

Blue Crab Landings

Florida’s blue crab landings through 2021 suggest a continuation of landings volume below its historic average, beginning in 2000. The 2021 landings are the lowest since 2009, and the second 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 2012, statewide landings have been relatively stable, hovering between 6 -8 million pounds. At the time of this report 2022 blue crab landings were only valid through part of the year and considered preliminary. The catch-per-unit-effort (pounds per trip) of Florida Gulf Coast landings has remained relatively stable for the hard-shell fishery but shown a decreasing trend since 2019. 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.

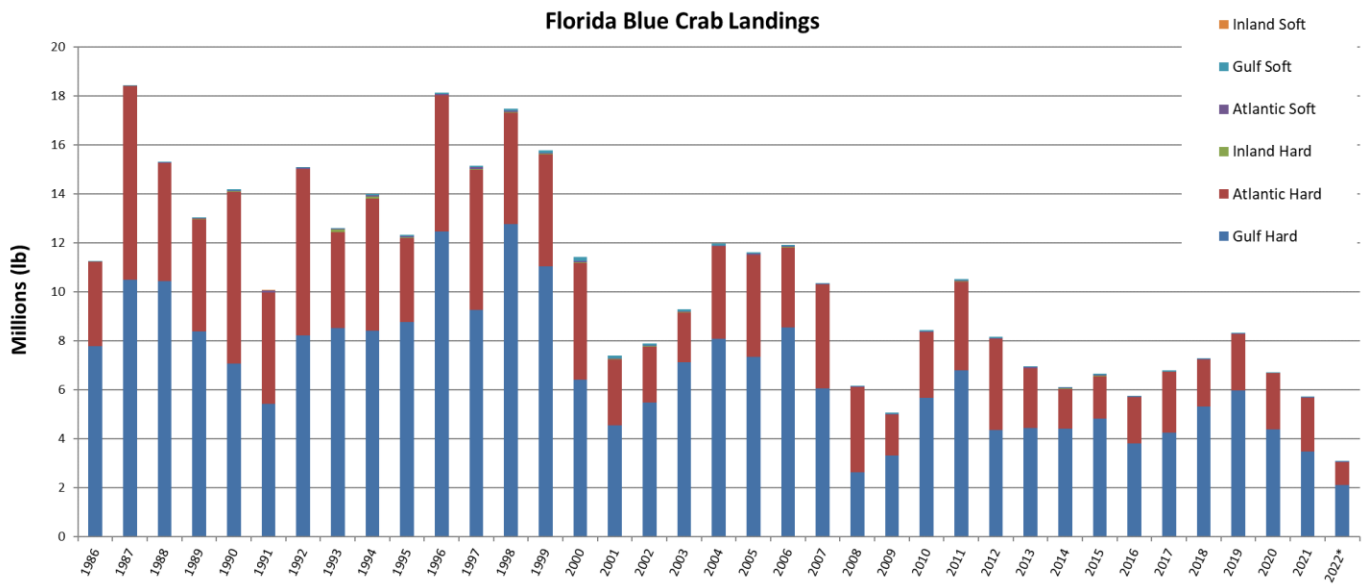


Figure 1. Statewide Florida blue crab landings. Data obtained from Florida Fish and Wildlife Marine Fisheries Information System.

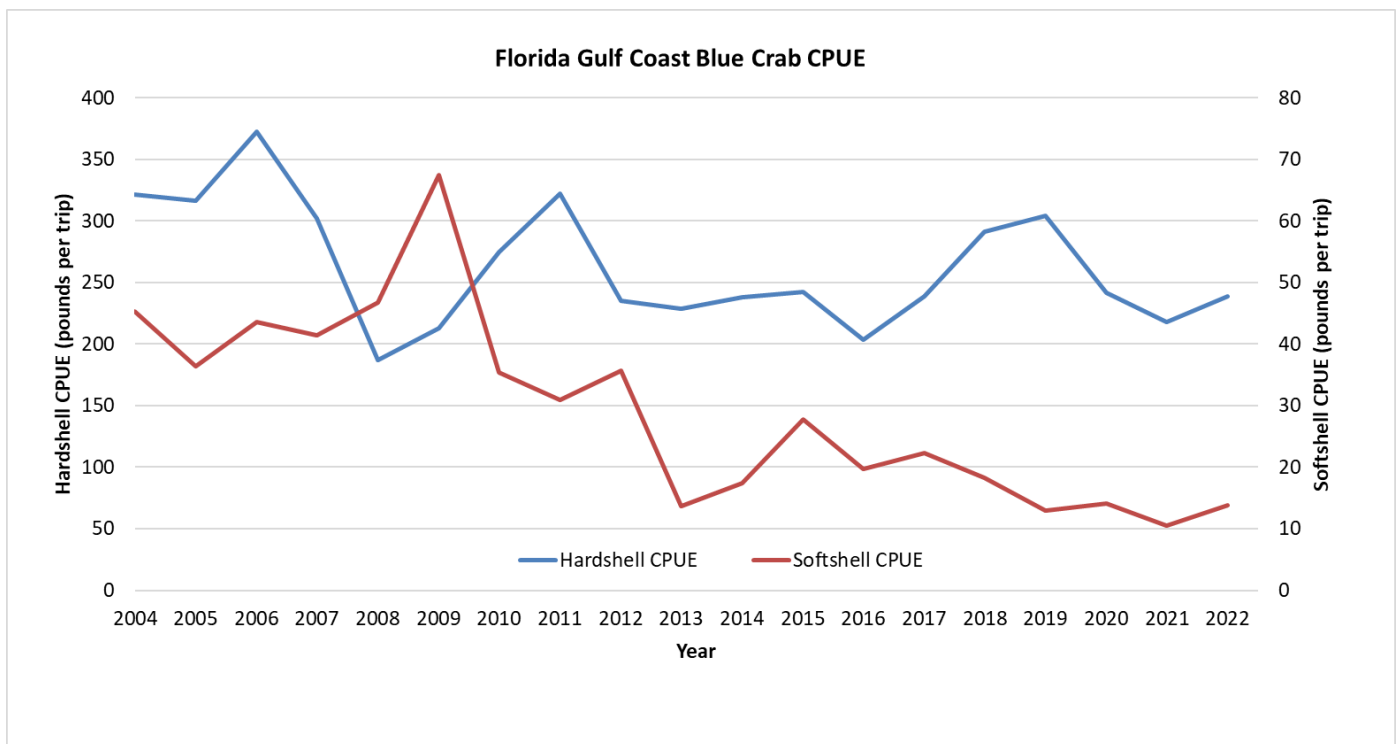


Figure 2. Florida Gulf Coast blue crab catch per unit effort (pounds/trip). Data obtained from Florida Fish and Wildlife Marine Fisheries Information System.

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. Bycatch reduction devices must be installed in recreational traps by March 1, 2023. The Commissioners concluded there was insufficient information regarding the magnitude of DBT catch in commercial blue crab traps as well as how a BRD may decrease the catch of marketable crabs. FWC staff obtained funding for the 2022 fiscal year to investigate these questions in the Northeast TBRZ. Similar research in the Big Bend region (Northwest) will take place in the 2023 FY. These studies aim to guide FWC managers on the necessity for regulations in the proposed management areas.

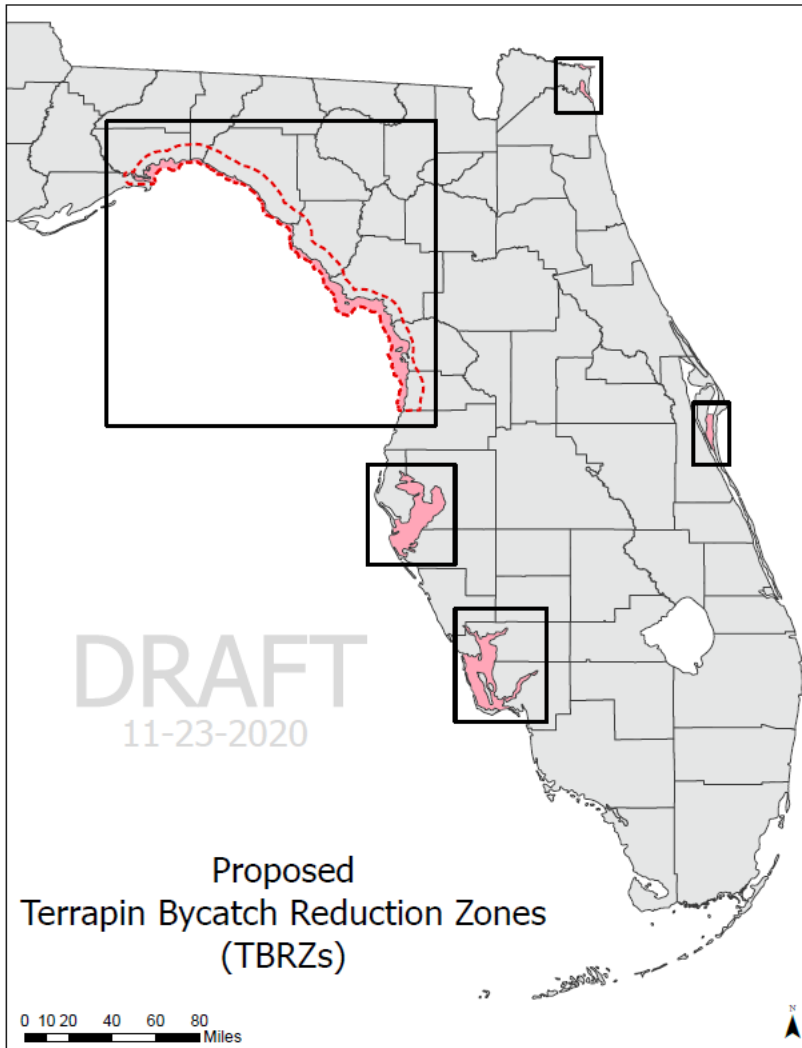


Figure 3. Terrapin Bycatch Reduction Zones (TBRZ) proposed by FWC Managers at the December 2020 FWC Commission meeting. Research is currently underway to assess the necessity for regulations in the TBRZs. Final rules will not be established until all research is complete.

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 2022 derelict trap retrieval 327 traps were removed from the St. Johns River, and 88 traps were retrieved from Brevard through St. Lucie Counties.