



# Greater Atlantic Region Bulletin

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## Federal Lobster Permit Holders

### American Lobster Trap Transfer Program Guide

*Effective Date: July 17, 2024*

The Trap Transfer Program allows lobster permit holders to permanently buy and sell trap allocation for some lobster management areas (see Figure 3). For the purposes of this bulletin, ‘traps’ refers to the exchange of trap allocation.

We will accept trap transfer applications for the 2025 fishing year beginning on August 1, 2024, through September 30, 2024. To be accepted, applications must be postmarked, provided to a delivery service, or received by our office by September 30, 2024. We will process all transfer requests after the trap transfer period has closed and will notify applicants via mail of our decisions by December 31, 2024. Approved trap transfers will become effective on May 1, 2025. Please contact the Analysis and Program Support Division at (978) 282-8483 with questions about your application, permit, or trap allocation. Please contact the Sustainable Fisheries Division at (978) 281-9315 for information about the regulations and requirements of the Trap Transfer Program.

If you are a Federal lobster permit holder, submit your application to us as outlined by these instructions. If you hold **only** a state lobster license, contact your state agency for information on state transfer requirements. Additional guidance for dual (Federal and state) permit holders is included in this guide.

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## Frequently Asked Questions on Trap Transfers

### 1. *Who is allowed to transfer traps?*

- All Federal lobster permit holders with qualified Area 2, 3, and/or Outer Cape Area traps, including those with permits in confirmation of permit history (CPH), may sell traps up to their full permitted allocation to another Federal lobster permit holder, in any increment (see question 7).
- All Federal lobster permit holders, including those with permits in CPH, may buy traps up to the current maximum trap cap for Areas 2, 3, and/or Outer Cape, even if their lobster permit does not qualify for trap fishing.
- If you have more than one Federal permit, you can be both the ‘buyer’ and ‘seller’ to transfer traps between your permits.

### 2. *Can I lease traps?*

- No, leasing traps is not allowed. Traps can only be permanently bought or sold.

### 3. *What is the difference between a partial and full business transfer?*

- A partial transfer is when you sell some or all of your traps through the Trap Transfer Program, but keep your Federal lobster permit. The buyer is taxed 10 percent of the traps upon transfer. If you sell all of your traps, you can still use your Federal lobster permit for non-trap fishing, and maintain the option to buy back in to the Area 2, 3, and/or Outer Cape trap fishery at a later date.
- A full business transfer is when you sell your vessel and its permits to another owner (ownership change) or when you transfer your permit onto another vessel (vessel replacement). All traps stay with the permit, and permit splitting is not allowed. This type of transfer is exempt from the 10-percent conservation tax and is not conducted through the Trap Transfer Program.
  - **Note:** Full business transfers may take up to 30 days to process. Please plan accordingly if you are considering a full business transfer prior to submitting a Trap Transfer Program application. Contact the Permit Office with further questions at 978-282-8438.

### 4. *What is a “conservation tax?”*

- **Every buyer is taxed 10 percent on their purchase** and thus is only able to receive 90 percent of the transferable traps to their permit; e.g., 100 traps are bought, 90 traps are transferred to the buyer’s permit, and 10 traps are retired from the fishery. This is referred to as the “conservation tax.”

### 5. *Which traps are available to buy and/or sell?*

- Multiple areas may be part of a transfer transaction, but only Area 2, 3, and/or Outer Cape traps are transferable to the buyer. Traps from Areas 1, 4, 5, and 6 will be removed from the fishery permanently as part of completing the transaction because they are not transferable.
  - **Example:** Your permit is qualified to trap fish in Areas 2 and 4, and you would like to sell 200 traps. Because you have multiple areas on your permit, both areas are reduced by 200 traps. The buyer can only receive Area 2 traps, but not Area 4 traps, because Area 4 traps are not transferable. You, as the seller, debit 200 traps from both Areas 2 and 4. The buyer receives 180 Area 2 traps only (10-percent conservation tax on buyer’s

received transfer), and the 200 non-transferable Area 4 traps are removed from the fishery.

- The Trap Transfer Program regulations require that Area 1 permit holders who choose to sell Area 2, 3, and/or Outer Cape traps will permanently give up their Area 1 trap fishing rights.
  - **Example:** Your permit is qualified to trap fish in Areas 1 and 3, and you would like to sell 300 traps. Only the Area 3 traps are transferred to the buyer, and your permit is no longer qualified to trap fish in Area 1. You, as the seller, debit 300 traps from your Area 3 allocation and lose your Area 1 trap qualification. The buyer receives 270 Area 3 traps only (10-percent conservation tax on buyer's received transfer; Area 1 traps are non-transferable).
  - Area 1 permit holders may choose to *buy* traps through the program without giving up their Area 1 trap qualification.

**6. *Can I split my state and Federal permits to transfer traps separately?***

- No. Federal regulations require dual permit holders fishing under one operation to have a single fishing history associated with their state and Federal lobster permits. If you choose to split your permits onto two separate boats, your Federal permit would maintain your qualified allocation, and your state allocation would be zero. If a dual permit holder wants the qualified allocation to remain with their state permit, they can relinquish their Federal permit. Consult your state agency for more information on this topic.

**7. *How many traps can I transfer?***

- You must base any purchase/sale on your fishing year 2025 allocation.
- You may sell traps in any increment. If multi-area traps are sold in which the lower area allocation will be entirely removed, you may still sell all of the traps. The conservation tax of 10 percent applies to each area allocation in a multi-area transfer. In cases of irregular numbers, fractions of a trap after tax are always rounded in favor of the buyer (i.e., taxed/removed traps are rounded down, or received traps are rounded up).
- The buyer may **NOT** receive any quantity of traps that would exceed his/her permit's maximum trap cap per area. If multi-area traps are purchased that satisfy one area's maximum trap cap but exceed another, the additional traps will be removed from the fishery permanently.
- **Example:** If you have a permit with 400 Area 2 traps and you bought 600 traps from a permit with Area 2 and 3 eligibility, you would be buying 600 Area 2 and Area 3 traps. Your permit can only receive traps up to the Area 2 maximum trap cap of 800 traps, so you would receive only 400 Area 2 traps and 540 Area 3 traps (after the conservation tax). The remaining non-transferable 140 Area 2 traps after the 10-percent conservation tax are also removed from the fishery.

**8. *How do I figure out my allocation after I have bought/sold traps?***

- After all transfers have been approved or disapproved, the buyer and seller will each receive a receipt via mail confirming approved trap transfers along with their final 2025 allocations. You may request a copy of your permit's allocation by contacting the permit office at 978-282-8483.

**9. *What if I am a dual permit holder and my state and Federal allocations are different?***

- This situation only applies to a few dual permit holders whose initial Federal allocation does not match their initial state allocation.

- By applying for a transfer, you are declaring into the Trap Transfer Program and consenting to have your state and Federal allocations aligned at the lower allocation per Lobster Management Area. State and Federal trap allocations for each specific Lobster Management Area must be aligned at the beginning and end of each trap transfer period for each year. **This means that you will permanently forfeit the higher allocation.** If you have any questions about this or would like to find out if this situation applies to you, please contact the permit office at 978-282-8438. You may also need to contact your state agency. Refer to Table 3 below for this trap transfer scenario.

**10. Can a Federal-only permit holder transfer traps with a dual permit holder?**

- Yes. A dual permit holder may buy traps from a Federal-only permit holder, but then the dual permit holder must buy an equal number of state-only traps to balance the state and Federal trap allocation. **If an equal state allocation is not obtained by the end of the trap transfer period, the purchased Federal allocation will be forfeited.** If you are a Federal-only permit holder, you may buy traps from a dual permit holder, but you will not receive the state traps since you do not have a state permit.

**11. Can a dual permit holder transfer traps with another dual permit holder?**

- Yes. If you are both permitted by the same state, then all transferable traps purchased can be fished by the buyer according to state permit regulations and Federal maximum trap caps. See Table 5 for an example of two dual permit holders from Massachusetts transferring 200 traps. The seller debits 200 traps from both Federal and state, and the buyer receives 180 of each after conservation tax.
- You can also transfer traps with a dual permit holder from a **different state; however**, the buyer may **not** fish the purchased state traps in his/her permitted state waters. These purchased state traps would be forfeited (i.e., the state traps do not transfer). The buyer may fish the purchased Federal traps *IF* he/she is able to purchase an equal number of state-only traps from a permit holder permitted by **the same state**, by the end of the trap transfer period. **If an equal same-state allocation is not obtained by the end of the trap transfer period, then all purchased allocation will be forfeited.**

**12. How do I apply?**

- Complete and submit the [trap transfer application](#) with signatures from the authorized buyer and seller of traps. Once you apply for a trap transfer, you have declared entry into the Trap Transfer Program.
- If your permit's allocation is involved in more than one transfer, make sure all transfer applications are submitted and you indicate the order you would like them processed on the form's "Transaction" box.
- Submit your application by mail to:
 

Trap Transfer Program  
Greater Atlantic Regional Permit Office  
55 Great Republic Drive  
Gloucester, MA 01930
- You can also submit your application via email to [nmfs.gar.permits@noaa.gov](mailto:nmfs.gar.permits@noaa.gov).
- Do not submit your payment agreements between the buyer and seller with your transfer application. It is the responsibility of the buyer and seller to establish a timeline for payment, if any should occur, on their own terms. **Transfers are not final until approved by NMFS.**

**13. *What happens after I submit my application?***

- Once the trap transfer period is closed on September 30, 2024, we will coordinate with state agencies to review all applications and either approve or disapprove each trap transfer request. We will base this decision on whether the seller has the traps to sell, and whether the buyer has the capability to accept that number of traps to his/her lobster permit based on the area-specific maximum trap caps.
- If there are any changes to your state and/or Federal permit(s) involved in a trap transfer, please contact the agencies that issued those permits. If a change occurs after an application is submitted, you may need to resubmit a corrected application.
- If a trap transfer form is filled out incorrectly, we will notify the buyer and seller that they must submit a revised and corrected trap transfer form.
- We will make all decisions on all trap transfer requests by December 31, 2024. If we approve a transfer, we will send a receipt and final allocation letter to each party involved in the transfer. If your transfer is not approved, we will notify you and explain the reason in writing.
- **We must approve a trap transfer application before the transfer is considered final.** Buyers and sellers are cautioned not to finalize transfer deals unless we approve the transfer.

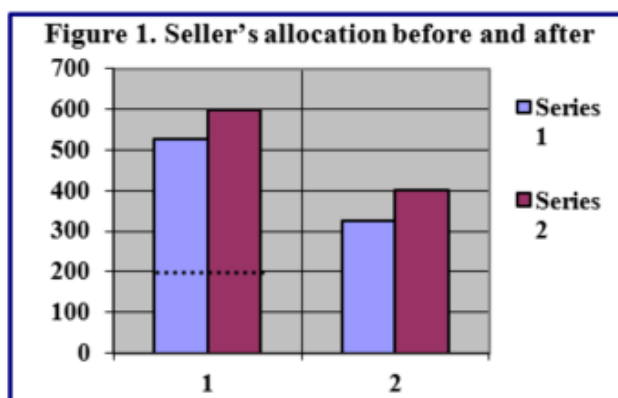
**14. *Are there any regulations or legislation that could affect this program or these area allocations in the future?***

- Following the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's recommendation to withdraw Area 2 and 3 ownership caps and maximum trap cap reductions, NOAA Fisheries [removed these regulations](#). However, as part of their withdrawal, the Commission is also investigating potential alternative measures. If new measures are adopted, it could impact your trap allocations in the future. We suggest—as with all business decisions—that you participate by your own choice, and at your own risk.
- We recommend staying up to date with Commission decisions and updates to be aware of what is changing in the management of the lobster fishery. Management updates, meeting summaries, and stock assessment reports can all be found on the [Commission website](#).

## Trap Transfer Examples

If your lobster permit is qualified for trap fishing in more than one area when you sell traps, the multi-area allocations will be reduced first. This is referred to as ‘bottom-up’ transferring. All Area allocations will be reduced by the number of traps sold, and all transferable allocations will be taxed 10-percent, regardless of equal or varying trap allocations per area(s). If multi-area traps are sold in which the lower area allocation is entirely removed but is an irregular number, fractions of a trap after tax are always rounded in favor of the buyer (i.e. taxed/removed traps are rounded down, or received traps are rounded up). The buyer retains fishing rights to all areas for which the purchased transferable traps qualify. **REMINDER:** If your permit is qualified for Area 1 and you sell traps, you will lose your ability to trap fish in Area 1. However, any Federal lobster permit, including those qualified for Area 1, may buy Area 2, 3, or Outer Cape traps without losing the Area 1 qualification. A buyer with a Federal lobster permit may buy traps from area(s) where his/her permit did not previously qualify. The buyer’s permit will then acquire the historical qualification specific to the transferable traps purchased.

**Example 1:** If you have 526 Area 2 traps and 600 Outer Cape Area traps, and you want to sell 200 traps, the transaction will occur from the bottom up, as shown in Figure 1 to the right (dotted line shows removal of 0-200). After the conservation tax is applied, the buyer receives 180 Area 2 traps and 180 Outer Cape Area traps to his permit, and the seller is left with 326 Area 2 and 400 Outer Cape traps.



**Example 2:** The same seller from Example 1 wants to sell an additional 400 traps to a different buyer. He has 326 Area 2 and 400 Outer Cape Area traps left to sell. These traps are sold from the bottom up as shown in the Figure 2 to the right (dotted line 0-400). After the conservation tax and rounding are applied, the buyer receives 294 Area 2 traps and 360 Outer Cape Area traps to his permit. The seller retains a Federal lobster permit and may use it to fish with non-trap gear.



### **Most Restrictive Rule**

A permit holder who elects more than one qualified area on his/her permit for a given fishing year is bound by the lowest allocated trap limit across all the areas selected on his/her permit, even though

the permit may qualify for a higher allocation in another area. Thus, when multiple areas appear on the permit, the vessel must comply with the most restrictive regulation present on the permit. State allocation restrictions may also apply for dual permit holders. Table 1 has some examples.

**Table 1**

Examples	(Designated) Permit Area Qualification and Allocation	Most Restrictive Rule means...
Example A	Area 2 = 600 traps Area 3 = 1,200 traps	You may fish up to 600 total traps in Areas 2 and 3 or fish 1,200 traps in Area 3 only
Example B	Area 3 = 1,000 traps Area 4 = 1,200 traps	You may fish up to 1,000 total traps in Areas 3 and 4 or fish 1,200 traps in Area 4 only

### Trap Transfer Scenarios

**1. Dual permit holder with Federal and state allocations not the same for each Lobster Management Area (see Question 8)**

Table 2 shows an example of aligning permits with dually-allocated areas for Area 2 and the Outer Cape. Table 3 shows an example of aligning permits with dually-allocated Area 2 and Federally-allocated Area 3. Note that unaligned allocations would always be synchronized at the lower value.

**Table 2**

Area Qualification	Initial Trap Allocation	Synchronized Trap Allocation for Trap Transfer
Area 2	State allocation = 600 Federal allocation = 800	State allocation = 600 Federal allocation = 600
Outer Cape Area	State allocation = 600 Federal allocation = 600	State allocation = 600 Federal allocation = 600

**Table 3**

Area Qualification	Initial Trap Allocation	Synchronized Trap Allocation for Trap Transfer
Area 2	State allocation = 800 Federal allocation = 500	State allocation = 500 Federal allocation = 500
Area 3	State allocation = No allocation since Area 3 is entirely Federal waters Federal allocation = 1102	State allocation = No allocation since Area 3 is entirely Federal waters Federal = 1102

**2. Federal-only permit holder trap transfer with a dual permit holder (see Question 9)**

An example of a Federal-only permit holder buying 200 Area 2 traps from a dual permit holder is shown in Table 4. The 10-percent conservation tax is reflected in the final allocation.

**Table 4**

Area Qualification	Initial Trap Allocation	Final Trap Allocation
Federal permit holder (buyer)	State allocation = N/A Federal allocation = 400	State allocation = N/A Federal allocation = 580
Dual permit holder (seller)	State allocation = 600 Federal = 600	State allocation = 400 Federal = 400

**3. Dual permit holder trap transfer with another dual permit holder (see Question 10)**

See Table 5 for an example of two dual permit holders from Massachusetts (MA) transferring 200 traps. The seller debits 200 traps from both Federal and state, and the buyer receives 180 of each after conservation tax.

**Table 5**

Area Qualification	Initial Trap Allocation	Final Trap Allocation
MA dual permit holder (buyer)	State allocation = 600 Federal allocation = 600	State allocation = 780 Federal allocation = 780
MA dual permit holder (seller)	State allocation = 600 Federal = 600	State allocation = 400 Federal = 400

See Table 6 for an example of a Massachusetts dual permit holder buying 200 traps from a Rhode Island dual permit holder. See Table 7 for an example of a second transfer of 200 traps where the dual permit holder buys from a state-only permit holder to align the state and Federal allocation.

**Table 6**

Area Qualification	Initial Trap Allocation	Final Trap Allocation
MA dual permit holder (buyer)	State allocation = 600 Federal allocation = 600	State allocation = 600 Federal allocation = 780
RI dual permit holder (seller)	State allocation = 600 Federal = 600	State allocation = 400 Federal = 400

**Table 7**

Area Qualification	Initial Trap Allocation	Final Trap Allocation
MA dual permit holder (buyer)	State allocation = 600 Federal allocation = 780	State allocation = 780 Federal allocation = 780
MA state permit holder (seller)	State allocation = 600 Federal = N/A	State allocation = 400 Federal = N/A

**For more trap transfer examples and scenarios, see the Lobster Trap Transfer Program Presentation and Scenario Worksheet available under the [“Trap Transfer Program”](#) tab on our website.**



Figure 1. Lobster Management Areas

