (center) of Bayonne won the 2024 Governor's Cup, with a 36 3/4" Black Drum!

Operation Game Thief

Report Abuse of our Outdoor Heritage!

1-855-OGT-TIPS

24 Hours a Day, Seven Days a Week

The person who poaches, pollutes habitat and abuses public land tarnishes the image of sportsmen and robs us of our fish and wildlife, as well as tax and license dollars. You can make a difference.

Call OGT to report:

- Negligent use of firearms
- Over the limits for game and fish
- Commercial exploitation of fish and wildlife
- Pollution of habitat, dumping on state land
- Destruction of signs and state property
- Illegal killing, taking or possession of any wildlife



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Funded by the New Jersey State Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs.

Designed to encourage sportsmen to report poaching and wildlife crimes.

New Jersey Marine Digest

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Shawn LaTourette, Commissioner

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This *Digest* is designed and produced by Kalkomey Enterprises, LLC; www.kalkomey.com.

Partial funding for the *Digest* is provided by the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Program.

Cover photo: Great Bay Boulevard Wildlife Management Area in Ocean County, NJ. Photo by Matthew Hencheck, NJDEP Fish & Wildlife.

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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



Barry Emens with his catch on the F/V Susan Hudson.

The Striped Bass Bonus Program will continue in 2025, where anglers possessing a Bonus permit may keep a striper at 24 inches to 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.

Application Process: To apply and for regulation or program updates, please visit 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, 2026 in order to remain eligible for 2026.

Reducing Striped Bass Recreational Release Mortality

Striped bass release mortality is defined as recreationally caught striped bass that are released alive but die due to stress or injury from the fishing interaction.

Due to regulations or angler preference, the majority of recreationally caught striped bass (over 90%) are released alive. Even though most of these fish survive, in some years more striped bass are estimated to die from being caught and released than are actually harvested. Between 40-50% of total striped bass removals are attributed to release mortality each year.

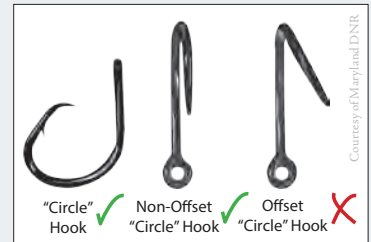
In 2021 and 2023, regulations were implemented to reduce release mortality in the striped bass recreational fishery:

Using Circle Hooks When Fishing with Bait for Striped Bass

It is required to use 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.

A circle hook is defined as a non-offset hook where the point curves back perpendicularly towards the shank. The design is intended to reduce the occurrence of gut hooking.



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

Using Gaffs for Striped Bass

It shall be unlawful for any person to gaff or attempt to gaff any striped bass at any time when fishing recreationally.

What Can You Do to Reduce Release Mortality?

Release mortality is a concern in most recreational fisheries. Management tools to reduce release mortality are limited but there are things you can do to help save more fish.

Follow the regulations above when fishing for striped bass and follow the tips below when fishing for any species.

Tips for Releasing Fish Unharmmed

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.
- Do not fight the fish to exhaustion. Land fish quickly, except when retrieving from depths of 40-feet or more.
- If retrieving fish from greater depths, 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.

Fish Handling Best Practices

- Keep the fish in the water when de-hooking or use a rubber or knotless landing net. Carefully remove hooks with a dehooker or needle-nose pliers.
- Use wet hands or gloves to minimize loss of fish's protective layer. Avoid handling fish with dry hands.
- Minimize physical injury. Avoid dragging fish across dry sand or rocks. Do not allow fish to flop around on deck.
- Hold fish horizontally with support. Do not touch gills or eyes.
- Return the fish to the water as soon as possible. Minimize time spent taking pictures.
- When reviving fish, move fish headfirst into the current so water flows through the mouth and over the gills.