

2026 Rodeo Rules

SCOPE: These rules govern the Annual Destin Fishing Rodeo to be held October 1 through October 31.

GENERAL:

- 1 Contestants shall abide by the Rodeo rules. All rules are interpreted by the Rodeo Rules Committee and/or Board of Directors. The decisions of the official Rodeo Rules Committee and/or Board of Directors shall be final.
- 2 Rules may be modified, interpreted or changed without notice to meet unusual or emergency conditions by action of the Rodeo Rules Committee and/or Board of Directors.
- 3 Any winning angler or captain is subject to a polygraph test to verify authenticity of catch. The Rules Committee and/or Board of Directors will determine cause for the test.
- 4 Anyone who fails a polygraph test or is determined cheating (by the Rules Committee and/or Board of Directors) will be disqualified from participating in the rest of the year's Rodeo and the following two years' Rodeos. All catches in the current Rodeo will be disqualified.
- 5 Scales are considered accurate to the point of failure. Failed scales will be substituted with State certified, calibrated scales. No fish will be re-hung or re-weighed.
- 6 Inshore Division, Pier, Bridge, Jetty and Surf, Kayak and Paddleboard entries must be caught within the area between the eastern end of Choctawhatchee Bay (mouth of the ditch) to Navarre Beach Bridge.
- 7 All Boats must enter the Gulf through Destin's East Pass with the exception of weather-related condition trips which have called and notified the Rodeo office prior to departure. (850) 837-6734
- 8 Boat Entry: A copy of a State/Coast Guard issued Boat Registration Form must be on file with the Rodeo prior to first weigh-in by boats Under 26'. Boats and/or competitors entered after the beginning of the Rodeo in any division are not eligible for competition until the day following registration, with the exception of Bonus Awards (Jackpot, King Mackerel Daily, etc.) which must be entered 72 hours before being eligible.
- 9 All fish must be caught on rod and reel, using hook and line. Handheld electric reels may be used.
- 10 Fish can only be weighed in the division that the boat was registered in and/or "open" divisions.
- 11 Boats may not leave Destin East Pass prior to 12:01 a.m. and must return to weigh-in by 7:00 p.m. daily. A daily bag limit will apply. Overnight fishing prohibited except in the Extended Voyage Division.
- 12 Prize winning fish shall be the largest by weight. In the event of a tie, the first fish recorded shall be the winner. Minimum weight of one pound is required for eligibility.
- 13 All fish are to be drawn (from anal vent through the breastplate to the throat with all entrails removed) and washed for inspection prior to being recognized by the weighmaster. Whole fish brought to the Rodeo weighmaster will be sent to the back of the line. An exception will be made for Triggerfish, Sheepshead, Pompano, Flounder and Sharks. Sharks will be weighed and recorded whole. If the shark is in contention for a prize, it will be gutted to determine that it is a legal fish. The whole weight will be the recorded weight. Fish in contention for world or state records will be weighed prior to being drawn for Rodeo entry at the request of the angler.
- 14 It is the responsibility of the angler to dispose of all fish.
- 15 Angler must be clearly identified prior to weighing fish. Only two fish per specie, per day, per person will be weighed. Boat captain and angler must be present, sign official entry form and verify the weight and angler of each fish officially entered in the Destin Fishing Rodeo at the time of weigh-in. The Angler's SSN may be required prior to being awarded a cash prize. By signing the official entry form, the captain also attests the angler whose name appears on the entry form did catch the fish being weighed. The captain's signature and initials at Division Line further attests to the division being entered. No changes in division will be allowed after the entry form is signed. The Captain's Signature proves ALL information on the form is correct.
- 16 Fish which have spoiled, been mutilated, frozen or appear to have been frozen, or chemically treated are not eligible for competition. (SHARKS MAY BE SHOT)
- 17 Any boat or individual in arrears to the Destin Fishing Rodeo after December 31st of the year the debt is incurred will be ineligible for all subsequent Rodeos until the debt is satisfied.
- 18 In an effort to expedite the weigh-in process, the largest fish in each division should be presented first.
- 19 Weigh Barge Etiquette: Boat Crew is responsible for getting the catch from the boat to the Rodeo scales. Barge Officials have the right to recommend Unsportsmanlike Conduct to the Board of Directors.

- 20 The following persons are not eligible for awards (except, the King Mackerel Jackpot Awards, Captains Awards or Mates Awards if they have participated as such within the current calendar year: (a) Captains/crew members charter/commercial boats. Defined as "Crewmember" under definitions.; (b) commercial fishermen returning from a commercial trip are ineligible to enter fish from that trip; (c) No fish caught on a Recreational Rodeo Trip may be sold, bartered or traded; (d) commercial fishing pier owners/operators may not enter a fish in pier, bridge, jetty and surf division; (e) Rodeo Officials.
- 21 To expedite the weigh-in process during heavy traffic times, all boats will be required to check-in with the DOCKMASTER and be visually recognized past the point in the Harbor. Open Division contenders will be given a time-stamp to avoid controversy in case of a tie. After 5:00 p.m., Private Boats under 26', Kayaks and Paddleboards must park in a designated slip and walk their catches to the barge. At busy times, Charter Boats with customers, will be given preference. Order of weigh-in will be left to the discretion of the DockMaster.
- 22 Unsportsmanlike action by Rodeo participant may disqualify that individual from this and future events.
- 23 Complaints or protests must be in the form of a written statement and personally turned in to the Rodeo officials on duty not later than 7:00 p.m., seventy-two (72) hours following the occurrence which occasioned the complaint. A cash deposit of five hundred dollars (\$500) must accompany the protest. The burden of proof is on the Protester. If the complaint or protest is found to be valid, the deposit is returned, If not, the deposit becomes the property of the Destin Fishing Rodeo, Inc. Once a protest has been filed, the protested must be notified and has 72 hours to reply, in writing, their position on the protest. If the Board determines that a polygraph is required, the protested has 48 hours to inform the Board of their intentions whether or not to take the polygraph. The Board will strive to settle the matter within 14 days of the written position by the protested.
- 24 Participants in the Rodeo may not possess in excess of the FWC Recreational bag limits. Commercial quantities may not be possessed even for boats commercially permitted.
- 25 BRUCE CHEVES DAY – October 16 is Bruce Cheves Day at the Destin Fishing Rodeo. The traditional 'Ring of the Bell' and other celebratory events will be conducted to celebrate the longtime weighmaster and storyteller.

DIVISIONS OF COMPETITION:

Specific awards and prizes for the Divisions of Competition are listed in the Awards Schedule/Prize List.

- 1 SHARKS – ** If you catch a shark and want to bring it to the Rodeo Barge, you must first contact a member of The Rodeo Shark Identification Team to confirm that the species is a legal catch. The team member will then contact the Rodeo Office to notify that the shark has been identified as legal and it can be weighed. If you have a Federal Reef Permit, you must adhere to Federal Rules. HMS Permits are required to weigh any shark in the Destin Fishing Rodeo. No Nurse, Lemon or federally protected shark will be allowed. HMS permits available at www.hmspermits.noaa.gov. All sharks brought to the weigh-in station must qualify using Federal Regulations, regardless of State regulations, if they are different. Minimum length on all Hammerheads is 78 inches, All other sharks (except for the Atlantic Sharpnose), the minimum length is 54 inches.
- 2 CATCH & RELEASE DIVISION: This is a BOAT award. An official entry must be made at the weigh-in barge. It is the responsibility of the captain to present Photo documentation of the catch to the Rodeo office within 48 hours of the catch. Photo must include the Current-Year Rodeo Flag or sticker or a digital date/time stamp.
- 3 BILLFISH DIVISION: HMS Permits are required to weigh any billfish in the Destin Fishing Rodeo. The Billfish Division includes of the Largest Blue Marlin, White Marlin, Swordfish and Sailfish of the tournament. The Rodeo has added 3" to the Federal size limit of these species. Length is measured from lower jaw to fork. The minimum length of a Blue Marlin is 102"; White Marlin is 69" and the Sailfish is 66". The Rodeo encourages anglers to check the leaderboard before killing a billfish. Billfish can be caught and released as entry in the Billfish Catch and Release Division with photo documentation.
- 4 LADIES, SENIOR AND JUNIOR AWARDS: Only Ladies, Seniors and Juniors may enter fish in the Ladies, Senior and Junior Divisions. Ladies, Seniors and Juniors may cross in their appropriate categories (ie. Boat Type). Division must be declared at entry.
- 5 Double G Custom Rods and Restoration YOUTH ANGLER MINGO (October 1 – 31, 2026) The junior (age 6-14) girl and boy angler on a Charter AND on a Party Boat that catch the largest Mingo Snappers of the tournament will win a custom-built rod. (4 rods – 2 for Charter and 2 for Party).

- 6 EXTENDED VOYAGE DIVISION. Boats must notify Rodeo Headquarters prior to leaving the boat slip by calling 850-837-6734. To qualify in the EXTENDED VOYAGE DIVISION. The trip must be declared prior to the boat leaving the slip. Declaration must include the name of the Captain, the Second Captain, the date of departure, expected return date and whether the boat is departing from East Pass or the Ditch. The boat must return a different calendar day than when it departs, vessel must be at sea for a minimum of 18 hours and a maximum of 96 hours. A vessel on extended voyage cannot add additional fuel on board between the time they leave the Destin Harbor and return to the Destin Harbor. Once a vessel has been declared on an Extended Voyage, all fish brought back from the trip must be weighed in the Extended Voyage Division, Billfish Division, or Billfish Catch and Release Division. All Boats must enter the Gulf through Destin's East Pass with the exception* of extended voyage trips which have called and reported that they are going through the ditch.
- 7 Fish must be weighed on the day of the vessel's return to port. Two licensed captains are required aboard fare carrying vessels at all times and both captains must sign entry forms at the dock. Dates of Extended Voyages and both captains' names must be declared prior to leaving the boat slip. Fish caught on Extended Voyages ARE NOT ELIGIBLE FOR RODEO RECORDS, JACKPOT AWARDS or BONUS AWARDS (Special awards offered from time to time).
- 8 *Exceptions: medical or weather related must be approved by BOD and/or the Rules Committee. If a vessel must return to port for approved medical or weather related reasons after the close of scales on the scheduled day of return (after the vessel has been away for at least 18 hours and it is a different calendar day), the captain must call the Rodeo office (850) 837-6734, and declare what they are bringing to the scales and the estimated weight of each fish that will be weighed. The catch must be brought to the scales the following day within the first hour of scales being open.
- 9 KAYAK DIVISION - ONLY human powered kayaks will be allowed. NO pier/shoreline/wade/jug/trot line/hand line/cast or drag net/bow fishing allowed. All Kayaks should be launched from shore. No assistance from another vessel is allowed. Entries must be caught within the area between the eastern end of Choctawhatchee Bay (mouth of the ditch) to Navarre Beach Bridge. Fish caught in the Kayak Division are eligible to weigh in the Kayak Division. (No Jack Crevalle, Black Drum, Sharks or Rays allowed).
- 10 PADDLEBOARD DIVISION - ONLY human powered Paddleboards will be allowed. NO pier/shoreline/wade/jug/trot line/hand line/cast or drag net/bow fishing allowed. All Paddleboards should be launched from shore. No assistance from another vessel is allowed. A contestant shall not be eligible to hold more than one place in the Paddleboard division. Entries must be caught within the area between the eastern end of Choctawhatchee Bay (mouth of the ditch) to Navarre Beach Bridge. Fish caught in the Paddleboard Division are eligible to weigh in the Paddleboard Division (No Jack Crevalle, Black Drum, Sharks or Rays allowed).
- 11 PIER, BRIDGE, JETTY & SURF DIVISION – \$25 fee (for anglers 15 years and older) must be paid 24 hours prior to weighing fish in PBJS division. Only fish caught on Pier, Bridge, Jetty or Surf are eligible in this division. Fish must be weighed the day of the catch. Entries must be caught within the area between the eastern end of Choctawhatchee Bay (mouth of the ditch) to Navarre Beach Bridge. "LARGEST" fish (daily and overall) Junior and Senior awards may be a specie outside the division (except for sharks and rays, Jack Crevalle and Black Drum).
- 12 KING MACKEREL DAILY - Based on 31 boat participation \$100 buy in.
 - a. Pays \$100 a day to the Captain for largest King Mackerel of the day.
 - b. At the end of the tournament the remainder of the pot will be split 25% to Captain in pot with Largest King Mackerel and 75% to local Charities.
- 13 KING MACKEREL JACKPOT - Open to all registered boats (Fare Carrying or Private) that have paid the Jackpot entry fee (\$100 per boat) **ALL WINNERS IN KING MACKEREL JACKPOT MAY BE ADMINISTERED A POLYGRAPH TEST at the discretion of the Board of Directors.** The Jackpot will be split as follows:
(AFTER 10% TO RODEO FOR ADMINISTRATIVE FEE)
 - a. Largest King Mackerel 50% / Second Largest King Mackerel 30% / Third Largest King Mackerel 20%.
 - b. Jackpot Fee must be paid 72 hours before fish may be weighed in.
 - c. Prize money will be paid to the person named on the entry form.

AWARDING OF PRIZES:

1. A prize not claimed within thirty (30) days after the date of the award shall revert to the Rodeo.
2. DAILY prizes must be claimed by the angler or legal Guardian at the Merchandise Trailer within 48 hours of the close of scales the day of catch.
3. The Rodeo will present six (6) Captain's Awards: Charter Boat Captain, Party Boat Captain, Charter Boat Captain – 26 feet and under, Private Boat Captain, Private Boat Captain – 26 feet and under, and Extended Voyage Captain. Winning captains will be determined at the end of the tournament using a simple formula: 1st Places = 20 points, 2nd Places = 10 points, Daily Awards = 1 point (If a fish wins more than one daily prize, it will only be awarded 1 point). All 1st & 2nd Place fish will be counted in the total Captain's Points (from Boat Divisions and Open Divisions) No points will be awarded for the First Fish or King Mac Jackpot. Should Captain's Award points end up in a tie, the captain that reached the final points first will become Captain of the Year. All point calculations and rulings by Rodeo officials are final.
4. Overall Prizes may only be picked up by the person who won the prize. A signed letter from the prize winner indicating permission for a named other person to retrieve their prize may be scanned or e-mailed, no later than Monday, November 2, 2026 to fishing@destinfishingrodeo.org.
5. All awards are ANGLERS Awards (except for Captain's King Mackerel Jackpot, King Mac Daily, Captain's and Mate's Awards, and Billfish Tag and Release Awards). 1099's will be issued to the winners in accordance with the U.S. Internal Revenue Service.
6. Kids Certificates and/or Fishing Rods will be given to any child 10 or under who presents a fish to the Rodeo Dock before 5 p.m. (time exception will be made for anglers on registered vessels) every day. Only 1 rod and certificate per child per month.

DEFINITIONS:

1. **Rodeo officials:** Paid employees & the Official Rodeo Judges judging that day.
2. **Charter Boat:** A boat owned and operated as a charter fishing business in Destin as determined by the Rules Committee.
3. **Party Boat** - A boat owned and operated as a charter fishing business in Destin as determined by the Rules Committee and participates in the Beaufort Head Boat Survey.
4. **State** - Saltwater Charter Boat License: Required for captains taking paying customers out to the state water boundary (9 nautical miles in the Gulf of Mexico).

5. **Federal** - Federal charter permits are required for vessels taking paying passengers into federal waters (beyond 9 nautical miles in the Gulf of Mexico). These NMFS-issued permits cover species like Reef Fish, Coastal Migratory Pelagics, and Highly Migratory Species (HMS) like tunas and sharks. If you intend to cross into federal waters (beyond 9 miles off Destin) to fish for reef fish or coastal migratory pelagics, you must hold a federal Gulf Charter/Headboat Permit.
6. **Private Boat:** Vessel that has not carried passengers for hire as determined by the Rules Committee.
7. **Under 26':** Any vessel 25'11" and below as per official state vessel registration. Valid registration papers must be produced at the time of Rodeo registration. Registration Papers may be emailed to fishing@destinfishingrodeo.org, presented in person to the Rodeo Office or by mail (P.O. Box 296, Destin, FL 32540) prior to the Rodeo. Any fish caught aboard a vessel without documented registration papers on file will be disqualified.
8. **Non-motorized Vessel:** ONLY human powered vessels will be allowed. NO gasoline or electric motor propelled boats, sail boats, airboats, float tubes, or poled boats may be used.
9. **Open Awards Classification:** Awards eligible to all motorized vessels registered in the Destin Fishing Rodeo.
10. **Registered Entry:** A registered entry is an entry that is recorded with an official Rodeo Judge and eligible to be recorded on the leader board at the weigh station.
11. **Crewmember:** Any adult (18 or older) person whose primary occupation is as a credentialed crew member while underway of any commercial/for-hire fishing vessel in the Gulf.
12. **Legitimate Entry for Captain Awards:** The heaviest fish in each category from a boat, per trip, that takes a position on the leaderboard. In the event of a tie, the earliest weigh-in prevails.
13. **Junior Angler:** any angler age 6 – 14 years old on the day of the competition. Anglers under the age of 6 are eligible for a certificate and rod and reel.
14. **Lady Angler:** Female anglers age 15 and older on the day of competition.
15. **Senior Angler:** Any angler 65 years or older on the day of competition.