



Department of Natural Resources

Iowa Commercial Fishing Regulations

You cannot use commercial gear to take commercial fish and turtles from the waters of the state, except as otherwise provided by Iowa Code Chapter 481A 141.145 and 482 and Iowa Administrative Rules of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Chapter 57, Sections 82, 86, and 87.

Commercial Licenses and Regulations

You cannot use or operate commercial gear unless someone at the site where commercial gear is being used has an appropriate valid commercial license. A commercial license is valid from the date of issue through January 10 of the next calendar year. A commercial license can only be issued to an individual.

Commercial Fishing License Regulations - Mississippi River

- You can operate commercial gear and take, try to take, possess, process, transport, or sell any commercial fish, commercial turtles, or turtle eggs on the Mississippi River.
- You can take turtles (all commercial turtle harvest regulations apply).
- You can possess and sell any commercial fish or turtles or their parts which have been lawfully taken.
- You can take 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.
 - Catfish must be 15 inches to be kept. Catfish less than 15 inches must be returned unharmed to the water.
 - You cannot transport zebra mussels and live bighead carp and silver carp.
 - Shovelnose sturgeon and bowfin must remain intact until the fish reach the final processing facility or business (does not include vessels or vehicles).
 - The minimum fork length for **shovelnose sturgeon** measured from the tip of the snout to the fork of the tail is 27 inches. You cannot possess shovelnose sturgeon less than 27 inches in Iowa waters.
 - You cannot harvest shovelnose sturgeon longer than 34 inches fork length from waters of the Mississippi River bordering Wisconsin.
 - You cannot harvest shovelnose sturgeon from May 16 – Oct 14. You cannot harvest shovelnose sturgeon from gear set before midnight on October 15.
- You must use a dated receipt with at least two parts, with one original and one copy of each receipt, for all intrastate and interstate shipments of commercial fish, turtles, turtle eggs, or roe or roe species.
 - The receipt must show 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, bartered, or traded.
 - You must keep a copy of each receipt for five years after the transaction.

Commercial Fishing License Regulations - Missouri River

- You can operate commercial gear and take, try to take, possess, process, transport, or sell any commercial fish, commercial turtles, or turtle eggs on the Missouri River.
- You can take turtles (all commercial turtle harvest regulations apply).
- You can possess and sell any commercial fish or turtles or their parts which have been lawfully taken.
- You can take carp, smallmouth buffalo, black buffalo, largemouth buffalo, 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, longnose gar, shortnose gar, bowfin, gizzard shad, goldeye, mooneye and silver carp.
- You must use a dated receipt with at least two parts, with one original and one copy of each receipt, for all intrastate and interstate shipments of commercial fish, turtles, turtle eggs, or roe or roe species.

- The receipt must show 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, bartered, or traded.
- You must keep a copy of each receipt for five years after the transaction.

Commercial Inland Fisher License

- All commercial fishing on inland waters is conducted through a competitive contract fishing procedure which involves competitive bidding and a public bid letting.
 - Contact the DNR fisheries bureau for more information.
 - Commercial fishers licensed with the state may enter into contract with owners of private water bodies to remove injurious fish with approval from the director or staff of the department before any sampling or removal operations.
 - The specific species you can take is listed on the contract.

Commercial Fish Helper License

- You can help a commercial fisher or commercial roe harvester operate commercial gear and take, attempt to take, possess, or transport commercial fish, roe species, roe, commercial turtles, or turtle eggs.
- You cannot operate commercial gear except under the direct supervision of a commercial fisher or commercial roe harvester.
 - A commercial fisher 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 being supervised.
- You cannot buy, sell, barter, or trade commercial fish, roe species, roe, commercial turtles, or turtle eggs.
- A person under sixteen years of age can help a commercial harvester without a commercial helper license.

Commercial Turtle Harvester License

- You can operate commercial gear and take, try to take, possess, transport, sell, barter, or trade commercial turtles or turtle eggs.
- Turtles can only be harvested from July 16 to May 14. The turtle harvest season is closed May 15 to July 15.
 - You cannot harvest turtles from gear set before midnight on July 15.
 - Daily Catch and Possession Limits

Turtle Species	Daily Catch Limit	Possession Limit
Common Snapping Turtle	4	20
Spiny Softshell Turtle Or Smooth Softshell Turtle	1	5
Painted Turtle	1	5

- You cannot take turtle eggs from wild nests.
- You can only take common snapping, spiny softshell, smooth softshell and painted turtles.
- You can possess turtles or their parts which have been lawfully taken.
- You cannot sort, cull, high-grade, or otherwise replace any turtle in your possession.
- You can only take turtles by hand, turtle hook, turtle trap, hook and line. Licensed commercial fishing gear can be used in the Mississippi and Missouri rivers only.
- Turtle traps cannot have more than one throat or funneling device.
 - The last hoop to the tail-line of turtle traps must have a functional escape hole with a minimum diameter in all directions of 7-1/2 inches to let fish and small turtles pass through.
 - 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.
- Set all turtle traps with the top visible above the waterline at all times.
 - You must lift and empty of catch all turtle traps at least once every 72 hours (3 days).
 - When checked, turtles can be taken into possession, up to the daily catch limit, or released immediately.

- You must use a dated receipt with at least two parts, with one original and one copy of each receipt, for all intrastate and interstate shipments of commercial fish, turtles, turtle eggs, or roe or roe species.
 - The receipt must show 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, bartered, or traded.
 - You must keep a copy of each receipt for five years after the transaction.

Nonresident Commercial Turtle Harvester License

- You can only harvest commercial turtles from the boundary waters (Mississippi, Missouri and Big Sioux Rivers).

Commercial Turtle Helper License

- You can help a commercial turtle harvester operate commercial gear, and take, try to take, possess, or transport commercial turtles or turtle eggs.
- You cannot buy, sell, barter, or trade commercial turtles or turtle eggs.
- A person under sixteen years of age can help a commercial turtle harvester without a commercial turtle helper license.
- You cannot take turtle eggs from the wild.
- You cannot operate commercial gear except under the direct supervision of a commercial turtle harvester.
 - A commercial turtle 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 turtle helper being supervised.

Nonresident Commercial Turtle Helper

- You can only help a licensed nonresident commercial turtle harvester.

Commercial Turtle Buyer License

- You can buy, barter, or trade commercial turtles or turtle eggs.
- You can only buy turtles from a licensed commercial fisher, commercial turtle harvester, or aquaculture unit.
- You must keep a copy of the receipt for as long as you are in possession of the turtles.
- You must keep accurate records of all transactions.
 - The records must have the date, number, weight, and species of turtles bought, the name and address of the seller, and the county or pools where the turtles were taken.
 - The records must be updated monthly.
 - These records must be available for employees of the department to examine upon request.

Commercial Roe Harvester License

- You can harvest, possess, transport, or sale roe or roe species or their parts.
- You must also have a valid commercial fisher license.
- You can sell roe or roe species only to a commercial roe buyer licensed in this state.
- You can harvest, possess, transport, or sell shovelnose sturgeon, bowfin, or their parts.
- You must keep the receipt given to you by a commercial roe buyer for five years after the date of the transaction.

Commercial Roe Buyer License

- You can buy, barter, or trade roe or roe species for resale.
- You must use 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.
- You must keep the original receipt and give a copy of the receipt to the commercial roe harvester selling the commercial roe species or roe.
- You must keep these receipts for five years after the date of the transaction.

Required Reports

All commercial fishers, commercial turtle harvesters, commercial turtle buyers, commercial roe harvesters, and commercial roe buyers must submit a monthly report with all information requested on forms provided by the Iowa DNR.

The DNR must receive the reports no later than the fifteenth day of the following month. Commercial licensees who do not submit a report by the deadline may be charged with a simple misdemeanor and receive a fine or have their license revoked.

Reciprocity for Commercial Fishing and Commercial Turtle Fishing

Reciprocal commercial fishing and commercial turtle harvest privileges are contingent upon grant of similar privileges by the appropriate state to Iowa residents.

Commercial Gear Regulations

Licensed commercial fishers can use hoop nets, trap nets (fyke nets), gill nets, trammel nets, slat nets (basket traps), seines and trotlines (setlines).

Mesh Size Restrictions

Gear	Restrictions
Hoop nets and trap nets	An escape hole with a minimum diameter of one and one-half inches all directions must be provided within 12 inches past the last hoop to the tail-line.
Gill nets	The webbing must have a mesh size not less than three and one-half inches square measure.
Trammel nets	The webbing must have a mesh size not less than two inches square measure.
Seines	There are no mesh size restrictions.
Slat nets	An escape hole with a minimum diameter of one and one-half inches all directions must be provided in the end opposite the throat.

Tagging of Commercial Gear

Commercial fishers and **turtle harvesters** must provide and attach weather-resistant gear tags to each piece of gear in use. Each weather-resistant gear tag must plainly show the name, address and commercial license number of the licensee and if the gear is for fish or turtles.

Gear	Where to Attach the Tag
Trotline and seine	one end
Hoop net, slat net, trap net, and turtle trap	the end nearest the pot
Gill net and trammel net	the float line nearest the take-out hole

Gear Attendance

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

Gear	Attendance
Seines, trammel nets and gill nets	Constant attendance when fished by driving, drive-seining, seining, floating or drifting methods.
Hoop nets	At least once every 96 hours during open water conditions and at least once every 20 days during ice cover conditions.
Slat nets	At least once every 48 hours during open water conditions.
Trap nets and trotlines	At least once every 24 hours.
Gill nets and trammel nets	At least once every 24 hours during open water conditions and at least once every 96 hours during ice cover conditions.
Turtle Traps	At least once every 72 hours.

Unlawful Methods for Commercial Gear

You cannot:

- Use any commercial gear within 900 feet of a navigation dam on the boundary waters. You cannot use entanglement gear, including gill and trammel nets, within 1,500 feet below each of the locks and dams on the Mississippi River.
- Use commercial gear within 300 feet from the mouth of a tributary stream emptying into the boundary waters.
- Lift or to fish another person's licensed commercial gear; unless you are a licensed fish helper or turtle helper under the direct supervision of the licensee.
- Possess game fish or other fish, turtles or mussels deemed illegal by other provisions of law while commercial fishing. Immediately release back into the water a fish caught that you cannot possess legally; handle with wet hands to help prevent injuring the fish.
- Block or stop navigation through channels with commercial fishing gear unless a minimum of three feet of water depth is kept over float lines of any entanglement gear or leads to trap nets. Gear cannot block over one-half the width of navigable channel if there is less than three feet of water over the gear.

Baits

- Licensed **commercial fishers**, **commercial turtle harvesters**, and **commercial roe harvesters** can 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.
- You can use any member of the following families as bait fish in boundary waters: minnows, suckers, mudminnows, herrings, mooneyes, bowfin, unless otherwise prohibited by law.
- You can use green sunfish and orange-spotted sunfish for bait fish.
- You can use minnow seines to take bait in the boundary waters.
 - Minnow seines cannot not be longer than 50 feet and eight feet in depth.

Commercial fishers may use mussels for bait subject to the following rules:

Season	Open season throughout the year; you can only take mussels between sunrise and sunset.
Species	Species not listed as threatened or endangered; you cannot take and possess zebra mussels
Areas	You can only harvest live mussels from the Mississippi River and connected backwaters. You can harvest dead mussels from all waters of the state.
Limits	24 whole mussels or 48 shell halves; you cannot sell mussels or shells.
Methods	hand, pole and line, diving, and crowfoot bar (no longer than 20 feet long)

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