

Summary of New Regulations for Northeast Lobster and Jonah Crab Trap/Pot Fisheries

The following changes have been made to the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan (Plan) as of August 2021 and February 2024. All Plan requirements not listed here remain in place and should continue to be followed. (Document last updated on 03/28/2025)

CHANGES TO NORTHEAST LOBSTER AND JONAH CRAB TRAP/POT 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 (ASMFC) 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 in these areas for research purposes with appropriate state and federal permits (see below).

EXEMPTED FISHING PERMITS

Exempted Fishing Permits (EFPs) are issued for activities in support of 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.

If you are interested in testing ropeless gear or have another idea for research related fishing without persistent buoy lines, please contact your NOAA Fisheries regional office. You may also need to obtain authorization from the state that issues your fishing permit.

NEW RESTRICTED AREAS

LMA1 Restricted Area, Offshore Maine LMA1 zones C/D/E:

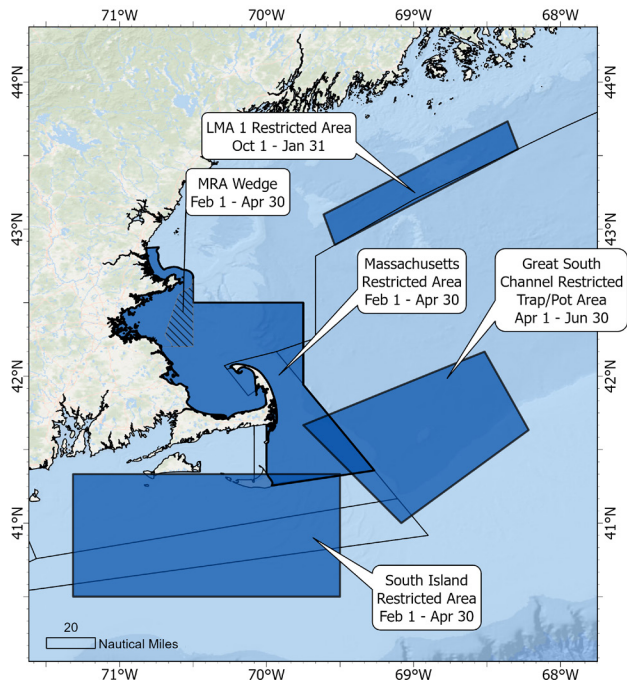
Closed to buoy lines October 1-January 31.

Longitude	Latitude
-69° 36.77' W	43° 06.00' N
-68° 21.60' W	43° 44.00' N
-68° 17.27' W	43° 32.68' N
-69° 32.16' W	42° 53.52' N
-69° 36.77' W	43° 06.00' N

South Island Restricted Area:

Closed to buoy lines February 1-April 30.

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



For EFP Questions contact:

- Greater Atlantic Region (Maine to Virginia): (978) 281-9315 or nmfs.gar.researchpermit@noaa.gov.
- Southeast Region (North Carolina to Florida): (727) 824-5305

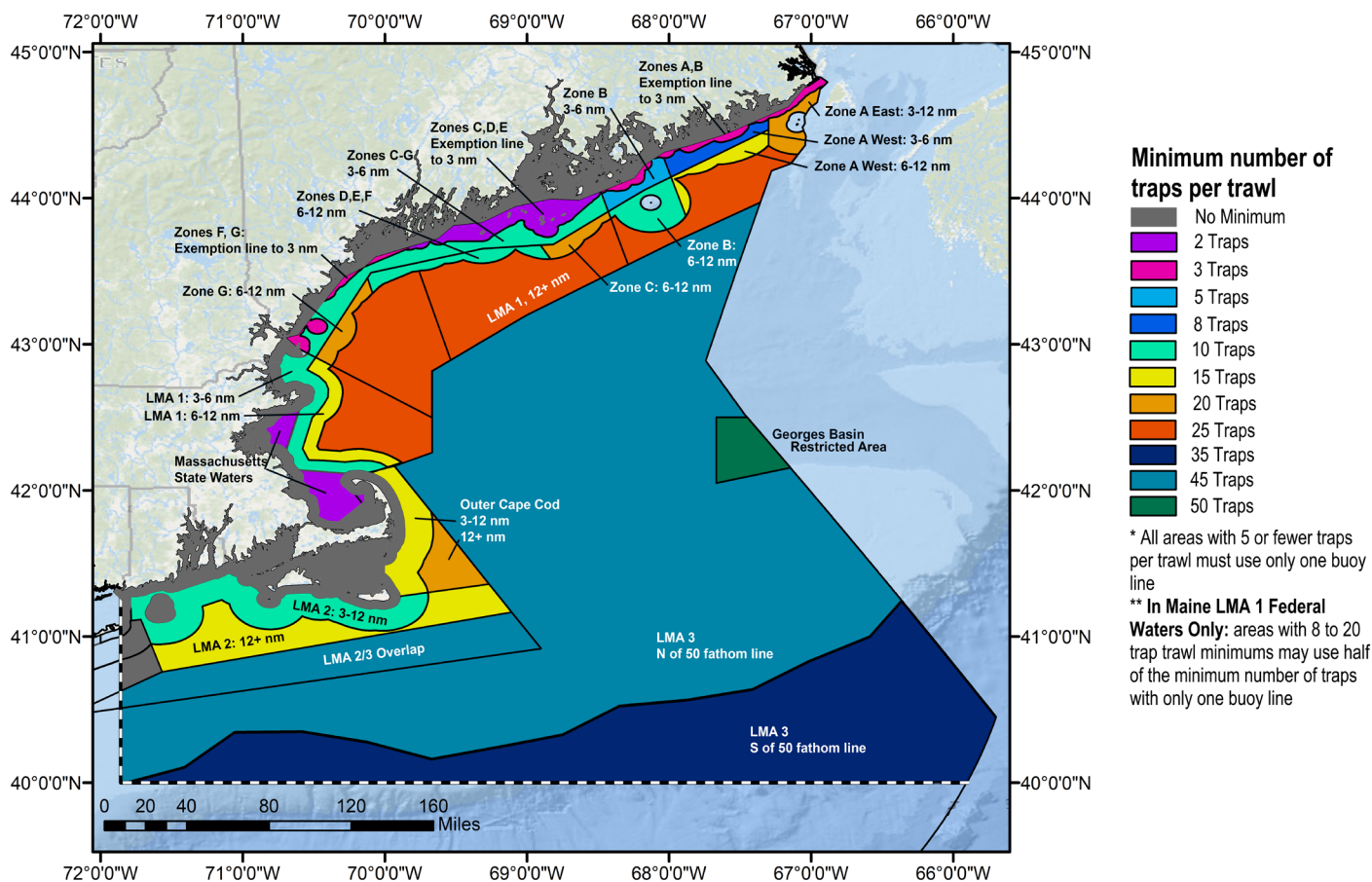
Massachusetts Restricted Area:

This area expands the previous Massachusetts Restricted Area (MRA). The entire area is closed to buoy lines February 1-April 30.

Longitude	Latitude
-70° 48.98' W	42° 52.32' N
-70° 43.94' W	42° 52.58' N
-70° 30.00' W	42° 39.77' N
-70° 30.00' W	42° 30.00' N
-69° 45.00' W	41° 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.

CHANGES TO NORTHEAST LOBSTER AND JONAH CRAB MINIMUM TRAP PER TRAWL REQUIREMENTS EFFECTIVE MAY 1, 2022



The tables below only list the management areas with new minimum traps per trawl requirements. Requirements for all other areas remain the same. Visit fisheries.noaa.gov/ALWTRP for complete regulations.

MINIMUM NUMBER OF TRAPS PER BUOY LINE IN MAINE MANAGEMENT ZONES

MAINE ZONE	TRAP/TRAWL REQUIREMENTS WITH TWO BUOY LINES	TRAP/TRAWL REQUIREMENTS WITH ONE BUOY LINE
ME exempt area—3 nm, Zones A, B, F, G	N/A	3
ME exempt area—3 nm, Zones C, D, E	4	2 (status quo)
ME 3–6 nm*, Zone A West	8	4
ME 3–6 nm*, Zone B	N/A	5
ME 3–6 nm*, Zones C, D, E, F, G	10	5
ME 3–12 nm, Zone A East	20	10
ME 6*–12 nm, Zone A West	15	8
ME 6*–12 nm, Zone B, D, E, F	10 (status quo)	5
ME 6*–12 nm, Zone C, G	20	10

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

MINIMUM TRAPS PER TRAWL IN LOBSTER MANAGEMENT AREAS

LOBSTER MANAGEMENT AREAS (LMA)	MINIMUM TRAPS/TRAWL
LMA 1, excluding Maine Zones	
LMA 1, 6*–12 nm	15
LMA 1 beyond 12 nm	25
Outer Cape Cod	
3- 12 nm	15
LMA 3	
<i>In all LMA3 areas below, maximum trawl length is also increased from 1.5 to 1.75 nautical miles.</i>	
North of 50 fathom line on the south end of Georges Bank	45
South of 50 fathom line on the south end of Georges Bank	35
Georges Basin Restricted Area	50

CHANGES TO NORTHEAST LOBSTER AND JONAH CRAB TRAP/POT WEAK INSERTS

EFFECTIVE MAY 1, 2022

The 2021 rule removes the requirement for weak link at buoys* and other surface system flotation devices, and adds requirements for weak rope or insertions within the buoy line. Weak rope may also be used on any buoy line down to the lowest point where a weak insert is required.

Northeast lobster and Jonah crab trap/pot management areas where the regulations regarding weak inserts have changed are in the table below. Requirements for all other areas, other trap/pot fisheries, and gillnet fisheries remain the same.

Visit fisheries.noaa.gov/ALWTRP for complete regulations.

*Weak links at the buoy may still be used voluntarily.

AREA	WEAK INSERTION REQUIREMENTS
ME Exempt Waters	See State Regulations
ME Exempt Line-3 nm	1 weak insert 50% down the line OR top 50% of buoy line weak rope.
NH State Waters	
MA State Waters	
RI State Waters	Weak inserts every 60 feet OR full weak line in the top 75% of line.
LMA 2	
ME Zone A West, B, C, D, E; federal waters 3-12 nm	
MA and NH 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.
ME Zone A East, F, and G; federal waters 3-12 nm	
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.

WEAK ROPE AND INSERT REQUIREMENTS

The same rules apply in state and federal waters, except in Maine exempt waters (check with Maine DMR for requirements). All weak inserts 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 and inserts must be chosen from the list of NMFS-approved gear, and connected with any NMFS-approved rigging method on our fisheries.noaa.gov/ALWTRP website. To see the most updated list of approved weak line and inserts, please visit fisheries.noaa.gov/NE-approved-weak.

APPROVED WEAK ROPE

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

Fully formed weak ropes approved for use are available on our website. Some approved weak rope is available with state specific tracers. Check with your local gear supplier for availability.

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).



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 on our website.



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.



CHANGES TO GEAR MARKING REQUIREMENTS

EFFECTIVE DATE MAY 1, 2022

The tables below show 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 your state agency for complete regulations.

FEDERAL WATERS

REQUIREMENTS FOR FEDERAL WATERS
AREA COLOR IS BASED ON PERMIT'S PRINCIPAL PORT (NON-LMA 3) OR LMA 3 PERMIT.
<p>Maine</p> <p>One 3-foot SOLID PURPLE mark within 6 inches of one 12-inch GREEN mark, both within 2 fathoms of the surface buoy or within 2 fathoms of the highfliers and buoys at the surface; and</p> <p>One 12-inch PURPLE mark within 6 inches of one 12-inch GREEN mark at the top, middle, and bottom of the body of the buoy line.</p>
<p>New Hampshire</p> <p>One 3-foot SOLID YELLOW mark within 6 inches of one 12-inch GREEN mark, both within 2 fathoms of the surface buoy or within 2 fathoms of the highfliers and buoys at the surface; and</p> <p>One 12-inch YELLOW mark within 6 inches of one 12-inch GREEN mark at the top, middle, and bottom of the body of the buoy line.</p>
<p>Massachusetts</p> <p>One 3-foot SOLID RED mark within 6 inches of one 12-inch SOLID GREEN* mark, both within 2 fathoms of the surface buoy or within 2 fathoms of the highfliers and buoys at the surface; and</p> <p>One 12-inch RED mark (may be longer) within 6 inches of one 12-inch GREEN mark at the top, middle, and bottom of the body of the buoy line.</p> <p>NOTE: If you have line marked at every 60 feet as required by the state, there must be a GREEN mark next to all RED state marks. RED and GREEN marks must be within 6 inches of each other.</p> <p>*State regulations require SOLID GREEN marks in the surface system.</p>
<p>Rhode Island</p> <p>One 3-foot SOLID SILVER/GRAY mark within 6 inches of one 12-inch GREEN mark, both within 2 fathoms of the surface buoy or within 2 fathoms of the highfliers and buoys at the surface; and</p> <p>One 12-inch SILVER/GRAY mark within 6 inches of one 12-inch GREEN mark at the top, middle, and bottom of the body of the buoy line.</p>
<p>LMA 3</p> <p>One 3-foot SOLID BLACK mark within 6 inches of one 12-inch GREEN mark, both within the 2 fathoms of the surface buoy or within 2 fathoms of the highfliers and buoys at the surface; and</p> <p>One 12-inch BLACK mark within 6 inches of one 12-inch GREEN mark at the top, middle, and bottom of the body of the buoy line.</p>

STATE WATERS

REQUIREMENTS FOR STATE WATERS (Check with your state for the latest requirements)
<p>Maine (Except Exempt Waters)</p> <p>One 3-foot SOLID PURPLE mark within 2 fathoms of the surface buoy or within 2 fathoms of the highfliers and buoys at the surface; and</p> <p>One 12-inch PURPLE mark in top 50% and in the bottom 50% of the body of the buoy line.</p> <p><i>Maine Exempt Waters have different state requirements that are not included here.</i></p>
<p>New Hampshire</p> <p>One 3-foot SOLID YELLOW mark within 2 fathoms of the surface buoy or within 2 fathoms of the highfliers and buoys at the surface; and</p> <p>One 12-inch YELLOW mark in top 50% and in the bottom 50% of the body of the buoy line.</p>
<p>Massachusetts</p> <p>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</p> <p>Two 2-foot RED marks in the top 50% and in the bottom 50% of the body of the buoy line.</p> <p>* Additional marks may be necessary. No length of buoy line greater than 60 feet without a state RED mark is allowed.</p> <p>**If the buoy line is RED or RED/WHITE (candycane), WHITE marks must be substituted for RED marks.</p>
<p>Rhode Island</p> <p>One 3-foot SOLID SILVER/GRAY mark within 2 fathoms of the surface buoy or within 2 fathoms of the highfliers and buoys at the surface; and</p> <p>One 12-inch SILVER/GRAY mark in top 50% and in the bottom 50% of the body of the buoy line.</p>

SOLID MARKS may be applied with dye, paint, tape, heat-shrink tubing, insertion of a colored rope or braided sleeve, or as approved in writing by the Greater Atlantic Regional Administrator.

NON-SOLID 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.

SOLID COLORED ROPE may be used for state-specific gear marks throughout the line, including the solid surface mark, but solid green rope may not be used in place of federal green marks.

CANDY-CANE ROPE or rope with a distinctive state-specific colored strand throughout may be used instead of the state-specific gear marks in the lower buoy line, but not for the surface mark.

GREATER ATLANTIC REGIONAL FISHERIES OFFICE CONTACT

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