



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Law Enforcement – Licensing Section
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IOWA COMMERCIAL FISHING LAWS

It is unlawful to use commercial gear in the taking of commercial fish and turtles from the waters of the state, except as otherwise provided by statute or administrative rules of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

Commercial Licenses and Gear Tags

1. A person shall not use or operate commercial gear unless an individual is at the site where the commercial gear is being operated who possesses an appropriate valid commercial license. A commercial license is valid from the date of issue through January 10 of the succeeding calendar year.
2. A commercial fisher license is required to operate commercial gear and to take, attempt to take, possess, process, transport, or sell any commercial fish, commercial turtles, or turtle eggs. Check under permissive catch for species that can be legally taken.
3. A commercial fish helper license is required to assist a commercial fisher or commercial roe harvester in operating commercial gear and in taking, attempting to take, possessing, or transporting commercial fish, roe species, roe, commercial turtles, or turtle eggs. A commercial fish helper is not permitted to buy, sell, barter, or trade commercial fish, roe species, roe, commercial turtles, or turtle eggs. A commercial helper license is not required for a person under sixteen years of age to assist a commercial harvester.
4. A commercial fisher, commercial turtle harvester, or commercial roe harvester licensee must be present when commercial gear is operated. A commercial fish helper or commercial turtle helper shall not operate commercial gear except under the direct supervision of a commercial fisher, commercial turtle harvester, or commercial roe harvester. A nonresident commercial turtle helper is licensed only to assist a licensed nonresident commercial turtle harvester. **"Direct supervision"** means that a commercial fisher, commercial turtle harvester, or commercial roe harvester must be in the same boat, within hand signal distance, or within vocal communication distance, without the help of any electronic or amplifying device, of the commercial fish helper or commercial turtle helper being supervised.
5. A commercial roe harvester license permits the harvest, possession, transportation, or sale of roe or roe species or their parts. A commercial roe harvester is not permitted to buy, barter, or trade roe or roe species unless in possession of a valid roe buyer license. A commercial roe harvester shall sell roe or roe species only to a commercial roe buyer licensed in this state. To harvest roe, a commercial roe harvester shall possess a valid commercial fisher license and a valid commercial roe harvester license. **"Roe"** means fish eggs. **"Roe species"** means fish harvested for their eggs. Roe species include but are not limited to shovelnose sturgeon and bowfin and any other fish defined as roe species by the commission by rule.
6. A commercial roe buyer license is required to buy, barter, or trade roe or roe species for resale.
7. A commercial turtle harvester license is required to operate commercial gear and to take, attempt to take, possess, transport, sell, barter, or trade commercial turtles or turtle eggs. Nonresident commercial turtle harvesters shall harvest commercial turtles only from the boundary waters (Mississippi, Missouri and Big Sioux Rivers). The taking of turtle eggs from the wild is prohibited. See below under permissive catch for species legally taken.
8. A commercial turtle helper license is required to assist a commercial turtle harvester in operating commercial gear, and in taking, attempting to take, possessing, or transporting commercial turtles or turtle eggs. A commercial turtle helper is not permitted to buy, sell, barter, or trade commercial turtles or turtle eggs. A commercial turtle helper license is not required for a person under sixteen years of age to assist a commercial turtle harvester. The taking of turtle eggs from the wild is prohibited.
9. A commercial turtle buyer license is required to engage in the business of buying, bartering, or trading commercial turtles or turtle eggs. Commercial turtle buyers may only purchase turtles from a licensed commercial turtle harvester.
10. Commercial fishers and turtle harvesters shall provide and affix weather-resistant gear tags to each piece of gear in use. Each weather-resistant gear tag shall plainly show the name, address, and commercial license number of the licensee and whether the gear is fish or turtle gear.

11. **Annual license fees are as follows:**

a.	Commercial Fisher, resident	\$202
b.	Commercial Fisher, nonresident	\$402
c.	Commercial Fish Helper, resident (16 years old and older)	\$52
d.	Commercial Fish Helper, nonresident (16 years old and older)	\$102
e.	Commercial Roe Harvester, resident	\$102
f.	Commercial Roe Harvester, nonresident	\$3,502
g.	Commercial Roe Buyer, resident	\$252
h.	Commercial Roe Buyer, non-resident	\$502
i.	Commercial Turtle Harvester, resident	\$102
j.	Commercial Turtle Harvester, nonresident	\$402
k.	Commercial Turtle Helper, resident (16 years old and older)	\$52
l.	Commercial Turtle Helper, nonresident (16 years old and older)	\$102
m.	Commercial Turtle Buyer, resident	\$202
n.	Commercial Turtle Buyer, nonresident	\$402

Tagging of Commercial Gear

Each trotline shall have the tags affixed to one end. Each hoop net, slat net, trap net, and turtle trap shall have the appropriate tag affixed to the end nearest the pot. Each gill net and each trammel net shall have the tags affixed to the float line nearest the take-out hole. Each Seine shall have the tags affixed to one end.

Baits

1. It is lawful for licensed commercial fishers, commercial fish helpers, commercial turtle harvesters, and commercial turtle helpers to pursue, take, possess and transport any commercial fish or their parts, bait fish, turtles, frogs, salamanders, leeches, crayfish or any other aquatic invertebrates for bait unless otherwise prohibited by law.
2. It is lawful to use any member of the following families as bait fish in boundary waters: cyprinidae, the minnows; catostomidae, the suckers; umbridae, the mudminnows; clupeidae, the herrings; hiodontidae, the mooneyes; amillidae, the bowfin, unless otherwise prohibited by law.
3. It is lawful to use green sunfish, *Lepomis cyanellus*, and orange-spotted sunfish, *Lepomis humilis*, for bait fish.
4. It is lawful to use minnow seines for taking bait in the boundary waters. Minnow seines may not exceed 50 feet in length and eight feet in depth.
5. Mussels for bait use are subject to the following rules:

Season: There shall be an open season for taking mussels throughout the year. The taking of mussels is restricted to the hours between sunrise and sunset.

Species: Species other than those listed as threatened or endangered may be lawfully taken and possessed. Zebra mussels shall not be taken and possessed.

Areas: **Live mussels may be harvested only from the Mississippi River** and connected backwaters. Dead mussels may be harvested from all waters of the state.

Limits **The sale of mussels or shells is not permitted.** The possession limit is 24 whole mussels or 48 shell halves. Licensed commercial fishers, licensed sport anglers, and children younger than 16 years of age may take and possess mussels.

Methods: Mussels may be taken by hand or pole and line.

Use: Mussel cannot be bought or sold in Iowa. They can be used as bait if legally collected.

Unlawful Methods for Commercial Gear

It is unlawful:

1. To use any commercial gear within 900 feet from a navigation dam on the boundary waters. In addition it is unlawful to use entanglement gear, including gill and trammel nets within 1,500 feet below each of the locks and dams on the Mississippi River.
2. To use commercial gear within 300 feet from the mouth of a tributary stream emptying into the boundary waters.
3. For a person to lift or to fish licensed commercial gear of another person, except by the licensee and the licensee's helper/helpers.
4. To have in one's possession game fish or other fish, or turtles, deemed illegal by other provisions of law while engaged in commercial activities. A fish caught in commercial fishing that is not lawful to possess shall be handled with wet hands and immediately released under-water with as little injury as possible.

5. To block or inhibit navigation through channels with commercial fishing gear unless a minimum of three feet of water depth is maintained over float lines of any entanglement gear or leads to trap nets. Gear shall not block over one-half the width of navigable channel if there is less than three feet of water over the gear.

Sale of Commercial Fish, Roe, Turtles, and Turtle Eggs

1. A person possessing a commercial fishing license may possess and sell any commercial fish or turtles or their parts which have been lawfully taken. A person possessing a commercial turtle license may possess turtles or their parts which have been lawfully taken. A person possessing a commercial roe harvester license may possess roe species or their parts which have been lawfully taken.
2. All intrastate and interstate shipments of commercial fish, turtles, turtle eggs, or roe or roe species, must be accompanied by a receipt which shows the name and address of the seller, date of sale, and the species, numbers, and pounds of the fish, roe species, roe, turtles, or turtle eggs being sold. It is illegal to transport live bighead and silver carp.
3. Commercial fishers and commercial turtle harvesters shall utilize a dated receipt with at least two parts, with one original and one copy of each receipt, that contains the species, number, and pounds of fish or turtles sold, bartered, or traded. Commercial fishers and turtle harvesters shall retain a copy of each receipt for five years following the transaction. A purchaser of commercial fish or turtles shall retain a copy of the receipt for as long as the purchaser is in possession of the fish or turtles.

Commercial Roe and Turtle Buyers

1. Commercial roe buyers shall utilize a dated receipt with at least two parts, with one original and at least one copy of each receipt, for each purchase of commercial roe species and roe. The original of the receipt shall be kept by the commercial roe buyer and a copy of the receipt shall be given to the commercial roe harvester selling the commercial roe species or roe. Commercial roe buyers and commercial roe harvesters shall retain such receipts for five years following the date of the transaction.
2. Commercial turtle buyers shall maintain accurate records of all transactions. The records shall contain the date, number, weight, and species of turtles purchased, the name and address of the seller, and the county or pools where the turtles were taken. The records shall be updated monthly. Such records shall be available for examination by employees of the department upon request. A commercial turtle buyer shall only purchase turtles from a licensed commercial fisher or commercial turtle harvester.
3. A commercial roe or turtle buyer's license can be issued to an individual or a business. Turtles and roe may be purchased through a business whether the owner (whose name is on the license) is present at the business location or not.

Reports Required

All commercial fishers, commercial turtle harvesters, commercial turtle buyers, commercial roe harvesters, and commercial roe buyers shall submit a monthly report supplying all information requested on forms furnished by the department. Reports must be received by the department no later than the fifteenth day of the following month. A person who violates the reporting requirements is guilty of a simple misdemeanor and may have their license revoked.

Reciprocity for Commercial Fishing and Commercial Turtle Fishing

1. Reciprocal commercial fishing and commercial turtle fishing privileges are contingent upon a grant of similar privileges by the appropriate state to residents of this state.
2. The commission may negotiate commercial reciprocity agreements with other states.

Commercial Fishing-Mississippi River and Missouri River

Fish may be taken for commercial purposes from the Mississippi and Missouri rivers subject to the following regulations.

Commercial Fishers license does not allow turtle harvest on inland waters.

Permissive Catch:

Except for channel catfish, flathead catfish, blue catfish and shovelnose sturgeon, which may not be taken from the MISSOURI RIVER, it shall be lawful to take with licensed commercial fishing gear the following species; carp, smallmouth buffalo, black buffalo, largemouth buffalo, channel catfish, flathead catfish, black bullhead, yellow bullhead, brown bullhead, freshwater drum, northern redhorse, silver redhorse, spotted sucker, white sucker, river carpsucker, quillback, highfin carpsucker, white amur, bighead carp, shovelnose sturgeon, longnose gar, shortnose gar, bowfin, gizzard shad, goldeye, mooneye and silver carp.

It is illegal to transport live bighead and silver carp.

Sturgeon and Bowfin Regulations:

A commercial roe harvester license is required to harvest, possess, transport, or sell shovelnose sturgeon, bowfin, or their parts. The minimum fork length for shovelnose sturgeon measured from the tip of the snout to the fork of the tail is 27 inches. No shovelnose sturgeon less than 27 inches may be possessed in Iowa waters. No shovelnose sturgeon longer than 34 inches fork length may be harvested from waters of the Mississippi River bordering Wisconsin. Shovelnose sturgeon is closed to harvesting from May 16 – Oct 14. No shovelnose sturgeon may be harvested from gear set prior to midnight on October 15. Shovelnose sturgeon and bowfin must remain intact until the fish reach the final processing facility or business. For the purposes of this section, final processing facility does not include vessels or vehicles.

Bighead Carp, Silver Carp and Zebra Mussels:

It is illegal to transport zebra mussels and live bighead carp and silver carp.

Size Limits:

The minimum length limit for all catfish is 15 inches. Catfish less than 15 inches shall be returned unharmed to the water.

Permitted Gear:

Hoop nets, trap nets (fyke nets), gill nets, trammel nets, slat nets (basket traps), seines and trotlines (setlines) may be used by licensed commercial fishers.

Mesh Size Restrictions:

a.	Hoop nets and trap nets. An escape hole with a minimum diameter of one and one-half inches all directions shall be provided within 12 inches beyond the last hoop to the tailline.
b.	Gill nets. The webbing shall have a mesh size not less than three and one-half inches square measure.
c.	Trammel nets. The webbing shall have a mesh size not less than two inches square measure.
d.	Seines. There are no mesh size restrictions.
e.	Slat nets. An escape hole with a minimum diameter of one and one-half inches all directions shall be provided in the end opposite the throat.

Gear Attendance:

The licensee must be present when lifting commercial gear. All commercial gear shall be lifted and emptied of catch at the following time intervals, except during periods of inclement weather. Inclement weather is defined as that threatening to life, health or safety.

a.	Constant attendance by the licensee of seines, trammel nets and gill nets is required when the gear is fished by driving, dive-seining, seining, floating or drifting methods.
b.	Hoop nets shall be attended at least once every 96 hours and slat nets at least once every 48 hours during open water conditions. Hoop nets shall be attended at least once every 20 days during the ice cover conditions.
c.	Trap nets and trotlines shall be attended at least once every 24 hours.
d.	Gill nets and trammel nets shall be attended at least once every 24 hours during open water conditions, and at least once every 96 hours during ice cover conditions.

Commercial Fishing - Inland Waters

All commercial fishing on inland waters is conducted through a limited entry contract fishing procedure which involves competitive bidding and a public bid letting. Those interested in contract fishing should contact the fisheries bureau of the DNR for more information. Commercial fishers licensed with the state may enter into contract with owners of private water bodies for the removal of injurious fish provided approval is received from the director or staff of the department prior to any sampling or removal operations.

TURTLES

License Requirements

A person shall not take, possess, or sell turtles or turtle eggs from the water of the state without an appropriate license.

a.	A commercial turtle harvester license is required to operate commercial gear and to take, attempt to take, possess, transport, sell, barter, or trade commercial turtles or turtle eggs. Nonresident commercial turtle harvesters shall harvest commercial turtles only from the boundary waters.
b.	A commercial fisher license entitles fishers to operate any licensed commercial fishing gear for taking, possessing or selling turtles from the Mississippi and Missouri rivers only.
c.	A commercial turtle helper license is required to assist a commercial turtle harvester in operating commercial gear, and in taking, attempting to take, possessing, or transporting commercial turtles or turtle eggs. A commercial turtle helper is not permitted to buy, sell, barter, or trade commercial turtles or turtle eggs. A commercial turtle helper license is not required for a person under sixteen years of age to assist a commercial turtle harvester.
d.	A commercial turtle buyer license is required to engage in the business of buying, bartering, or trading commercial turtles or turtle eggs.

Non-Residents:

It shall be unlawful for any non-resident to take turtles in Iowa, by any method, except from the Mississippi, Missouri and Big Sioux rivers.

Permissive Catch:

It shall be lawful to take common snapping turtles, softshells, and painted turtles. Harvest of all other species of turtles is prohibited. The taking of turtle eggs from wild nests is prohibited.

Methods:

The method of taking turtles shall only be by hand, turtle hook, turtle trap, licensed commercial fishing gear in the Mississippi and Missouri rivers only, and hook-and-line. Turtle traps shall be constructed with no more than one throat or funneling device. The last hoop to the tail-line of turtle traps shall have a functional escape hole provided with a minimum diameter in all directions of 7-1/2 inches to allow passage of fish and small turtles. Barrel and floating type turtle traps must have a functional escape hole below the water surface with a minimum diameter in all directions of 7-1/2 inches.

Tags:

Commercial turtle harvesters shall provide and affix weather-resistant gear tags to each piece of gear in use. Each weather-resistant gear tag shall plainly show the name, address, and commercial license number of the licensee and that the gear is for turtle.

Gear Attendance:

All turtle traps shall be lifted and emptied of catch at least once every 72 hours.

For additional information regarding commercial fishing laws, license applications or report forms, contact the DNR central office address listed on the front cover.

IF PURCHASING A RESIDENT LICENSE, THE APPLICANT MUST MEET THE RESIDENCY REQUIREMENTS OUTLINED IN THE [IOWA CODE 483A.1A](#).