

Proposed Approach for Fulfilling the Council's motions on Recreational Initiative

Council motion from August 2023 Meeting

Motion: To direct Council staff to work with NMFS to develop an outline, estimated schedule, and deliverables for pursuing the recreational initiative for discussion at the October 2023 Council meeting. The proposal should consider a budget for hiring a consultant to facilitate the initiative, proposed activities, a strategy for involving stakeholders, the expected number of meetings, and participants to accomplish identified goals.

Motion carried with no opposition.

Project Description and Purpose

This Recreational Initiative is being considered to engage recreational anglers and associated industry members to review and evaluate past and current management strategies, and explore potential innovative management strategies that could be applied in the future. Lessons and recommendations resulting from this exercise should inform future Council recreational management measures.

Background

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) governs fishing in the federal waters of the United States. The Magnuson-Stevens Act formed the regional fishery management Councils to make regional fishery management recommendations to NOAA Fisheries that aim to balance competing interests using the best scientific information available. The Council process allows for extensive public participation. The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) is responsible for recommending conservation and management measures for fishery resources occurring in the federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico. The Council's recommendations strive to achieve the greatest overall benefit to the nation while preventing overfishing consistent with the ten national standards laid out by the Magnuson-Stevens Act. The management goals and objectives of the Council are to manage for sustainable fishery resources by preventing overfishing through the implementation of annual catch limits and accountability measures, which incorporate management and scientific uncertainty, as mandated by the 2006 reauthorization of Magnuson-Stevens Act and NOAA guidelines. In support of this mission, the Council relies on the best scientific information available to guide management and must operate within the confines of the law. The Council aims to continue to improve upon timely and accurate scientific and monitoring information as resources and with partner state and federal agencies allow.

Since its inception, the Council has recommended management measures for both the recreational and commercial sectors. This process document focuses on the recreational sector, as the Council has numerous other ongoing documents and actions that consider management changes for the commercial fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico. In some cases, there are sector-specific annual catch

limits and separate accountability measures to allow management measures to be tailored to each sector's specific needs. In other cases, both sectors are managed with a shared annual catch limit and separate management measures are used to constrain harvest by each sector to the shared limit. Over time, the recreational sector has grown in both participation and efficacy. Efficacy gains include but are not limited to an increased number of anglers with larger boats and more motors. Additionally, anglers also have access to vastly improved technologies (e.g., radar, GPS, GPS-locking trolling motors, underwater terrain, and object-identifying mapping software in conjunction with chirp sonar depth finders) than was available 10 years ago. This growth, in combination with the use of annual catch limits, has led to shrinking recreational harvest opportunities and decreased satisfaction for the recreational sector. The Gulf of Mexico and the South Atlantic regions have the greatest number of recreational anglers in the nation compared to other regional management councils. Recreational fisherman targeting federally managed species are subject to season, possession, and size limit constraints, and area restrictions as fisheries managers work to constrain recreational harvest to levels that will allow stocks to reproduce to levels consistent with management goals year after year. Often, this results in the Council recommending multiple short-term management modifications or fixes as described above for highly sought-after species. Sometimes, this approach eases or even pleases some fishermen in certain regions for a short period of time but does not allow for the Council to take a holistic approach to resource management or stakeholders that desire a healthy resource for access and utilization. The Council and NOAA Fisheries recognize that there are numerous challenges inherent in the current approaches used to manage the recreational sector. In an effort to improve future recreational management techniques, the Council is committed to developing a recreational fisheries initiative to engage active recreational anglers and associated industry members to review and evaluate past and current management strategies and to explore potential innovative management strategies that could be applied in the future.

During the January 2023 Council meeting, the Council passed the following motion to initiate work on a recreational initiative without opposition. At the April 2023 meeting, the Council amended item seven of the initiative and it is reflected as follows:

Motion: Initiate development of a recreational fisheries management initiative for reef fish in 2023. The goal of this initiative is to evaluate the efficacy of current Federal recreational reef fish management in the Gulf of Mexico and develop future management approaches and guidance intended to prevent overfishing, address discards and/or discard mortality, account for uncertainty in recreational data, and provide for innovative new management approaches to regulate Federally managed recreational fisheries. The initiative would include:

1. Development, review, and revision of goals and objectives for recreational fisheries management;
2. A review of the status of Federally managed species in the Gulf of Mexico that are highly sought after by recreational anglers, including recreational sources of directed and bycatch mortality;
3. A review of recreational management measures, including how management measures have changed over time;

4. Assessment of the performance and efficacy of recreational accountability measures and recommended improvements;
5. Evaluation and consideration of harvest control rules (i.e., pre-agreed guidelines) for setting bag, size, and season limits;
6. Scientific recommendations to the Council for addressing variability and uncertainty in recreational catch estimates, including use of multiple years of data, identification of catch estimates that are the result of low sample sizes or outliers, and statistical recommendations and guidance for how such approaches could be implemented; and,
7. Exploration of innovative new management strategies.

The following is a work plan designed to develop the recreational initiative with the help of a consultant.

Participant Structure

Consultant

Statement of Work – Services Provided by Consultant

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) seeks a highly qualified consultant to plan, conduct, and facilitate meetings with Recreational Working Group members in coordination with a Steering Committee to fulfill the Council’s Recreational Initiative. The Council anticipates the consultant would be hired by spring 2024 and complete work and final reports no later than March 2025.

The consultant will be required to complete the following tasks:

- Provide professional guidance to the Steering Committee on proposed objectives for fulfilling the Council’s recreational initiative in a logical and timely manner.
- Work with the Steering Committee to develop Working Group agendas and expected outcomes for each meeting.
- Provide feedback on the makeup, fishing experience, and regional balance of the proposed Working Group.
- Coordinate monthly meetings with the Steering Committee to provide updates on progress and receive feedback.
- Provide an overview and schedule of the length and type of meetings anticipated throughout the project for Council feedback.
- Attend Council meetings to present proposed meetings and scope of work for Council review. Adjust scope and incorporate Council feedback as appropriate.
- Facilitate Working Group meetings to guide participants through the agenda to anticipated outcomes.
- Coordinate and secure appropriate experts (e.g., NOAA Fisheries, Council staff, Gulf state staff, Steering Committee members, and other Working Group Members) to make necessary presentations for Working Group meetings.

- Document and synthesize key outcomes and prepare a summary report from the Working Group meetings for Steering Committee feedback.
- Refine outcomes and provide draft updates to the Council.
- After Council feedback, adjust agendas and objectives for future Working Group meetings as necessary with feedback from the Steering Committee.
- Present the final outcomes of the entire effort to the Council.
- Develop and provide recommendations on a stakeholder engagement strategy throughout the process and at the end of the process for the Council’s consideration of next steps.

Desired Experience and Demonstrated Skills

1. Familiarity with the U.S. Federal fisheries management system, including a basic understanding of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and other Applicable Laws.
2. General understanding of recreational fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico.
3. Ability to work independently to develop materials and meeting agendas.
4. Strong written and verbal skills. Demonstrated ability to synthesize and summarize complex issues and meeting deliberations into clear outcomes and compartmentalize into next steps.
5. Demonstrated experience facilitating meetings.
6. Demonstrated ability to summarize conflicting information in an objective manner.
7. The successful candidate will not have a conflict of interest, defined as any financial or other interest which conflicts with actions or judgments and could impair objectivity and/or create a competitive advantage for individuals or relevant organizations.

Steering Committee

Purpose:

The Steering Committee is a core group of individuals that will work closely with the consultant to direct work on the recreational initiative through the Working Group and through coordination with Council and agency staff. The consultant, with direction from the Council and Steering Committee, will refine the objectives and develop agendas for each Working Group meeting; define the engagement process between the Council and the Working Group; review and refine Working Group products and deliverables that the consultant develops; and identify and plan Council review and feedback for the Working Group meeting outcomes. The Steering Committee will also work with the consultant to identify and develop a timeline for staff to produce appropriate background materials to support the initiative and help coordinate work from partner agencies.

Proposed Makeup of the Steering Committee:

The Steering Committee should be comprised of no more than six members appointed by the Council. The members could be comprised of two NOAA Fisheries staff (e.g., Southeast Recreational Fishing Coordinator or National Recreational Fisheries Policy Coordinator and the Regional Administrator or Assistant Regional Administrator for Sustainable Fisheries); a Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission staff member; and two Council members that represent the recreational sector; and the Council Executive Director. The Executive Director would coordinate with the consultant and Steering Committee to monitor the consultant’s progress throughout this

process. Various staff members from the Council, Southeast Regional Office, and Southeast Fisheries Science Center would engage in the project to make it a success.

Scope of Work:

- Select consultant
- Develop Working Group agendas and objectives in coordination with the consultant
- Guide the consultant in breadth, depth, priorities, and timeline for collation of the background materials needed for (Recreational Initiative items 1, 2, 3, 4, and 7).

The initiative would include:

- Development, review, and revision of goals and objectives for recreational fisheries management;
 - A review of the status of Federally managed species in the Gulf of Mexico that are highly sought after by recreational anglers, including recreational sources of directed and bycatch mortality;
 - A review of recreational management measures, including how management measures have changed over time;
 - Assessment of the performance and efficacy of recreational accountability measures and recommended improvements;
 - Exploration of innovative new management strategies.
- Review and synthesize Working Group outputs
 - Determine when outcomes and deliverables are ready for Council review
 - Work with the consultant and Working Group to develop a stakeholder engagement strategy
 - Work with the consultant to coordinate work on Recreational Initiatives 5 and 6 with the appropriate Council and agency staff to outline the breadth, depth, and timing for collation of the background materials. Work may include forming an Interdisciplinary Planning Team (IPT) or Technical Working Group (TWG) that can provide recommendations and advice regarding Recreational Initiatives 5 and 6. Work by the IPT or TWG could occur simultaneously with the work of the Steering Committee and Working Group, and inform Working Group efforts later in the process.
 - Evaluation and consideration of harvest control rules (i.e., pre-agreed guidelines) for setting bag, size, and season limits;
 - Scientific recommendations to the Council for addressing variability and uncertainty in recreational catch estimates, including the use of multiple years of data, identification of catch estimates that are the result of low sample sizes or outliers, and statistical recommendations and guidance for how such approaches could be implemented.

Schedule of Work/Anticipated Meetings:

1. Monthly virtual planning meetings to obtain updates from the consultant and provide feedback.
2. Steering Committee members are expected to attend Working Group meetings. During Working Group meetings, Steering Committee members are expected to observe and provide guidance and insight during facilitated discussions toward meeting outcomes.
3. Work with the consultant to identify and develop a timeline for the appropriate staff to develop background materials to support and inform the parts of the initiative planned for

each meeting as well as coordinate work from partner agencies or divisions as needed.

Working Group

Purpose:

The Working Group is a group of knowledgeable individuals with recreational fishing interests who will review current and historical management successes and failures; and advise the Council on potential novel management measures that should be explored with the aim of improving the recreational and overall fisheries management structure in the Gulf of Mexico. The working group would focus on the exploration of ideas rather than reacting to proposed regulatory decisions from the Council. The goal would be for the working group to strive for consensus-based recommendations, and inform the Council of the benefits and drawbacks of various management approaches. Members will participate in meetings and provide recommendations for consideration by the Council.

Proposed Makeup of the Working Group:

Comprised of 12-16 members appointed by the Council through an open application process. Membership should reflect the diversity of interests, geographic range, and experience in the reef fish fisheries the Council manages. The working group aims to represent private anglers, for-hire captains, tackle shop owners/manufacturers, divers, and associated industry advisors/participants.

Scope of Work:

1. Attend Working Group meetings
2. Review background materials and be prepared for meetings.
3. Provide guidance and feedback to the Council and Steering Committee at three meetings.
4. Provides recommendations on the proposed stakeholder engagement strategy drafted by the consultant with input from the Steering Committee.

Schedule of Work/Anticipated Meetings:

The Working Group is expected to meet a minimum of three times. Each meeting will have an agenda prepared by the consultant with input from the Steering Committee. The anticipated length of each meeting is 1.5 to 3 days.

Proposed Schedule

Year	Month	Anticipated Activities
2023	October	Council reviews process document and provides staff direction
2024	January	Council appoints Steering Committee
	February	Steering Committee selects consultant
	March	Contract is finalized with consultant
	April - May	Planning meetings with consultant and Steering Committee
	June	Present Draft Agendas and Proposed meeting structure to the Steering Committee. Updates provided to the Council and feedback considered
	July	Solicit Working Group members/Perform fishing violations background checks on applicants, if Council requests.
	August	Council appoints Working Group members; Steering Committee and Consultant develop agenda and background materials for first Working Group Meeting
	September	Host Working Group Meeting #1
	October	Council discusses outcomes and future direction for next Working Group Meeting
	November	Host Working Group Meeting #2
	December	
2025	January	Council discusses outcomes and future direction for next Working Group Meeting
	February	Host Final Working Group Meeting #3 and Wrap-up project
	March	Consultant writes report and completes final edits with Steering Committee
	April	Consultant presents final report to Council

Draft Budget

Anticipated Project Costs: These costs are projected at the maximum expected rates. The composition of the final working group membership could impact projected travel costs as well as holding one meeting in a central Gulf of Mexico state instead of the Council office. The total cost also includes the cost of a consultant to facilitate the process.

Total estimated costs to fulfill this project = \$204,284

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Projected Meeting Costs Breakdown:

Steering Committee Meetings: Monthly virtual meetings with the consultant are projected to occur; thus, no travel or meeting space estimates were considered. Council members that are appointed and eligible for a salary on the Steering Committee would be budgeted for based on the Council’s makeup of the committee.

Working Group Meetings: Two in-person meetings are planned to be held in the Council office in Tampa, Florida. One meeting in a more central location has been budgeted for below. The

Steering Committee is currently proposed to meet when the Working Group is convened and anticipated travel costs are budgeted to include two Council representatives, one consultant, twenty working group members, and four technical and administrative Council staff members. Cost projections are based on historical travel costs for similar meetings at federal per diem rates and meeting room costs.

The tables below detail these projections for each meeting including travel and stipends for Council representatives based anticipated makeup of the Steering Committee and Working Group as well as travel for staff members for one meeting proposed in the central Gulf.

Anticipated Working Group meeting and travel costs = \$99,709.

Travel for Consultant to Council meetings: Anticipated trips for a consultant to present and meet with the Council at three meetings. **Travel costs = \$4,575.** Anticipated flat rate fee for experienced consultant is budgeted at a maximum of **\$100,000.**

Working Group - Local	No. of	Salary/Stipend		Airfare/ Mileage		Lodging		Per Diem		Meeting Room		Totals
	Days	No.	Cost	Average	No.	Cost	No.	Cost	No.	Cost		
	3		541		600		145		69		350	
Council Members		2	3243	2	1200	2	870	2	552			\$5,865
Staff- lunch only								4	204			\$204
Working Group Members				16	9600	16	6960	16	4416			\$20,976
Consultant				1	600	1	435	1	276			\$1,311
Meeting Room Costs										1	1050	\$1,050
												\$29,406
												\$58,813
Working Group - Gulf Region	No. of	Salary/Stipend		Airfare/ Mileage		Lodging		Per Diem		Meeting Room		Totals
	Days	No.	Cost	Average	No.	Cost	No.	Cost	No.	Cost		
	3		541		600		145		69		2500	
Council Members		2	3243	2	1200	2	870	2	552			\$5,865
Staff- lunch only				4	2400	4	1740	4	1104			\$5,244
Working Group Members				16	9600	16	6960	16	4416			\$20,976
Consultant				1	600	1	435	1	276			\$1,311
Meeting Room Costs										1	7500	\$7,500
												\$40,896
												\$40,896
Consultant Council Travel	No. of	Salary/Stipend		Airfare/ Mileage		Lodging		Per Diem		Meeting Room		Totals
	Days	No.	Cost	Average	No.	Cost	No.	Cost	No.	Cost		
	4				600		145		69			
Consultant				1	600	1	580	1	345			\$1,525
												\$1,525
												\$4,575