



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Division of Marine Fisheries

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Marine Fisheries Advisory

Reminder: New Recreational Lobster and Crab Trap Rules for 2021

This advisory serves as a reminder of recreational lobster and crab trap rules for 2021. There are several new rules this year designed to prevent the gear from interacting with certain protected species and reducing the potential harm of any interaction should it occur.

Trap Fishery Closure. This winter, DMF established a state-wide recreational lobster and crab trap fishery closure and haul out period of November 1 – May 15. This rule went into effect on March 5, 2021. Any recreational trap gear in the water during the closure may be subject to removal and seizure by the DMF or the Massachusetts Environmental Police. Recreational lobster and crab trap fishermen may not set their trap gear for 2021 until May 16. This closure does not apply to unbuoyed gear fished and retrieved from the shoreline. This closure was implemented to prevent right whales from becoming potentially entangled in recreational trap gear when they aggregate in our waters during the winter and early spring periods, and to provide an opportunity to remove lost or abandoned recreational trap gear to prevent the gear from becoming derelict.

Maximum Buoy Line Diameter. For the 2021 season, recreational lobster and crab trap gear may only be fished with buoy lines not exceeding 5/16". This maximum buoy line diameter serves several purposes. This eliminates the potential for recreational trap fishermen to fish heavy diameter buoy lines. In doing so, it reduces the potential injury and mortality to marine mammals if an entanglement were to occur as lighter diameter rope breaks free more easily. Other existing buoy line rules affecting the recreational lobster and crab trap fishery remain unchanged. This includes the requirement for a weak link in the surface system where buoy meets the buoy line and that buoys lines bear a red mark at least four inches in length midway on the buoy line.

Blue Crab Trap Prohibition. It is now unlawful to fish for or retain blue crabs taken by cylindrical or six-sided trap gear. Fishermen may continue to fish for blue crabs using gears like dip nets and baited lines, as well as collapsible traps and lift traps that are actively tended and fished in an open configuration. A recreational lobster and recreational crab trap permit is not required to take blue crabs by these allowed active fishing gears. This prohibition on trap gear was implemented to prevent diamondback terrapin turtles from being captured and subsequently drowning in crab traps. These turtles are listed as threatened under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act and share nearshore estuarine habitat with blue crabs and may be caught incidentally in crab trap gear. The blue crab possession limit remains 25-crabs per person per calendar day and the minimum shell size remains five inches as measured from tip-to-tip across the shell spines.

For more information on the recreational lobster and crab fishery in Massachusetts, please view the [2021 recreational fishing guide](#).