

SPECIES SNAPSHOT

A 2024 status update for South Carolina's saltwater species

SOUTHERN FLOUNDER

Southern flounder are the most common flounder species in South Carolina estuaries and are a popular target of recreational anglers. Recreational harvest accounts for over 99% of flounder harvested in the state. In 2021, the minimum harvest size was increased to 16" total length and possession limits were decreased to 5 per person and 10 per boat.



SIZE & SEX

Females grow much faster and larger than males, and almost all legal-sized fish caught in SC are female. On average, females reach the 16-inch minimum harvest size at 2.5 years. The largest recorded flounder caught in SC weighed 17 pounds, 9.6 oz.

AGE & MATURITY

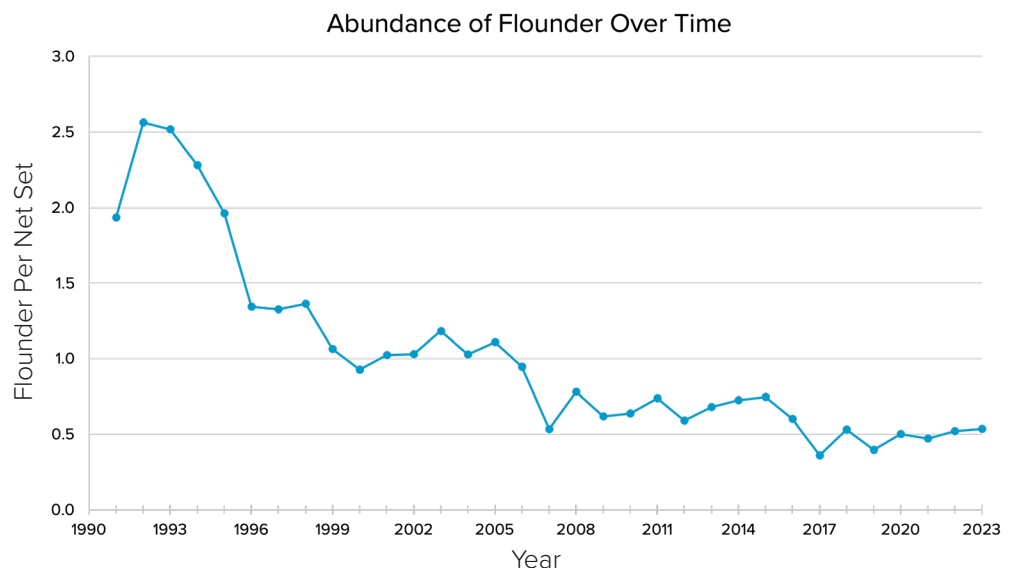
Around half of male and female flounder are capable of reproducing after a year, and almost all are mature after two years. By the time a female reaches the 16-inch minimum size, she has likely had an opportunity to reproduce at least once.

HABITAT & LIFE CYCLE

Southern flounder juveniles and adults inhabit estuaries from the brackish waters of rivers to the ocean. Adults spawn in offshore waters during the cooler months and juvenile fish move into their estuarine homes after 1-2 months at sea.

Flounder Numbers Have Declined in SCDNR Surveys Over Time

- The number of southern flounder captured in SCDNR's trammel net survey has declined over time, with 2017 marking an all-time low.
- The average size of fish encountered has also declined, a typical sign of overfishing.
- It is too early to determine if the 2021 regulation changes were enough to rebuild the population.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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How do we get these numbers?



- Working from customized boats, SCDNR biologists conduct two different survey types in every major South Carolina estuary to capture and study flounder.
- Since 1990, the collection of this data has allowed biologists to track the health of our state's flounder by keeping tabs on population numbers, size, age and other biological information over time.
- Other SCDNR flounder research projects focus on learning more about flounder movement and genetics. We are also currently in the early stages of developing a southern flounder stock enhancement program.

Many factors impact flounder numbers



FISHING PRESSURE

As our coastal population has grown, so too has angling pressure. Over the last 30 years, the number of saltwater fishing trips in South Carolina has more than doubled. More anglers means more harvested flounder.



WIND PATTERNS

Southern flounder rely on favorable onshore winds to help larvae hatched in offshore environments move into the estuaries, where they will spend most of their life.



TEMPERATURE

The sex of a flounder is influenced by temperature, meaning waters much warmer or cooler than 73 degrees Fahrenheit during critical early life stages will result in more males in the population.

You can help flounder in South Carolina

HANDLE WITH CARE

When catch-and-release fishing, always handle fish with wet hands and/or a rubber-coated net. Minimize the time that fish spend out of water and revive when necessary before release.

CLIP THE LINE

Southern flounder may swallow natural bait and become gut-hooked. In this situation, clip your line as close to the hook as possible, giving the fish the best chance of dislodging the hook after release.

BUY A FISHING LICENSE

Even if you don't fish, consider purchasing a fishing license. Saltwater license fees help fund research and protection efforts for flounder and many other saltwater species.