

A blue crab is shown from a top-down perspective, resting on a wooden boardwalk. The crab's body is a pale yellowish-tan, while its legs and claws are a vibrant blue. The boardwalk consists of parallel wooden planks that run diagonally across the frame. The lighting is bright, casting a soft shadow of the crab onto the wood below it.

Crabbing Trotline Rules

- An Overview and History -

Current Rec Trotline Rules

- Start times:
 - April, October, November, December
 - Chesapeake Bay: ½ hour after sunrise – 5 p.m.
 - Tidal Tribs: ½ hour after sunrise - sunset
 - May-September
 - Chesapeake Bay: ½ hour before sunrise – 5 p.m.
 - Tidal Tribs: ½ hour before sunrise - sunset
- Length:
 - Chesapeake Bay: 1,200 feet
 - Atlantic Ocean: 600 feet per person/1,200 feet max per boat
- Distance:
 - Cannot be set within 100 feet of any other trotline, collapsible crab trap or net ring
- License is required for use

Recreational Start Time History

- 1994 (prior to start of season) - Prohibited from being set or fished:
 - Between 5 p.m. and sunrise where commercial crab pots are allowed
 - Between sunset and sunrise in the tidal tribs of the Chesapeake Bay
- 1994 (August) – Start time changed from “sunrise” in tidal tribs to 5:30 a.m.
- 1995 (Emergency reg effective from September 15 – end of year) – Recreational trotlines limited to being set and fished:
 - From 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. in areas where commercial crab pots allowed
 - From 5:30 a.m. to sunset in tribs (no change to tribs)
 - Rec crabbers only allowed to crab Friday, Saturday and Sunday
- 2002 (November) – current rules enacted

Other Rec Rule History

- Length
 - 1975: 100 yard max for rec use (longer = com)
 - 1980: Sport crabber's lic required to use >100 yards
 - 1994: 1,000 feet max, no more than 2 trotlines per boat (changed to no more than 2,000 feet per boat in middle of season)
 - 1999: 600 feet for non-licensed; 1,200 feet for non-commercial license
 - 2001: 1,200 feet, but non-commercial license required
 - 2004: ATL – 600 feet per person/1,200 feet per boat; CB – 1,200 feet per boat (current rules)
- Distance
 - 1975: May not intersect with previously set trotline
 - 1984: Trotline or collapsible trap may not be set within 50 feet of previously set trotline
 - 1994: Trotline, collapsible trap and net ring may not be set within 100 feet of previously set trotline
 - 2014: May not set/fish trotline within 100 feet of any other person's set gear
 - 2015: Current rules enacted
- License
 - 1980: Sport crabber's lic required to use >100 yards
 - 1984: Sport crabber's lic required to use >500 feet
 - 1994: Com license required to use more than 1,000 feet
 - 1999: Non-commercial license required to use between 600-1,200 feet of trotline
 - 2001: Non-commercial license required to use trotline of any length up to 1,200 feet in CB
 - 2004: License is required in CB, no license is required in ATL

Commercial Start Time History

- 1994 – Prohibited from being set between 5 p.m. and 3 a.m.
- 1995 (Emergency reg effective from September 15 – end of year) – Limited to catching crabs from 6 a.m. – 2 p.m. (set time removed though)
- 2001 (July) – Set time eliminated, catch time set from 1 hour before sunrise to 7 hours after sunrise
- 2002 – Current commercial rules enacted
 - April, October, November, December: sunrise – 10 hours after sunrise
 - May-September: 1 hour before sunrise – 9 hours after sunrise
- NOTE: The Department has authority to regulate the set time of commercial crabbers and allow for a start time earlier than 1 hour before sunrise, but cannot restrict the workday to less than 11 hours, including time to set and take up gear. This authority has not been used since the General Assembly gave it to DNR in 2012 because the industry has been conflicted on what the workday should look like. Because of this conflict, DNR has maintained status quo.