

Red Drum (*Sciaenops ocellatus*)

Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) for Red Drum:

Essential fish habitat includes all of the following habitats to a depth of 50 meters offshore: tidal freshwater; estuarine emergent vegetated wetlands (flooded saltmarshes, brackish marsh, tidal creeks); estuarine scrub/shrub (mangrove fringe); submerged rooted vascular plants (sea grasses); oyster reefs and shell banks; unconsolidated bottom (soft sediments); ocean high salinity surf zones; and artificial reefs. The area covered includes Virginia through the Florida Keys.

Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPC):

HAPC for red drum include all coastal inlets, all state-designated nursery habitats of particular importance to red drum; documented sites of spawning aggregations in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida; other identified spawning areas in the future; and habitats identified for submerged aquatic vegetation.

These habitats include the most important habitats required during the life cycle of the species, including the spawning areas and estuarine nursery grounds. Other areas of specific concern are barrier islands in each state, as these structures are vital to maintain estuarine conditions needed by larval and juvenile stages. Passes between barrier islands into estuaries also are very important, as the slow mixing of seawater and freshwater is generally regarded as being of prime importance in the productivity of the estuary. A rapid change may cause environmental stresses too great for many estuarine organisms to withstand.

Seagrass beds or submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) prevalent in the Chesapeake Bay and the sounds and bays of North Carolina and Florida are also critical areas for red drum, particularly for 1 and 2 year old fish (>750mm or 29.5 in FL). Seagrass beds, shallow areas of estuarine rivers and mainland shorelines, are where many red drum reside during the summer.

The various inlets, adjoining channels, sounds, and outer bars of ocean inlets are critical areas for spawning activity as well as feeding and daily movements and may be affected by constant dredging, jettying or excessive boat traffic. Adult red drum spend a lot of time in these areas during spring and fall with large concentrations located near the least trafficked inlets.