

Florida Fishing Guide Requirements Checklist¹

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Introduction

Florida fishing guides represent an important sector of the fishing industry, providing access to the marine environment and inshore, offshore, and migratory fisheries. The process of running a fishing guide business is complex, with a variety of requirements. This document is designed to assist guides by providing a quick checklist of basic requirements needed to operate as a for-hire guide in the state of Florida and adjacent federal waters. Every fishing guide business is unique, so not all regulations will apply equally. As guides navigate this checklist, they should consider a variety of factors, including the type of charter they run, the vessel they operate, where they operate, and what species they target in order to determine if a requirement applies to their situation.

Basic Requirements

- U.S. Coast Guard Captain's License (original license must be with you) https://www.dco.uscg.mil/national_maritime_center/
- Required if guiding from vessel for-hire in coastal waters
 - Kayak guides do not need a USCG license.
 - Guides fishing freshwaters that are non-navigable to the coast (inland waters not regulated by USCG) do not need a USCG license.
- U.S. Coast Guard Vessel Safety Requirements (in addition to requirements for private vessels)
- Commonly overlooked requirements—not all encompassing. See link for full Uninspected Passenger Vessel requirements: http://wow.uscgaux.info/Uploads_wowII/P-DEPT/UPV_GUIDEBOOK_under100GT_CGD11_rev052017.pdf
- Type 1 PFDs for all passengers
- Enrolled in an ongoing random drug testing program (must carry proof with you)
- If vessel >5 gross tons, must be federally documented with Coastwise endorsement



Figure 1. Managing a successful for-hire guide business requires much more than just catching fish.
Credits: Florida Sea Grant

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- If carrying >6 passengers, must have Certificate of Inspection issued by USCG
- Florida Charter Captain or Charter Boat Fishing License <https://myfwc.com/license/commercial/saltwater/charter/>
- State (FL) Gulf Reef Fish Charter (no-charge endorsement on fishing license for Gulf state charters only, excluding Monroe County) <https://myfwc.com/license/commercial/saltwa>
 - Applies to any state for-hire operation that intends to fish or harvest red snapper, vermillion snapper, gag grouper, red grouper, black grouper, gray triggerfish, greater amberjack, lesser amberjack, banded rudderfish, or almaco jack in Gulf state waters (excluding Monroe County)
- Florida commercial registration for vessel <https://www.flhsmv.gov/motor-vehicles-tags-titles/vessels/vessel-titling-registrations/commercial-vessels/>
- Local city and/or county business license (some call it a tax)



Figure 2. For-hire requirements differ when targeting inshore versus reef species.

Credits: Florida Sea Grant

Federal Waters Permits

https://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/operations_management_information_services/constituency_services_branch/permits/permits_%20details/index.html

- Atlantic Highly Migratory Species Charter/Headboat Permit (for-hire fishing in federal waters of the Gulf or Atlantic for tunas, sharks, swordfish, and billfish) <https://hmspermits.noaa.gov/>

***Required in state waters when fishing for bluefin, bigeye, or albacore yellowfin**

Gulf of Mexico Federal For-Hire Permits

- Gulf of Mexico Charter/Headboat Coastal Migratory Pelagics Permit (for-hire fishing Gulf federal waters for king mackerel, Spanish mackerel, and cobia) *limited access
- Gulf of Mexico Charter/Headboat Reef Fish Permit (for-hire fishing Gulf federal waters for reef fish) *limited access
 - Sea turtle release gear is required on all federally permitted for-hire Gulf reef fish vessels (CFR 622.29 [a] [1])

South Atlantic Federal For-Hire Permits

- South Atlantic Charter/Headboat Coastal Migratory Pelagics Permit (for-hire fishing in Atlantic federal waters king mackerel, Spanish mackerel, and cobia)
- Atlantic Charter/Headboat for Dolphin Wahoo (for-hire fishing in Atlantic federal waters for dolphin or wahoo)
- South Atlantic Grouper/Snapper (for-hire fishing for multiple reef fish species including grouper, snapper, gray triggerfish, sea basses, jacks, porgies, grunts, spadefish, hogfish, and tilefishes)
 - Sea turtle release gear is required on all federally permitted for-hire Atlantic Snapper Grouper vessels (CFR 622.179(a)(1))

New reporting requirements for federal permit holders scheduled for summer 2020



Figure 3. For-hire guides operating in federal waters have additional requirements.

Credits: Jennifer Huber

State Regulations

- Florida Charter/For-hire Regulations: <https://myfwc.com/license/commercial/saltwater/charter/>
- Florida Recreational Fishing Regulations: <https://myfwc.com/fishing/saltwater/recreational/>

Federal Regulations

- Gulf of Mexico: https://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable_fisheries/gulf_fisheries/index.html
- Atlantic: https://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable_fisheries/s_atl/index.html
- Shark regulations for Federal Waters: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/atlantic-highly-migratory-species/atlantic-highly-migratory-species-fishery-compliance-guides>

Conclusion

Running a fishing guide business means navigating the complicated world of licenses, permits, and safety regulations. This quick guide was prepared to help Florida fishing guides ensure they are compliant with local, state, and federal requirements related to operating a for-hire fishing business. It is important to remember that rules change—like the updates to the Federal For-Hire requirements anticipated in summer 2020. Guides should consult the links from time to time to ensure they are compliant with the most current requirements.

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