

Massachusetts Guide to Regulations for Lobster and Jonah Crab Trap/Pot Fisheries

In this handout, you will find the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan (Plan) regulations that apply to the lobster and Jonah crab trap/pot fisheries. If your principal port is in Massachusetts, the following requirements apply to you.

GENERAL TRAP/POT REQUIREMENTS

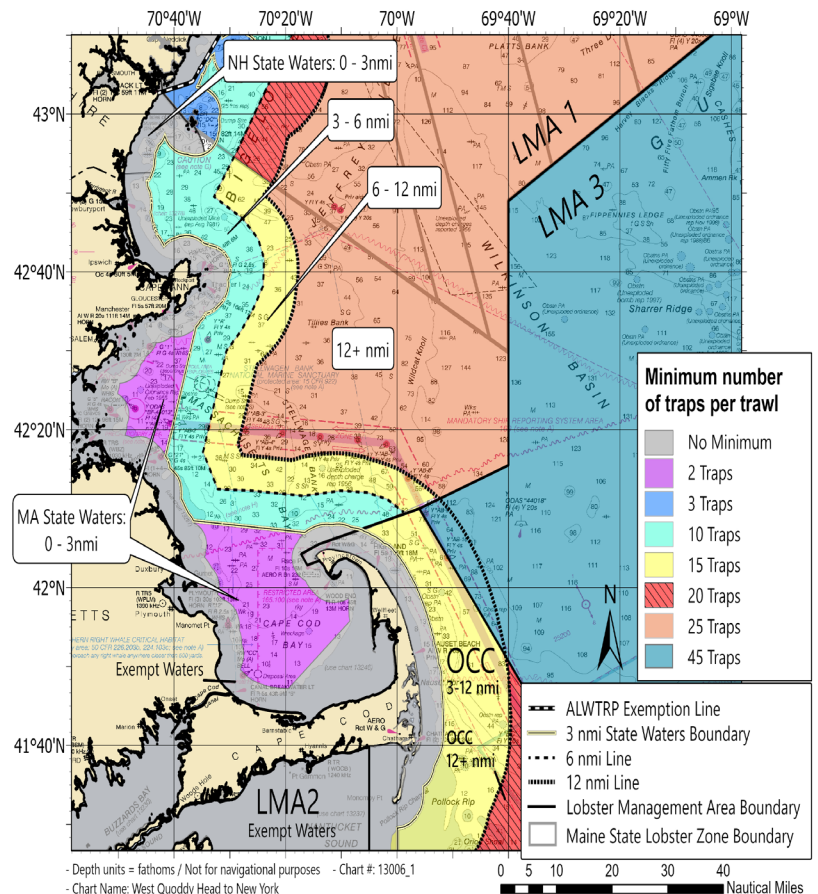
- No buoy line floating at the surface.
- No wet storage of gear (all gear must be hauled out of the water at least once every 30 days).
- All groundlines must be made of sinking line.
- **Massachusetts state waters:** Maximum buoy line diameter allowed is 3/8 inch.



To see these regulations and updates on our website, please scan the QR code with your phone's camera >>

MINIMUM TRAPS PER TRAWL IN LOBSTER MANAGEMENT AREAS

LOBSTER MANAGEMENT AREAS (LMA)	MINIMUM TRAPS / TRAWL
LMA 1	
3-6* nm	10 (no change)
6*-12 nm	15
Beyond 12 nm	25
Outer Cape Cod	
3-12 nm	15
12+ nm	20
LMA 2 (no changes)	
3-12 nm	10
12+ nm	15
LMA 2/3 overlap	20 (if you have an LMA 2 permit only) 45 (if you have an LMA 3 permit)
LMA 3	
North of 50 fathom line on the south end of Georges Bank	45, increase maximum trawl length to 1.75 nm
South of 50 fathom line on the south end of Georges Bank	35, increase maximum trawl length to 1.75 nm
Georges Basin Restricted Area	50, increase maximum trawl length to 1.75 nm



*Note that the 6 nm line refers to an approximation, described in 50 CFR 229.32 (a)(2)(ii).

Questions?

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WWW.FISHERIES.NOAA.GOV/ALWTRP

GEAR MARKING

These are the new gear marking requirements for Northeast lobster and Jonah crab trap/pot gear. Requirements for all other management areas and other fisheries remain the same. These requirements represent the minimum markings. Additional markings are also allowed. Visit fisheries.noaa.gov/ALWTRP and Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries for updates and complete regulations.

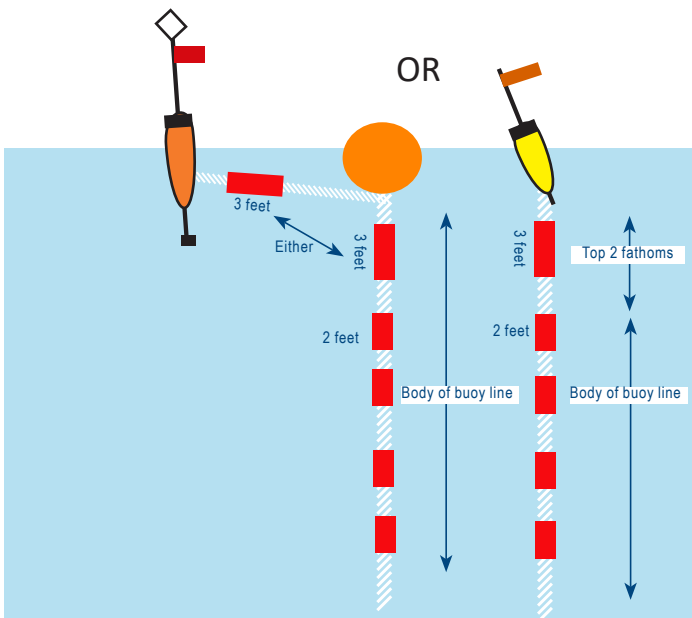
STATE WATERS

One 3-foot SOLID RED mark within 2 fathoms of the surface buoy or within 2 fathoms of the highfliers and buoys at the surface; and

A minimum of two RED marks measuring at least 2 feet in length in the top 50% of the buoy line and two RED marks at least 2 feet in length in the bottom 50% of the buoy line.

There can be no length of buoy line greater than 60 feet without a 2-foot RED mark.

*If the body of the buoy line is RED or RED/WHITE (Candy Cane), WHITE marks must be substituted for RED marks.

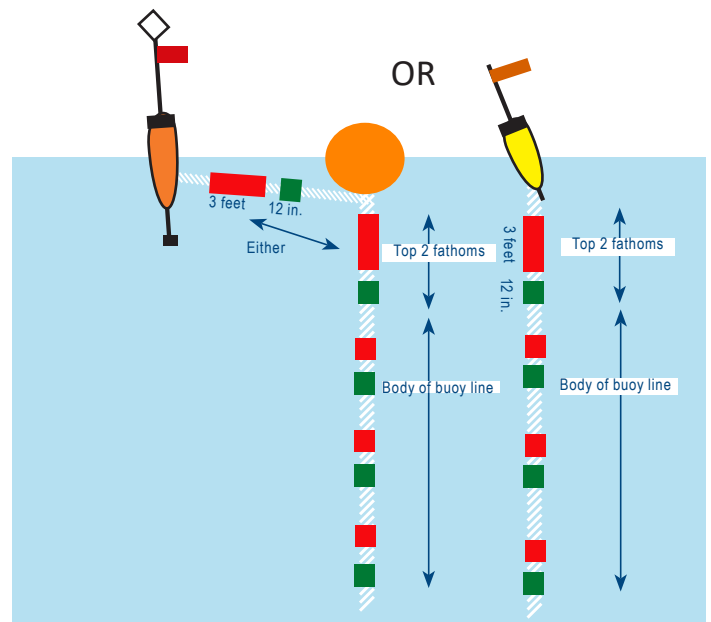


FEDERAL WATERS

One 3-foot SOLID RED color mark within 6 inches of one 12-inch SOLID GREEN (required by state regulations) mark in the top 2 fathoms of the surface buoy or within 2 fathoms of the highfliers and buoys at the surface; and

One 12-inch (can be longer) RED mark within 6 inches of one 12-inch GREEN mark at the top, middle, and bottom of the body of the buoy line.

If you have line marked at every 60 feet as required by the state, there must be a GREEN mark next to each RED state mark.



WAYS TO MARK YOUR GEAR

A **SOLID RED rope** may be used for state-specific gear marks, including the solid surface mark.

The SOLID 3-foot mark may be applied with dye, paint, tape, heat-shrink tubing, insertion of a braided sleeve, or the line may be marked as approved in writing by the Greater Atlantic Regional Administrator.

Rope with a distinctive RED colored strand throughout or RED and WHITE Candy Cane rope may be used instead of the state specific gear marks in the body of the buoy line.

For 12-inch federal marks or where state-specific colored rope is not used, the 12-inch marks may be added using dye, paint, tape, heat-shrink tubing, zip ties; spliced in insertion of a colored rope or braided sleeve or other material, or a thin line may be woven into or through the line; or the line may be marked as approved in writing by the Greater Atlantic Regional Administrator.

SURFACE SYSTEM MARKING

A surface system is the collection of buoys, radar reflectors, and high flyers that identify the presence of stationary bottom fishing gear. The following rules apply in state and federal waters:

When buoy marking is not already required by state or federal regulations, the letters and numbers to mark gear must be at least 1 inch (2.5 cm) in height, block letters or Arabic numbers, in a color that contrasts with the color of the buoy.

Trap/pot surface buoys must be marked to identify the vessel or fishery with one of the following:

- The owner's motorboat registration number and/or U.S. vessel documentation number; or
- The federal commercial fishing permit number; or
- Positive identification marking required by the vessel's home-port state.

WEAK ROPE AND INSERTS

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

The same rules apply in state and federal waters.

Weak inserts and line must be chosen from the list of NMFS-approved gear. To see the most updated list of approved weak line and inserts, please visit fisheries.noaa.gov/NE-approved-weak.

Weak links must be designed in such a way that the bitter end of the buoy line is clean and free of any knots when the weak link breaks.

Weak rope can also be used on any buoy line down to the lowest point where a weak insert is required. Use of 100 percent weak rope is also allowed in place of inserts.

APPROVED WEAK ROPE

To be approved, the average breaking strength must be within 10 percent of 1,700 lbs.

Some of the fully formed weak ropes approved for use are:

- Rocky Mount Red (3/8"), Candy Cane (3/8"), and Candy Cane v01/22 (3/8") (see below)
- Neocorp 3/8" and 1/2" polyester rope
- Seaway 5/16" #10 Braid
- Everson 3/8" whale safe rope

The approved three-strand ropes may be spliced into traditional buoy ropes to create inserts, or they can be used to replace standard rope as weak rope.

The approved braided ropes can be used as full weak rope (but not inserts) connected to your regular line using a knot at the depth required for your fishing area (the depth of your lowest required weak insertion or the proportion of your rope required to be weak).



Check fisheries.noaa.gov/NE-approved-weak for information about more weak rope and weak inserts as they are approved.

REQUIREMENTS BY LOCATION

MA State Waters: Full weak rope in the top 75% of the line or no length of rope greater than 60 feet without a weak insert in the top 75% of the line.

MA LMA 1, OCC Federal Waters 3–12 nm: 2 weak inserts at 25% and 50% down the line OR top 50% of buoy line weak rope.

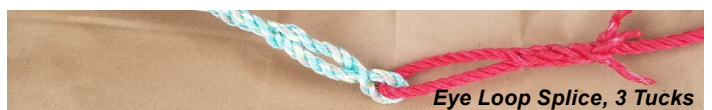
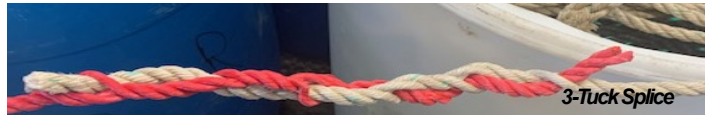
LMA 1 & OCC beyond 12 nm: 1 weak insert 33% down the line.

LMA 3: Top 75% of one buoy line is full weak line. Bottom 25% can be higher strength.

APPROVED WEAK INSERTS

Weak Rope Inserts (not allowed for braided ropes)

All weak rope (1700-pound breaking strength) inserts must be at least 3 feet in length, must be connected on each end with a tuck or splice, and must be a contrasting color. Approved splices are below and on our website.



The red rope in these pictures is weak rope manufactured by Rocky Mount Cordage Company.

South Shore (Novabraid) Sleeve

Sleeves must be at least 3 feet long and of a contrasting color.



In-line Manufactured Links

All in-line manufactured weak links must be stamped with the breaking strength, must be a contrasting color, and must be connected to the regular-strength rope with a tuck or splice.



LOBSTER AND JONAH CRAB TRAP/POT CLOSURE AREAS

CHANGES TO CLOSURE AREAS

All new and existing closures are modified from restricting all trap/pot fishing to only restricting trap/pot fishing that uses persistent (traditional) buoy lines, except for federal waters in the Outer Cape Lobster Management Area (LMA), which remains closed consistent with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission American lobster Interstate Fishery Management Plan. Gear that does not use persistent buoy lines, such as “ropeless” gear that retrieves trap/pot trawls when the vessel is on-site, is now allowed. Fishermen must obtain authorization from the state (if in state waters) and Exempted Fishing Permits from NOAA to be exempt from other federal regulations requiring buoy lines before using ropeless gear.

RESTRICTED AREAS

Massachusetts Restricted Area

This area expands the previous Massachusetts Restricted Area (MRA). The entire area is closed to buoy lines February-April.

Longitude	Latitude
-70° 48.98' W	42° 52.32' N
-70° 43.94' W	42° 52.58' N
-70° 38.69' W	42° 12.00' N
-70° 30.00' W	42° 12.00' N
-70° 30.00' W	42° 30.00' N
-69° 45.00' W	42° 30.00' N
-69° 45.00' W	41° 56.50' N
-69° 16.00' W	41° 21.50' N
-69° 57.90' W	41° 15.30' N
-70° 00.00' W	41° 20.30' N
-70° 00.00' W	41° 40.20' N

Massachusetts state regulations extend the MRA closure in state waters to May 15, with potential extension until May 31, if whales remain in the area. More information can be found at www.mass.gov/orgs/division-of-marine-fisheries.

South Island Restricted Area:

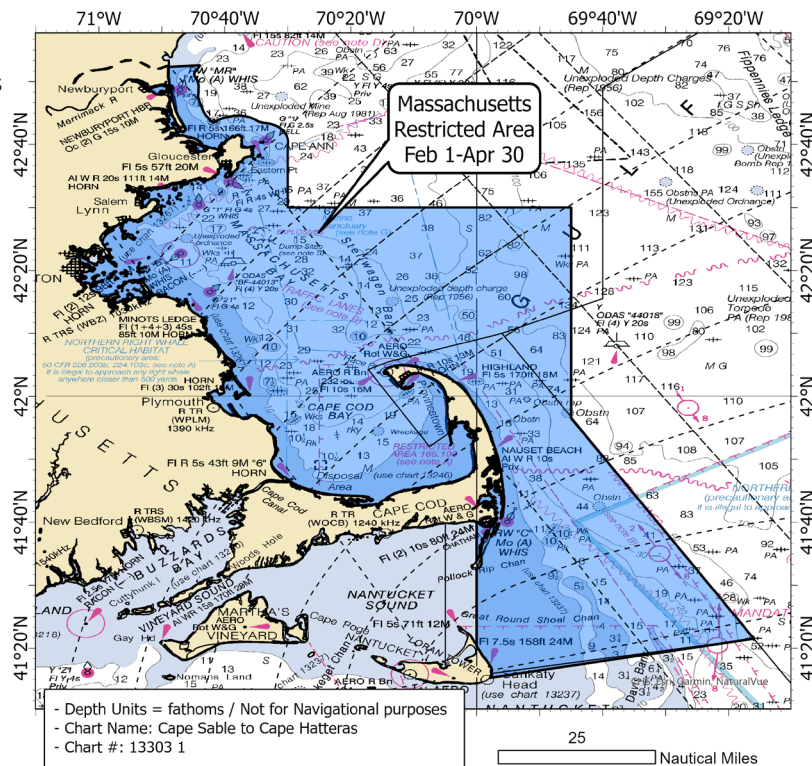
Closed to buoy lines February-April

Longitude	Latitude
-71° 19.00' W	41° 20.00' N
-69° 30.00' W	41° 20.00' N
-69° 30.00' W	40° 30.00' N
-71° 19.00' W	40° 30.00' N

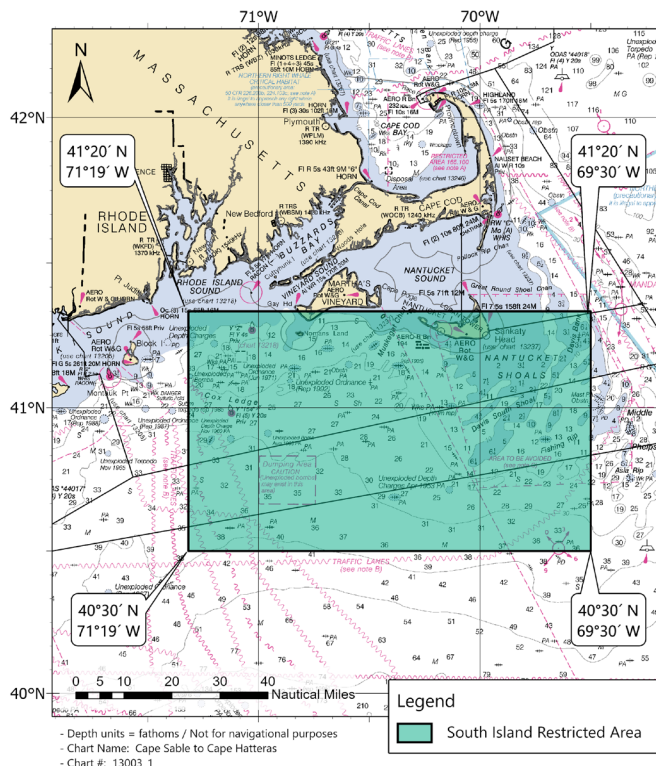
EXEMPTED FISHING PERMITS

Exempted Fishing Permits (EFPs) are issued for activities that support fisheries-related research. There are studies underway to develop fishing methods that do not use buoy lines to retrieve gear and alert other fishermen to the presence of gear on the bottom. Results of this work would enable the fishing industry to operate in areas where persistent buoy lines are prohibited. To participate in this research, federally permitted vessels must operate under EFPs, usually headed by a research, academic, state, or fishery organization that designs a research plan. If you are interested in testing ropeless gear or have another idea for fishing without buoy lines, please contact us at (978) 281-9315 or nmfs.gar.researchpermit@noaa.gov.

Massachusetts Restricted Area



South Island Restricted Area



This document is a summary of the 2021 and 2024 additions and changes to the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan's commercial Northeast lobster and Jonah trap/pot fishing regulations. Additional regulations apply, and can be found in the Northeast Trap/Pot Outreach Guide available on our website www.fisheries.noaa.gov/ALWTRP. Because regulations change, it is your responsibility as a fisherman to become familiar with the latest regulatory updates and to comply with the current official regulations. Consult 50 CFR 229.32 for the complete Plan regulations.