

Basic recreational saltwater fishing regulations

This brief summary of regulations governs the taking of saltwater species in Florida state waters for personal use. It is not applicable to the commercial harvesting of these species. The absence of complete laws, rules and regulations in this summary does not relieve persons from compliance with those laws, rules or regulations. State waters extend to 3 nautical miles on the Atlantic and 9 nautical miles on the Gulf. Federal rules apply beyond state waters. For species that do not have an established bag limit, more than 100 pounds or two fish per harvester per day (whichever is greater), is considered commercial quantities. A saltwater products license and commercial vessel registration are required to harvest commercial quantities of unregulated species. It is illegal to sell recreationally harvested fish without compliance with commercial license requirements. *Issue Thirty Five, July 2009* **Highlights indicate recent regulation changes.**

| Species | Minimum Size Limits | Closed Season | Daily Rec. Bag Limit | Remarks |
|---|--|---|--|--|
| Amberjack, Greater ▲ | 28" fork Atlantic ; 30" fork Gulf | | 1 per harvester per day | |
| Amberjack, Lesser & Banded Rudderfish ▲ | Not less than 14" or more than 22" fork | | 5 aggregate of lesser amberjack and banded rudderfish | |
| Billfish ▲ | Sailfish 63" ; Blue Marlin 99" ; White Marlin 66" | | 1 per harvester per day aggregate bag limit | Measured tip of lower jaw to fork. All landed fish must be reported to NOAA within 24 hours 800-894-5528. HMS permit required in federal waters. |
| Black Drum ▲♦† | Not less than 14" or more than 24" | | 5 per harvester per day | May possess one over 24". |
| Bluefish ▲ | 12" fork | | 10 per harvester per day | |
| Bonefish ♦ | 18" | | 1 per harvester per day | |
| Clams (Hard) | 1" thick across hinge | May not harvest half hour after official sunset until half hour before official sunrise | One 5 gal. bucket per harvester or 2 per vessel, whichever is less per day (whole in shell) | Illegal to harvest from closed areas. Go to www.floridaaquaculture.com for allowable harvesting areas. |
| Cobia (Ling) ▲ | 33" fork | | 1 per harvester or 6 per vessel per day, whichever is less | To sell or exceed the daily bag limit follow commercial regulations. |
| Crab, Blue | | Sept. 20–Oct. 4 Gulf state waters beyond 3 miles closed to traps; federal waters closed to traps; Regional closures (see map on page 9) | 10 gallons whole per harvester per day | 5 traps maximum. Trap requirements apply. Harvest of egg-bearing crabs prohibited. The pulling of traps from one hour after official sunset until one hour before official sunrise is prohibited. |
| Crab, Blue Land | | July 1–Oct 31 | 20 per harvester per day | Trapping prohibited, harvest of egg-bearing females prohibited, harvest prohibited in state parks and from the right-of-way of federal, state or county maintained roads. |
| Crab, Stone | 2 ¾" claw | May 16–Oct 14 | 1 gal. Stone Crab claws per harvester or 2 gal. per vessel, whichever is less | 5 traps maximum. Trap requirements apply. Illegal to possess whole crab. Harvest of egg-bearing crabs prohibited. |
| Crawfish (Spiny Lobster) ▲ | Larger than 3" carapace measured in the water | April 1–Aug. 5 Exception: Sport Season (last consecutive Wed & Thurs of July each year) | Regular season: 6 per harvester per day | Recreational trapping prohibited. Spiny Lobster permit required when license required. Special bag limit for 2-day Sport Season. Contact FWC regional office for current information on Sport Season. |
| Dolphin ▲ | 20" fork Atlantic | | 10 per harvester per day, not to exceed 60 per vessel per day | To sell or exceed the daily bag limit follow commercial regulations. |
| Flounder ▲♦† | 12" | | 10 per harvester per day | May be harvested by spearing. Snatching prohibited. |
| Gag ▲♦ | 24" Atlantic & Monroe County 22" Gulf (excluding Monroe County) | Closed in Gulf Feb. 1–March 31 | 2 per harvester per day | Not more than 2 fish may be Gag or Black Grouper, either individually or in combination in Atlantic and Monroe County . Included within the 5 per harvester per day (Atlantic) and 4 per harvester per day (Gulf) Grouper aggregate bag limit. Gulf —zero daily bag and possession limit for captain & crew on for-hire vessels. |
| Grouper, Black ▲♦ | | | 2 per harvester per day Atlantic & Monroe County ; 4 per harvester per day Gulf (excluding Monroe County) | |
| Grouper, Red ▲♦ | | | 5 per harvester per day Atlantic ; 2 per harvester per day Gulf | |
| Grouper, Snowy ▲♦ | | | 1 per harvester per day Atlantic | Included within the 5 per harvester per day (Atlantic) and 4 per harvester per day (Gulf) Grouper aggregate bag limit. |
| Grouper, Yellowfin & Yellowmouth ▲♦ | 20" | Closed in Gulf Feb. 1–March 31 | | |
| Grouper, Scamp ▲♦ | 20" Atlantic & Monroe County ; 16" Gulf (excluding Monroe County) | | | |
| Grouper, Warsaw & Speckled Hind ▲ | | | 1 per vessel per day of each species | |
| Grouper, all others ▲ | | Closed in Gulf Feb. 1–March 31 for Rock Hind and Red Hind | | |
| Hogfish ▲ | 12" fork | | 5 per harvester per day | |
| Mackerel, King ▲ | 24" fork | | 2 per harvester per day | Bag limit in Gulf—Atlantic fishery reduced to 1 when federal waters are closed to all harvest. Call SW Regional Office for details. |
| Mackerel, Spanish ▲ | 12" fork | | 15 per harvester per day | Transfer of Spanish Mackerel to other vessels at sea is prohibited. |
| Mullet, Striped (Black) & Silver | | | 50 aggregate per harvester per day; Aggregate vessel limits Feb. 1–Aug. 31: 100 per vessel; Sept. 1–Jan. 31: 50 per vessel | Mullet aggregate bag limit includes Striped and Silver. Call DMFM for additional restrictions in Pinellas and Charlotte counties. |
| Oysters | 3" | June, July, Aug. in Dixie, Wakulla, Levy counties . July, Aug., Sept. in all other areas. | 2 bags per harvester or vessel, whichever is less per day. 1 Bag = 60 lbs. or two 5 gal. buckets (whole in shell) | Apalachicola Bay has summer & winter seasons/areas. Harvest from approved shellfish areas only. Go to www.floridaaquaculture.com for allowable harvesting areas. |
| Permit & Pompano ▲† | Not less than 11" or more than 20" fork | | 6 per harvester per day aggregate of Permit and Pompano | May possess one over 20" of either Permit or Pompano. Vessel restriction: no more than 2 permit and pompano over 20" fork length at any time in any combination. Giggling, spearing, snatching prohibited. |
| Pompano, African ▲† | Not less than 24" fork | | 2 fish per harvester or per vessel per day, whichever is less | Hook & line gear only. |
| Red Drum (Redfish) ▲♦† | Not less than 18" or more than 27" | | 1 per harvester per day | Giggling, spearing, snatching prohibited. Harvest in Federal waters prohibited. |
| Red Porgy ▲♦ | 14" Atlantic | | 3 per harvester per day Atlantic | |

| Species | Minimum Size Limits | Closed Season | Daily Rec. Bag Limit | Remarks |
|-----------------------------|---|--|--|---|
| Scallops, Bay | | Sept. 11–June 30 | 2 gallons whole or 1 pint meat per harvester per day, no more than 10 gallons whole, or ½ gallon meat per vessel anytime | Harvest allowed only in state waters of the Gulf of Mexico from the Pasco-Hernando county line, to the west bank of the Mexico Beach Canal in Bay County. |
| Sea Bass, Black ▲◆ | 12" Atlantic; 10" Gulf | | 15 per harvester per day Atlantic | |
| Shad | | | 10 aggregate per harvester per day | American, Alabama & Hickory are part of aggregate limit. Hook & line gear only. |
| Shark | | | 1 per harvester or 2 per vessel per day, whichever is less | Practice of finning and filleting at sea prohibited. Spearing prohibited. See list below for prohibited species. |
| Sheepshead ▲◆T | 12" | | 15 per harvester per day | Snatching prohibited. |
| Shrimp ▲ | | April & May closed to Nassau, Duval, St. Johns, Putnam, Flagler & Clay counties | 5 gallons heads on per harvester or vessel per day, whichever is less | Contact FWC Regional Office for closed areas. |
| Snapper, Black & Wenchman ▲ | | | Included within 10 per harvester per day Snapper aggregate bag limit | |
| Snapper, Cubera ▲◆ | Not less than 12" or more than 30" (see remarks) | | Included within 10 per harvester per day Snapper aggregate bag limit if under 30" | Allowed 2 Cubera Snapper over 30" per harvester or vessel per day, whichever is less. 30" or larger not included within the Snapper aggregate bag limit. |
| Snapper, Gray (Mangrove) ▲◆ | 10" | | 5 per harvester per day | Included within 10 per harvester per day Snapper aggregate bag limit. |
| Snapper, Lane ▲◆ | 8" | | Included within 10 per harvester per day Snapper aggregate bag limit Atlantic | Gulf not included within the Snapper aggregate bag limit. |
| Snapper, Mutton ▲◆ | 16" | | Included within 10 per harvester per day Snapper aggregate bag limit | |
| Snapper, Red ▲◆ | 20" Atlantic; 16" Gulf | Closed in Gulf Aug. 15–May 31 | 2 per harvester per day | Included within 10 per harvester per day Snapper aggregate bag limit. Note: Check www.MyFWC.com/Fishing for most current regulations prior to fishing. Gulf: Zero daily bag and possession limit for captain and crew on for-hire vessels. |
| Snapper, Schoolmaster ▲◆ | 10" | | Included within 10 per harvester per day Snapper aggregate bag limit | |
| Snapper, Vermilion ▲◆ | 12" Atlantic; 10" Gulf | Nov.1-Mar.31 Atlantic | 10 per harvester per day Gulf; 5 Atlantic | Vermilion Snapper not included within the Snapper aggregate bag limit. |
| Snapper, all other ▲◆ | 12" | | Included within 10 per harvester per day Snapper aggregate bag limit | Includes: Blackfin, Dog, Mahogany, Queen, Silk & Yellowtail. |
| Snook (all species) ▲◆T | Not less than 28" or more than 32" Atlantic Not less than 28" or more than 33" Gulf of Mexico, Monroe County, Everglades Nat. Park | Dec. 15–Jan. 31, June–Aug. Atlantic Dec.–Feb., May–Aug. Gulf of Mexico, Monroe County, Everglades Nat. Park | 1 per harvester per day | Snook permit required when saltwater license required. State regulations apply in federal waters. Illegal to buy or sell snook. Snatch hooks and spearing prohibited. |
| Sponge, Commercial | Greater than 5" in greatest dimension measured across the top of the sponge | | 10 per harvester per day | Includes: Sheepswool, Yellow, Grass, Glove, Finger, Wire, Reef & Velvet sponge. |
| Spotted Seatrout ▲◆T | Not less than 15" or more than 20" (statewide) except one fish over 20" per person | Nov. & Dec. S. Region Feb. N.E. and N.W. Regions (see regional definitions below) | 4 per harvester per day South Region 5 per harvester per day N.E. and N.W. Regions | See regional definitions below. |
| Swordfish | 47" lower jaw fork length, 29" cleithrum to keel length, or 33 pounds dressed weight | | 1 per harvester or 3 per vessel, whichever is less | All landed fish must be reported to NOAA within 24 hours 800-894-5528. HMS permit required in federal waters. |
| Tarpon | | | 2 fish possession limit | Requires \$50 tarpon tag to possess or harvest. Snatching and spearing prohibited. Boca Grande Pass has seasonal regulations. Contact DMFM for current information. |
| Tilefish, Golden ▲ | | | 1 per harvester per day Atlantic | Included within the 5 per harvester per day (Atlantic) and 4 per harvester per day (Gulf) Grouper aggregate bag limit. |
| Triggerfish (Gray) ▲ | 12" fork Atlantic; 14" fork Gulf | | | Triggerfish except Gray and Ocean have live landing & live well requirements. |
| Tripletail ▲◆T | 15" | | 2 per harvester per day | Hook & line gear only. No snatch hooks. |
| Wahoo ▲ | | | 2 per harvester per day | To sell or exceed the daily bag limit, follow commercial regulations. |
| Weakfish ▲◆ | 12" | | 4 per harvester per day | |

- ▲ Must remain in whole condition until landed ashore (heads & tails intact)
- ◆ Measured as total length. Total length is the straight line distance from the most forward part of the head with the mouth closed to the farthest tip of the tail with the tail compressed or squeezed together while the fish is lying on its side.
- T Harvest prohibited by or with the use of any multiple hook in conjunction with live or dead natural bait.

ORNAMENTAL TROPICAL FISH AND PLANTS

See *Regulations for taking aquarium species have changed* on page 14.

PROHIBITED SPECIES

It is unlawful to harvest, possess, land, purchase, sell, or exchange the following species:

Longbill Spearfish, Mediterranean Spearfish, Roundscale Spearfish, Nassau Grouper, Goliath Grouper (Jewfish), Sawfish, Atlantic Angel Shark, Bigeye Sixgill Shark, Bigeye Thresher Shark, Bignose Shark, Caribbean Reef Shark, Dusky Shark, Galapagos Shark, Longfin Mako Shark, Narrowtooth Shark, Night Shark, Puffer fish (harvest prohibited in Volusia, Brevard, Indian River, St. Lucie and Martin counties), Sevengill Shark, Sixgill Shark, Smalltail Shark, Basking Shark, Whale Shark, Spotted Eagle Ray, Sturgeon, White Shark, Sand Tiger Shark, Bigeye Sand Tiger Shark, Manta Ray, Spiny Dogfish, Longspine Urchin, Stony, Hard and Fire Corals, Sea Fans, Florida Queen Conch and Bahama Starfish. Harvest of live rock in state waters is prohibited.

FWC REGIONAL OFFICES

Northwest Region Panama City 850-265-3676; North Central Region Lake City 386-758-0525;

Northeast Region Ocala 352-732-1225; Southwest Region Lakeland 863-648-3200; South Region West Palm Beach 561-625-5122

SEATROUT REGIONS

Northwest Region means all state waters lying north of the Flagler-Volusia County line to the Florida-Georgia border, and adjacent federal Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) waters.

Northwest Region means all state waters north and west of a line running due west from the westernmost point of Fred Howard Park Causeway (28E9.350°N 82E48.398°W), which is approximately 1.17 nautical miles south of the Pasco-Pinellas County line to the Florida-Alabama border, and adjacent federal EEZ waters.

South Region means state waters lying between the Flagler-Volusia County line on the Atlantic Ocean and the southern boundary of the Northwest Region on the Gulf of Mexico in Pinellas County and adjacent federal EEZ waters.

Harvester: Regardless of what species you are fishing for, bag limits are only for properly licensed individuals and those people exempt from licensing requirements who are actively harvesting. People harvesting may not exceed the individual bag limit and take someone else's bag limit. That is, people (including children) who are not actively harvesting or are not properly licensed (if license is required) may NOT be counted for the purpose of bag limits.



For saltwater fish identification, request a copy of FWC's *Fishing Lines* magazine or visit: MyFWC.com. Click on "Fishing."