



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Division of Marine Fisheries

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MarineFisheries Advisory

DMF Announces North Shore State Waters Sea Scallop Pilot Program for Winter of 2026

Overview of Pilot Program

The Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) has initiated a pilot program to increase sea scallop dredge fishing access this winter. This program will allow authorized permit holders to tow sea scallop dredges in certain discrete areas within the Year-Round North Shore Mobile Gear Closure Area off Gloucester and in Salem Sound (see map on page 3) during the period of February 15 – April 30. Details on how to apply and relevant qualifying criteria are provided below.

This pilot program creates discrete spatial exemptions to historic mobile gear closures along the North Shore which were originally enacted to prevent user group conflicts with inshore fixed gear fisheries. However, the current late-winter and early-spring fixed gear closures to protect endangered right whales have provided the occasion to consider seasonal mobile gear fishing opportunities. Persons participating in DMF’s program to experiment with ropeless lobster trap gear in Massachusetts’ state waters should be aware that these areas will be opening to mobile gear fishing.

In recognition of the fact that our inshore waters along the North Shore are important to recreational divers and the hand harvest of sea scallops, DMF developed the shoreward boundary of these open areas to occur adjacent to the 90-foot depth contour to prevent potential user group conflicts. Further, the spatial extent of the open areas also restricts access to certain areas within the Spring Cod Conservation Zone to protect habitat important to spawning Gulf of Maine cod.

In developing this program, DMF has also worked with the Bureau of Underwater Archaeology to identify the proximate location of known shipwrecks. These wrecks are identified on the map and participants should avoid them to prevent damage to underwater archeological resources, as well as damage to and loss of fishing gear. Please note that these wreck locations are not comprehensive and are approximate. If any wrecks or other archaeological artifacts are encountered, participants should provide relevant information to DMF within 24 hours.

Sea scallops taken from the areas opened by this pilot program may not be landed as whole, in-shell product. Fishers are therefore required to shuck the product at sea and land only the adductor muscle. The Commonwealth’s possession and landing limit of shucked sea scallops of 200 pounds per day applies. For more information about the regulatory requirements affecting the sea scallop fishery, please review this [policy](#).

Eligibility Criteria to Potentially Participate in the Pilot Program

To participate in this pilot program, a commercial fisher must meet the following qualifying criteria: (1) hold a valid 2026 Coastal Access Permit; (2) have verifiable landings of sea scallops from the waters under the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth during any year over the course of the prior three calendar years (2023 -2025); (3) have a clean enforcement record throughout the prior three calendar years (2023 – 2025); (4) install and maintain an operable cellular based electronic vessel tracking device approved by DMF when participating in the pilot program; and (5) be a Massachusetts resident or a resident of a state who provides Massachusetts with reciprocal access to their state waters sea scallop fishery.

Requirement for a Complaint Electronic Vessel Tracking Device

Electronic tracking devices are mandated to participate in this pilot program to ensure compliance with spatial boundaries of the exempted open areas, as well as other relevant time-area rules. Further, these devices provide high resolution spatial data regarding where fishing activity is occurring and this will help inform how this program may proceed into the future, as well as other future fishery management actions.

Approved vessel tracking devices include only those devices that have also been approved for use by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission for federal lobster and Jonah crab permit holders. Federal Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) are not sufficient for this program. Once DMF receives your application to participate in the pilot program, staff will contact you with information regarding your need to install a tracking device or if your current tracking unit is compliant with this requirement. If you have vessel tracking specific questions, please email dmf.tracking@mass.gov or call 978-491-6265.

How To Apply

To apply, please send an e-mail to marine.fish@mass.gov with the subject line “North Shore Sea Scallop Pilot Program Application” and in the body of the e-mail provide the following information: (1) permit holder name; (2) DMF permit identification number; and (3) vessel name.

Note that it may take at minimum of one-week to obtain the requested pilot program authorization. This is because DMF has to verify you meet the above-described eligibility criteria and confirm that you have a compliant electronic vessel tracking device. Additional processing time may be necessary if you need to purchase, install, and verify the operability of a compliant electronic vessel tracking device. At present, DMF anticipates the process to acquire a compliant electronic vessel tracking device may take up to two weeks, but this is subject to change.

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