



JOSH STEIN
Governor

D. REID WILSON
Secretary

KATHY B. RAWLS
Director

M-4-2026

PROCLAMATION

RE: GILL NET RESTRICTIONS – INTERNAL COASTAL AND JOINT FISHING WATERS SOUTH OF MANAGEMENT UNIT A – OPENS MANAGEMENT UNIT C AND A PORTION OF MANAGEMENT UNIT E TO THE USE OF GILL NETS WITH STRETCHED MESH LENGTH OF 4 INCHES THROUGH 6 ½ INCHES WITH GEAR EXEMPTIONS

This proclamation supersedes proclamation M-26-2025 dated November 18, 2025. This proclamation opens Management Unit C and portions of Management Unit E to the use of gill nets with a stretched mesh length of 4 inches through 6 ½ inches, implements gear exemptions for the shad fishery and maintains closures of all other management units south of Management Unit A to the use of gill nets with a stretched mesh length of 4 inches through 6 ½ inches, except as described in Section II, in accordance with Amendment 4 to the N.C. Southern Flounder Fishery Management Plan and the Federal Incidental Take Permits for endangered and threatened Sea Turtles and endangered Sturgeon.

Kathy B. Rawls, Director, Division of Marine Fisheries, hereby announces that effective at **4:00 P.M., Friday, February 20, 2026**, the following provisions **shall apply to the use of gill nets with a stretched mesh length of 4 inches through 6 ½ inches south of Management Unit A (south of 35° 46.3000' N latitude):**

I. **GEAR RESTRICTIONS**

- A. It shall be unlawful to use gill nets with a stretched mesh length greater than 6 ½ inches.
- B. It shall be unlawful to use gill nets with a stretched mesh length of 4 inches through 6 ½ inches except those described in Section II.

II. **AREA EXEMPTIONS AND RESTRICTIONS FOR RUN-AROUND, STRIKE, DROP, AND DRIFT GILL NETS**

A. Exempted gear definitions:

- 1. Run-around, strike, or drop gill nets - gill nets that are actively fished by either (1) using the boat to run a net around a school of fish, creating a closed circle, or (2) using the boat after the net is set to herd fish into the net without delay, whereby soak time does not exceed 30 minutes from the end of the set to the beginning of the haul.
- 2. Drift gill nets - gill nets that are used to capture fish while being moved along by water currents whereby the net stays attached to the vessel from deployment through retrieval.

- B. It shall be unlawful to use run-around, strike, drift, and drop gill nets with a stretched mesh length 5 inches or greater except those areas described below.

- 1. **Management Unit C: Internal Coastal and Joint Fishing Waters of the Pamlico, Pungo, Bay, and Neuse rivers drainages, Pamlico Sound west of 76° 30.0000'W, and Turnagain Bay. In Turnagain Bay north of the 35° N parallel and east of 76° 30.0000'W out to 200 yards from shore (Map 1).**

2. **Management Unit E: Cape Fear River and its tributaries north of the Railroad Bridge described as a line running from a point on the west shore at 34° 15.5760' N - 77° 59.3000' W; running easterly to a point on the east shore at 34° 15.6270' N - 77° 59.2300' W (Map 2).**
 3. **Management Unit E: Northeast Cape Fear River and its tributaries north of the Interstate 140 Bridge described as a line running from a point on the west shore at 34° 17.9430' N – 77° 57.5540' W to a point on the east shore at 34° 18.1320' N – 77° 57.3790' W (Map 2).**
- C. It shall be unlawful to use or possess more than 800 yards of run-around, strike, drop, and drift gill net per SCFL/RSCFL holder or per vessel regardless of the number of license holders on the vessel.

III. **SEA TURTLE AND ATLANTIC STURGEON INTERACTION REPORTING**

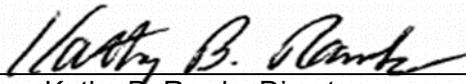
It shall be unlawful to fail to report any sea turtle or sturgeon captured in gill nets permitted by the Incidental Take Permit (ITP). Reports shall be made within 24 hours of the capture to the Division of Marine Fisheries at 252-515-5500 or 800-682-2632. Self-reported takes of sea turtles and sturgeon by fishermen fishing without an observer do not count toward the allowable takes in the ITP.

IV. **GENERAL INFORMATION**

- A. This proclamation is issued under the authority of N.C.G.S. 113-134; 113-170.4; 113-170.5; 113-182; 113.182.1; 113-221.1; 143B-289.52 and N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission Rules 15A NCAC 03H .0103, 03J .0103, and 03M. 0503.
- B. It is unlawful to violate the provisions of any proclamation issued by the Fisheries Director under their delegated authority pursuant to N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission Rule 15A NCAC 03H.0103.
- C. **All other existing gill net rules and proclamations remain in effect.** See <https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/marine-fisheries/rules-proclamations-and-size-and-bag-limits/fisheries-management-proclamations#currentprocs> to refer to those M-type proclamations for gill net regulations that may be effective in the areas covered by this proclamation.
- D. In accordance with N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission Rule 15A NCAC 03J .0103 (b)(3)(A) it shall be unlawful for gill net mesh length to exceed 6 ½ inches in Internal Coastal Fishing Waters.
- E. The restrictions in this proclamation apply to and are in addition to the maximum allowed yardage for Recreational Commercial Gear License holders described in N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission Rule 15A NCAC 03O .0302.
- F. Proclamation [M-12-2025](#) dated June 3, 2025 prohibits the use of gill nets in the Joint Fishing Waters of the state from midnight on Friday to midnight on Sunday each week. Portions of Albemarle and Currituck sounds are exempt from that provision.
- G. Proclamation [M-15-2025](#), dated August 29, 2025, reopens areas of the Pamlico and Neuse rivers previously closed to gill nets and implements tie-down (vertical net height restrictions) and distance from shore restrictions for ITP non-exempt (i.e., fixed, stationary, or anchored) gill nets with a stretched mesh length five inches or greater in the western Pamlico Sound and rivers in accordance with Amendment 2 to the N.C. Estuarine Striped Bass Fishery Management Plan.
- H. The small mesh gill net attendance requirements in N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission Rule 15A NCAC 03J .0103 (g) and (i) and 03R .0112, mesh length restrictions in 03J .0103 (a)(2), navigational passage requirements in 03J .0101, as well as all other existing gill net rules and proclamations remain in effect.

- I. Proclamation [FF-26-2024](#) dated June 20, 2024 states that from January 1 through September 30, it shall be unlawful for a commercial fishing operation to take or land mullet for commercial purposes from 11:59 P.M. Friday to 12:01 A.M. Monday each week, and from October 1 through December 31, it shall be unlawful for a commercial fishing operation to take or land mullet for commercial purposes from 11:59 P.M. Friday to 12:01 A.M. Tuesday each week.
- J. Proclamation [M-2-2025](#) dated December 16, 2024 requires holders of a Standard Commercial Fishing License (SCFL), Retired Standard Commercial Fishing License (RSCFL), or Recreational Commercial Gear License (RCGL) who deploy gill nets in Internal Coastal Fishing Waters with an exception for run around, strike, drop or drift gill nets, to possess a valid Estuarine Gill Net Permit issued by the Division of Marine Fisheries.
- K. [Proclamation M-7-2025](#) dated February 4, 2025, establishes the Observer Trip Scheduling System (OTSS) and requires holders of an Estuarine Gill Net Permit who deploy gill nets (except run-around, strike, drop, or drift gill nets) to either possess a valid OTSS confirmation number or have an authorized agent of the division present while fishing. To obtain either a confirmation number or an agent of the division, planned fishing activity must be reported at least one week in advance (Monday-Wednesday) by calling 800-487-8747 or online at <https://dmf.ncdenr.org/OTSSPublic/>.
- L. **A confirmation number, issued by the Observer Trip Scheduling System, does not legally permit the use of non-exempted gill nets in a closed Management Unit or area, or when such use is otherwise prohibited.**
- M. N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission Rule 15A NCAC 03I .0113 specifies that it shall be unlawful for any licensee under Chapter 113, Subchapter IV of the General Statutes to refuse to allow the Fisheries Director or their agents to obtain biological data, harvest information, or other statistical data necessary or useful to the conservation and management of marine and estuarine resources from fish in the licensee's possession. The Division of Marine Fisheries has implemented an Estuarine Gill Net Permit and an observer program as an inspection procedure to obtain such data.
- N. For gill net restrictions in the Albemarle Sound Area (Incidental Take Permit-Management Unit A) refer to the most recent M-type proclamations for that area.
- O. The Division of Marine Fisheries has received the Endangered Species Act Incidental Take Permits (ITP) for threatened or endangered sea turtles, and endangered sturgeon. This ITP allows the legal continuation of the inshore gill net fisheries in North Carolina, subject to permit conditions. The ITP conditions are designed to monitor, avoid and minimize, and mitigate interactions with these species in gill net fisheries permitted by the ITP (i.e., non-exempted gill net fisheries). Permit conditions require the division to provide 7-10 percent observer coverage in the permitted large mesh gill net fishery and 1-2 percent observer coverage in the permitted small mesh gill net fishery in Internal Coastal and Joint Fishing Waters. **If the required coverage is not maintained, large and small mesh gill nets could be prohibited in all Internal Coastal and Joint Fishing Waters.**
- P. The Pamlico Sound is closed annually from September 1 through December 15 each year to large mesh gill nets by National Marine Fisheries Service, Federal Rule 50 CFR Part 223. The Sea Turtle Incidental Take Permit allows the division to open certain areas within the Pamlico Sound to large mesh gill nets.
- Q. The intent of this proclamation is to implement gill net restrictions for gill nets with a stretched mesh length 4 inches through 6 ½ inches in accordance with Amendment 4 to the N.C. Southern Flounder Fishery Management Plan and allow directed and bycatch fisheries for shad while minimizing interactions with threatened and/or

- endangered species.
- R. In accordance with N.C. General Statute 113-221(f) and 113-221.1(c) all persons who may be affected by rules and proclamations issued by the Fisheries Director are under a duty to keep themselves informed of current rules and proclamations. Multiple rules and proclamations regulating a fishery, species, gear, etc. may be in effect concurrently.
- S. Contact N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries, P.O. Box 769, Morehead City, NC 28557, 252-515-5500 or 800-682-2632 for more information or visit the division website at <https://www.deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/marine-fisheries>.
- T. **This proclamation opens Management Unit C and portions of Management Unit E to the use of gill nets with a stretched mesh length of 4 inches through 6 ½ inches, implements gear exemptions for the shad fishery and maintains closures of all other management units south of Management Unit A to the use of gill nets with a stretched mesh length of 4 inches through 6 ½ inches, except as described in Section II, in accordance with Amendment 4 to the N.C. Southern Flounder Fishery Management Plan and the Federal Incidental Take Permits for endangered and threatened Sea Turtles and endangered Sturgeon.**

By: 
Kathy B. Rawls, Director
DIVISION OF MARINE FISHERIES

February 18, 2026
3:10 P.M.