

Florida's Limited Harvest Strategy for Goliath Grouper

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

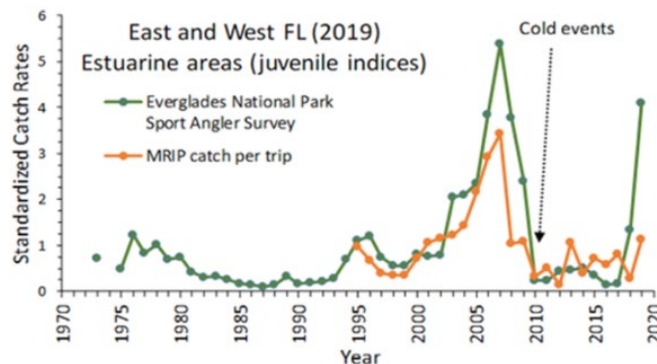
April 2022

The harvest is structured as a limited access fishery (i.e., not open access). Anglers participating in the limited harvest fishery are required to obtain harvest permits and tags

- A maximum of 200 harvest permits and tags are to be awarded via random-draw lottery
 - Lottery application fee: \$10
 - Permit fee (if awarded): \$150 for residents; \$500 for non-residents
 - Permits and tags are non-transferable
 - Limit of one harvest permit and one goliath tag per person per year
 - No exemptions to the requirement to obtain a harvest permit
 - Harvest permits will be required for anglers that are otherwise exempt from the requirement to obtain a recreational saltwater fishing license (e.g., children under 16 years of age, residents 65 years of age or older, etc.).
 - Bag limit: one goliath per person per year (limited entry goliath grouper harvest permit and tag required).
- Includes post-harvest requirements:
 - Anglers must securely attach a valid goliath grouper tag immediately upon harvest.
 - Must report harvest information and submit biological sample. Equipment and instructions for taking and submitting a biological sample will be included in the permit package.

The harvest slot is structured to protect larger, older goliath grouper and not disrupt spawning potential and rebuilding of the population age structure

- While current goliath grouper population trends indicate an increase in numbers, that increase is largely due to increases in juveniles and less due to increases in adult fish (i.e., age composition is still in early rebuilding stages). Therefore, continued recovery and ultimate rebuilding of the stock depends on protecting habitat and mature adults, particularly older, larger fish.



- The size range selected for the harvest slot follows this principle by utilizing an escapement-based management strategy
 - Escapement is the proportion of fish allowed to “escape” the fishery and survive to reach sexual maturity and enter the spawning component of the population.
- Goliath grouper in the 24-36 inches total length harvest slot are typically found in nearshore and inshore habitats, prior to maturing and moving offshore
 - The size range chosen for the harvest slot prevents removals of reproductive adults (goliath grouper > 43 inches) and ensures that older, larger spawners are protected and continue contributing to the rebuilding of stock abundance, biomass, and age structure.
- The harvest slot also minimizes barotrauma concerns for released fish. Harvest is only allowed by hook-and-line, circle hooks are required when using natural bait, and the use of a dehooking device is mandatory.

The harvest season and area are set to protect goliath grouper spawning and prevent harvest of fish from spawning aggregations and from areas known to support heavy dive ecotourism

- Harvest season: March 1 through May 31 each year
 - Goliath grouper spawning season is July-September. Therefore, setting a March-May harvest season further prevents harvest of spawning fish and protects spawning potential.
- Harvest area: all state waters of Florida, excluding state waters of Martin County south through the Atlantic coast of Monroe County and Dry Tortugas National Park.
 - Prohibiting harvest from southeast Florida protects all goliath grouper in areas known to have important spawning aggregations and prevents disruption of dive ecotourism.
 - FWC does not have authority to allow goliath harvest in federal waters. Therefore, larger, older goliath grouper in federal waters are excluded from harvest and protected.