

# Southeast Fishery Bulletin

National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, 9721 Executive Center Drive N., St. Petersburg, FL 33702

## **FOR INFORMATION CONTACT:**

Chris Smith, Public Affairs Officer  
(727) 570-5301, Pager 888-955-4854  
Dennis Klemm, Fishery Biologist  
(727) 570-5312

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### **NOAA Fisheries Restricts Large-mesh Gillnets in Pamlico Sound to Protect Sea Turtles**

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) has implemented a final rule affecting gillnetters operating in Pamlico Sound, North Carolina (east of 76°30.0' W. longitude, north of 35°00' N. latitude, and south of 35°46.3' N. latitude). NOAA Fisheries is closing these waters to fishing with gillnets with a mesh size larger than 4 1/4 inch (10.8 cm) stretched mesh ("large-mesh gillnet"), on a seasonal basis, from September 1 through December 15 each year, to protect sea turtles. These Federal restrictions are effective immediately.

These Federal restrictions are necessary to reduce mortality by entanglement in gillnets of sea turtles listed as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. Implementation of this rule follows the September 2001 NOAA Fisheries interim final rule previously enacted for Pamlico Sound. Observer and stranding data have demonstrated that entanglement in large-mesh gillnets is a significant source of mortality to threatened and endangered sea turtles in Pamlico Sound. Similar management actions implemented in 2001 resulted in a 67 percent reduction in sea turtle strandings from the previous year.

Gillnetters may continue to utilize gillnets with mesh of 5 inches (12.7 cm) or larger only in the Gill Net Restricted Areas (GNRAs including the Shallow and Mainland GNRA) included in Proclamation M-10-2002 [Revised] by the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries (NCDMF) and authorized under the NOAA Fisheries Endangered Species Act (ESA) section 10 permit (#1398) to NCDMF. Large-mesh gillnetting in this area must conform to all of the requirements of Proclamation M-10-2002 [Revised]. The NOAA Fisheries closure boundaries and NCDMF GNRA are shown in the attached map. The NCDMF management plan, as implemented in the Proclamation and section 10 permit, assures that portions of the fishery can remain open while maintaining necessary protections and obtaining data to aid in determining future fishery management options. The NCDMF proclamation took effect on September 1, 2002.

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NOAA Fisheries is an agency of the Department of Commerce's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The agency conducts scientific research and provides services and products to support fisheries management, fisheries development, trade and industry assistance, enforcement, and protected species and habitat conservation programs.