



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Division of Marine Fisheries
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Marine Fisheries Advisory

Reminder: Seasonal Closures Affecting Trap Gear Fishing Effective February 1st

On Sunday, February 1, a series of seasonal closures affecting trap gear fishing will go into effect. See the map on the third page of this advisory and review the various sections below for additional details on how, when, and where these closures apply.

These trap gear closures are designed to protect the critically endangered North Atlantic right whale (NARW). During the late-winter and early-spring months, approximately two-thirds of the known NARW population visit Massachusetts waters and adjacent federal waters and these closures are designed to prevent NARWs from becoming entangled in fishing gear, particularly trap gear buoy lines, a leading cause of serious injury and mortality.

These closures will be actively monitored and enforced. Violations may result in criminal or non-criminal fines and penalties, as well as administrative actions to suspend or revoke commercial fishing permits. Commercial fishers who may have lost gear during the open fishing season are encouraged to submit [gear loss reports](#) to the Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) to document this gear loss and potentially help identify this gear should it be observed within the closures. If there are unexpected and exigent circumstances that render you unable to remove your gear from a closed area prior to February 1, it is critical that you immediately contact DMF and the Massachusetts Environmental Police (MEP).

If commercial fishers move their trap gear into adjacent open areas, the gear must bear the appropriate buoy line breaking strength modifications and colored markings for the jurisdiction where the gear is being maintained. Please refer to [NOAA Fisheries Guide](#) for further details.

Massachusetts Commercial Trap Gear Closure. From February 1 – May 15, commercial fishers are prohibited from fishing, setting, maintaining, or abandoning trap gear in the waters under the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth north and east of Cape Cod, covering the state waters portions of the Massachusetts Restricted Area (below), as well as the Cape Cod Canal. Please note, this closure may be extended past May 15 or rescinded after April 30 based on the presence or absence of right whales.

This closure applies to all commercial lobster and edible crab traps, fish pots, and whelk pots. However, exempt from this is trap gear fished by commercial fishers authorized to participate in DMF's pilot program to experiment with on-demand ("ropeless") trap gear. This on-demand testing does not occur inside Cape Cod Bay because of the persistent high density of right whales in the area throughout the season. In addition to potential penalties or permitting actions described above, unauthorized traps found within this closure are fishing gear debris under state law and may be disposed of by DMF and the Massachusetts Environmental Police.

Federal Commercial Lobster and Jonah Crab Trap Gear Closures. From February 1 – April 30, commercial fishers are prohibited from fishing, setting, maintaining, or abandoning lobster and Jonah crab trap gear within those federal waters within the Massachusetts Restricted Area (including that area of outer Massachusetts Bay formerly known as the "wedge") and the federal and state waters portions of the South of the Islands Restricted Area. Exempt from this are those fishers authorized by NOAA Fisheries to test on-demand gear under the federal Exempted Fishery Permit.

Other Massachusetts Fixed Gear Closures. Please note that gillnet fishing throughout Massachusetts state waters is prohibited from January 1 – May 15 and fishing buoyed recreational lobster and crab trap fishing is prohibited from November 1 – May 15. Like the Massachusetts Commercial Trap Gear Closure, these state closures may be extended past May 15 or rescinded after April 30 based on the presence or absence of right whales.

For more information, please visit our protected species website:
<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/protected-species-regulations>

