

**Mississippi Crab Fishery Report - MDMR
 GSMFC Crab Subcommittee Meeting – October 10, 2024
 Reporting Period – October 1, 2023 – September 30, 2024**

Licenses

Mississippi’s commercial license year is from May 1 to April 30 of the following year. In the 2023-2024 commercial license year 148 resident commercial crab trap licenses, 21 non-resident commercial crab trap licenses, 70 resident commercial crab trawl licenses, and 1 non-resident commercial crab trawl licenses were sold (Figure 1).

A total of 576 resident recreational crab trap licenses and 118 non-resident recreational crab trap licenses were sold between October 1, 2023 and September 30, 2024 (Figure 1).

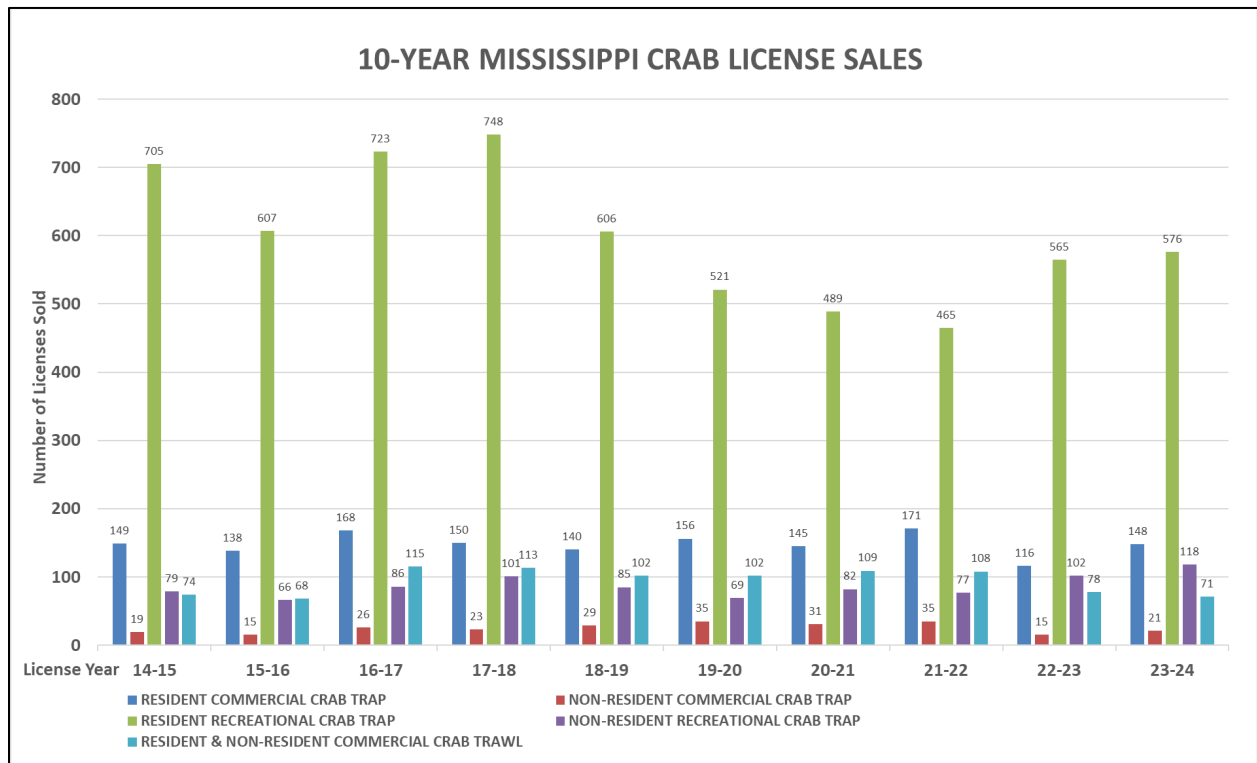


Figure 1. Mississippi Crab Licenses Sold – 2014-2024.

Landings

A total of 866,266 pounds of blue crabs were landed in Mississippi in 2023 with a dockside value of approximately \$1,677,963 (Figure 2).

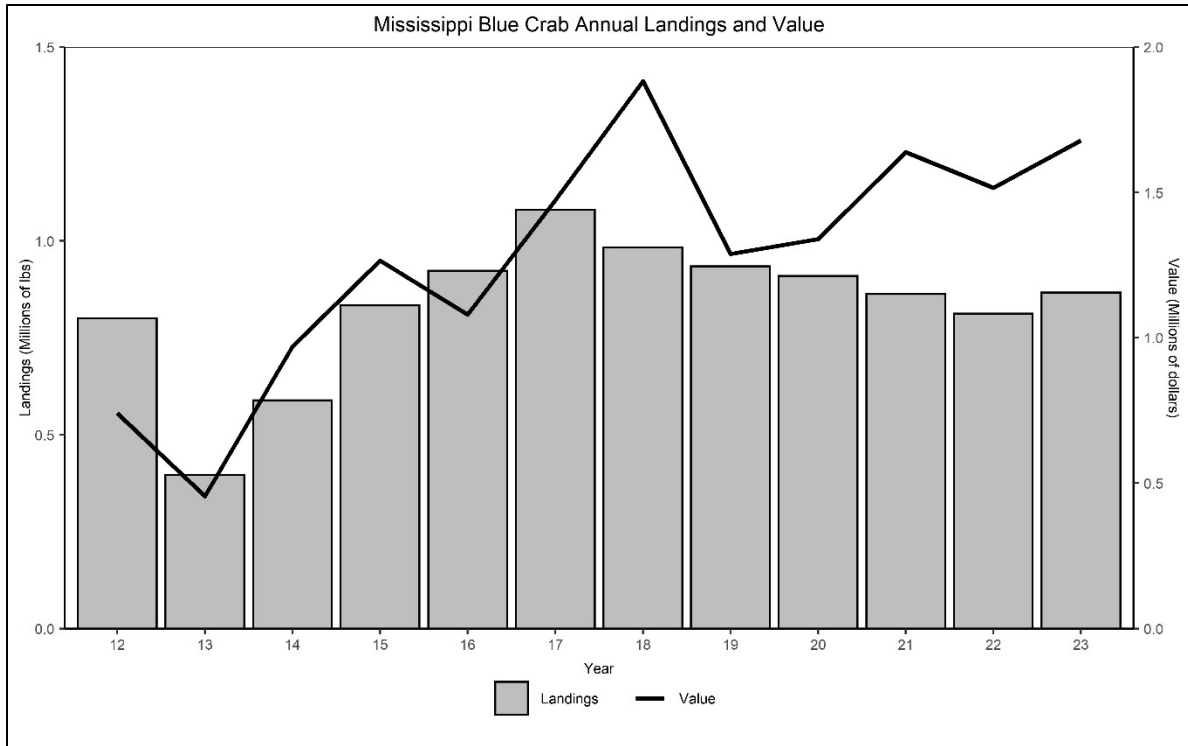


Figure 2. 2011-2023 Annual Mississippi Blue Crab Landings and Value.

A total of 877,630 pounds of blue crabs were landed in Mississippi from January 1 to August 31, 2024 with a dockside value of approximately \$1,919,583 (Figure 3).

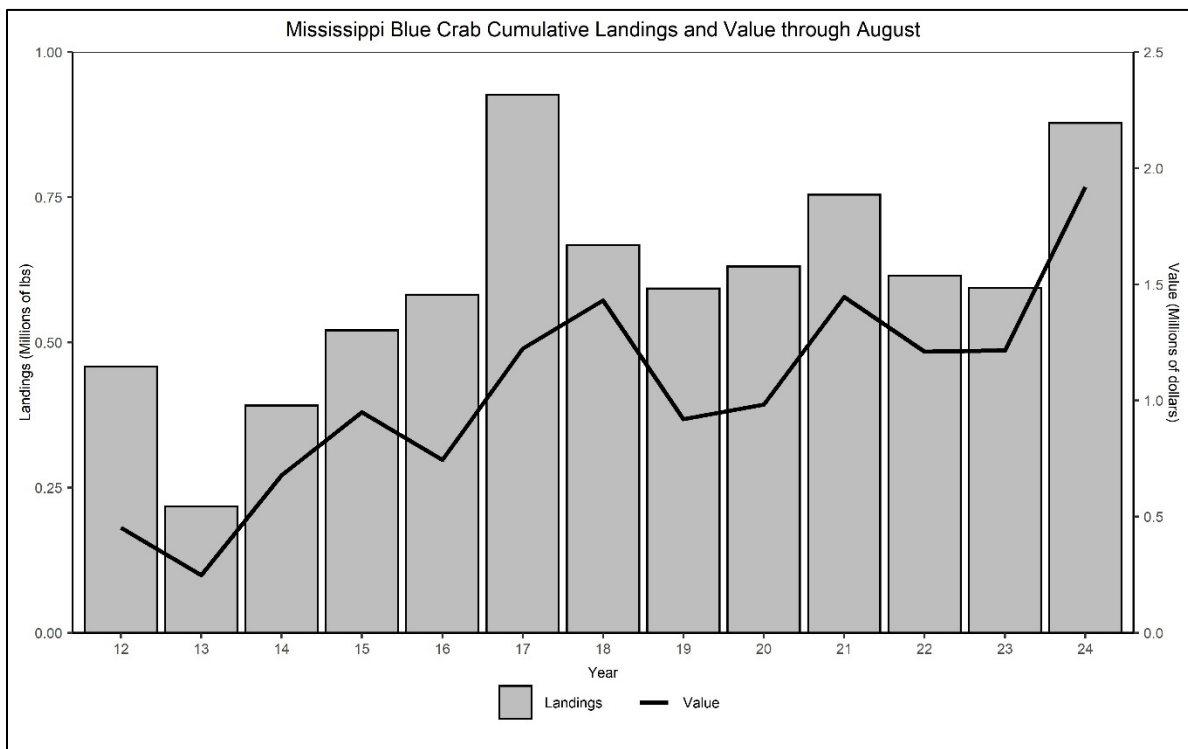


Figure 3. January to August 2011-2024 Mississippi Blue Crab Landings and Value.

The average Blue Crab landings from October through September for the previous 5-year period were 876,920 pounds with a value of approximately \$1,476,530. Monthly landings for October 2023 to August 2024 versus the 5-year average are shown in Figure 4.

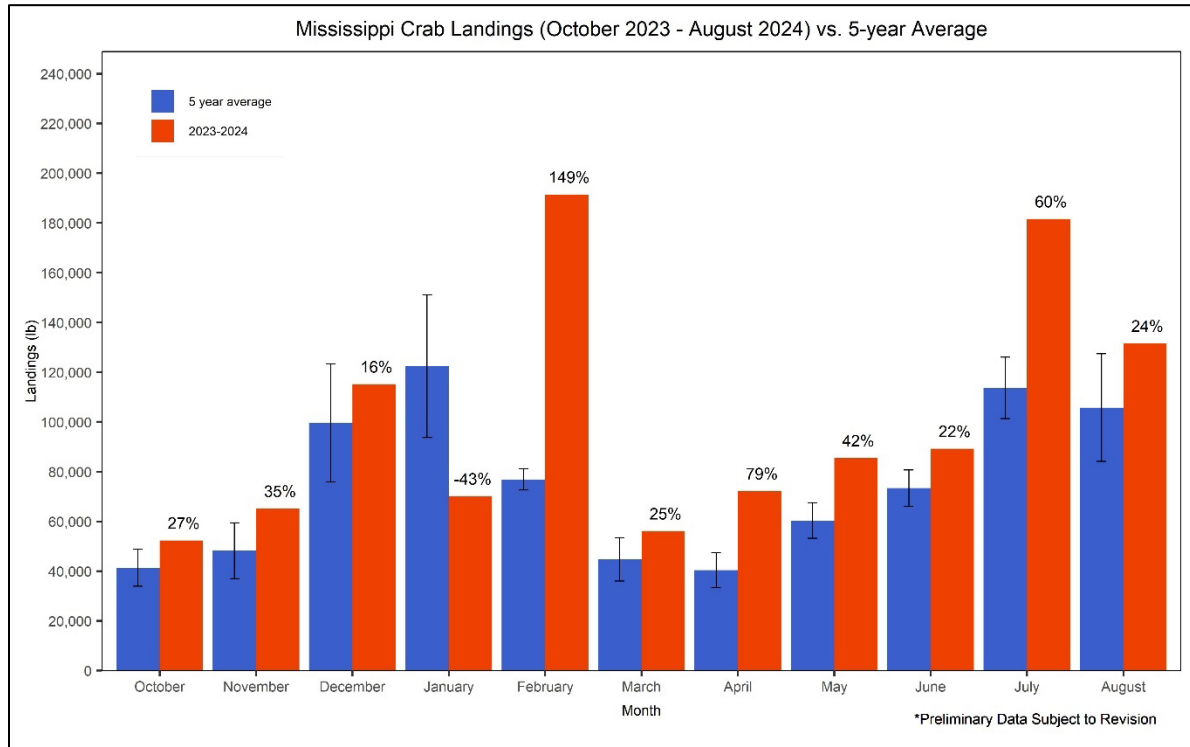


Figure 4. October 2023 to August 2024 Monthly Crab Landings vs. Previous 5-year Monthly Averages.

Derelict Crab Trap Removal Program

398 derelict crab traps were removed during a public cleanup event in February 2024. The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR), Office of Marine Fisheries, Shrimp and Crab Bureau (SCB) removed and recycled an additional 126 crab traps from the environment from October 2023 to September 2024 through staff directed removal efforts. The Mississippi Derelict Crab Trap Removal program began in 1999, and through September 2024, has removed a total of 22,917 traps from Mississippi state waters.

TED's and Escape Rings

Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR) has utilized 2011 fisheries disaster funding to distribute TEDs at no cost to Mississippi crab fishermen since October 2015. Through September 2024, 8,332 TEDs have been distributed to both commercial and recreational crab fishermen with this funding and the program will continue while current supplies last.

Since 2008 MDMR has provided a total of 21,995 TEDs at no cost to crab fishermen through various programs.

Also funded through the 2011 disaster grant, and in response to a 2017 regulation change, MDMR has distributed 80,772 escape rings (2 3/8") through September 2024. The escape rings are provided at no cost to licensed resident crab fishermen while current supplies last.

FID Sampling Programs

SCB staff continued fishery independent trap surveys for blue crabs within three major estuaries – St. Louis Bay, Back Bay of Biloxi, and the lower Pascagoula River. Each estuary was sampled monthly from October 2023 through December 2023 for a total of 9 sample sets with a total of 54 traps pulled. This sampling program, which began in September 2014, was discontinued in December 2023. This program provided data on CPUE, size and sex composition, blue crab abundance, and bycatch composition. In total, 364 sample sets were completed during the project.

In January 2024 SCB began a new crab trap survey protocol. This program is currently funded through the GSMFC IJ State Research Funding (SuRF) Program and consists of sampling along a transect in the Biloxi Bay system at three fixed stations per month: one station in the bay, a second station at the mouth of the bay, and a third station in the Mississippi Sound. In addition to continuing to provide valuable data on CPUE, size and sex composition, blue crab abundance, and bycatch, this new protocol will allow for better monitoring of annual migratory patterns. From January to September 2024 a total of 27 sample sets were completed and a total of 160 traps were pulled (two traps were lost).

SCB staff also continued a fishery independent crab trap survey in Mississippi commercial blue crab harvest waters that was initiated in 2021 and funded through the SuRF Program. Six crab traps were placed at a randomly selected site in each of the three coastal counties from October 2023 through December 2023 to provide data on CPUE, size and sex composition, blue crab abundance, and bycatch composition. During this time period, there were a total of 9 sample sets with a total of 53 traps pulled (one trap was lost). This sampling protocol was discontinued in December 2023 in favor of the new, transect based crab trap monitoring program described above.

In 2021 SCB started experimental trawl monitoring using two experimental trawls – 6' and 12' otter trawls –for collection of juvenile finfish, penaeid shrimp and blue crabs in nearshore areas otherwise unsuitable for trawling with a standard 16' trawl. Beginning in July 2023, this protocol was altered to utilize only the 12' net as this was found to be the more effective of the two gear types. Additionally, the number of trawls collected each month was expanded from 12 to 18 randomly selected sites to ensure adequate coverage of each watershed. A total of 214 small trawls were completed from October 2023 through September 2024.

MDMR, Office of Marine Fisheries, Finfish Bureau (FB) staff continued an experimental fishery independent study using seines using SuRF Program funding. A 50' bag seine was tested for collection of YOY and juvenile finfish, penaeid shrimp and blue crabs. Monthly samples were collected at six fixed sites located in the three coastal counties. A total of 48 seine pulls were completed from October 2023 through September 2024.