



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Division of Marine Fisheries

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Marine Fisheries Advisory

Important Updates for Commercial Lobster Permit Holders

Seasonal Commercial Trap Gear Closure Reminder: Massachusetts' seasonal commercial trap gear closure goes into effect on February 1, 2023 ([see map](#)). The closure includes all waters under the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth north and east of Cape Cod. The state closure does not extend into those southern state waters in Lobster Conservation Management Area 2. This state closure was extended in 2021 to include state waters north from Scituate to the New Hampshire maritime border. The closure remains in effect until May 15 but may be rescinded before or extend past that date based on the observed presence or absence of right whales in state waters.

The purpose of this closure is to protect seasonal aggregations of right whales from potential entanglements in buoy lines. Compliance with this closure is critically important to the Commonwealth's right whale conservation strategy. DMF will be partnering with the Massachusetts Environmental Police and a small group of commercial trap fishers to remove any lost or abandoned gear remaining in the closure area after this date. To assist us in this, DMF is requesting fishers contact DMF if they observe any lost or abandoned gear and provide us with information regarding the location, i.e., latitudinal/longitudinal coordinates or the TD's (LORAN coordinates) of this gear. Please e-mail any such information to conservationsolutions@mass.gov.

There are also seasonal federal closures to the fishing of lobster and crab trap gear with persistent buoy lines occurring from February 1 – April 30. This includes the Massachusetts' Restricted Area, which contains adjacent federal waters on Stellwagen Bank and within the Outer Cape Cod Lobster Conservation Management Area, as well as the South Island Restricted Area, which is bounded by 41° 20' N to the north, 40° 30' N to the south, 69° 30' W to the east, and 71° 19' W to the west.

Massachusetts Restricted Area Wedge: The [Massachusetts Restricted Area Wedge](#) ("wedge") is an area of federal waters that is not seasonally closed to trap fishing or the use of persistent buoy lines, but is located between the Massachusetts' state waters trap gear closure in Massachusetts Bay to the west and the Massachusetts Restricted Area west of Stellwagen Bank to the east. In 2022, NOAA Fisheries closed this area to traps using persistent buoy lines on an emergency basis from April 1 – April 30 and DMF has received a number of inquires

questioning if this area will be closed again in 2023. While NOAA Fisheries has not announced a closure of this area for 2023, the Regional Administrator, Mike Pentony, has informed DMF the federal government intends to implement an emergency closure of this area imminently. Please stay tuned for more information.

Federal lobster trap permit holders are reminded that all buoy lines affixed to trap gear set in federal waters must comply with federal buoy marking requirements. See NOAA Fisheries' gear marking illustration for more information on marking [requirements](#). Please note that Massachusetts' regulations require all red state marks have a corresponding federal green mark when the gear is set in federal waters.

Weak Links: DMF is no longer requiring commercial trap fishers to rig the buoy lines with a weak link at the buoy capable of breaking when exposed to 600-pounds of push-pull pressure. Fishers who continue to want to fish with weak links at the buoy may continue to do so.

This action does not, in any way, alter the continued requirement that commercial trap fishers fish buoy lines that break when exposed to 1,700 pounds of tension. This may be achieved through fishing custom 1,700-pound breaking strength buoy line or inserting [contrivances](#) approved by NOAA Fisheries into the buoy line. For Massachusetts state waters, these contrivances are to occur within the top 75% of the buoy line at a frequency of once every 60'.

2023 Trap Tag Order Form Update and Installation Deadline: Trap tag order forms have been mailed. Please note the coastwide trap tag price, negotiated by ASMFC on behalf of the Northeast states, has increased from \$.17 to \$.18 per tag for 2023. Please place your trap tag orders by February 1st to ensure delivery prior to May 1st. Permit holders are reminded that the deadline for affixing year-specific trap tags on traps is May 1st of the current fishing year.

2022 Commercial Permits Extended Through February 28, 2023: Due to delays in the generation, mailing, and processing of 2023 permit renewal applications, DMF has extended the validity of 2022 commercial, dealer, and special permits through February 28, 2023. Active permit holders will need a valid 2023 permit beginning on March 1, 2023. See original December 1st [advisory](#).

Limited Entry Permit Renewal Deadline Reminder: Renewal applications for limited entry permits or permits that have limited entry endorsements or a striped bass endorsement must be received in our office or postmarked by February 28, 2023.

If you have any questions, please email us at marine.fish@mass.gov.