

PREAMBLE

This chapter establishes minimum size limits for the taking or possession of speckled trout by commercial and recreational fishermen. The minimum size limits will protect the spawning stocks and increase yield in the fishery. This chapter is designed to assure that Virginia is consistent with all federal and interstate management measures for speckled trout. In addition, this chapter establishes a commercial landings quota for speckled trout. The goal of these management measures is to perpetuate the speckled trout resource in fishable abundance throughout their range and generate the greatest possible economic and social benefits from their harvest and utilization over time.

This chapter is promulgated pursuant to authority contained in §28.2-201 of the Code of Virginia. This chapter amends and re-adopts, as amended, previous Chapter 4VAC20-280-10 et seq., which was adopted ~~July 28, 2020~~ July 27, 2021, and effective ~~August 1, 2020~~ September 1, 2021. The effective date of this chapter, as amended, is ~~September 1, 2021~~ April 1, 2026.

4VAC20-280-10. Purpose.

The purpose of this chapter is to protect and rebuild the spawning stocks of speckled trout, minimizing the possibility of recruitment failure, and to increase yield in their fisheries.

4VAC20-280-20. Definitions.

The following words and terms, when used in this chapter, shall have the following meanings unless the context clearly indicates otherwise.

“Fishing year” means the time period from September 1 of the current calendar year through August 31 of the following calendar year.

“Snout” means the most forward projection from a fish’s head that includes the upper and lower jaw.

"Speckled trout" means any fish of the species *Cynoscion nebulosus*.

“Total length” means the length of a fish measured from the most forward projection of the snout, with the mouth closed, to the tip of the longer lobe of the tail (caudal) fin, measured with the tail compressed along the midline, using a straight-line measure, not measured over the curve of the body.

4VAC20-280-30. Size and possession limits, and seasonal closure.

A. It shall be unlawful for any person to take, catch, or possess any speckled trout less than 14 inches in total length, except that the catch of speckled trout by pound net or haul seine may consist of up to 5.0%, by weight, of speckled trout less than 14 inches in total length.

B. It shall be unlawful for any person fishing commercially with commercial hook-and-line gear, or fishing recreationally with any gear type to possess more than one speckled trout 24 inches or greater in any one day.

C. It shall be unlawful for any person fishing commercially with commercial hook-and-line gear or recreationally with any gear type to possess more than five speckled trout in any one day.

D. It shall be unlawful for any person fishing recreationally to take, catch, or possess any speckled trout from April 1, 2026, through June 30, 2026.

4VAC20-280-40. (Repealed.)

4VAC20-280-50. Directed commercial landings quota and daily incidental catch limit.

A. For each fishing year the directed commercial landings quota of speckled trout shall be limited to 51,104 pounds.

B. When the commission announces that the directed commercial landings quota has been reached, it shall be unlawful for any commercial fisherman registration licensee to take, harvest, land, or possess more than the daily incidental catch limit for the remainder of the fishing year. The daily incidental catch limit shall be 50 pounds of speckled trout per licensee aboard the vessel, not to exceed 100 pounds per vessel.

4VAC20-280-55. Seafood Buyer Reporting Requirements.

Any licensed seafood buyer who purchases speckled trout shall report daily purchases in pounds using the commission's interactive voice recording system on the day of purchase from August 1 to November

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30, except when the commission announces that the directed commercial landings quota has been reached for the current fishing year.

4VAC20-280-60. Penalty.

Pursuant to §28.2-903 of the Code of Virginia, any person violating any provision of this chapter shall be guilty of a Class 3 misdemeanor, and a second or subsequent violation of any provision of this chapter committed by the same person within 12 months of a prior violation is a Class 1 misdemeanor.

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 of the Code of Virginia, duly advertised according to statute, and recorded in the Commission's minute book, at meeting held in Hampton, Virginia on March 31, 2026.

**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
MARINE RESOURCES COMMISSION**

BY: _____
Joseph D. Grist
Acting Commissioner

Subscribed and sworn to before me this _____ day of _____, 2026.

Notary Public