



Information Related to Changes to Minimum Size and Creel Limits of Spotted Seatrout (Speckled Trout)



What are the new proposed regulations?

13-inch total length to 20-inch total length slot/15 creel, with 2 fish over 20-inches total length allowed within (not in addition to) the 15 fish creel.

Elimination of the charter guides and/or their deckhands creel limit while conducting a for-hire trip. Charter guides and deckhands may participate in fishing activity, but their bag limit of spotted seatrout is zero and they may not harvest spotted seatrout on a charter trip. A sunset (go back to previous regulations) for the new regulations on January 1, 2028, unless regulations are modified prior that date.

When were the new regulations finalized?

The new regulations published as final in the November 20, 2023 state register and were effective upon publication of the rule.

What is the goal of changing the regulations?

The management target for Spotted Seatrout is a female spawning stock biomass of 6.2 million pounds. In order to achieve that target within 5 years, we must reduce the harvest of female Spotted Seatrout by a minimum of 20% per year. The current proposed rule would reduce harvest of female spotted seatrout by 19.1%

Why does the harvest need to be reduced?

The stock is currently overfished, meaning there are not enough fish to sustain the population at desired levels in the future. In addition to being overfished, increased fishing pressure has led to overfishing (too many fish being harvested for the population to replenish itself) for 7 of the last 10 years.

Why a 20% reduction?

A 20% reduction in the harvest of female Spotted Seatrout was the lowest level of reduction that would achieve the management target within five years.

Why a five year recovery timeline?

That is the time it will take to reach the management target with a 20% reduction in female Spotted Seatrout harvest. The current proposed rule will likely result in a recovery closer to six years if the regulations do not sunset.

Why a 15 fish creel limit?

Based on public input collected during numerous public meetings and an e-mail/web survey, the 15 fish per person daily creel limit was the most supported creel limit option.

Why not a 12-inch minimum length limit with a 15 fish creel limit?

Maintaining the 12-inch minimum length limit WOULD NOT lead to the management target UNLESS the daily creel limit is reduced to at least nine fish per person per day. This combination (12 inches and 15 fish) would only result in an 8% reduction in female harvest per year.

Were other options considered that would achieve the 20% harvest reduction of female Spotted Seatrout?

LDWF presented the Commission with several options for rebuilding the stock in 2019, 2021, 2022, & 2023. In 2020, these options were also presented to the public in an online survey that was emailed to saltwater license holders and was available on LDWF's website.

MINIMUM LENGTH LIMIT (INCHES)	CREEL	PERCENT REDUCTION	*STRONGLY SUPPORT OR SLIGHTLY SUPPORT
12	9	21	29.3%
12.5	10	21	Not Assessed
13	11	21	39.9%
13.5	15	20	50.9%
14	25	21	34.3%

**Results from the electronic survey. The survey was available on the LDWF website and available to anyone.*

Is habitat loss a factor?

Habitat loss is a factor in the declining health of the Spotted Seatrout stock, as well as environmental conditions and events such as fluctuating salinity, freezes, etc. The population modeling techniques used by LDWF include 39 years of data that account for these factors as well as harvest estimates.

Why change angling regulations when many other factors are at play?

Reducing harvest of the stock is the only factor LDWF can control to help rebuild the stock. Ultimately, no matter the cause, the stock is now at a level that cannot support the harvest pressure it once could.