



Greater Atlantic Region Bulletin

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NORTHEAST MULTISPECIES (GROUND FISH) **FISHING YEAR 2017 REGULATIONS**

Effective Date: May 1, 2017

We are announcing groundfish management measures that will be effective on May 1, 2017, and providing updates on other management measures. To see which regulations apply to you, this Bulletin is divided into six sections:

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Update on Framework 56 to the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan

Development of Framework 56 was delayed to incorporate the results of the December 2016 witch flounder assessment. The New England Fishery Management Council submitted Framework 56 to us on April 13th, 2017, and we are developing a proposed rule to implement Framework 56 measures. Once we announce a proposed rule for Framework 56, detailed information will be available at:

<http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/sustainable/species/multispecies/>. As explained in more detail below, if approved, Framework 56 would change several management measures for the 2017 fishing year, including catch limits for several stocks.

Initial Fishing Year 2017 Catch Limits

Last year, Framework 55 set specifications for all groundfish stocks for the 2017 fishing year. These quotas will be in effect on May 1, 2017, and are in **Table 1** below. For groundfish sectors, allocations based on these specifications and initial 2017 fishing year rosters will be available on May 1, 2017. We will adjust these allocations based on final 2017 sector rosters, and any updated specifications, once the final rule is published implementing approved Framework 56 measures. Framework 56 proposes increased quotas for George Bank (GB) haddock and witch flounder and decreased quotas for GB cod and GB yellowtail flounder. There are no changes proposed for the remaining 16 groundfish stocks.

After we finalize fishing year 2016 catch information, we will subtract any sector or common pool quota overages from the respective fishing year 2017 sector or common pool catch limits, if necessary.

Table 1. Initial Fishing Year 2017 Catch Limits (mt, live weight).

Stock	Total ACL	Groundfish sub-ACL	Preliminary Sector sub-ACL	Preliminary Common Pool sub-ACL	Recreational sub-ACL	Midwater Trawl Fishery	Scallop Fishery	Small-Mesh Fisheries	State Waters sub-component	Other sub-component
	A to H	A+B+C	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
GB Cod*	730	608	596	12					23	99
GOM Cod	473	437	270	10	157				27	10
GB Haddock*	46,017	44,599	44,287	312		450			484	484
GOM Haddock	4,285	4,177	2,980	37	1,160	42			33	33
GB Yellowtail Flounder*	261	211	208	3			42	5	0	3
SNE/MA Yellowtail Flounder	256	187	153	34			34		5	29
CC/GOM Yellowtail Flounder	409	341	325	16					43	26
American Plaice	1,272	1,218	1,197	22					27	27
Witch Flounder*	441	370	361	9					12	59
GB Winter Flounder	650	590	585	5					0	60
GOM Winter Flounder	776	639	605	34					122	16
SNE/MA Winter Flounder	749	585	519	67					70	94
Redfish	10,514	10,183	10,126	57					111	221
White Hake	3,448	3,340	3,314	26					36	72
Pollock	20,374	17,817	17,701	116					1,279	1,279
N. Windowpane Flounder	177	66		66					2	109
S. Windowpane Flounder	599	104		104			209		37	249
Ocean Pout	155	137		137					2	17
Atlantic Halibut	119	91		91					25	4
Atlantic Wolffish	77	72		72					1	3

*Catch limit will be replaced when the final rule for Framework 56 becomes effective.

Windowpane Flounder Accountability Measures

In fishing year 2015, the total annual catch limit for both Northern and Southern windowpane flounder were exceeded by more than 20 percent. As a result, the accountability measures (AMs) for both stocks have been triggered. Normally, groundfish AMs for non-allocated stocks are implemented at the start of the fishing year on May 1, after notice is published in the *Federal Register* with the action that puts in place management measures for that fishing year. However, rulemaking for Framework 56 and associated 2017 fishing year measures was delayed this year, and as a result final 2017 measures are also delayed and will not be in place by May 1. The Northern and Southern windowpane flounder AMs will not be effective on May 1, 2017, but will be put in place at a later date. Additional information on the 2015 quota overages, and the associated AMs, will be available in the Framework 56 proposed rule.

When we publish a proposed rule for Framework 56, detailed information will be available at: <http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/sustainable/species/multispecies/>.

Sector Measures

Approved Sectors

We have approved 19 sectors to operate in fishing years 2017 and 2018 (May 1, 2017, through April 30, 2019).

- Georges Bank Cod Fixed Gear Sector
- Maine Coast Community Sector
- Northeast Coastal Communities Sector
- Northeast Fishery Sectors I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX, X, XI, XII, and XIII
- Sustainable Harvest Sectors 1, 2 and 3.

All approved sectors receive “universal” exemptions from trip limits for allocated stocks, the GB Seasonal Closure Area, and the requirement to use a groundfish day-at-sea (DAS) to land groundfish. Also, all sector vessels may use a 6-inch mesh codend on haddock separator trawls, rope trawls, and Ruhle trawls when fishing on Georges Bank. We have approved 21 additional exemptions for fishing years 2017 and 2018, of which 20 were approved in previous fishing years. Additional information on approved and disapproved sector exemptions can be found on our website (under the sectors tab) at:

<https://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/sustainable/species/multispecies/>.

At-Sea Monitoring Changes

2017 Coverage Level

We have determined that **the at-sea monitoring (ASM) coverage level for 2017 is 16 percent**. Part of this 16 percent includes the Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology observer coverage that is paid in full by the Northeast Fisheries Observer Program (NEFOP). Because NEFOP covers a portion of sector trips, sectors can expect to pay for ASM on fewer than 16 percent of their vessels' trips in 2017. When the NEFOP coverage rate for fishing year 2017 is finalized we intend to notify the public, including sector managers, of the NEFOP coverage rate.

ASM Program Reimbursement in 2017

We expect to again be able to reimburse sectors for a portion of their eligible ASM expenses. At this time, we do not know what the reimbursement rate will be, but expect it will be less than the fishing year 2016 rate of 85 percent. Once sectors submit all of their final invoices for April trips with at-sea monitoring, we will determine the remaining funding balance available for the 2017 fishing year. We intend to publicly announce the reimbursement rate as early in the 2017 fishing year as possible to help sectors and their members plan accordingly.

New Vessel Monitoring System Exemption for Handgear A Vessels

New this year, sectors can request an exemption to allow Handgear A vessels enrolled in their sector to fish for groundfish without being required to carry a Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) unit. Handgear A vessels should contact their sector managers to determine if their sector has the exemption.

Handgear A vessels using this exemption must still call into the pre-trip notification system at least 48 hours prior to starting a trip to facilitate ASM selection, and must carry an ASM if selected for coverage. Additionally, all other reporting and monitoring requirements still apply, including the requirement to complete a vessel trip report and to declare their trip end before beginning to offload. Instead of using a VMS unit for declaring trip start and end hails, vessels must declare the start and end of trips using the interactive voice response (IVR) system. For further instructions, please refer to your sector letter of authorization or call the Sustainable Fisheries Division at (978)-281-9315.

Handgear vessels must still carry a VMS unit if they wish to fish in multiple broad stock areas (for example, Gulf of Maine and Georges Bank) on the same trip, when fishing in the Eastern and Western U.S./Canada Areas, and to access any sector exemptions or access areas that require VMS reporting.

Closed Area II Yellowtail Flounder/Haddock Special Access Program

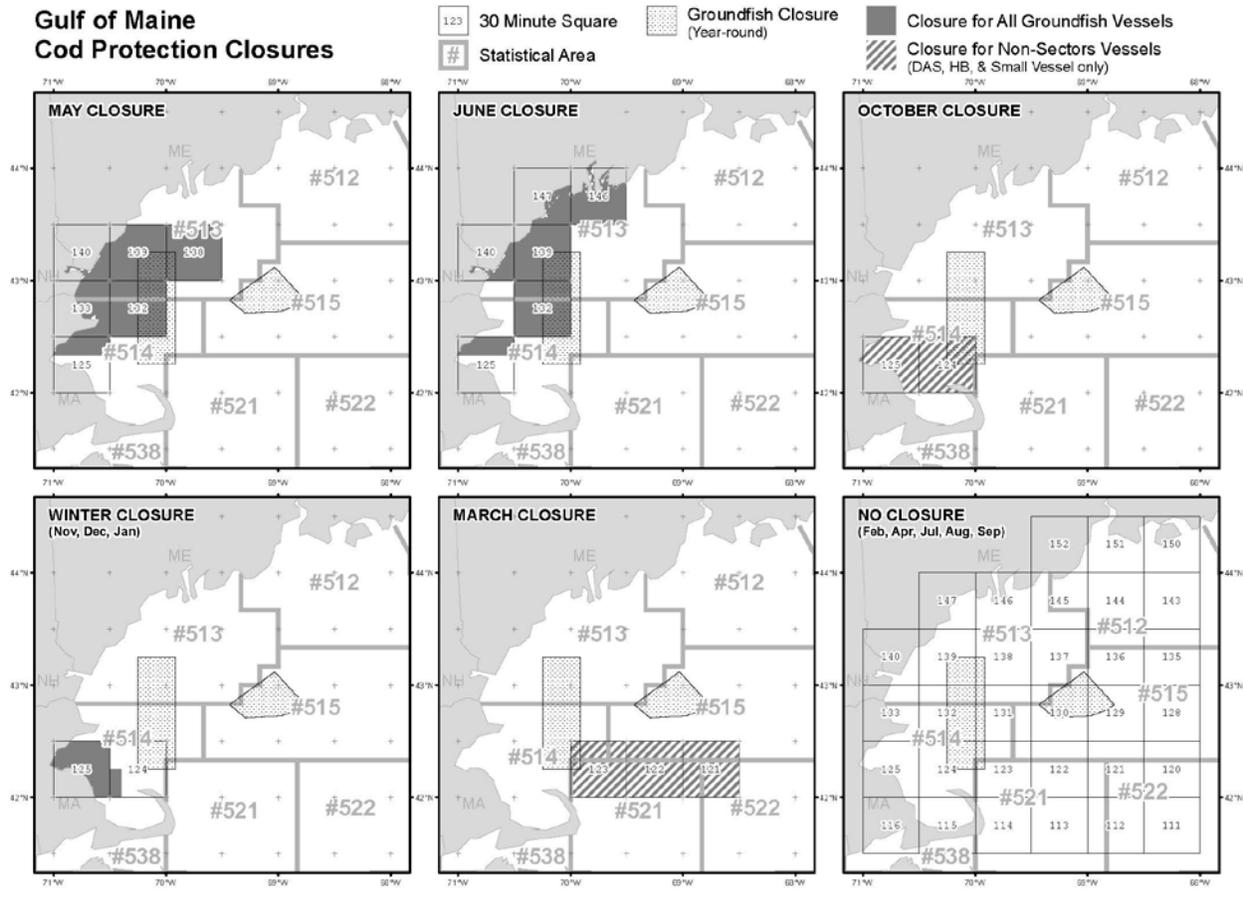
Sector vessels may not target yellowtail flounder in the Closed Area II Yellowtail Flounder/Haddock Special Access Program (SAP) in fishing year 2017. Vessels are not allowed to fish in this SAP using flounder trawl nets.

Sector vessels may fish in this SAP in 2017 to target haddock, but must fish with a haddock separator trawl, a Ruhle trawl, or hook gear. The SAP will close on January 31, 2018.

Gulf of Maine Cod Protection Closures

All groundfish vessels are reminded that they may be subject to the seasonal Gulf of Maine Cod Protection Closures. Vessels should consult **Figure 1** to determine if there are closures that apply to them at times they plan to fish.

Figure 1. Gulf of Maine Cod Protection Closures



Common Pool Measures and Trip Limits

Common pool possession and trip limits are set at the levels summarized in **Table 2** and **Table 3** (below) for the start of the 2017 fishing year. Any landings prior to midnight on April 30, 2017, are subject to the fishing year 2016 landing limits. All landings after 0001 hours on May 1, 2017, are restricted to the fishing year 2017 limits in this Bulletin.

Table 2. Initial Common Pool Possession and Trip Limits for the 2017 Fishing Year

Stock	2017 Trip Limit
GB Cod (outside Eastern U.S./Canada Area)	250 lb per DAS, up to 500 lb per per trip
GB Cod (inside Eastern U.S./Canada Area)	100 lb per DAS, up to 500 lb per trip
GOM Cod	25 lb per DAS, up to 100 lb per trip
GB Haddock	100,000 lb per trip
GOM Haddock	500 lb per DAS, up to 1,000 lb per trip
GB Yellowtail Flounder	100 lb per trip
SNE/MA Yellowtail Flounder	500 lb per DAS, up to 1,000 lb per trip
CC/GOM Yellowtail Flounder	750 lb per DAS, up to 1,500 lb per trip
American plaice	1,000 lb per trip
Witch Flounder	150 lb per trip
GB Winter Flounder	250 lb per trip
GOM Winter Flounder	2,000 lb per trip
SNE/MA Winter Flounder	2,000 lb per DAS, up to 4,000 lb per trip
Redfish	Unlimited
White hake	1,500 lb per trip
Pollock	Unlimited
Atlantic Halibut	1 fish per trip
Windowpane Flounder	Possession Prohibited
Ocean Pout	
Atlantic Wolffish	

Table 3. Initial Cod Trips Limits for Handgear A, Handgear B, and Small Vessel Category Permits for the 2017 Fishing Year

Permit	2017 Trip Limit
Handgear A GOM Cod	25 lb per trip
Handgear A GB Cod	250 lb per trip
Handgear B GOM Cod	25 lb per trip
Handgear B GB Cod	25 lb per trip
Small Vessel Category	300 lb of cod, haddock, and yellowtail flounder combined; additionally, vessels are limited to the common pool DAS limit for all stocks.

If approved, Framework 56 would substantively increase the 2017 catch limit for witch flounder. In the Framework 56 proposed rule, we may propose a change to the common pool trip limit for witch flounder consistent with the Council-recommended quota increase.

We will monitor common pool catch, and may adjust possession and trip limits, if necessary, to ensure the common pool quotas are fully caught, but not exceeded. Up-to-date quota monitoring reports can be found on our website at:

<https://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/aps/monitoring/nemultispecies.html>.

Closed Area II Yellowtail Flounder/Haddock Special Access Program

Common pool vessels may not target yellowtail flounder in the Closed Area II Yellowtail Flounder/Haddock SAP in fishing year 2017. Vessels are not allowed to fish in this SAP using flounder trawl nets.

Common pool vessels may fish in this SAP in 2017 to target haddock, but must fish with a haddock separator trawl, a Ruhle trawl, or hook gear. The SAP is open from August 1, 2017 through January 31, 2018.

Common Pool Trimester Total Allowable Catches

The common pool catch limit for each stock is divided into trimester total allowable catches (TACs): Trimester 1 (May 1-August 31); Trimester 2 (September 1-December 31); and Trimester 3 (January 1-April 30). ***Fishing Year 2017 trimester TACs are listed in Table 4 below.***

TAC Area Closures

Once we project that 90 percent of a trimester TAC for a stock is caught, we will close that Trimester TAC Area to common pool vessels fishing with gears capable of catching that stock. The area will remain closed until the end of that trimester, and will re-open at the start of the next trimester if sufficient quota is available to do so. The areas that will close for each stock, and the gears that the closure will apply to, are listed in **Table 5** on page 9.

During the fishing year, we will post weekly quota monitoring reports here:
<https://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/aps/monitoring/nemultispecies.html>.

Table 4. Initial FY 2017 Trimester TACs (mt)*

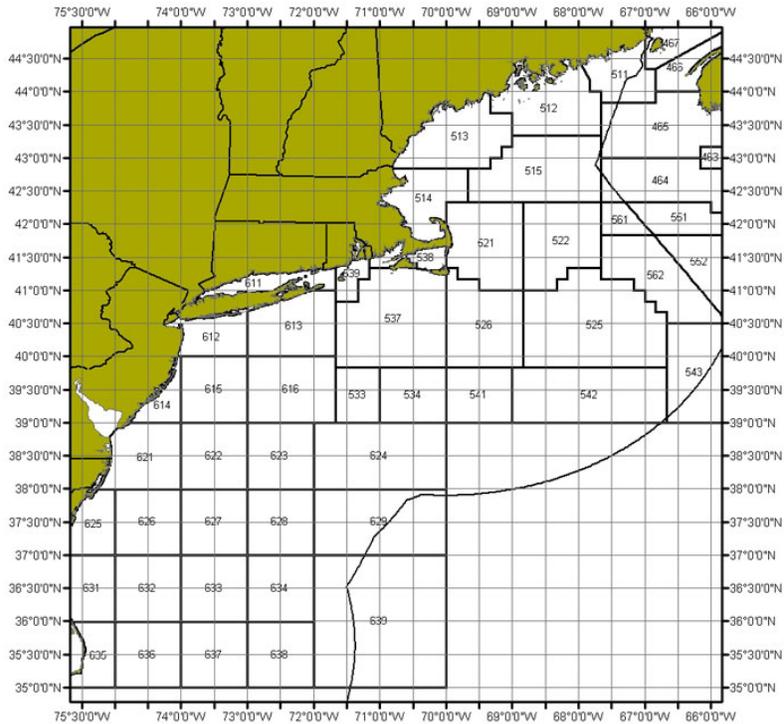
Stock	2017 TAC (mt)		
	Trimester 1	Trimester 2	Trimester 3
GB Cod	2.9	4.4	4.5
GOM Cod	2.7	3.6	3.7
GB Haddock	84.3	103.0	124.8
GOM Haddock	10.0	9.6	17.3
GB Yellowtail Flounder	0.8	1.3	2.2
SNE/MA Yellowtail Flounder	7.2	12.7	14.4
CC/GOM Yellowtail Flounder	5.5	5.5	4.7
American Plaice	5.2	7.8	8.7
Witch Flounder	2.3	2.7	3.6
GB Winter Flounder	0.4	1.2	3.3
GOM Winter Flounder	12.6	12.9	8.5
Redfish	14.3	17.7	25.1
White Hake	9.8	8.0	8.0
Pollock	32.5	40.6	42.9

* SNE Winter Flounder quota is not managed by trimester so is not included here.

Table 5. Common Pool Trimester TAC Area Closures

Stock	Statistical Area (see Figure 2)	Gear
GOM cod	513, 514	Trawl, gillnet, longline/hook
GB cod	521, 522, 525, 561	Trawl, gillnet, longline/hook
GOM haddock	513, 514, 515	Trawl, gillnet, longline/hook
GB haddock	521, 522, 525, 561, 562	Trawl, gillnet, longline/hook
CC/GOM yellowtail flounder	514, 521	Trawl, gillnet
GB yellowtail flounder	522, 525, 561, 562	Trawl, gillnet
SNE/MA yellowtail flounder	537, 539, 538, 613	Trawl, gillnet
GOM winter flounder	514	Trawl, gillnet
GB winter flounder	522, 525, 561, 562	Trawl
Witch flounder	512, 513, 514, 515, 521, 522, 525	Trawl
American plaice	512, 513, 514, 515, 521, 522, 525	Trawl
Pollock	513, 514, 515, 521, 522	Gillnet, trawl, longline/hook
Redfish	513, 514, 515, 521, 522	Trawl
White hake	513, 514, 515, 521, 522	Gillnet, trawl

Figure 2. Statistical Areas



Recreational Measures for Gulf of Maine Cod and Haddock

Measures for May 1

The 2016 recreational measures will remain in effect on May 1, 2017 (see **Table 6** below). However, we are preparing a proposed rule to solicit public comments on revised recreational measures based on the New England Fishery Management Council’s recommendations. The Council recommended that recreational possession of Gulf of Maine cod be prohibited in 2017. The council recommended that the minimum size for Gulf of Maine haddock remain unchanged, that the bag limit be reduced from 15 fish to 12 fish, and that a fall closed season be added to the existing spring closure. We will provide additional information when the proposed rule is published in the *Federal Register*. Anglers are also reminded to check their state regulations to ensure they comply with all federal and state requirements.

Table 6. Recreational Cod and Haddock Measures in place on May 1, 2017.

Species	Gulf of Maine				Outside Gulf of Maine			
	Bag Limit	Size Limit	Closed Season	Open Season	Bag Limit	Size Limit	Closed Season	Open Season
Cod	1	24 inches (61.0 cm)	May 1 – July 31 and October 1 – April 30	August 1 through September 30	Private Vessels 10 For-Hire Vessels Unlimited	22 inches (55.9 cm)	Open All Year	May 1 through April 30
Haddock	15	17 inches (43.2 cm)	March 1 – April 14	May 1 – February 28 and April 15 – April 30	Unlimited	18 inches (45.7 cm)	Open All Year	May 1 through April 30

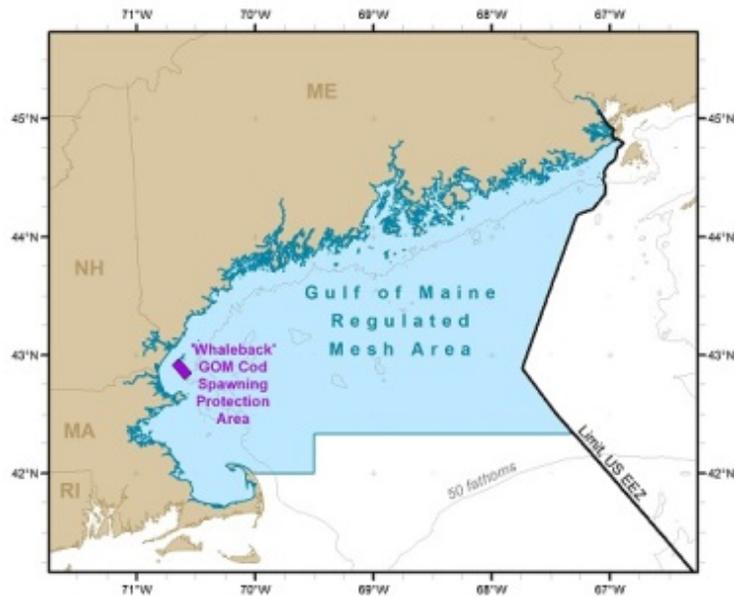
Transiting Regulations

A recreational fishing vessel may possess cod that was caught outside the Gulf of Maine while transiting the Gulf of Maine during the season cod possession is prohibited in the Gulf of Maine. The groundfish regulations allow a vessel to transit the Gulf of Maine Regulated Mesh Area (**Figure 3**) with cod and haddock caught outside the area, up to the possession limits outside the area, provided all bait and hooks are removed from fishing rods and any cod and haddock on board has been gutted and stored. A recreational fishing vessel that fishes inside and outside the Gulf of Maine on the same trip, or fishes outside the Gulf of Maine and transits the Gulf of Maine on the same trip, must comply with the most restrictive (larger) minimum fish size for all cod and haddock on board (**Table 7**).

Table 7. Most restrictive minimum fish size

Minimum Fish Sizes (total length in inches)			
Species	Inside Gulf of Maine	Outside Gulf of Maine	Most Restrictive
Cod	24	22	24
Haddock	17	18	18

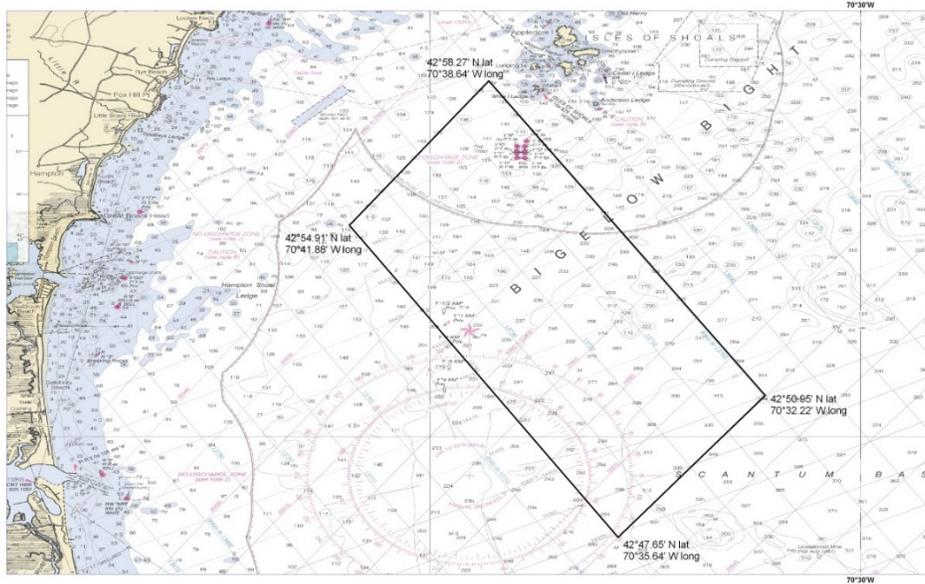
Figure 3. Gulf of Maine Regulated Mesh Area



Whaleback Cod Spawning Protection Area

Recreational and commercial vessels remain subject to the Whaleback Cod Spawning Protection Area (**Figure 4**, below).

Figure 4. Whaleback Cod Spawning Protection Area



Gear Restrictions

From April 1 through June 30 of each year, all recreational vessels, including private recreational and charter/party vessels, may only use pelagic hook-and-line gear, as defined below, when fishing in the GOM Cod Spawning Protection Area.

Point	N. Latitude	W. Longitude
CSPA1	42° 50.95'	70° 32.22'
CSPA2	42° 47.65'	70° 35.64'
CSPA3	42° 54.91'	70° 41.88'
CSPA4	42° 58.27'	70° 38.64'

Pelagic hook-and-line gear is defined as handline or rod and reel gear that is designed to fish for, or that is being used to fish for, pelagic species. No portion of this gear may be operated in contact with the bottom at any time.

Possession Restrictions

Any vessel fishing in the GOM Cod Spawning Protection Area, including pelagic hook-and-line gear by recreational vessels, is prohibited from possessing or retaining regulated species or ocean pout from April 1 through June 30 of each year.

Transiting

Recreational and commercial vessels are allowed to transit the GOM Cod Spawning Protection Area, provided all gear is stowed in accordance with the regulations as described above.

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