



Declaration of Regulation Change 26-03

Under the authority of section 26-159a-22 of the Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies (RCSA) and section 26-159a of the general statutes, as amended by Public Act 25-179, the Commissioner is authorized to establish or adjust, by declaration, closed seasons, length limits and creel limits in order to comply with interstate fishery management plans adopted by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) or the U.S. Department of Commerce.

In accordance with the aforementioned authority, the following sections of departmental regulations are amended in this Declaration:

- 26-159a-4. Minimum lengths
- 26-159a-7. Creel limits
- 26-159a-20. Closed recreational fishing seasons

This Declaration supersedes Declaration 25-02 and shall be effective 10 days after signing and shall remain in effect until amended or superseded by subsequent action.

4/9/2026

Katherine S. Dykes
Commissioner

Date

26-159a-4. Minimum lengths

(a) No person, while on the waters of this state or on any parcel of land, structure, or portion of a roadway abutting tidal waters of this state shall possess or land any fish of the following species taken by sport fishing methods, regardless of where taken, if it is less than the identified length as measured from the tip of the snout to the end of the tail:

(1) Scup (porgy) (*Stenotomus chrysops*): ~~[10.5]~~ 11 inches, except that no person ~~[on a vessel operating under the authority of a party/charter vessel registration issued under section 26-142a of the Connecticut General Statutes shall possess or land fish less than 11 inches;]~~ fishing from shore shall possess or land fish less than 9.5 inches;

(3) Summer flounder (fluke) (*Paralichthys dentatus*): ~~[19.5]~~ 19 inches from May 4 through August 1, both dates inclusive, and 19.5 inches from August 2 through October 15, both dates inclusive, except that no person at an enhanced opportunity shore fishing site defined in subsection (d) of this section shall possess or land fish less than 17 inches from May 4 through October 15, both dates inclusive;

(7) Tautog (blackfish) (*Tautoga onitis*): ~~[14]~~ 16 inches;

(10) Black sea bass (*Centropristis striata*): ~~[12]~~ 15.5 inches;

(11) American eel (*Anguilla rostrata*): ~~[6]~~ 9 inches;

(13) Striped bass (*Morone saxatilis*): 28 inches, except that no person shall possess or land striped bass greater than or equal to 31 inches.

(d) Enhanced opportunity shore fishing site means any public access fishing site listed in Appendix A.

26-159a-7. Creel limits

(a) Unless otherwise specified in section 26-112-45 of the Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies, the daily creel limit for species taken by sport fishing methods, including spears of any kind, shall be as set forth in this subsection. No person, other than a person authorized to take finfish under a license or registration issued pursuant to section 26-142a of the Connecticut General Statutes, while on the waters of this state or on any parcel of land, structure, or portion of a roadway abutting tidal waters of this state shall possess or land any of the following species, regardless of where taken, in excess of the identified number.

(2) Black sea bass (*Centropristis striata*): ~~[25]~~ 4 fish, except that paying passengers on a vessel operating under the authority of a party or charter fishing vessel registration issued under section 26-142a of the Connecticut General Statutes may possess not more than 6 fish from September 1 through December 31, all dates inclusive;

(3) Summer flounder (fluke) (*Paralichthys dentatus*): ~~[5]~~ 3 fish;

(5) Scup (porgy) (*Stenotomus chrysops*): ~~[10]~~ 30 fish, except that paying passengers on a vessel operating under the authority of a party/charter vessel registration issued under section 26-142a of the Connecticut General Statutes may possess ~~[45]~~ 40 fish per angler from September 1 to October ~~[15]~~ 31, inclusive;

(6) American eel (*Anguilla rostrata*): ~~[50]~~ 25 fish;

(7) Winter flounder (*Pseudopleuronectes americanus*): ~~[10]~~ 2 fish;

(8) Bluefish (*Pomatomus saltatrix*): ~~[10 fish]~~ 5 fish, except that paying passengers on a vessel operating under the authority of a party or charter fishing vessel registration issued under section 26-142a of the Connecticut General Statutes may possess not more than 7 fish;

- (10) Tautog (blackfish) (*Tautoga onitis*): ~~[4]~~ 2 fish from ~~[January]~~ April 1 to April 30, 2 fish from July 1 to August 31, and ~~[4]~~ 3 fish from October ~~[1]~~ 10 to November 28, all dates inclusive;
- (12) Weakfish (*Cynoscion regalis*): ~~[6]~~ 1 fish; ~~[and]~~
- (13) Striped bass (*Morone saxatilis*): ~~[2]~~ 1 fish; ~~and~~
- (14) Menhaden (*Brevoortia tyrannus*): 50 fish or 5 gallons, whichever is the greater amount.

26-159a-20. Closed recreational fishing seasons

(a) No person, while on the waters of this state or on any parcel of land, structure, or portion of a roadway abutting tidal waters of this state shall take, possess or land any of the following species taken by sport fishing methods, regardless of where taken, **except** during the following periods.

(1) Scup (porgy) (*Stenotomus chrysops*): ~~[For persons on a vessel operating under the authority of a party/charter vessel registration issued under section 26-142a of the Connecticut General Statutes, October 16 to June 11, inclusive; for all other persons, September 27 to May 23, inclusive;]~~ May 1 to December 31, all dates inclusive;

(2) Tautog (*Tautoga onitis*): ~~[May 1 to June 30, September 1 to September 30, and December 7 to December 31];~~ April 1 to April 30, July 1 to August 31, October 10 to November 28, all dates inclusive;

(3) Summer flounder (fluke) (*Paralichthys dentatus*): ~~[September 2 to May 23];~~ May 4 to October 15, both dates inclusive; ~~[and;]~~

(4) Winter flounder (*Pseudopleuronectes americanus*): ~~[May 31 to March 31]~~ April 1 to December 31, both dates inclusive;

(5) Black sea bass (*Centropristis striata*): May 16 to November 25, both dates inclusive, except that paying passengers on a vessel operating under the authority of a party or charter fishing vessel registration issued under section 26-142a of the Connecticut General Statutes may take, possess, and land black sea bass during the period May 16 to December 31, both dates inclusive; and

(6) Atlantic cod (*Gadus morhua*): the open season specified in 50 CFR 648.89;

Appendix A. Section 26-159a(d) Enhanced Opportunity Shore Fishing Sites at which summer flounder may be taken as small as 17 inches.

County	City	Owner	Site (w/ Link)
Fairfield	Bridgeport	City	Pleasure Beach Family Fishing Pier
Fairfield	Bridgeport	City	Saint Mary's by the Sea
Fairfield	Bridgeport	City	Seaside Park
Fairfield	Fairfield	City	Ash Creek Open Space
Fairfield	Fairfield	City	Jennings Beach
Fairfield	Fairfield	City	Penfield Beach
Fairfield	Fairfield	City	Penfield Reef
Fairfield	Norwalk	City	Calf Pasture Beach
Fairfield	Norwalk	City	Maritime Aquarium Park
Fairfield	Stratford	City	Bond's Dock
Fairfield	Stratford	City	Long Beach
Fairfield	Stratford	City	Point-No-Point
Fairfield	Stratford	City	Russian Beach
Fairfield	Stratford	City	Short Beach Park
Fairfield	Westport	State	Sherwood Island State Park
Middlesex	Old Saybrook	State	South Cove Causeway
New Haven	Branford	City	Branford Point
New Haven	Guilford	City	Chaffinch Island Park
New Haven	Madison	State	Hammonasset Beach State Park
New Haven	Milford	Audubon	CT Audubon Coastal Center
New Haven	Milford	City	Gulf Beach
New Haven	Milford	State	Silver Sands State Park
New Haven	New Haven	City	Criscuolo Park
New Haven	New Haven	State	Tomlinson Bridge Fishing Pier
New Haven	West Haven	City	Bradley Point Park
New Haven	West Haven	City	Sandy Point
New Haven	West Haven	City	Sandy Point Bird Sanctuary

Appendix A, Continued. Section 26-159a(d) Enhanced Opportunity Shore Fishing Sites at which summer flounder can be harvested as small as 17 inches.

County	City	Owner	Site (w/ Link)
New London	East Lyme	City	Cini Memorial Park
New London	East Lyme	City	Hole-in-the-Wall Beach
New London	East Lyme	City	McCook Park
New London	East Lyme	State	Rocky Neck State Park
New London	Groton	State	Bluff Point State Park and Reserve
New London	Groton	City of Groton	Eastern Point Beach
New London	New London	City	City Pier and Waterfront Park
New London	New London	State	Fort Trumbull State Park
New London	Old Lyme	State	DEEP Marine HQ -Ferry Landing Park
New London	Stonington	City	Mystic River Park
New London	Stonington	State	Stonington Point
New London	Stonington	City	Stonington Town Dock Fishing Pier
New London	Waterford	State	Harkness Memorial State Park
New London	Waterford	City	Mago Point Park
New London	Waterford	City	Waterford Beach Park

Justification

Need: To comply with mandatory provisions of Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) Interstate Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) for the subject species.

Under 16 U.S.C. Chapter 17 - Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act (ACFCMA) Section 5106, states are required to implement and enforce ASMFC FMPs. If a state fails to implement mandatory measures of a Commission plan, the Secretary of Commerce is required to impose a moratorium on fishing for that species within the waters of the non-complying state.

Management Authority: Summer flounder, scup and black sea bass are managed jointly by ASMFC and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) through a joint FMP. American eel, striped bass, tautog, and Atlantic menhaden are managed solely by ASMFC.

Atlantic menhaden: The menhaden creel limit has been adopted in response to state resident concerns that unlicensed commercial fishing was taking place (i.e. individuals taking large numbers of menhaden, intending to sell them rather than keep them for personal use). The creel limit is intended as a law enforcement tool and is not intended to restrict overall recreational harvest. These measures remain status quo for 2026.

American eel: Addendum III to the ASMFC American Eel FMP required states to adopt a 9-inch minimum size and 25 fish creel limit to provide additional conservation for the yellow eel life stage. The minimum size and creel limit adopted here through modification of RCSA sections 26-159a-4 and 26-159a-7 apply to all tidal waters of the state, including those tidal waters that fall within the inland district. These measures remain status quo for 2026.

Black sea bass: Regional management for this species has been in place since 2013. Addendum XXX to the ASFMC FMP for black sea bass, adopted in early 2018, revised the management regions, established regional allocations of the recreational harvest limit, and required states within a region to develop similar measures that could not depart from a “regional standard” by more than three fish in possession limit and one inch in minimum size. The 2017 projected northern region (MA-NY) harvest exceeded the 2018 allocation of the recreational harvest target, and a regional harvest reduction was therefore required for 2018. Because Connecticut had an open season that was considerably longer than other states in the northern region, the regional standard approach adopted under Addendum XXX resulted in Connecticut bearing the brunt of the required regional reduction; Connecticut was required to substantially reduce the planned open season for 2018 and reduce the planned possession limit to achieve a 28.5% reduction in harvest. Subsequently, prior to the opening of the 2018 black sea bass season, northern region states filed an appeal with ASMFC seeking to address what the region viewed as an Addendum XXX outcome that was inequitable and not based on the best available science. The northern region appeal requested the initiation of a new Addendum that would institute the 2011 – 2015 timeframe for regional re-allocation of the recreational harvest limit and also incorporate updated harvest data which would allow for more equitable regional management of black sea bass for 2018.

The northern region states (MA-NY) met via conference call on April 27, 2018, and reached a compromise in an effort to develop revised 2018 recreational measures that would meet the needs of the northern region without unduly impacting other regions, while still constraining harvest to

the 2018 recreational harvest limit. The northern region appealed, and revised 2018 recreational measures were heard at the ASMFC Interstate Fishery Management Plan Policy Board on May 3, 2018. The proposed northern region 2018 revised recreational measures were approved by the Policy Board and subsequently implemented by the ASMFC Summer Flounder, Scup and Black Sea Bass Management Board, allowing Connecticut to forgo the planned reductions in season length and possession limit that had been required as a result of Addendum XXX. The Policy Board also initiated new management action for the 2019 black sea bass recreational fishery and tasked the Plan Development Team with developing a white paper to consider the impacts of changes in black sea bass abundance and distribution to the management of commercial and recreational fisheries. For 2019, the ASMFC Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Management Board approved status quo recreational measures for black sea bass for all states, given relatively close correspondence of estimated 2018 recreational harvest and the 2019 recreational harvest limit, and the anticipated completion of a black sea bass stock assessment in late 2019 that likely will require adjustments to prevailing recreational measures. In 2020, incorporation of revised MRIP harvest estimates into both a stock assessment and the annual federal specifications-setting process initially resulted in a requirement for an approx. 30% coastwide reduction in black sea bass recreational harvest; this proposed reduction was attributable to revised MRIP harvest estimates (both current and historic) that were 3-4 times larger than previous estimates. However, due to uncertainty around the recently revised MRIP estimates and the robust nature of the black sea bass stock, the MAFMC Management Committee recommended status quo black sea bass recreational measures coastwide for 2020. MAFMC and ASMFC subsequently voted to implement status quo recreational measures for 2020 at their joint December 2019 meeting. Status quo measures were also maintained in 2021 due to uncertainty in 2020 recreational harvest estimates due to COVID-related suspension of MRIP sampling. For 2022, comparison of 2021 MRIP harvest estimates to the 2022 recreational harvest limit suggested a 28% reduction in black sea bass harvest was necessary. Subsequent analyses by the ASMFC Technical Committee suggested a revised reduction of 20.7% was acceptable, and the management board subsequently voted to adopt this revised reduction at a special board meeting in February 2021. After obtaining public input on potential options to achieve the required reduction, CT chose to adopt an increased minimum length of 16 inches (all other northern region states adopted the same length limit) and a reduced season of May 19 – December 1, with the exception that for-hire vessels would retain a status quo season and remain open during the entirety of December (i.e., season of May 19 – December 31). For 2023, MAFMC and ASMFC implemented a “harvest control rule” approach for the first time; the outcome of this approach required a 10% coastwide reduction in black sea bass harvest, which CT accomplished by implementing a two-week mid-season closure from June 24 – July 7 (both dates inclusive) for boat/shore anglers but not for for-hire anglers (i.e. for-hire season remained status quo from 2022). In 2023 to and including 2025, minor adjustments to the season were made to maintain a Saturday opening.

For 2026, the ASMFC board and MAFMC, voted to allow for a 20% coastwide liberalization of the recreational black sea bass harvest. In addition, addendum XXXII to the fishery management plan, requires the states and regions reduce disparities in regulations between regions and states when liberalization is allowed. With that in mind, the Board, at its February 2026 meeting, allocated a 27% liberalization to the northern region. The northern region states of NY, CT, RI and MA collaborated to craft regulations that reduced management disparity within the region.

Bluefish: Based on the 2025 management track stock assessment findings and rebuilding plan projections, the Board and Council set new specifications for the 2026 and 2027 fishing seasons. For 2026, the commercial quota was set at 4.66 million pounds, and the recreational harvest limit (RHL) was set at 22.02 million pounds. Due to the increase in RHL, recreational bag limits will increase in 2026 and 2027 to include a 5-fish bag limit for private anglers and a 7-fish bag limit for for-hire anglers.

Scup: This species has been managed by region since 2013, with the states of MA-NY constituting the “northern” management region. Although further liberalization in the scup minimum size and creel limits has been permitted since 2013, Connecticut maintained conservative management measures in 2013 and 2014. In 2015 the minimum size and creel limit were liberalized to match neighboring states. Those 2015 measures were retained in 2016 and 2017. Because the 2017 projected harvest was less than the 2018 recreational harvest limit, management action by the ASFMC and the MAFMC in late 2017 and early 2018 allowed regions to further relax management measures for 2018. In response, the northern region gained ASFMC approval to reduce the minimum size to 9 inches in 2018. Connecticut was also allowed to reduce the minimum size at enhanced opportunity shore fishing sites to 8 inches. In 2019, ASMFC approved proposals from the northern region for minor liberalizations to scup measures, given coastwide harvest in 2018 was 30% lower than the recreational harvest limit. After considering and gathering public input on several potential options, the northern region states reached consensus to open the scup season year-round in 2019, and to increase party/charter creel limits from 45 to 50 fish during each states’ current party/charter bonus season (for CT: Sept 1 – Oct 31). In 2020, incorporation of revised MRIP harvest estimates into both a stock assessment and the annual federal specifications-setting process initially resulted in a requirement for an approx. 60% coastwide reduction in scup recreational harvest; this large, proposed reduction was attributable to revised MRIP harvest estimates (both current and historic) that were 3-4 times larger than previous estimates. However, due to uncertainty around the recently revised MRIP estimates and the robust nature of the scup stock, the MAFMC Management Committee recommended status quo scup recreational measures coastwide for 2020. MAFMC and ASMFC subsequently voted to implement status quo recreational measures for 2020 at their joint December 2019 meeting. Status quo measures were also maintained in 2021 due to uncertainty in 2020 recreational harvest estimates due to COVID-related suspension of MRIP sampling. For 2022, comparison of 2021 MRIP harvest estimates to the 2022 recreational harvest limit suggested a 56% reduction in scup harvest was necessary. MAFMC and ASMFC voted at their joint December 2021 meeting to implement a 1-inch increase in minimum length coastwide, which would produce an estimated 33% reduction in recreational harvest. NOAA responded to this action by stating that the agency would implement a federal waters closure for recreational scup harvest in 2022 but subsequently declined to implement that closure when the final federal rule was published. For 2023, MAFMC and ASMFC implemented a “harvest control rule” approach for the first time; the outcome of this approach required a 10% coastwide reduction in scup harvest, which the northern region states achieved by implementing a 10.5” minimum size for boat anglers, and a 9.5” minimum size for all shore anglers, even at the enhanced sites, along with a reduction in season from year-round to May 1 – Dec. 31, and a decrease in the fall party/charter bonus bag limit from 50 to 40 fish. In 2024, northern states were again required to reduce scup harvest, which was accomplished by raising the minimum size for boat angler to 11” with no other changes to regulations. Regulations were held status quo for 2025 and 2026.

Striped bass: Addendum IV to the Striped Bass FMP, approved at the February 4, 2015, ASMFC meeting, called for a 25% reduction in Amendment VI commercial fisheries quota and a 25% reduction in the collective coastal states sport harvest (relative to 2013 harvest) in 2015. Public input strongly favored 1 fish at 28 inches or stricter measures. A minimum size of 28 inches and a possession limit of 1 fish was instituted in 2015. Addendum VI, approved at the October 2019 ASMFC meeting, called for an 18% coastwide reduction in both recreational and commercial removals, in response to a 2018 stock assessment that determined the striped bass stock was overfished. The recreational measure approved in Addendum VI for the “ocean” fishery (all areas except Chesapeake Bay) was a 28-35” slot limit, with a one fish bag limit and no closed season. Connecticut implemented this measure in 2020 and left this measure in place until May 2023. On May 2, 2023, ASMFC took emergency action to reduce striped bass harvest and mandated a reduced slot limit of 28-31” for the ocean fishery, to be implemented by all coastal states by July 2, 2023. Connecticut implemented the 28-31” slot limit effective May 26, 2023. Addendum VI also created a mandate for coastal states to implement rules requiring circle hooks when recreationally fishing for striped bass. Connecticut implemented the circle hook rule for 2021 through a separate regulatory action. The 28-31" slot limit remained in place in 2024-2025 and will remain in place for 2026 as well.

Bonus Striper Fishing Program: This program, initiated in 2011, allowed anglers to obtain one tag/voucher per season to allow harvest of one undersized striped bass (22-28”). This program was suspended indefinitely in 2020. This action was taken in response to the overfished condition of the striped bass stock and the need to reduce harvest.

Summer flounder: This species has been managed by region since 2014 with Connecticut and New York forming a management region. Each state within a management region is compelled under Addendum XXVII to the FMP to adopt identical minimum size and creel limits and limit the open season to a specific number of days. Addendum XXVIII, approved in early 2017, required raising the minimum length to 19 inches and reducing the possession limit to 3 fish, with the open season length remaining status quo. Because the 2017 projected harvest was less than the 2018 recreational harvest limit, management action by the ASFMC and the MAFMC in late 2017 and early 2018 allowed regions to relax management measures for 2018. In response, CT and NY gained ASFMC approval to change the possession limit to 4 fish and modestly lengthen the season in 2018. The minimum size remained at 19 inches (17 inches at enhanced opportunity shore fishing sites in CT). During 2019-21, recreational measures for the CT-NY region were kept status quo given that estimated annual recreational harvests each year approximated the recreational harvest limits for the following year. For 2022, based on comparison of estimated 2021 harvest and the 2022 recreational harvest limit, ASMFC and MAFMC determined that a 16.5% liberalization in harvest was permissible. After obtaining public comment and discussing options, CT and NY received ASMFC approval to implement a reduced minimum length of 18.5 inches and an expanded season of May 1 – Oct. 9 for 2022 (bag limit was kept status quo at 4 fish). For 2023, ASMFC and MAFMC voted to maintain status quo regulations from 2022. In 2024, due to a mandate from ASMFC/MAFMC to reduce recreational harvest, CT and NY implemented a split season: May 4 – August 1 – 19" minimum length; August 2 – October 15 – 19.5" minimum length. The possession limit was set at 3 fish per angler for both portions of the season. CT and NY maintained status quo regulations in 2025 and 2026.

Tautog: The 2016 tautog stock assessment assessed Long Island Sound as a separate population for the first time and determined that tautog were overfished and that overfishing was occurring.

Amendment 1 to the ASFMC Tautog FMP required that CT and NY develop recreational and commercial management measures to reduce harvest by 20.3%. (the original draft amendment specified a 47% reduction, but CT and NY gained Board approval for a more modest reduction). In response, the two states developed common recreational measures that include the same possession limits, minimum size, spring and summer seasons (fall seasons differ in length) for 2018. These same common recreational measures were implemented in 2019 and remained in place through 2025. These measures currently remain in place for 2026, although mid-season changes may occur due to a draft addendum initiated in 2025.

Winter flounder: This species is managed by NOAA Fisheries in federal waters and ASMFC in state waters. Since only a fraction of the state waters catch limit (set aside) is being used, ASMFC was able to adopt a 10-month open season for recreation harvest in 2014 and maintain this season through 2025. The Board maintained 2025 recreational measures for the 2026-2028 fishing years.

Public Input/Notice: Due to the short timeline and the multi-state collaborative process used to set regional (MA-NY) recreational rules for black sea bass, an online survey of public preferences was conducted with 3,322 people responding to the survey for CT. Public input for the increase to the bluefish possession limit, was taken during the ASMFC/MAFMC process.

DECLARATION AUTHORITY

Regulation 26-159a-22. Compliance with Interstate Fishery Management Plans.

(a) The Commissioner may, by declaration, establish and adjust closed seasons, length limits, creel limits, trip limits, and trip limit adjustment values in order to comply with interstate fishery management plans and emergency actions adopted by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission or the U.S. Department of Commerce.

(b) The Commissioner shall inform the public of all such changes at least 10 days prior to the effective date by placing posters at state boat launch areas, by issuing news releases, by mailing notices to bait and tackle shops and by mailing notices to all affected license holders.

(c) Any declaration made under this section shall be for a period not more than 120 days provided, if notice of intent to amend regulations has been published under Chapter 54, such declaration shall remain in effect until said regulations have been adopted, but not longer than 240 days. In 2025, PA 25-170 modified Sec. 26-159a to include the text: “Any declaration related to interstate fishery management plans that is made pursuant to a regulation adopted pursuant to this section shall remain in effect until a new declaration is made or such regulation is amended.” This supersedes (c) above, eliminating the 120- or 240-day limitation on declaration length.

How to interpret the text in this declaration

The base for this declaration is existing text “on the books” in Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies (RCSA). The different-colored fonts in the declaration modify RCSA to accomplish the intended change to the rules that are on the books.

Black font: existing text in RCSA

Blue underlined font: text being added to a section of RCSA

Red strike-through font: text being deleted from a section of RCSA