

Get Hooked This Summer!

Saltwater Recreational Fishing at The Jersey Shore

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Going out recreational fishing is an excellent way to connect with our marine ecosystems here in New Jersey, while providing opportunities not only for enjoyment but also to harvest some of your own local seafood. We are very fortunate that our productive marine ecosystems provide great fishing opportunities year-round from beaches, fishing piers, or aboard boats along the Jersey Shore.

Saltwater recreational fishing is already a very popular activity with up to 1 million people participating annually in these fisheries in New Jersey. If you have never gone saltwater fishing before, or even if you've been many times, there are great resources to help you find out how to get in on the action, and how to do so responsibly to help support the long-term sustainability of our marine resources.

The objective of this Earth Day Every Day newsletter is to educate you about how and where you can go saltwater recreational fishing in New Jersey, how you can do so responsibly, and how to legally adhere to current fishery management regulations.

What Can I Catch (and Legally Keep)?

There are many opportunities to fish for and to harvest a variety of species in New Jersey's inshore waters. If you are out fishing with a rod-and-reel, you can catch some of the most popular finfish species such as summer flounder, black sea bass (Figure 1), bluefish, and striped bass, as well as other species such as tautog, porgies (or "scup"), sheepshead, and weakfish.



Figure 1 – The author with a summer flounder caught in Ocean County (left) and a black sea bass caught at an offshore reef (right, photo credits: Amelia Valente).

If you are looking to catch some blue crabs, then you've got a great shot throughout our bays and estuaries using handlines or traps. And, if you want to harvest your own shellfish, such as hard clams, you can head out with a clam rake or even grab them with your bare hands!

If you need help identifying the most common marine species here in New Jersey, check out this [Marine Species Identification](#) guide from the Marine Resources Administration of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), which also maintains a website focused on [What to Fish For](#).

There are fisheries management measures regulating how many fish people can harvest daily, the seasons during which you can do so, and the harvest sizes. Check out NJDEP's [fishing seasons summary chart](#) and "[Attention Anglers](#)" (Figure 2) summary sheet to find out what you can legally harvest while saltwater fishing in New Jersey.

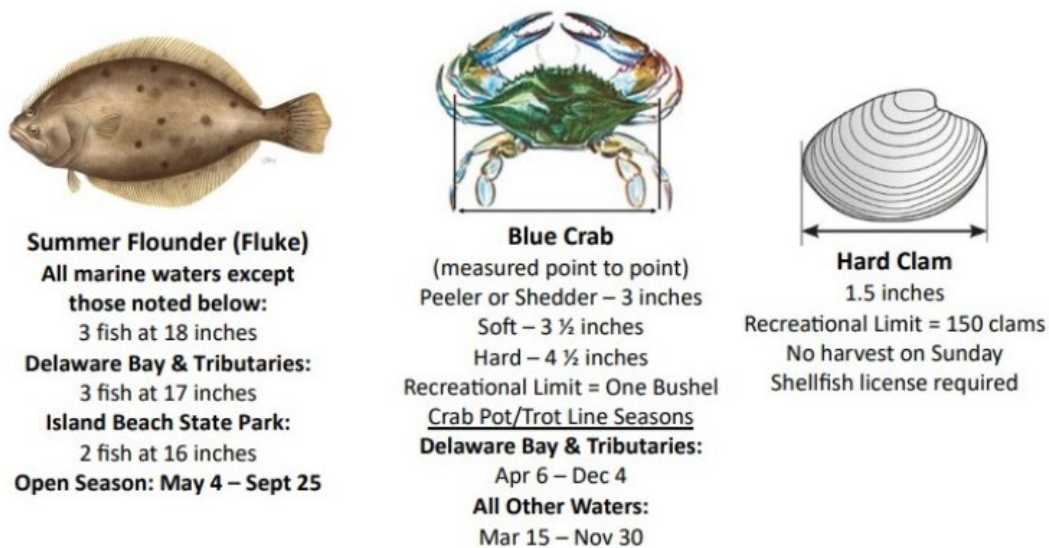


Figure 2: Fisheries management regulations for some of the most popular saltwater species. Adapted from NJDEP's [Attention Anglers](#) 2026 summary sheet.

If you would like to learn more about the science and management of the species commonly caught in New Jersey, check out the [Sustainable Seafood Profiles](#) resources from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the [Managed Species](#) profiles available from the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC).

If you are wondering what species are around before you go fishing, then call your local tackle shop to get updates on what's biting in order to plan ahead and help to maximize your chances of success. Your local tackle shop will also be the best place to buy fishing tackle, bait, lures, and other gear needed for your trip. If you are looking for environmental information, such as water temperature, weather forecasts, or tidal information, check out our July 2025 newsletter to find out "[What Can I Expect at the Jersey Shore?](#)".

Where Can I Go Fishing?

Check out NJDEP's [Saltwater Fishing Opportunities](#) map and scan areas of interest to see beaches and fishing piers where you can fish without having to go out on a boat (Figure 3). That map also shows launch ramps if you or a friend have a boat to launch that isn't kept at a marina. There are great options along Raritan Bay, all the way down the Atlantic Coast of New Jersey, and throughout Delaware Bay.

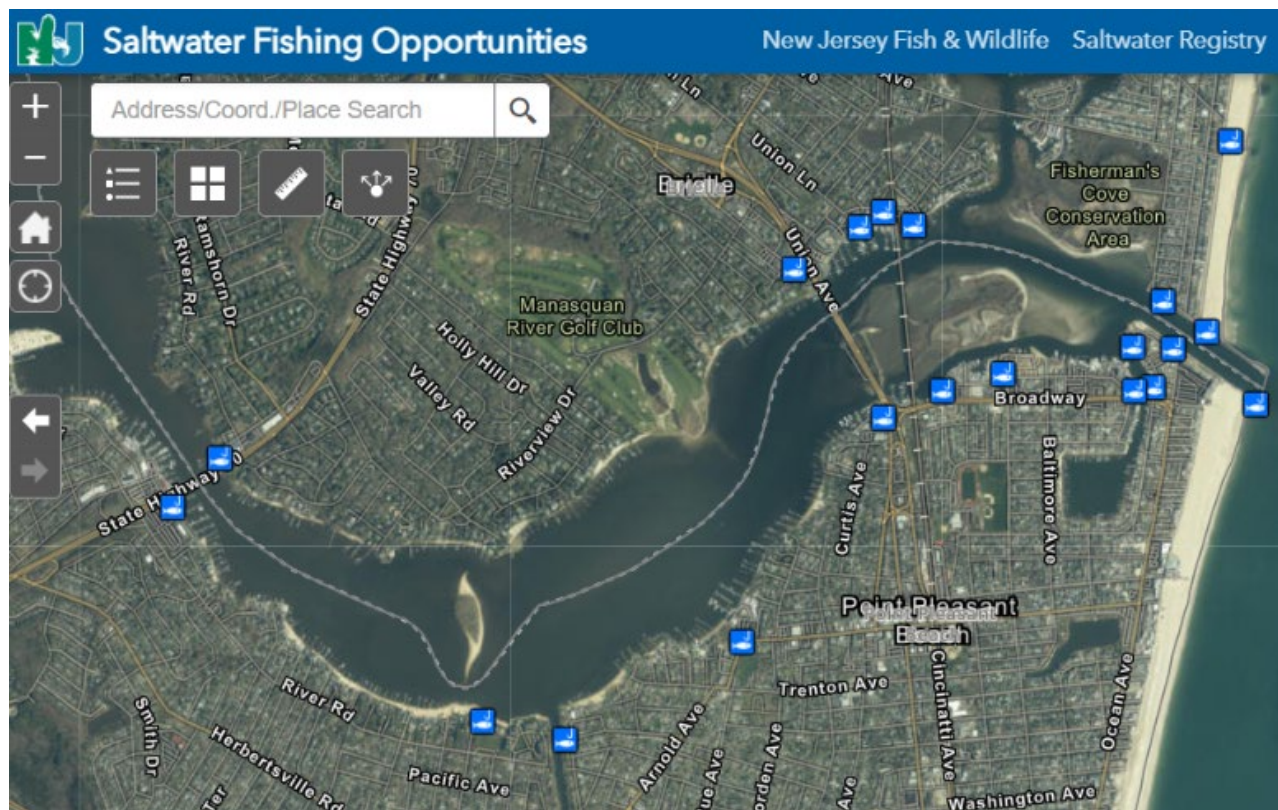


Figure 3: Screenshot of NJDEP's [Saltwater Fishing Opportunities](#) map showing the fishing access points and marinas along the Manasquan River.

A great way to go fishing is on a "for-hire" boat, including a party boat or a charter boat. A party boat, which is also known as a headboat, is where you pay per person (or "head") to go fishing on that boat for the day, while for a charter boat you typically reserve the whole boat for a fishing trip for your group. Whether you are a new or very experienced angler, going fishing on a party or charter boat are great options to fish with a professional captain and to learn from other people who are on the boat. Party and charter boats are located all throughout New Jersey, and one way to find one near you is to check out [NJDEP's Party and Charter Boat Directory](#), or by checking in with your local tackle shop who are well connected with what boats are fishing in their areas.

Do I Need A Permit or License?

There are many [Marine Regulations](#) for our saltwater recreational fisheries to help support the long-term sustainability of these resources and the industries that are dependent on these resources. The links shared above outline the open seasons, possession limits (i.e., how many you can keep), and the size restrictions for harvest. In addition to these regulations, there are some licenses and permits that might

be needed --- check out the NJDEP [Saltwater Recreational Licenses & Permits](#) webpage for more info and to acquire what is required before you go fishing.

For example, there is no saltwater fishing permit in New Jersey, but our state does have a [Saltwater Recreational Registry Program](#). Individual saltwater anglers ages 16 and older must register for this free program if any of the following criteria are met:

- Recreationally fish with a hand line or rod and line, spearfish or fish by hand
- Recreationally fish in the marine and fresh tidal waters of the State of New Jersey
- Recreationally fish in marine waters outside the State of New Jersey but land the catch in New Jersey

Individual saltwater anglers are exempt from registering if they are (a) under the age of 16 or (b) solely fish on for-hire (party or charter) vessels that are registered with this program.

If you are harvesting shellfish, such as hard clams, oysters, or mussels, then a [Shellfish license](#) is required. In addition, you can only harvest shellfish from waters classified as Approved (year-round) or conditionally Approved (only seasonally in certain months) for safe harvesting as determined by:

NJDEP's Bureau of Marine Water Monitoring --- check out their [Shellfish Classification map](#) to see where in your local waters you can legally harvest your own shellfish.

If you are going fishing for blue crabs with handlines, manually operated collapsible traps, or scoop nets, then no license is required. However, a license is required to catch crabs recreationally if not more than two non-collapsible Chesapeake-style crab pots or not more than two trot lines are used.

If you ever have any questions about current regulations, then reach out to one of the following NJDEP offices to seek clarification before going out fishing:

- Bureau of Marine Fisheries – General Marine Fisheries Regulations
 - o 609-748-2020
 - o NJMarineFisheries@dep.nj.gov
- Bureau of Shellfisheries – Shellfish Fisheries and Aquaculture Regulations
 - o Nacote Creek Office (Atlantic/Ocean/Monmouth Counties): 609-748-2040
 - o Delaware Bay Office: 856-785-0730
- Saltwater Registry and Licensing Support
 - o 609-748-2038
 - o Saltwaterregistry@dep.nj.gov
- Marine Law Enforcement
 - o 609-748-2050

Can I Eat What I Catch?

One of the great aspects of recreational fishing is that you have the ability to harvest your own seafood, which is a great food choice and an important part of a healthy diet --- check out this [“Eating Fish is Healthy”](#) fact sheet from Rutgers Cooperative Extension for more seafood nutrition information.

In addition to adhering to the regulations mentioned above, you want to make sure anything that you harvest is safe to eat, because some waters in the state are not as clean as others. Fortunately, NJDEP has their [Fish Smart, Eat Smart](#) program, which you should reference to ensure that you are following safe consumption guidelines based on the finfish and crab species that you’re catching in the waterbody where you are fishing. As mentioned above, if you are harvesting shellfish such as hard clams, make sure to refer to NJDEP’s [Shellfish Classification map](#) to ensure that you are harvesting them from locations where it is safe and legal to catch these filter-feeding bivalves.

If you are interested in more seafood facts for the species that you’re catching, then once again the [Sustainable Seafood Profiles](#) resources from NOAA (Figure 4) are great to learn sustainability information, nutrition facts, and even cooking recipes!

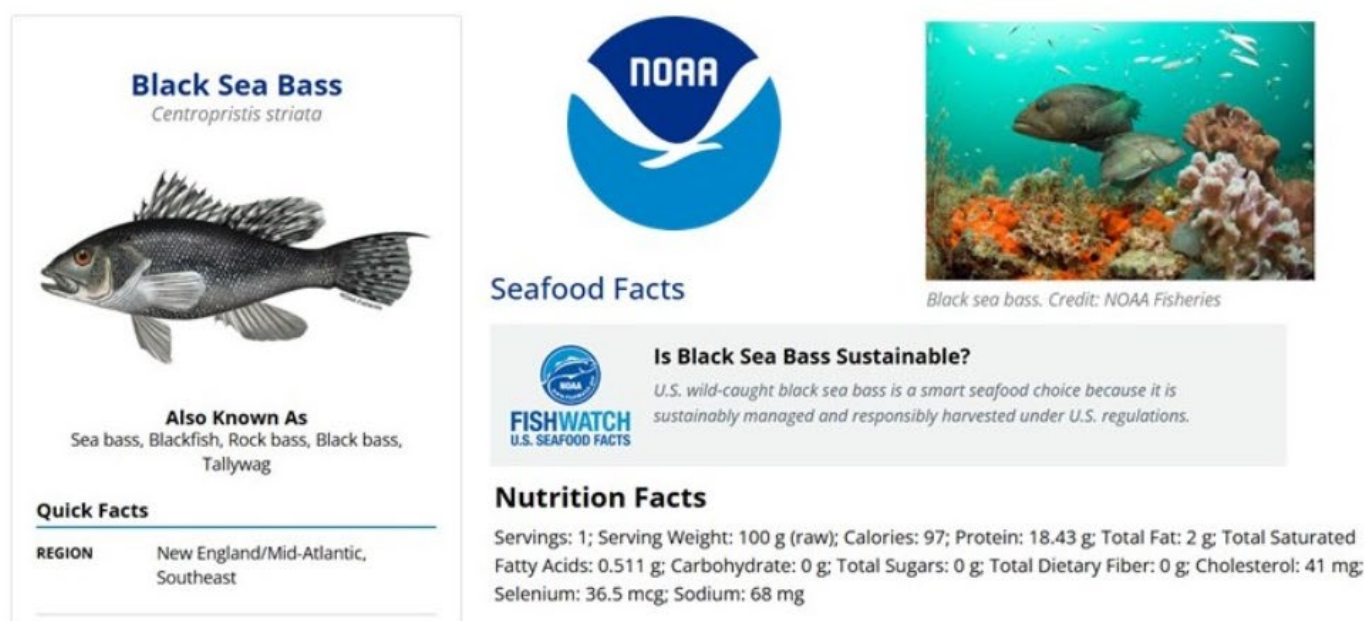


Figure 4: Seafood related information for black sea bass as taken from NOAA [Sustainable Seafood Profile](#).

Citizen Science Opportunities

When you are going out recreational fishing, there are also some opportunities to participate in citizen science projects as an added benefit of the experience. The following are some of these opportunities to pair recreational trips with citizen science projects:

- [NJDEP Volunteer Angler Survey](#) – provide information on your catch and fishing efforts to be used in fisheries science and management.
- Fish Tagging Projects – Scientists frequently tag fish to learn about their behavior and migration patterns. If you ever catch a tagged fish, be sure to record the tag ID number and phone number and then call the phone number on the tag to share info about the fish that you caught (e.g., fish length and health, location caught) to contribute to these projects, including Rutgers University's [Fish Tagging Research and Education Program \(FiTREP\)](#).

There are also other tagging programs where you can buy fish tags to put on the fish that you catch and release:

- o [American Littoral Society](#)
- o [Gray FishTag Research](#)
- There are also many different reporting tools and apps where you could report sightings of fish, wildlife, and marine debris that you see while out recreational fishing, such as:
 - o [iNaturalist](#)
 - o [NJDEP Marine Protected Species Reporter](#)
 - o [Marine Debris Tracker](#)

Discussion

Hopefully this information helps you feel well prepared to head out and enjoy some fishing this summer, or any time of the year given all the great saltwater recreational fishing opportunities at the Jersey Shore. Getting out on the water can help you connect with our marine ecosystems and by being sure to adhere to the regulations you can do so sustainably and as a responsible steward of our marine resources ---- perhaps also with the opportunity to catch your own tasty seafood dinner!

If you feel like you could benefit from some additional information to help you get started, or as a refresher if you haven't gone fishing in a while, then check out some of the hands-on educational fishing programs offered by [NJDEP](#) or the [American Littoral Society](#), which have programs for adults and youth.