

Blue Crab Landings

Florida’s blue crab landings through 2023 suggest a continuation of landings volume below its historic average, beginning in 2001. The 2021 - 2023 landings are the lowest since 2009, and among the lowest landings since 1986, when trip ticket use was mandated in Florida. These landings appear to follow the historical cycle of 5-10-year intervals of landings “lows” and “highs” (Figure 1). Since 2013, statewide landings have been relatively stable, hovering between 5.7-8 million pounds. At the time of this report 2024 blue crab landings were only valid through part of the year and considered preliminary. The damage sustained by Hurricane Helene in September 2024 will likely impact effort and landings in NW Florida counties through the end of the year. The catch-per-unit-effort (pounds per trip) of Florida Gulf Coast landings has remained relatively stable since 2012 but peaked in 2018 and 2019 (Figure 2). The catch-per-unit-effort of the softshell fishery has decreased since peak landings in 2009 (Figure 2). Florida does not collect recreational blue crab landings.

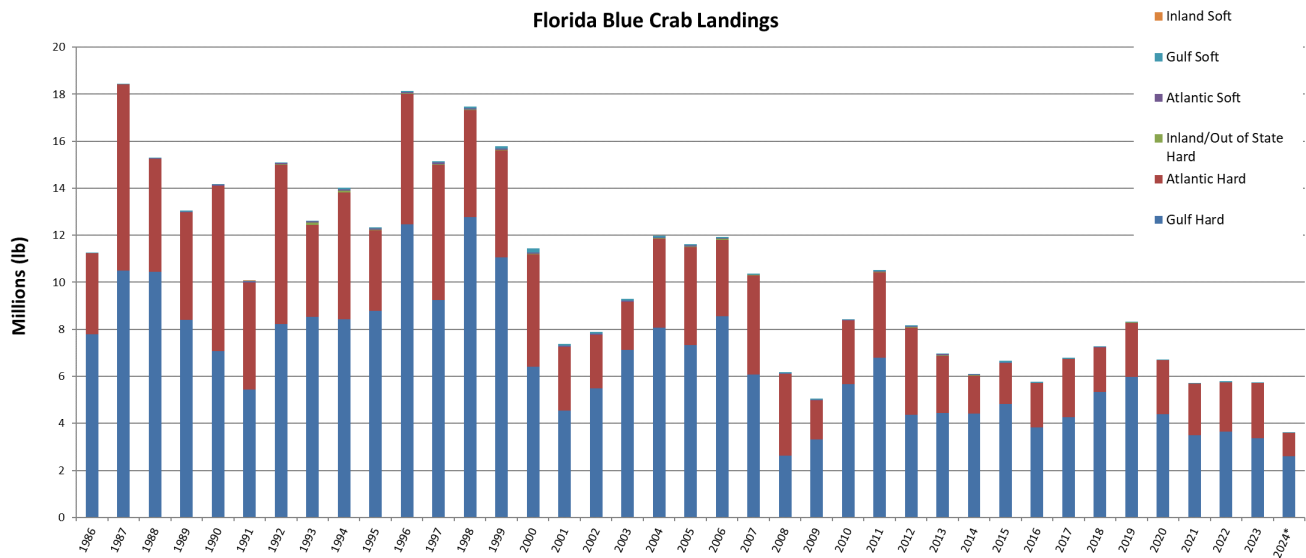


Figure 1. Statewide Florida blue crab landings. Data obtained from Florida Fish and Wildlife Marine Fisheries Information System.

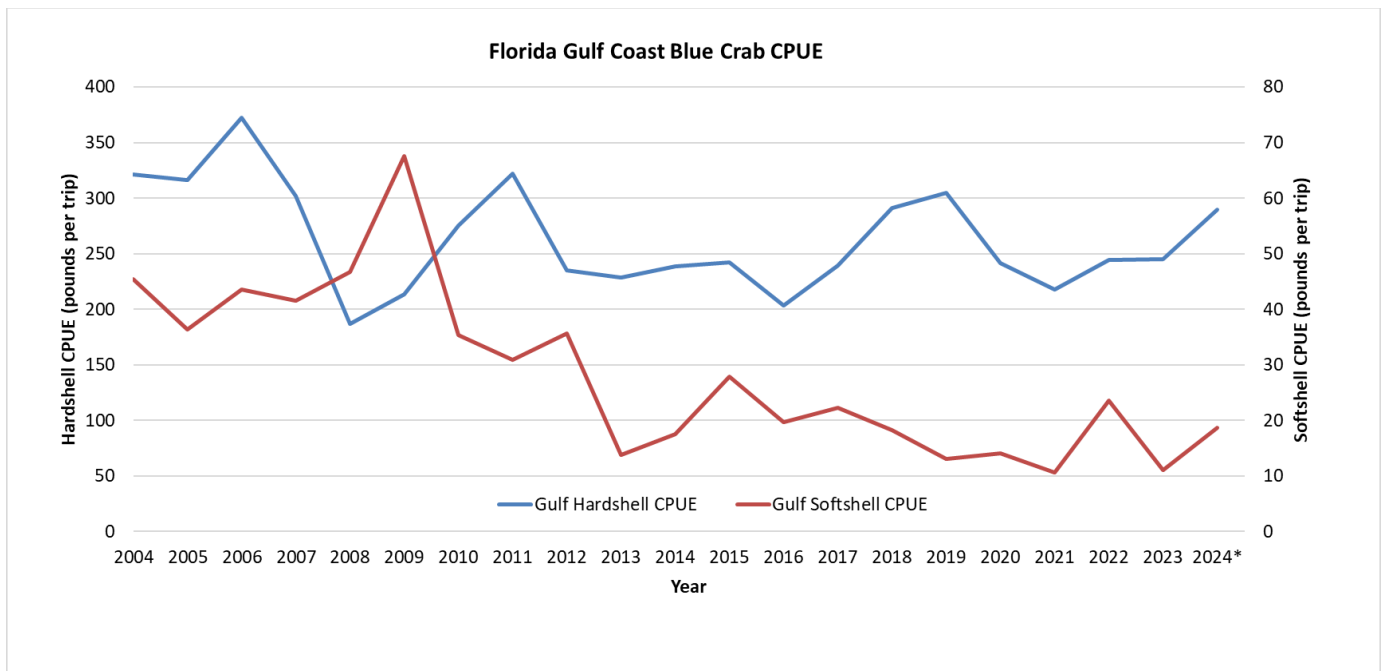


Figure 2. Florida Gulf Coast blue crab catch per unit effort (pounds/trip). Data obtained from Florida Fish and Wildlife Marine Fisheries Information System.

Research and Monitoring

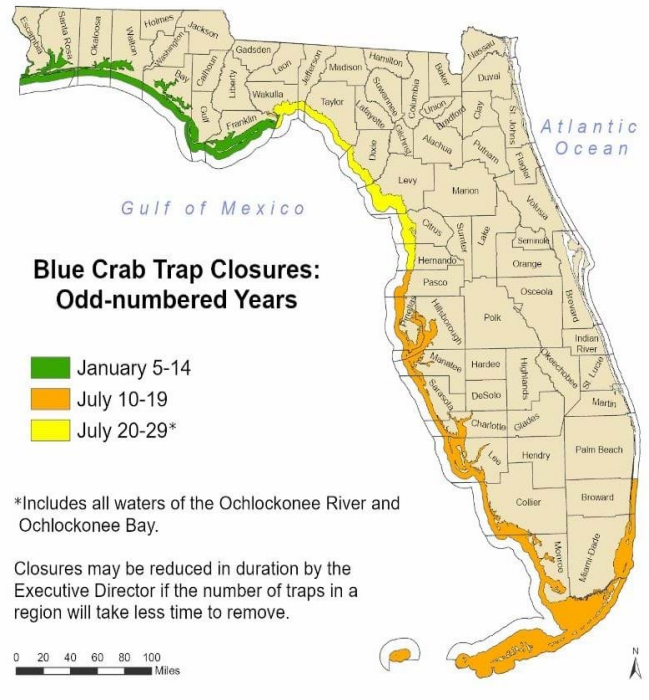
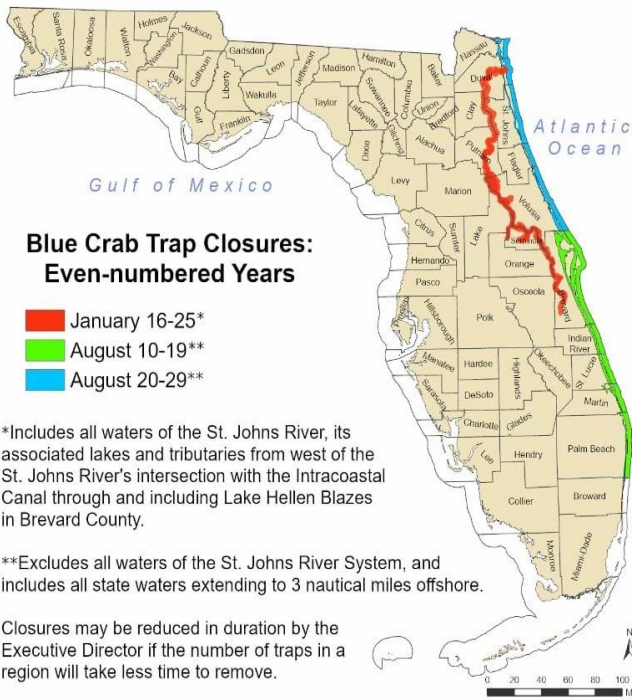
Fishery-independent and -dependent monitoring began in January of 2024 in the Crystal River and Steinhatchee areas of Florida. At each location both commercial style and modified traps (smaller mesh size without cull rings) are fished at each location and sampled monthly. When available researchers ride on commercial vessels to document catch composition. Hurricane Helene has temporarily suspended these efforts and may require adjustments to sampling locations.

Petition for use of Terrapin Excluder Devices (TEDs)

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) was petitioned by the Center for Biological Diversity, Florida Turtle Conservation Trust, and Diamondback Terrapin Working Group in January of 2020 to protect Diamondback Terrapins (DBT) (*Malaclemys terrapin*) from mortality in blue crab traps. In December 2020 FWC managers proposed 5 Terrapin Bycatch Reduction Zones (TBRZ) where the use of bycatch reduction devices would be enforced (Figure 3.) In December 2021 FWC Commissioners approved rule changes regarding possession of Diamondback Terrapins. Effective March 1, 2022, DBT may not be purchased or possessed for commercial or private sales. Those that were in possession of DBT as pets, could apply for a personal possession permit until May 31, 2022. Individuals or institutions which possess DBT for education and outreach must apply for a permit for Exhibition and Education. Additionally, FWC Commissioners instituted a rule change requiring all recreational blue crab traps to have a rigid funnel opening measuring no more than 2 x 6 inches at the narrowest point, beginning March 1, 2023. The University of Florida and FWRI conducted research to test two BRD designs and evaluate their performance in crab capture, crab retention, and terrapin capture. These results are under peer review. Additionally, research was conducted in the NE FL TBRZ to determine how BRDs may decrease the catch of marketable crabs in the region. These studies aim to guide FWC managers on the necessity for regulations in the proposed management areas. No additional management changes have been made at the time of this report.

Derelict Trap Retrieval Program

Derelict trap cleanup occurs during odd numbered years on the Gulf Coast of Florida, and even numbered years on the Atlantic coast of Florida.



During the 2024 derelict trap retrieval 251 blue crab traps were removed from the Atlantic Coast of Florida (127 commercial and 144 recreational). Additionally, 1,203 stone crab traps were collected from the Gulf of Mexico coast of Florida and Atlantic coast in the Florida Keys (1,117 commercial and 86 recreational).