



Recreational Spiny Lobster Fishery Information For 2026-2027

Recreational lobster season starts at 6:00 p.m. on Friday, October 2, 2026
and is open through Wednesday, March 17, 2027.

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Spiny Lobster, *Panulirus interruptus*
Illustration by CDFW Claudia Makeyev

The California spiny lobster is an important natural resource managed by the state of California for over 100 years. The species supports a valuable commercial fishery and a significant recreational fishery, and acts as an important keystone predator within the southern California nearshore ecosystem. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) is providing this newsletter to share important information for the upcoming recreational spiny lobster season, including a summary of the 2025-2026 recreational lobster season.

Snapshot of the 2025-2026 Spiny Lobster Season

Recreational Harvest Summary

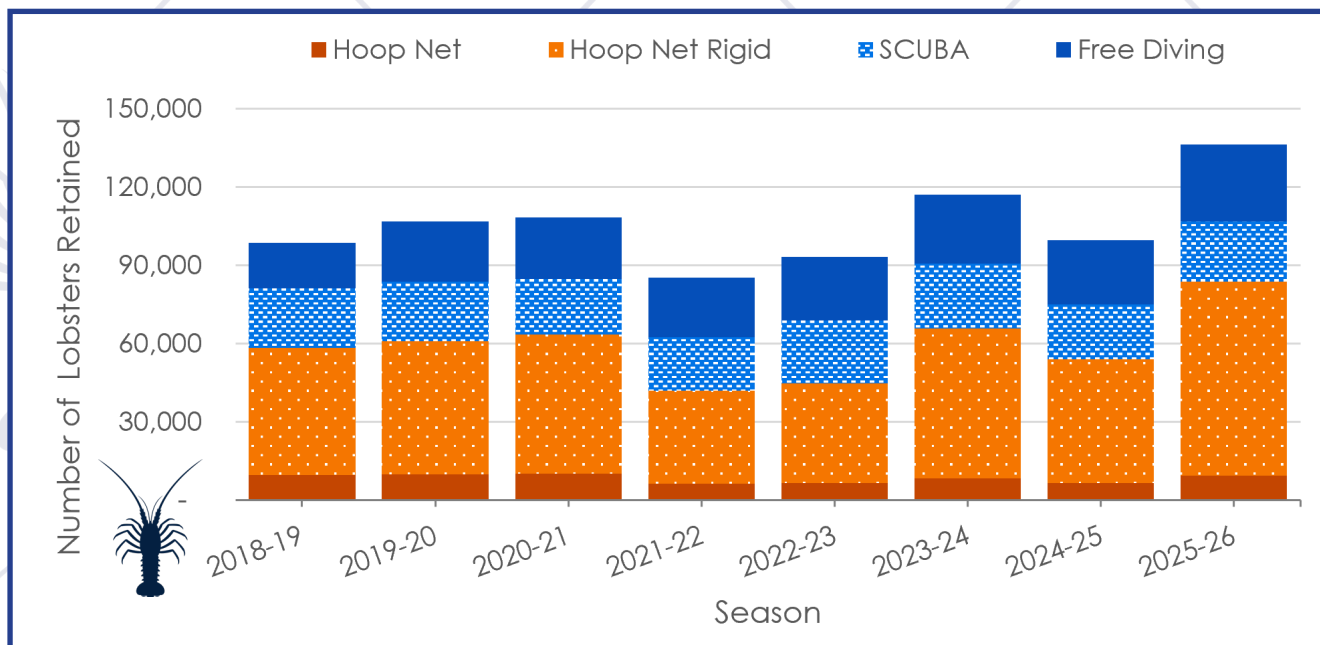
Recreational divers and hoop netters reported over 49,400 trips during the 2025-2026 season. These fishers reported keeping more than 136,800 legal-size lobsters – the most lobsters retained of any season since 2013 when seasonal lobster report cards were established. The total recreational catch is estimated to be about 254,200 lobsters when accounting for non-reported harvest.

Over half (54.8%) of the reported lobsters retained in the 2025-2026 season were caught with **rigid hoop nets**, followed by **free diving** (21.6%), **scuba diving** (16.9%), and **traditional hoop net** (6.8%). (Note, all percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.) Even though most lobsters were caught with rigid hoop nets, the catch per unit effort (CPUE, average number of lobsters caught per trip) was greater for scuba diving (3.6 lobsters/trip) compared to rigid hoop net (3.0 lobsters/trip), traditional hoop net (2.2 lobsters/trip), and skin diving (2.2 lobsters/trip).

For a detailed look at seasonal lobster report card harvest data, visit: [CDFW's Recreational Lobster Fishing page](#).



CDFW thanks everyone who returned their 2025-2026 lobster report card as required to make this harvest analysis possible.



Total reported lobsters retained by gear type from 2018-2019 to 2025-2026.

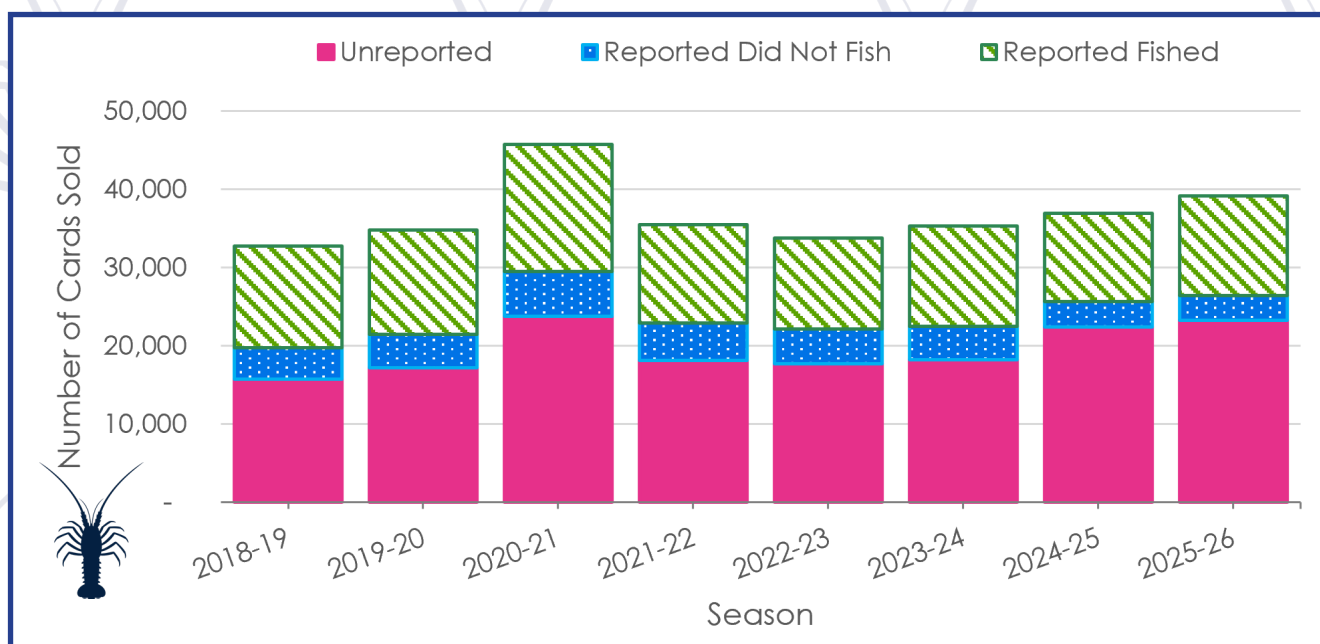
Snapshot of the 2025-2026 Spiny Lobster Season



Top 10 locations by percent of reported catch. These locations had the highest total number of reported lobsters kept during the 2025-2026 season.

Lobster Report Card Sales and Reporting Summary

CDFW sold 39,205 lobster report cards for the 2025-2026 season; the second highest number of seasonal cards sold after the 2020-2021 season. Of the cards sold for the 2025-2026 season, 41% (15,958) were reported (up from 39% the prior season but down from the historical average of 50%). Of the reported cards, 20% (3,172) did not fish.



Total lobster report cards sold by reporting status from 2018-2019 to 2025-2026.

Spiny Lobster Management

Regulation Spotlight:

How to Measure a California Spiny Lobster

In California, the minimum size limit for spiny lobster is **3¼ inches carapace length**, measured in a straight line on the midline of the back from the rear edge of the eye socket (hard part of the carapace between the horns) to the rear edge of the body shell (CCR T14, Section 29.90(c)). To determine if the lobster you've caught meets the minimum size limit, use a lobster gauge with a fixed gap of 3¼ inches. The carapace length of a legal-sized lobster is equal to or larger than the fixed gap. For a video demonstration, check out [How to Measure a California Spiny Lobster Video on CDFW's YouTube channel.](#)

Keep In Mind:



When fishing for lobster, measure your catch immediately.

- Divers must measure lobster while in the water and cannot remove any undersized lobster from the water.
- Hoop netters must measure the lobster immediately upon removal of their hoop net from the water.

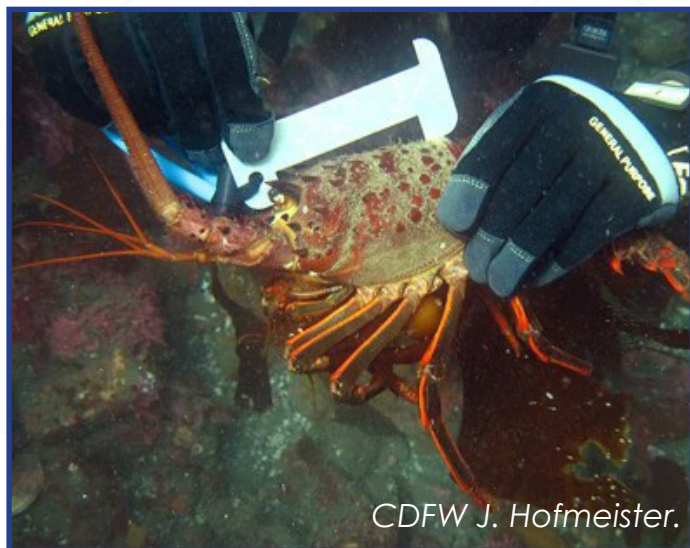


As soon as the measurement is taken, release any undersized lobster immediately into the water.

- Undersized lobster cannot be placed in any type of receiver, bag, or any other type of container.
- Undersized lobster cannot be kept on the person or retained in any person's possession or under their direct control.

For more information on recreational lobster regulations and management, please visit:

[CDFW's California Spiny Lobster page.](#)



Measuring a legal size lobster underwater.



Measuring a short/illegal sized lobster that is under 3.25 inches.

Enforcement Reminders

New Hoop Net Regulations Now in Effect

If you are using hoop nets to fish for lobster, please review the following changes to hoop net regulations that took effect on January 1, 2026.

- **Tampering Prohibition.** This new regulation makes it unlawful to disturb, move or damage another person's hoop net. On a boat, individuals may use another person's hoop net as long as the owner or operator of the hoop net is present. (CCR Title 14, Section 29.80(a)(3)(B)).
- **Line Marking Prohibition.** This new regulation prohibits the use of unique line markings that are required in other U.S. West Coast state or federal fisheries. Information on fisheries that are developing and adopting unique line marking requirements is summarized on [CDFW's Whale Safe Fisheries page](#). (CCR Title 14, Section 29.80(a)(4)).



24-Hour Hoop Net Prohibition

As a reminder, hoop nets may not be deployed south of Point Arguello, Santa Barbara County during the 24 hours leading up to the recreational lobster season opener. (CCR Title 14, Section 29.80(b)(6)).



Lobsters confiscated by law enforcement.



Legal Methods for Recreational Lobster Fishing

In California, lobster may only be taken by hoop net or by hand. Use of wired traps or devices like tickle-sticks, snares, or spears is prohibited. (CCR T14, Sections 29.80(b) and (g)).

Submit a Crime Tip Through CalTIP

CDFW encourages the public to report poaching or other wildlife crime through the CalTIP (Californians Turn In Poachers and Polluters) Program by calling **(888) 334-CALTIP** (2258), submitting anonymous tips via text to **TIP411** (847411), or using the "Report a Violation Online" link located on [CDFW's CalTIP page](#).

Spiny Lobster Fun Facts and Q & A

Fun Fact: California spiny lobster scrape their antennae together to make a loud squeaking sound to scare off predators.

Q: What is the Penalty for exceeding the bag limit, take of undersized lobsters, and/or take of lobster by hook and line?

A: Up to \$1,000 per violation or up to one year in jail.

Q: Where does the scientific name *Panulirus interruptus* come from?

A: The term *Panulirus* comes from the Greek words **palin** (backwards) and **oura** (tail) and is an anagram of the name *Palinurus*. Drawing inspiration from Roman mythology, Palinurus was the helmsman in Virgil's epic poem the **Aeneid** which the ancient Italian port Palinuro, famous for harvesting spiny lobsters, was named after. The Latin taxonomic epithet **interruptus** describes the interrupted or discontinuous transverse grooves on a lobster tail.

Q: How many eggs can an egg bearing female lobster carry?

A: Egg clutch size increases with increasing lobster size and can range from 200,000 to 1,600,000 per female and beyond! The seasonal fishery closure helps protect egg-bearing female lobsters in California from late April through August.

Q: How old is the oldest known California spiny lobster?

Boris, a California spiny lobster at the UC Santa Barbara teaching aquarium, is estimated to be 85-90 years old.



CDFW D. Stein.



CDFW J. Hofmeister.

A female California spiny lobster with eggs.

Close-up of California spiny lobster antennae.

Important Dates and Information



California spiny lobster on rocky reef.

Upcoming Dates and Deadlines

Please note, season dates reflect annual changes in the calendar year. Recreational lobster season is open from 6 p.m. on the Friday preceding the first Wednesday in October through the first Wednesday after the 15th of March.



August 15, 2026

2026-2027 Lobster report cards go on sale



October 2, 2026

Start of 2026-2027 recreational lobster season



March 17, 2027

Last day of 2026-2027 recreational lobster season



March 18, 2027

Online reporting available for 2026-2027 lobster report cards



April 30, 2027

2026-2027 lobster report card reporting deadline



October 1, 2027

Start of 2027-2028 recreational lobster season

Important Dates And Information

Submit Your Lobster Report Card by April 30th

Help CDFW manage spiny lobster by reporting your harvest at the end of each fishing season by April 30th. It is extremely important for all lobster report card holders to submit their completed cards on time, **even if no lobsters were taken or no attempts were made** to take lobsters. If you fail to submit your lobster report card by the April 30 deadline, a non-return fee will be charged when you go to purchase next season's card.

Don't let it catch you off guard – here are some tips to avoid the non-return fee:

Avoid last-minute reporting.

Submit your report card before the April 30 deadline either online (preferred) or by mail. Failing to report or return your report card by the deadline will result in a non-return fee next season.

Report on all lobster report cards purchased during the season.

Check your GO ID account to make sure you are reporting all of your cards. Every card associated with your GO ID must be reported online or mailed to CDFW by the April 30 deadline.

Report your card online or via the CDFW License App.

Harvest reporting can be submitted either online or via the CDFW License App one day after the season closes. This method allows for immediate confirmation that your harvest report has been received. When reporting online or via the app, report each card separately and make sure you get a confirmation number. If you did not get a confirmation number, your harvest report was not successfully reported.

Mailed in cards must be postmarked by April 30.

If you are returning a card by mail, CDFW uses the postmark date to determine whether the card was submitted by the deadline. If your card is lost in transit, you will need to provide proof of mailing (e.g., Certified Mail) on or before the deadline. Please check with your local USPS office for information on mailing and delivery.

Report lost or damaged cards.

If your card was lost or destroyed, you must let us know before the April 30 deadline by emailing lobster@wildlife.ca.gov. To the best of your memory, tell us the location, the gear type you used, and the number of lobsters you retained for each trip.

	MONTH	DAY	LOCATION CODE	GEAR CODE	LOBSTER RETAINED
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CDFW Fishing Resources and Links

Learn the Basics of Lobstering in California

Be sure to watch [CDFW's "How to Fish" Videos](#).

CDFW Mobile License App

Did you know that you can obtain, access, and display your sport fishing license on your mobile device? The CDFW License App allows users to display California sport fishing licenses and validations on their mobile phones and other mobile devices in lieu of a physical license. Users may also download and view various CDFW online resources and access the Online License Sales and Services website via the app. For more information about the app, please visit [CDFW's License App page](#). Please be aware, the mobile app should not be used in place of a physical lobster report card. While fishing for lobster, you still must have a physical lobster report card in your immediate possession, and all entries must be made on the physical report card.

Ocean Fishing Regulations

For information on general ocean invertebrate fishing regulations, consult [CDFW's Ocean Sport Fishing page](#).

Questions

Contact Us: lobster@wildlife.ca.gov

CDFW thanks 2026-2027 lobster report card holders in advance for contributing vital data to inform fisheries management.

