



Frequently Asked Questions

2014 Gulf of Mexico Recreational Fishing Closures and Accountability Measures

May 2014

Why are many recreational fishing seasons for reef fish being closed or shortened?

- Federal regulations require most federally managed species to have an annual catch limit. An annual catch limit is the amount of fish that can be caught by fishermen in a fishing year.
- Most federally managed species also have accountability measures which are management measures intended to prevent catch limits from being exceeded or mitigate overages if they occur.
- If the catch limit is exceeded, accountability measures are triggered.
- For many Gulf reef fish species, accountability measures include shortening the fishing season in the following year if the catch limit is exceeded in the prior year to ensure landings do not exceed the annual catch limit or annual catch target.
- Annual catch targets are catch levels set below the annual catch limit and are typically used for stocks that are depleted (overfished) and in need of rebuilding.
- Additionally, some species that are depleted require overages to be paid back in the following fishing year, resulting in catch limits and catch targets being reduced.

What Gulf of Mexico species exceeded their annual catch limits in 2013?

- Recreational catch limits for Gulf of Mexico red snapper, red grouper, gray triggerfish, and greater amberjack were exceeded in 2013.
- Combined commercial and recreational catch limits for Gulf of Mexico hogfish and Spanish mackerel were also exceeded.

What were the landings, annual catch limits, and annual catch targets for recreationally caught species exceeding their annual catch limits in 2013?

Species	Annual Catch Target	Annual Catch Limit	Landings
Gray triggerfish	217,100 lbs ww	241,200 lbs ww	524,605 lbs ww
Greater amberjack	1,130,000 lbs ww	1,299,000 lbs ww	1,566,488 lbs ww
Hogfish	n/a	208,000 lbs ww	251,034 lbs ww
Red Grouper	1,730,000 lbs gw	1,900,000 lbs gw	2,392,112 lbs gw
Red Snapper	n/a	5,390,000 lbs ww	9,541,327 lbs ww
Spanish mackerel	n/a	5,150,000 lbs ¹	5,912,344 lbs

¹Spanish mackerel has a combined commercial and recreational annual catch limit.

Where can I find more information about 2013 annual landings of federally managed species?

- Landings are summarized on the NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office website at: http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable_fisheries/acl_monitoring/index.html
- Landings are from the Marine Recreational Information Program, the Southeast Headboat Survey, the Texas Parks and Wildlife's recreational creel survey, and the Southeast Fisheries Science Center's commercial quota monitoring program.

What are the accountability measures for species that exceeded their annual catch limits?

Gray Triggerfish and Greater Amberjack

- Because both of these species are overfished, accountability measures require the annual catch limit and annual catch target to be reduced in the following year by the amount of the previous year's catch limit overage.
- Additionally, when recreational landings reach or are projected to reach the annual catch target for these species, NOAA Fisheries must close the fishery for the remainder of the year.

Red Grouper

- When recreational landings reach or are projected to reach the annual catch limit for red grouper, NOAA Fisheries must close the fishery for the remainder of the year; and
- If recreational red grouper landings exceed the annual catch limit, NOAA Fisheries must maintain the annual catch target at the level of the prior year's annual catch target and reduce the bag limit by one fish (from 4 to 3 in 2014).

Hogfish and Spanish Mackerel

- If the sum of commercial and recreational landings exceeds the total catch limit for these species, then during the following fishing year, if the sum of commercial and recreational landings reaches or is projected to reach the total catch limit, NOAA Fisheries will close the commercial and recreational sectors for the remainder of that fishing year.

Red Snapper

- NOAA Fisheries is required to close red snapper when the recreational quota is met or projected to be met.
- Additionally, in 2014 an annual catch target was set 20% less than the annual catch limit to increase the likelihood that a quota overage does not occur.

Are changes to the Marine Recreational Information Program survey responsible for so many annual catch limits being exceeded?

- New Marine Recreational Information Program estimates are more accurate and less biased than those produced previously. The Marine Recreational Information Program redesigned the dockside angler intercept survey in March 2013 to provide better coverage of the variety of fishing trips ending at different times of day.
- Assuming the new survey methodology eliminated past biases, the new estimates might not be directly comparable to 2013 catch limits or other management reference points and may be in part responsible for some annual catch limits being exceeded. However, other factors may also be responsible for higher landings in 2013. For instance, overall Gulf-wide fishing effort was up 8% compared to 2012 and scientific data indicates a strong year-class of red grouper is entering the fishery.

Gray Triggerfish

Why was the gray triggerfish recreational sector closed so early in 2014?

- The recreational annual catch limit was exceeded by more than double in 2013. Accountability measures require NOAA Fisheries to deduct the overage off of the following year's annual catch limit and annual catch target. Because of the magnitude of the 2013 overage, the annual catch limit and annual catch target for recreational gray triggerfish in 2014

was set to zero; therefore, NOAA Fisheries will close the recreational sector.

Why did NOAA Fisheries not close recreational gray triggerfish earlier in 2013 to prevent such a large overage?

- In 2012, the recreational gray triggerfish sector was closed in June.
- In 2013, projections completed early in the year indicated the recreational sector should close again in early June. However, at the time the recreational sector was projected to close, only 18% of annual catch target had been reported landed. NOAA Fisheries decided to wait until landings were available through June, but receipt of those landings estimates was delayed due to ongoing improvements to the Marine Recreational Information Program survey. When landings estimates through June were received in early fall it was determined the annual catch target was close to being met, therefore NOAA Fisheries closed the recreational sector on October 15, 2013. Furthermore, high levels of landings were reported in September and October, resulting in a large catch limit overage.

Why is NOAA Fisheries now closing recreational gray triggerfish in spring or early summer, when in previous years there were no closures?

- Based on the results of a 2011 population assessment, NOAA Fisheries and the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) determined gray triggerfish was not rebuilding according to the rebuilding plan and remained overfished.
- The Council developed a suite of actions intended to allow gray triggerfish to rebuild within the rebuilding plan timeline; this included a reduction in the annual catch limit and annual catch target.
- The reduced annual catch limits and annual catch targets are being met more quickly, resulting in earlier in-season closures.

Red Grouper

Why is NOAA Fisheries now closing recreational red grouper in-season, when there have not been closures in previous years?

- Annual catch limits for red grouper in prior years have not been exceeded, allowing the recreational red grouper fishing season to remain open until the end of the year.
- Based on a 2009 stock assessment, red grouper were determined to not be overfished or undergoing overfishing, and the stock was increasing in abundance.
- Recognizing that recreational fishing opportunities could be increased, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council chose to increase the bag limit from 2 to 4 fish, beginning in 2012. Landings in 2012 increased substantially compared to previous years, and were 96% of the catch limit. Landings in 2013 exceeded the catch limit by 26%, triggering this year's reduction to the bag limit and fishery closure.

When is the red grouper recreational sector expected to close in 2014?

- The red grouper recreational catch limit is estimated to be met by September 16, 2014.
- NOAA Fisheries will continue to monitor landings in season and will make adjustments to the closure date, as needed.

Instead of implementing a lengthy closure for red grouper why not reduce the bag limit to two fish?

- Accountability measures for red grouper only allow NOAA Fisheries to reduce the bag limit by one fish. The red grouper bag limit of 3 fish became effective May 5, 2014.
- Reducing the bag limit from 4 to 2 fish would require action by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council.
- A 2-fish bag limit would extend the season longer than a 3-fish bag limit, but may still result in the recreational sector being closed at the end of the year if landings in 2014 are similar to landings in 2013.

Greater Amberjack

What are the annual catch limits and annual catch targets for greater amberjack in 2014 and when is the recreational sector expected to close?

- Recreational catches of greater amberjack have approached or exceeded the annual catch limit in two of the last four years, resulting in adjusted catch limits where the overages have been subtracted from the next year's quota.
- The 2013 greater amberjack recreational catch limit was exceeded by 267,488 lbs. Annual catch limits and annual catch targets for 2014 were reduced by this same amount to 1,031,512 lbs and 862,512 lbs, respectively.
- NOAA Fisheries has not determined a closure date for the recreational greater amberjack sector and will continue to monitor landings in season. If catches are similar to those in 2013, the recreational greater amberjack sector is expected to close in late summer.

Hogfish and Spanish Mackerel

When will the hogfish and Spanish mackerel recreational sectors close in 2014?

- The Spanish mackerel recreational sector is not expected to close in 2014/15 despite last year's overage because the catch limit for Spanish mackerel is being significantly increased this year through new rulemaking.
- NOAA Fisheries has not determined the closure date for hogfish and will continue to monitor landings in season. If catches are similar to those in 2013, hogfish is expected to close this fall.

Red Snapper

When is the 2014 recreational red snapper season open in federal waters?

- The 2014 recreational red snapper season in federal waters begins June 1, 2014, at 12:01 a.m., local time and closes June 10, 2014, at 12:01 a.m., local time.

Why is the recreational season length 9 days instead of the 40-day season announced in December 2013?

- In March 2014, a U.S. District Court ruled, in part, that NOAA Fisheries failed to require adequate accountability measures for the recreational sector to ensure the recreational quota was not exceeded. The Court also found NOAA Fisheries failed to use the best scientific information available by not using the 2013 Marine Recreational Information Program data to determine if quota remained to allow for an additional fall season.
- The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council requested this emergency rule at their April 2014 meeting to better ensure red snapper recreational landings do not exceed the recreational quota established in the rebuilding plan, in accordance with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and the Court's ruling.
- The inconsistent state seasons account for nearly half of the total recreational quota.
- Taking these extended state seasons into account, and establishing a recreational annual catch target by applying the 20-percent buffer, reduced the federal season to 11 days. Subsequently, Louisiana extended their state-water season, which required a further reduction in the federal season to 9 days.
- For more information about how the recreational season was calculated go to the 2014 red snapper season length report in Appendix B (page 76) at: http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable_fisheries/gulf_fisheries/reef_fish/2013/rs_2014_rec/documents/pdfs/gulf_rs_2014_emergency_action_ea.pdf

Gag

Was the recreational annual catch limit for gag exceeded in 2013?

- No, the recreational annual catch limit for gag of 1.495 million pounds was not exceeded in 2013. Recreational landings totaled 1.467 million pounds, or 98% of the annual catch limit.

What will the recreational annual catch limit be for gag in 2014 and when will the gag recreational season open and close?

- The recreational annual catch limit for gag is 1.72 million pounds and the recreational annual catch target for gag is 1.519 million pounds.
- Recreational accountability measures for gag require NOAA Fisheries to close the recreational sector when the annual catch limit is met or projected to be met.
- The gag recreational season opens in federal waters on July 1, 2014, and will remain open until December 3, 2014, unless the annual catch limit is met or projected to be met before that date.

Vermilion Snapper

Recreational landings of vermilion snapper were much higher in 2013 than in previous years? Will there be a recreational closure for vermilion snapper?

- At this time, the vermilion snapper recreational sector is not projected to close in 2014.
- Marine Recreational Information Program landings of vermilion snapper in 2013 were nearly double those reported in 2012.
- Despite this large increase in recreational landings, the combined commercial and recreational annual catch limit for vermilion snapper of 3.42 million pounds was not exceeded. NOAA Fisheries will continue to monitor landings in season and will make adjustments to the closure date, as needed.

- NOAA Fisheries will continue to monitor vermillion snapper landings in-season. If combined commercial and recreational vermillion snapper landings reach or are projected to reach the annual catch limit, then NOAA Fisheries will close the commercial and recreational sectors for the remainder of the year.

About Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council is one of eight regional Fishery Management Councils established by the Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976. The Council prepares fishery management plans, which are designed to manage fishery resources within the 200-mile limit of the Gulf of Mexico.



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