



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

NEWS RELEASE

Sustainable and Cooperative Management of Atlantic Coastal Fisheries

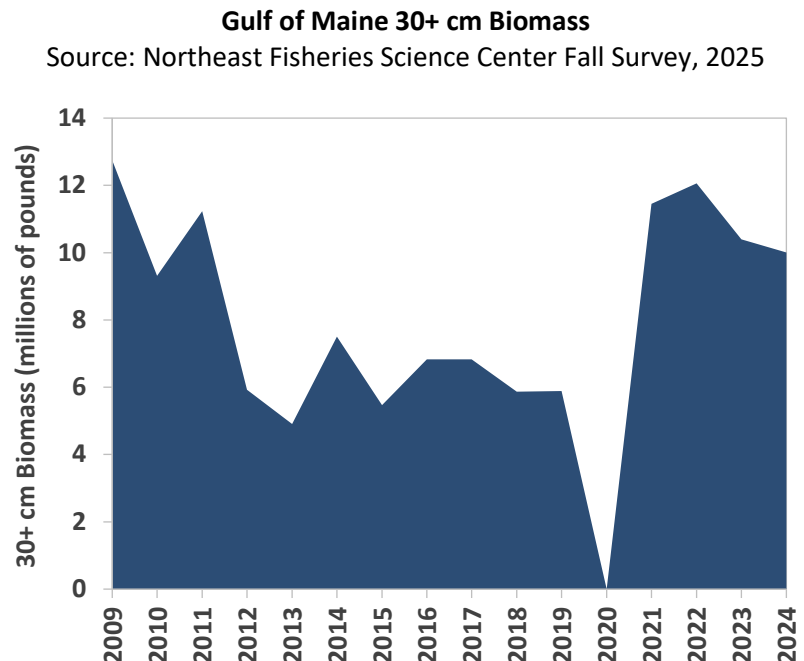
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Winter Flounder Stock Assessment Updates Find GOM Stock Not Experiencing Overfishing & SNE/MA Stock Not Overfished or Experiencing Overfishing

Arlington, VA – The Commission’s Winter Flounder Management Board received the results of the 2025 Stock Assessment Updates for the Gulf of Maine (GOM) and Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic (SNE/MA) winter flounder stocks and set specifications for the 2026-2028 fishing years.

For the GOM stock, it is unknown if the stock is overfished. However, the exploitation rate is estimated to be 19% of the overfishing exploitation threshold proxy, indicating the stock is not experiencing overfishing. The commercial fishery has experienced sharp declines in landings since the peak in 1982 at just over 6 million pounds. Landings declined steadily to approximately 770,000 pounds in 1999 and is estimated to be approximately 354,283 pounds in 2024. Recreational landings represented a significant portion of total harvest on the GOM stock during the 1980s, ranging between 2.5 and 10.5 million pounds. Recreational landings dropped below 440,000 pounds in 1992 and continued to drop to a time series low of approximately 49,824 pounds in 2024. This significant reduction in landings is largely attributable to low availability and/or low effort.



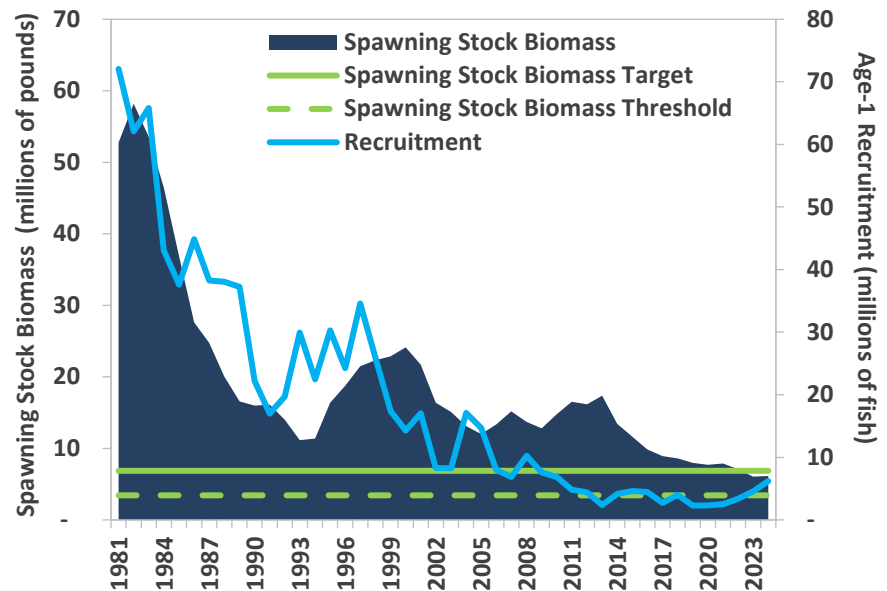
The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission was formed by the 15 Atlantic coastal states in 1942 for the promotion and protection of coastal fishery resources. The Commission serves as a deliberative body of the Atlantic coastal states, coordinating the conservation and management of nearshore fishery resources, including marine, shell and diadromous species.

Survey indices for the GOM stock have shown little change in the composition of age classes over time. This is concerning given the declining level of annual landings and low exploitation rate in the GOM. Overall, these indices of abundance have not shown any positive response to the large declines in commercial and recreational removals since the 1980s. However, recent increases (2021-2024) in biomass, if continued, may be the beginning of a response to low fishing effort.

The SNE/MA stock is considered not overfished nor experiencing overfishing. Spawning stock biomass (SSB) is estimated at 6.14 million pounds, 89% of the SSB target of 6.86 million pounds. Total fishing mortality is estimated at 0.048, which is 21% of the overfishing threshold of 0.233. Natural mortality, defined as the removal of fish from the stock due to causes not associated with fishing, is a source of uncertainty in the stock assessment and may be contributing to declining abundance. Although the stock is not overfished and not experiencing overfishing, trends in survey indices and model estimates all continue to indicate the stock is in poor condition.

Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic Spawning Stock Biomass

Source: Northeast Fisheries Science Center, 2025



SNE/MA commercial landings have declined significantly from the record high of 22.6 million pounds in 1981 to an all-time low of approximately 76,941 pounds in 2023. In 2024, commercial landings are estimated at 167,772 pounds. In response to the poor condition of the stock, a moratorium in the SNE/MA fishery was implemented in federal waters between May 2009 and April 2013. Concurrently, a 50-pound commercial bycatch limit was implemented in state waters and still remains in place today.

The SNE/MA recreational fishery has also experienced significant declines over time due to decreases in abundance. Landings were around 12 million pounds in the early 1980s, increased to 18.5 million pounds in 1984, and then precipitously declined to between 2 and 4.5 million pounds from 1992 to 2001. Landings continued to decline over the next two decades, from a high of 1.4 million pounds in 2002 to a low of 1,102 pounds in 2019. In 2024, recreational landings were estimated at 4,409 pounds.

Considering the results of the assessment updates and [catch limits recommended by the New England Fishery Management Council](#), the Board maintained 2025 recreational and commercial measures for the GOM and SNE/MA winter flounder stocks for the 2026-2028 fishing years (see Table 1). However, the Board discussed the 2 fish recreational possession limit currently in place for the SNE/MA stock, including concerns the low possession limit was discouraging targeting of winter flounder by the recreational fishery. The Board tasked the Winter Flounder Technical Committee to examine the

potential impacts of increasing the SNE/MA recreational possession limit and corresponding open seasons, and report its findings to the Board by the Commission's August 2026 meeting.

Table 1. 2026-2028 Winter Flounder Commercial and Recreational Measures for the Gulf of Maine and Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic Stocks

Stock	Sector	Trip Limit/ Possession Limit	Size Limit	Season	Gear
GOM	Commercial	500 lbs/ trip/day	12"	Maintain closures	Minimum 6.5" square or diamond mesh in cod-end
	Recreational	8 fish	12"	Open all year	
SNE/MA	Commercial	50 lbs/38 fish/trip/day	12"	Maintain closures	Minimum 6.5" square or diamond mesh in cod-end; 100-lb mesh trigger
	Recreational	2 fish	12"	Maintain closures	

Both assessment updates, as well as a more detailed overview of the updates, can be found on the Commission website at <https://asmfc.org/species/winter-flounder/> under News and Resources. For more information, please contact Tracey Bauer, Fishery Management Coordinator, at tbauer@asmfc.org or 703.842.0740.

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