

Status Update for South Carolina's Red Drum Population



A comprehensive 2024 regional study found that red drum numbers in South Carolina, Georgia and Florida have declined to unsustainable levels.



As our most sought-after gamefish, red drum are important to the coastal economy, environment and culture.



A South Carolina-specific study showed similar results, finding that our red drum have declined in the last decade.

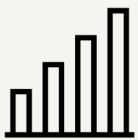
There are numerous potential causes for the decline of red drum numbers; the number of fish harvested is the only variable that we can directly influence.

The number of breeding adults is the lowest it's been in decades. In 2023, total removals (kept fish + released fish that later died) were the second highest on record.

Studies estimate that roughly 8% of red drum die following release. Increased fishing effort on adult fish during the spawning season may also impact the population.

Changes in environmental conditions (temperature, salinity, wind patterns, etc.) and habitat availability/quality can all impact the survival of young fish each year.

South Carolina must make smart management changes to reduce harvest, rebuild the population and ensure that anglers can continue to enjoy catching red drum.



A minimum 24% reduction in the total number of red drum removed (kept fish + released fish that later died) is needed to get the population above the "overfished" threshold in about seven years and to a healthy target in ~30 years.



Potential regulatory measures to reduce harvest could include changes to bag limits, boat limits and/or slot sizes. Currently, the limits are two fish per person, six per boat and 15-23 inches total length.



Because the fishery is largely catch and release (85-90%) and bag/boat limits are already relatively strict, it will likely take a combination of management changes to achieve the needed reduction.