

“PERTAINING TO RESTRICTIONS ON OYSTER HARVEST”

EMERGENCY CHAPTER 4 VAC 20-720-10 ET SEQ.

PREAMBLE

This emergency chapter establishes times of closure and other restrictions, for conservation purposes, on the harvest of oysters from all oyster grounds in the tidal waters of the Commonwealth. This emergency chapter is promulgated pursuant to authority contained in §§ 28.2-201, 28.2-507, 28.2-210, and 28.2-518 of the Code of Virginia. This emergency chapter amends and re-adopts, as amended, previous Chapter 4 VAC 20-720-10 et seq., which was adopted October 28, 2025, and made effective October 31, 2025. The effective date of this emergency chapter, as amended, is March 1, 2026.

**4VAC20-720-10. Purpose.**

The purpose of this emergency chapter is to conserve Virginia's oyster resources, especially oyster broodstock.

**4VAC20-720-40. Open oyster harvest season, harvest areas, and harvest limits.**

A. It shall be unlawful for any person to harvest oysters from public and unassigned grounds, except within the dates and areas and with the harvest gears set forth in this section.

B. It shall be unlawful to harvest clean cull oysters from the public oyster grounds and unassigned grounds, except within the seasons and areas and with the harvest gears as described in Table 1 in this subsection.

It shall be unlawful to exceed the daily individual bushel harvest limit or the daily vessel bushel limit of clean cull oysters in Table 1 in this subsection.

Table 1. Clean Cull Oyster Harvest Area, Harvest Dates, Harvest Gear, and Daily Bushel Limits				
Harvest Area	Harvest Dates	Harvest Gear	Daily Individual Bushel Limit	Daily Vessel Bushel Limit
Great Wicomico River Rotation Area 1	December 1, 2025, through December 31, 2025	Hand Scrape	8	16
Great Wicomico River Rotation Area 2	January 1, 2026, through January 31, 2026	Hand Scrape	8	16
James River Area 1, 2, and 3	October 15, 2025, through March 31, 2026	Hand Scrape	8	16
Mobjack Bay Area	February 1, 2026, through March 15, 2026	Hand Scrape	8	16
Piankatank River Area	February 1, 2026, through March 15, 2026	Hand Scrape	8	16

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Pocomoke Sound Area Public Ground 10	February 16, 2026, through February 28, 2026	Hand Scrape	8	16
Rappahannock River Area 7	December 1, 2025, through December 31, 2025	Hand Scrape	8	16
Rappahannock River Area 8	March 1, 2026, through March 15, 2026	Hand Scrape	8	16
Rappahannock River Rotation Area 2	February 1, 2026, through March 15, 2026	Hand Scrape	8	16
Rappahannock River Rotation Area 4	October 15, 2025, through November 30, 2025	Hand Scrape	8	16
Upper Chesapeake Bay - Blackberry Hangs Area	February 1, 2026, through March 15, 2026	Hand Scrape	8	16
White Shoal	November 1, 2025, through February 28, 2026	Hand Scrape	8	16
Corrotoman Hand Tong Area	October 1, 2025, through March 31, 2026	Hand Tong	14	28
Indian Creek	October 1, 2025, through March 31, 2026	Hand Tong	14	28
James River Seed Area, including the Deep Water Shoal State Replenishment Seed Area	October 1, 2025, through May 31, 2026	Hand Tong	14	28
James River Areas 1, 2, and 3	October 1, 2025, through October 14, 2025, and April 1, 2026, through May 31, 2026	Hand Tong	14	28
Little Wicomico River	October 1, 2025, through December 31, 2025	Hand Tong	14	28
Milford Haven	December 1, 2025, through February 28, 2026	Hand Tong	14	28
Mobjack Bay Area	October 1, 2025, through January 31, 2026	Hand Tong	14	28
Nomini Creek Area	October 1, 2025, through December 31, 2025	Hand Tong	14	28

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Piankatank River Area	October 1, 2025, through January 31, 2026	Hand Tong	14	28
Pocomoke Sound Area Public Ground 10	October 1, 2025, through February 15, 2026, and March 1, 2026, through March 31, 2026	Hand Tong	14	28
Pocomoke Sound Hand Tong Area	October 1, 2025, through March 31, 2026	Hand Tong	14	28
Rappahannock River Area 9	October 1, 2025, through March 31, 2026	Hand Tong	14	28
White Shoal	October 1, 2025, through October 31, 2025, and March 1, 2026, through May 31, 2026	Hand Tong	14	28
York River Hand Tong Area	October 1, 2025, through March 15, 2026	Hand Tong	14	28
York River Rotation Areas 1 and 2	October 1, 2025, through March 15, 2026	Hand Tong	14	28
Pocomoke and Tangier Sound Rotation Area 1	December 1, 2025, through March 15, 2026	Oyster Dredge	8	16
Thorofare	November 15, 2025, through November 30, 2025	Oyster Dredge	8	16
Deep Rock Area and Chesapeake Bay Patent Tong Area	November 1, 2025, through March 31, 2026	Patent Tong	8	16
Seaside Eastern Shore	November 1, 2025, through March 31, 2026	By Hand or Hand Tong	14	28

C. It shall be unlawful to harvest seed oysters from the public oyster grounds or unassigned grounds, except within the dates and areas and with the harvest gears described in Table 2 in this subsection.

Table 2. Seed Oyster Harvest Area, Harvest Dates, and Harvest Gear		
Harvest Area	Harvest Dates	Harvest Gear
James River Seed Area, including the Deep Water Shoal State Replenishment Seed Area	October 1, 2025, through May 31, 2026	Hand Tong

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D. In the Pocomoke and Tangier Sounds Rotation Areas, it shall be unlawful to possess on board any vessel more than 250 hard clams.

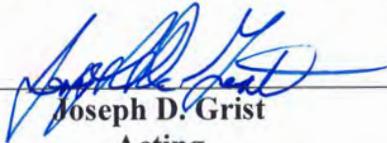
E. It shall be unlawful to possess any blue crabs on board any vessel with an oyster scrape or oyster dredge.

F. It shall be unlawful for any person or vessel to harvest clean cull oysters with more than one gear type in any single day from the public oyster grounds or unassigned grounds in the waters of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

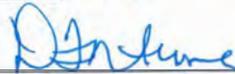
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This is to certify that the foregoing is a true and accurate copy of the chapter passed by the Marine Resources Commission, pursuant to authority vested in the Commission by §§ 28.2-201, 28.2-507, 28.2-210, and 28.2-518, of the Code of Virginia, duly advertised according to statute, and recorded in the Commission's minute book, at the meeting held in Hampton, Virginia, February 24, 2026.

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA  
MARINE RESOURCES COMMISSION

BY:   
Joseph D. Grist  
Acting  
Commissioner

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 26 day of Feb 2026.

  
Notary Public

