

Gulf Fishery News

A publication of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council



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The 2017 Federal Recreational Red Snapper Season

This year's recreational red snapper season opens on June 1. The private angler season will be 3 days, closing at 12:01 a.m. local time on June 4th. The federally permitted for-hire season will be 49 days, closing at 12:01 a.m. local time on July 20th.

More than likely, you have some questions about how the federal season length was determined. NOAA Fisheries has published an in-depth description of how the season lengths were projected and we'll give you an abbreviated overview in this article.



Photo: Mark Miller

First, federal law requires all federally managed species to be managed with an annual catch limit. Annual catch limits are set by the Council using guidance from the most recent stock assessment and the Council's scientific advisors. At 13,740,000 pounds, this year's red snapper annual catch limit is higher than the annual catch limit for any other finfish species we manage. Despite this, the private recreational season in federal waters is shorter than ever. Here's why:

To allow for the separate management of different fishing sectors, the stock annual catch limit is divided among commercial and recreational fishing sectors. For red snapper, 49% of the annual catch limit is allocated to the recreational sector while 51% is allocated to the commercial sector. While the commercial sector quota is set equal to the commercial annual catch limit for red snapper, the recreational sector quota is based on an annual catch target which is a level of harvest set below the annual catch limit to account for management uncertainty. In the case of red snapper, the Council added a 20% buffer between the recreational annual catch limit and annual catch target after a federal court ruling determined that the recreational annual catch limit alone was insufficient to prevent overfishing.

To allow for the separate management of the different sub-components of the sector, the recreational quota is divided between private anglers and federally permitted for-hire vessels. The private angler component of the recreational sector is 57.7% of the recreational quota and the federally permitted for-hire component is 42.3%. Last year, the total recreational quota and the private angling component exceeded the quota by 129,906 pounds so, this year's total recreational quota and private angling component quota had to be reduced by the amount of the overage.

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Did you know?

The Gulf Council encourages and accepts public testimony at every stage of the fishery management plan process. Comment opportunities go beyond scoping meetings and public hearings. The Council also takes open public comment during each Council meeting and accepts written and online comments throughout the process. Written comments can be emailed to: gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org or mailed to:

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
2203 N. Lois Avenue
Suite 1100
Tampa, Florida 33607

Questions?
Call Emily Muehlstein at
813-348-1630 ext. 238

Red Snapper Season continued...

The resulting quotas for 2017 after taking the annual catch target and overages into account are shown in this table:

Red Snapper Stock Annual Catch Limit		
13,740,000 pounds		
Commercial	Recreational	
7,007,000 pounds	6,603,094 pounds	
	Private Angler	Federal For-Hire
	3,004,075 pounds	2,278,000 pounds

While the recreational season lengths are based on the quotas, these values don't tell the whole story. There are other reasons why the seasons are getting shorter while the population and quotas are getting larger.

Overall, catch rates are higher than they've ever been. Meaning, there are more anglers catching red snapper and they are catching them faster than ever. In fact, anglers are landing red snapper at two and a half times the rate they did in 2007. This increase in harvest rate is attributed to a number of factors including: the expansion of the stock throughout its range which allows more anglers to target them throughout the Gulf; more readily available red snappers allowing anglers to have more successful fishing trips; and the average size of red snapper caught recreationally has more than doubled since 2007 increasing from 3.3 pounds to 7.25 pounds in 2016.



Photo: Joseph Cawthon

The next factor contributing to the abbreviated federal season for private recreational anglers is the increase in state water seasons. Because red snapper is a single stock, federal red snapper quotas apply to fish harvested Gulf-wide. Meaning, fish harvested in state seasons and state waters still count towards the federal quota. This only affects the private angling component of the recreational sector because federally permitted for-hire vessels may not participate in state water seasons. Therefore, red snapper harvest occurring in the state water seasons is deducted from the private angler component of the recreational sector and the federal private angler season must be adjusted to compensate for that harvest. This year, approximately 81% of the private angling component quota is anticipated to be caught during the state water fishing seasons.

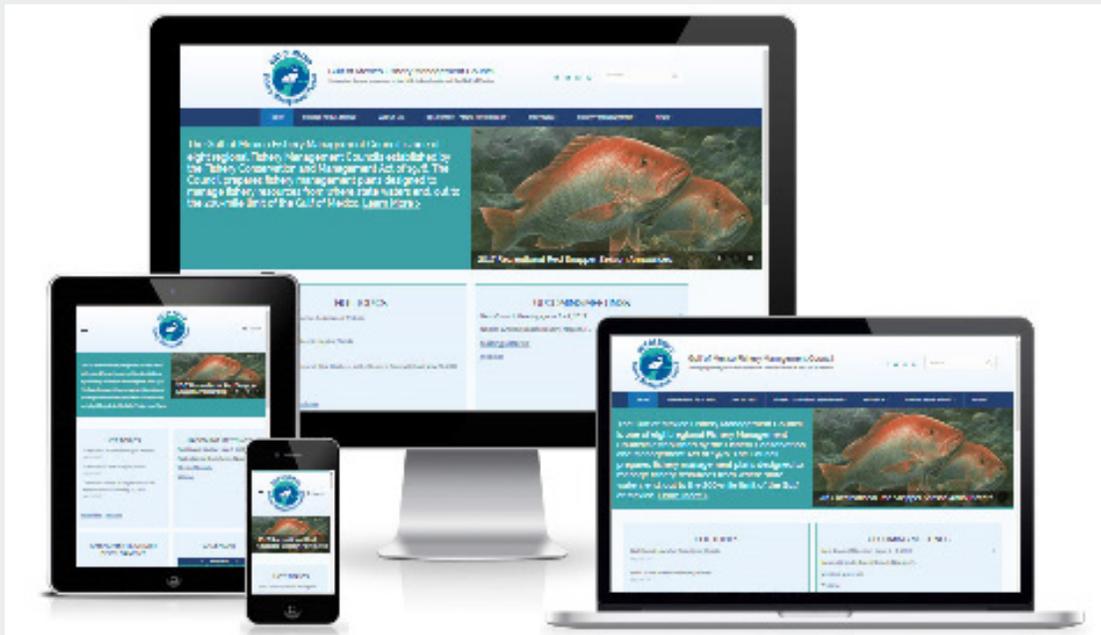
The Gulf Council recognizes that private anglers need better access to federal red snapper fishing. Recently, the Council's Private Recreational Red Snapper Advisory Panel met for the first time to consider ways to increase access. Additionally, some of the Gulf states have requested development of amendments that would allow them to manage the portion of the red snapper quota that has been harvested by each state historically. The Council plans to address the results of the Private Recreational Red Snapper Angler Advisory Panel at the June meeting in Naples, Florida and hopefully, we'll be able to find ways to alleviate the shrinking federal recreational seasons.



Gulf Council Website Redesign

The Council has launched a redesign of the website www.gulfcouncil.org. Along with a more contemporary look, changes have been made to site navigation to ensure quick and easy access to essential information.

Key features of the site include an emphasis on upcoming public meetings and meeting materials; fishery management amendments that are under development; and the latest news releases.



The site's simplified look, combined with improved functionality and optimization for mobile devices, allows users to better interact with the Gulf Council. Information on Council members, committees and panels, and archived meeting and fishery management materials provide improved access to Council operations for stakeholders and internal users. The new site also ensures increased transparency and access to the Council process by making archived meetings and management plans readily available and by providing straight-forward meeting agendas and supporting materials.

"We are excited about the new website launch," said Doug Gregory, Executive Director. "The redesigned site will provide stakeholders with a substantially improved level of access to fishery management information and Gulf Council meeting materials as we continue to enhance our public service."

The new Gulf Council site will be updated regularly. We encourage you to visit the site at www.gulfcouncil.org. Contact us by emailing gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org if you have questions of feedback on the redesigned website.



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In the News

NOAA Enforcement, State Partners Focus on Red Snapper Enforcement Operations

In order to better protect the red snapper fish stocks in the Southeast, NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement, alongside other state and federal natural resource enforcement agencies, will continue to conduct increased enforcement efforts focused on the commercial and recreational red snapper fisheries in Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic.

"We've been working closely with our state partners to patrol the Gulf waters and ensure compliance with the state and federal fishing regulations with the goal of better protecting red snapper stocks," said Manny Antonaras, deputy special agent in charge of NOAA Enforcement's Southeast Division. "We make every effort to educate the public on the rules and regulations governing the various red snapper seasons; it's a hot topic and a high priority for us."

In 2016, NOAA Enforcement and state Joint Enforcement Agreement (JEA) partners, including Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, conducted hundreds of patrols and red snapper focused operations in federal waters in the Gulf and South Atlantic. Day-to-day patrols are essential for enforcement efforts and visibility. But, targeted patrols — such as last year's snapper operations — help increase compliance among anglers by making them aware of the regulations and deter illegal activity.



Photo: Emily Muehlstein

"Focused enforcement operations are invaluable," said Lt. Pat O'Shaughnessy, supervisory enforcement officer of NOAA Enforcement. Adding that data collected from these operations become measurable results for year-to-year comparisons, which helps identify what approaches are working and what efforts need to be improved.

"We attend captains' and tournament meetings, as well as fishery management council meetings throughout the year to make sure the industry is aware of the regulations," said Enforcement Officer William Widener. "Our methods of communicating with industry are always evolving and it's something we're always trying to improve."

Increased patrols and enforcement activities are not the only ways NOAA is responding to the industry's call for action. Fines deterring illegal activity are increasing, too.

Continued on next page



In the News continued...

Last year's red snapper-focused enforcement activities resulted in NOAA Enforcement taking an enforcement action on more than 120 separate violations, with most occurring during a time when the federal season was closed.



Photo: NOAA

The significant level of willful non-compliance with federal regulations is not only unfair to the vast majority of fishers who abide by the rules, but indicates that those who choose to violate the law have been undeterred by the financial penalty currently being assessed for violations. In response, the NOAA Office of General Counsel has doubled the penalty for red snapper violations in the commercial and recreational fisheries this season.

How much will a red snapper violation in federal waters in the Gulf and South Atlantic now cost?

For red snapper violations that involve fish caught in federal waters during a closed season, that are over the catch limit, undersized, or filleted at sea, the penalty now starts at \$500 per violation, plus an additional \$50 per fish — up to the first 20 fish — associated with each violation. For more serious violations involving larger number of red snapper, where there is a history of past violations, or other extenuating circumstances, penalties may be assessed at a much higher amount in accordance with NOAA's Policy for the Assessment of Civil Administrative Penalties and Permit Sanctions. This fine increase applies to both Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic federal waters.

In addition to the increase in fines, enforcement operations similar to those conducted last year will resume this season.

"We're all responsible for ensuring our fisheries are sustainable for future generations," said Antonaras. "We are committed to safeguarding our marine resources and will ensure compliance with related regulations."

For information related to the red snapper season within state waters, visit each state's fishery management department to obtain the regulations in state waters. Red snapper may not be harvested in state waters on board a vessel with a valid federal commercial or charter vessel/headboat permit.

If you witness a violation, contact the 24-hour NOAA Office of Law Enforcement Hotline at 1-800-853-1964; tips may be left anonymously.

Source: NOAA Fisheries, https://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/ole/slider_stories/2017/26april17_red_snapper_fines_increase.html



Photo: Primofish

Recent Regulation Changes

NOAA Fisheries has recently approved and implemented new fishing regulations that were proposed by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council. The following is a list of regulations that have changed since the January edition of Gulf Fishery News.

King Mackerel

A single year-round regulatory boundary between the Gulf and South Atlantic migratory groups of king mackerel have been established at a line extending east from the Miami-Dade/Monroe County, Florida boundary.



The recreational bag limit of king mackerel has increased to 3-fish per person.

Commercial king mackerel zone quotas have changed as follows:

Fishing Year	Western Zone	Northern Zone	Southern Zone Hook-and-Line	Southern Zone Gillnet
2016-2017	1,180,000	531,000	619,500	619,500
2017-2018	1,136,000	511,200	596,400	596,400
2018-2019	1,116,000	502,200	585,900	585,900
2019-2020	1,096,000	493,200	575,400	575,400

Additionally, the Gulf migratory group eastern zone – northern subzone is renamed the northern zone, and the eastern zone – southern subzone is renamed the southern zone.

Yellowtail Snapper

The fishing year for yellowtail snapper begins on August 1 and runs through July 31, each year. The use of circle hooks is not required while commercial fishing with natural bait for yellowtail snapper south of Cape Sable (the line extending due west from 25°09' N. lat. off the west coast of Monroe County, Florida, to the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils' shared boundary).



Actions Awaiting Implementation

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council has recently taken final action on a number of fishery management measures. Once final action is taken, the proposed management measure is forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for rule making. During rule making, a proposed rule is published and a final comment period is opened to the public. The Secretary of Commerce reviews the proposed rule and any feedback received through public comment before deciding to approve, disapprove, or partially approve a proposed fishery management measure. If a measure is approved, NOAA Fisheries will publish the final rule and implement the new regulation.

The following fishery management measures have been approved and transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce by the Council and are awaiting approval and implementation:

- **Reef Fish Amendment 46 – Modify Gray Triggerfish Rebuilding Plan**
- **Reef Fish Amendment 43 – Hogfish Stock Definition, Status Determination Criteria, Annual Catch Limits, and Size Limit**
- **Mackerel Framework Amendment 5 – King Mackerel Permit Restrictions**
- **Modifications to Charter Vessel and Headboat Reporting Requirements**
- **Shrimp Amendment 17B – Establishing Optimum Yield, Target Number of Permits, Permit Pool, and Addressing Transit Provisions Through Federal Waters**
- **Reef Fish Amendment 36A – Commercial IFQ Program Modifications**



Photo credit: Mark Miller

Once any of these suggested management measures are approved and implemented the Council will update the regulations, publish, and send out a press release announcing the changes.



Future of Stock Assessment

In 2001, NOAA Fisheries published the first Stock Assessment Improvement Plan, which sought to bolster the capacity, content, extent, and infrastructure for conducting stock assessments. As a result, the scientific advice being provided to fishery managers allowing the recovery of many overfished stocks and dramatically reducing incidences of overfishing, has been improved. However, given changes in legal mandates and decades of research and development of new scientific tools, there is a need to update this important strategic document. Recently, NMFS drafted a next generation Stock Assessment Improvement Plan.



Photo: NOAA

This Stock Assessment Improvement Plan lays out a framework for moving toward a Next Generation Stock Assessment Enterprise. The vision of this NGSAs enterprise is to improve timeliness and efficiency of assessments while maintaining their utility to fishery management, prioritizing work relative to available resources, expanding the scope of stock assessments to be more holistic and ecosystem-linked, and utilizing innovative modeling and data collection techniques. Thus, this document will help guide the agency towards its vision of resilient ecosystems, communities, and economies for future generations.



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Gulf Fishery News



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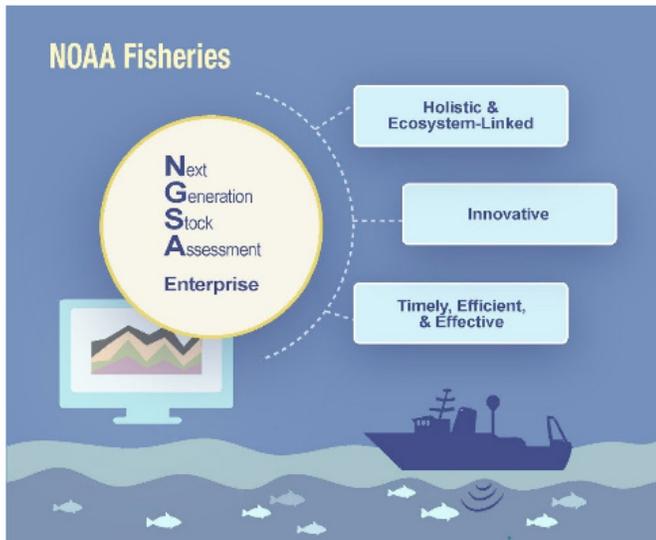
The Blog of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council



Future of Stock Assessment continued...

Click the following link to view the draft [Stock Assessment Improvement Plan](#).

Public comment relating to this draft document is welcome through June 15, 2017. Please send your comments to the National Stock Assessment Program Lead, Patrick Lynch (Patrick.Lynch@noaa.gov).



Source: National Marine Fisheries Service, NOAA,

<https://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/stock-assessment/future-of-stock-assessment>



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Photo: Mike Jennings



Public Hearings

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council held public hearings via webinar in May to take comments on the following:

[Reef Fish Amendment 44 - Minimum Stock Size Threshold \(MSST\) Revision for Reef Fish Stocks with Existing Status Determination Criteria](#)

[Reef Fish Amendment 47 - Establish a Vermilion Snapper MSY Proxy and Adjust the Stock Annual Catch Limit](#)

To read the Amendments and submit comments, please visit:

<http://gulfcouncil.org/fishery-management/proposed-amendments/>



Submit Your Comments!

Use the online public comment forms available for each proposed Amendment as listed on the "Amendments Under Development" page of our website.

<http://gulfcouncil.org/fishery-management/proposed-amendments/>

For general fishery comments, not related to a specific Amendment, use the "Submit General Fishery Comments" button on the "Fishery Management" website page.

<http://gulfcouncil.org/fishery-management/proposed-amendments/>

Online, oral, and/or written communications provided to the Council, its members, or its staff that relate to matters within the Council's purview are public in nature. These communications will be made available to the public in their entirety and will be maintained by the Council as part of the permanent record. **Note that all comments will be posted on the Council's website for viewing by Council members and the public.**

To help ensure that Council members have sufficient time to consider written testimony for a specific Council meeting, please submit your comments at least seven business days prior to the start of the Council meeting.

Materials submitted to Council members or staff for distribution prior to or during a Council meeting will be treated as all other comment forms and will be posted to the web site. Further, knowingly and willfully submitting false information to the Council is a violation of Federal Law.



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For more information on federal fishing regulations, visit www.gulfcouncil.org/fishing_regulations/federal/



Gulf Council to Meet in Naples, Florida

The Gulf Council will hold its next meeting at the Naples Grande Beach Resort, in Naples, Florida, June 5-8, 2017. Here's a quick look at some of the issues the Council will consider:

Minimum Stock Size Threshold for Reef Fish Stocks

The Council is scheduled to take final action on Amendment 44 which considers a standard way to determine minimum stock size threshold for species in the reef fish management unit.

[Read the document here](#)

[Read comments here](#)

[Submit comments here](#)

Vermillion Snapper

The Council is slated to take final action of Reef Fish Amendment 47- Establish a Vermillion Snapper MSY Proxy and Adjust the Stock Annual Catch Limit, which considers establishing an MSY proxy and associated status determination criteria that are consistent with the best scientific information available, and to establish an ACL that does not exceed the ABC yields from the most recent stock assessment (SEDAR 45 2016).

[Read the document](#)

[Watch the video here](#)

[Read comments here](#)

Modification of Number of Unrigged Hooks Carried Onboard Bottom Longline Vessels

The Council is scheduled to take final action on an abbreviated framework action to modify the number of hooks commercial reef fish vessels with a bottom longline endorsement in the Gulf of Mexico are allowed to carry onboard when using that gear (bottom longline) to fish for reef fish in the Gulf exclusive economic zone east of 85°30' west longitude (Cape San Blas). The need is to reduce the regulatory and potential economic burden on fishermen, by allowing them to carry more hooks onboard bottom longline fishing trips to compensate for hook loss.

[Read the document here](#)

[Submit comments here](#)

Spiny Lobster

The Council is slated to take final action on Spiny Lobster Regulatory Amendment 4- Modifications to Management Benchmarks, Annual Catch Limit, Annual Catch Target, and Prohibition of Traps for Recreational Harvest in the South Atlantic Exclusive Economic Zone. The purpose of this amendment is to modify the stock status determination criteria and catch levels for spiny lobster based on updated information and revised scientific recommendations, and to consider restrictions on the use of traps for recreational harvest. The need for this amendment is to ensure that the stock status determination criteria and catch levels for spiny lobster are based on the best scientific information available, to prevent overfishing, and to minimize negative effects of recreational traps in the South Atlantic.

[Read the document here](#)

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Photos: NOAA, Karen Hoak

Off the Boat!

Glimpses of fishing in the Gulf of Mexico



Photos: Ryan Rindone, Jason Whitaker, Jeff Carter, Dave Wolf, Mike Jennings, Emily Muehlstein.



The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

Protecting our marine resources

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The Gulf Council would like to hear from you! Please contact us regarding fishery questions, comments, or concerns you would like to see covered in the Gulf Fishery News. Anyone interested in submitting information, such as articles, editorials, or photographs pertaining to fishing or fisheries management, is encouraged to do so. Submissions may be mailed to Emily Muehlstein, Public Information Officer, Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, 2203 N. Lois Avenue, Suite 1100, Tampa, FL 33607. Materials can also be sent via fax to 813-348-1711, or by e-mail to emily.muehlstein@gulfcouncil.org.

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council is one of eight regional fishery management councils established by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The Council is responsible for the development and modification of fishery management plans (FMPs) that are designed to manage fishery resources in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of the Gulf of Mexico from state boundaries to the 200-mile limit.

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