

# FLORIDA KEYS LOBSTER REGULATIONS

Includes Sport (Mini) Seasons for 2024



KeysLobsterSeason.com

LET IT GO.  
LET IT GROW.

The Florida Keys  
& Key West  
... come as you are®



FLORIDA KEYS  
NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY



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## FACTS TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GO.

Additional rules and measuring information found in  
*Rules For All Seasons & Measuring Lobster* sections of this brochure.

### AREAS/ZONES CLOSED TO HARVEST OF SPINY LOBSTER

FLORIDA KEYS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY CLOSED ZONES (YEAR-ROUND) (MARKED BY 30" YELLOW BOUNDARY BUOY)			JOHN PENNEKAMP CORAL REEF STATE PARK (JPCRSP)
<b>Sanctuary Preservation Areas (SPAs)</b> Carysfort Reef, The Elbow, Key Largo Dry Rocks, Grecian Rocks, French Reef, Molasses Reef, Conch Reef, Davis Reef, Hen and Chickens, Cheeca Rocks, Alligator Reef, Coffins Patch, Sombrero Key, Newfound Harbor Key, Looe Key, Eastern Dry Rocks, Rock Key, Sand Key.	<b>Ecological Reserves</b> Western Sambo, Tortugas Ecological Reserve North and South (refer to GPS coordinates, not marked).	<b>Special-use Research Only Areas (No Entry)</b> Conch Reef, Tennessee Reef, Looe Key Patch Reef, Eastern Sambo.	<b>JPCRSP is Closed for Sport Season</b> All of JPCRSP is closed during the Sport Seasons to the harvest of any lobster species.  <b>Year-Round Coral Rule:</b> No person shall harvest any lobster species from or within any coral formation (patch reef) regardless of its proximity to or exclusion from a Lobster Exclusion Zone.  <b>JPCRSP Lobster Exclusion Zones:</b> Closed year-round. Marked by Orange/White Spar buoys, found at:  Turtle Rocks, Basin Hills North, Basin Hills East, Basin Hills South, Higdon's Reef, Cannon Patch, Mosquito Bank North, Mosquito Bank Southeast, Three Sisters North, Three Sisters South.
Other Closed Areas (Year-Round)			
Everglades National Park Dry Tortugas National Park	Biscayne Bay Card Sound Spiny Lobster Sanctuary  Biscayne National Park Coral Reef Protection Areas	City of Layton  Artificial Habitat in State Waters	
Spanish and Slipper Lobster Closed Areas			
Spanish and slipper lobster are closed year-round to harvest in Key Largo and Looe Key Existing Management Areas, all FKNMS zones listed above in this table, Everglades and Dry Tortugas National Parks.			
<i>NOTE - Coral is protected from damage/removal in state and federal waters.</i>			

### SPINY LOBSTER LOCAL ORDINANCES: REGULAR & SPORT SEASONS

#### Local Rule:

No snorkeling or diving within 300 ft. of improved residential or commercial shoreline or any man-made or private canal, or any public or private marina. This rule is in effect according to the information provided below.

<b>Islamorada</b> Applies during the 3 days preceding Sport Season, the entirety of Sport Season and the first 5 days of Regular Season.	<b>Marathon</b> Applies only during Sport Season.	<b>Key Colony Beach</b> Applies only during 4 days preceding Sport Season and continues until 10 days have elapsed after the opening of Regular Season.	<b>Unincorporated Monroe County, Key West, Layton</b> Applies during the 3 days preceding Sport Season, the entirety of Sport Season and the first 5 days of Regular Season.  Exception: An owner diving and snorkeling in front of his/her property to the center line of the canal or open water. Layton has a prohibition on harvesting lobster any time from waters within city limits.
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## SPINY LOBSTER REGULATIONS

	SPORT (MINI) SEASONS	REGULAR SEASON
Season Dates	Lobster mini-season is on the last consecutive Wednesday and Thursday in July. It begins 12:01 a.m. on Day 1 and ends 12 midnight on Day 2. On Sunday, July 14, 2024, a special one-day lobster sport day, for Florida residents only, begins at 12:01 a.m. and ends at midnight.	August 6 - March 31. Begins 12:01 a.m. August 6 and ends 12 midnight March 31.
Bag Limit	6 per recreational harvester per day in Monroe County & Biscayne National Park.	
Possession Limit Off the Water	Limit of 6 per recreational harvester per day in Monroe County and adjacent federal waters can only be possessed when transporting the catch by car.	6 per recreational harvester per day.
Minimum Size	Carapace must be larger than 3 inches and must be measured in the water. Possession and use of a measuring device is required.	
Diving at Night	NOT permitted in Monroe County. Note: Night is 1 hour after official sunset to 1 hour before official sunrise.	Permitted

NOTE - Egg-bearing lobsters regardless of species must be released unharmed.

Everyone loves *Panulirus argus*, Florida's spiny lobster. And during sport season days every July, these tasty morsels become the quarry du jour in the Florida Keys. But Lobster Sport (Mini) Seasons are by no means free-for-all. There are clear guidelines designed to make the hunt fun, safe – and legal. If everyone plays by the rules, people can enjoy these delectable crustaceans for years to come.

Local, state and federal agencies strictly enforce lobster harvest and boating safety regulations.

### MEASURING LOBSTER

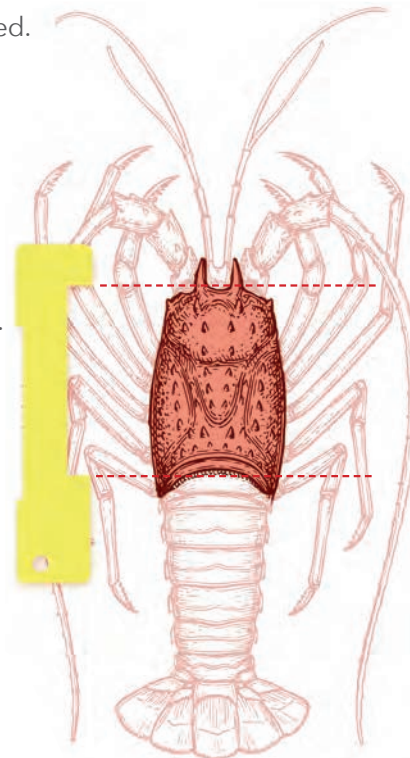
- No person shall harvest or attempt to harvest spiny lobster by diving unless they possess, while in the water, a gauge made for measuring lobster.

- All lobsters must be measured in the water, if harvested by diving. All lobsters must be measured immediately after taking, and immediately returned to the water free, alive and unharmed if undersized.

- Lobster carapace must be greater than three (3) inches to be harvested or possessed. All undersized lobsters must be released unharmed. Measurement begins at the forward edge between the rostral horns, excluding any soft tissue, and proceeds along the middle to the rear edge of the carapace.

- All recreationally harvested lobsters must remain whole while at sea.

- Tails can only be separated on land. When the tail is separated from the body, it must be greater than 5-1/2 inches.



## STAY LEGAL. STAY SAFE.

- 1 Size matters: Use a gauge and know how to measure.
- 2 Six means six. Bag limit = 6 per person per day.
- 3 Don't forget your boating safety gear.
- 4 Avoid closed areas.
- 5 Display a dive flag. Always.
- 6 Touching or anchoring your boat on coral is prohibited -- be aware!

### RULES FOR ALL SEASONS

**Possession:** Lobster must be of legal size before they are in possession. NOTE: You may not have lobster in your possession in Everglades National Park (Florida Bay).

**Bag Limits:** The federal bag limit cannot be combined with the state bag limit. In addition, people who are NOT actively harvesting or are not properly licensed (when a license is required) may NOT be counted for purpose of bag limits.

**License Requirements:** Recreational harvesters are required to possess a valid Florida Saltwater Fishing License with a current spiny lobster permit. Consult your license agent for exemptions.

**Gear:** Harvesting or attempting to harvest spiny lobster using any device that will or could puncture, penetrate or crush the exoskeleton (shell) or the flesh of the lobster is prohibited.

**Commercial Lobster Traps and Ghost Traps:** It is a felony to molest, damage, or take lobster from traps in federal or state waters. (Recreational trapping is prohibited.)

**Coral is protected** from damage and removal in federal and state waters. Do NOT touch, hold on to, stand on, break, anchor on, flip over or otherwise harm coral. It is a fragile living animal.

**Egg-bearing (berried) lobster regardless of species must be released unharmed.** Stripping egg-bearing females of eggs, and possession of spiny or ridged slipper lobster tails from which eggs have been removed, are prohibited. Eggs are an orange, yellow, brown, or red mass found covering the underside of the lobster's tail.

**Dive Flag:** All divers and snorkelers in the water are required to prominently display a diver down flag. In navigation channels, divers should stay within 100 feet of their dive flag and vessels should stay 100 feet away from any dive flag. On open water, divers should stay within 100 yards of their boat's dive flag and vessels should stay 100 yards away from boats flying dive flags. Vessels within any of those distances must slow to idle speed (no faster than is necessary to maintain headway and steerage).

**"Bully-netting"** is using a circular frame attached at a right angle to the end of a pole and supporting a conical bag of webbing. Possession of bully nets is prohibited in Everglades National Park (Florida Bay).

**"Hoop-netting"** is using a frame, circular or otherwise, supporting a shallow bag of webbing and suspended by a line and bridles. Possession of hoop nets is prohibited in Everglades National Park (Florida Bay).

**Artificial Habitat:** Harvesting lobster from artificial habitat in state waters is prohibited. Placing artificial habitat anywhere (state or federal waters) is prohibited. Artificial habitat is any material placed in the water that is reasonably suited to providing cover and habitat for spiny lobster. Such material may be constructed of wood, metal, fiberglass, concrete or plastic, or any combination thereof and may be fabricated for this purpose or other purposes. Artificial habitat does not include fishing gear allowed by FWC or artificial reefs permitted by Florida DEP or Army Corps.

