

Gulf Fishery News

A publication of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council



Fall 2019
Volume 41, Number 4

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Fishery Management
Council

*Protecting our marine
resources*

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Gulf Council Hosts Release Mortality Symposium

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) recently hosted a Release Mortality Symposium with the goal of reducing discard mortality from recreational fishing efforts. The objective of the meeting was to create an action plan for the recreational fishery to promote the use of barotrauma mitigation tools, enhance data collection efforts, and incorporate the results into stock assessments and management. Reducing discard mortality could allow for increased harvest and would address numerous National Standards of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act).



Photo: Angela Collins, FWC

During the Symposium, the discussion focused on the reduction of release mortality as a whole. Private, charter, and head-boat groups uniformly recommended that anglers should retain flexibility to choose the best release mortality mitigation measures for their circumstances and asked for best practice recommendations to guide angler choice.

Symposium participants recommended that current monitoring programs that collect data relevant to discards and discard mortality should ask for consistent information on discards including the number, species, mitigation technique used, condition upon release, and depth of capture. Additionally, current gaps in discard data were identified and prioritized. Finally, achieving consistent messaging to anglers was recommended.



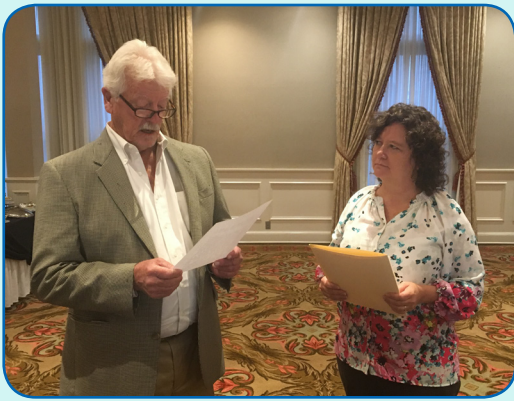
Photo: Angela Collins, FWC

The Outreach and Education Technical Committee recommended that the Gulf Council remain the point agency for communicating the best practices on handling and release of reef fish in the Gulf. The "[Fishing for Our Future](#)" website (see page 3) will be periodically updated with new research, recommendations, and best practices messaging. In the future, it was recommended that this website be branded as its own organization and enhanced with the addition of content that could be used by influencers.

The full Symposium report can be found [here](#). The Council wrote a letter to the Open Ocean Restoration Trustee Implementation Group requesting that they consider the outcomes of this Symposium as they initiate work on their Post-Release Mortality Reduction project in the Gulf.



Welcome to New Council Member, Mr. Troy Williamson



Troy Williamson is sworn in as a member of the Gulf Council by Sue Gerhart, NOAA Fisheries.
Photo: Emily Muehlstein

Troy Williamson developed a deep appreciation for fishing at a young age. His love of the sport is rooted in a memory of his grandma. She would take him down to the creek that ran along the edge of the Williamson cotton farm and sit, reading with an umbrella to shading her from the Texas sun, while he fished. He says that he can't remember catching any fish at all; it was simply an experience he shared with her.

Troy's passion for the outdoors grew along with him. He initially wanted to be a fisheries biologist, and worked for a summer at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Marine Lab in Rockport. Then, he earned a Bachelor's Degree in biology and chemistry. Eventually, Troy earned a Doctorate of Jurisprudence degree.

While his path led him away from the natural sciences and into a career as a civil trial lawyer, Troy always remained interested in fisheries.

He found an outlet for his passion in advocacy with the Coastal Conservation Association (CCA). His involvement with CCA opened new doors and he is now completing his third term as a Commissioner on the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission. He also sits on the Executive Committee of the Center for Sportfish Science and Conservation, Harte Research Institute at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi. Troy has also served on numerous Advisory Panels for the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council. Also, he still raises cotton and wheat on the Williamson farm.

Mr. Williamson answered the following questions to provide some insight on his perspective of the Gulf fishery:

What do you hope to bring to the Council?

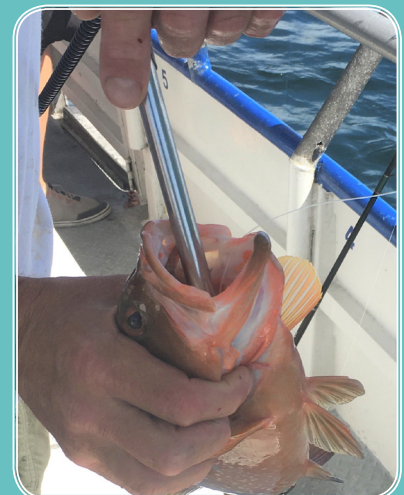
I plan to focus on what is good for the fishery and the fishermen. I have my own experience and perspective. I hope to make decisions that benefit everyone.

What aspect of the fishery is the most important to you?

For me, the most interesting part of the fishery that relates to humans and how fisheries and management impact the economy and community. Rebuilding of the fish populations is a success story and now, we need to shift our focus towards successfully managing fishermen.

Do you have a favorite fishing moment or story to tell?

Generally, I enjoy every opportunity I have to fish, especially fly-fishing. I learned at an early age that sport fishing is about the experience, not the catching. Being on the water with family and friends makes every trip a "favorite."



New Addition to Our Website - Fishing for Our Future

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council has launched a new addition to its website called [Fishing for Our Future](#). This new site is designed to educate stakeholders about release mortality and promote best fishing practices to reduce the likelihood that fish will die upon release.



Capt. Dylan Hubbard
Photo: Angela Collins, FWC

The site features a “discard dashboard” that displays information on the magnitude of discard mortality in the Gulf of Mexico. Users can access data on different species, time series, and modes of fishing. The dashboard, which currently houses information on red snapper, gag, and greater amberjack will be updated and expanded as new data become available.

The new site makes best fishing practice recommendations and curates outreach materials developed by organizations across the region. It also houses a comprehensive list of research relevant to discard mortality in the Gulf.

“Fishing for Our Future is a significant step towards facilitating a cultural change in our offshore fishery to decrease discard mortality,” said Captain Dylan Hubbard, Chairman of the Gulf Council’s Outreach and Education Technical Committee. “Hopefully, increasing awareness and encouraging anglers to get fish back into the water quickly, and back to the bottom safely, will give us more access to fish.”



Photo: FWC



Photo: FWC

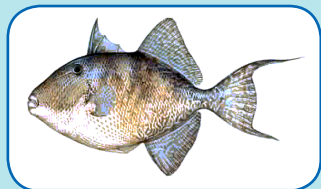
The new Fishing for Our Future website will be updated and improved regularly. We encourage you to visit the site at: <http://gulfcouncil.org/fishing-for-our-future/>

Please contact us at gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org if you have questions or feedback.

Recent Regulatory Closures

In accordance with regulations, NOAA Fisheries is required to close a fishery when the quota has been met or is projected to be met.

- **Commercial harvest of king mackerel in federal waters of the Western Zone closed at 12:00 pm, central time, on November 21, 2019.**
- Commercial harvest will reopen at 12:01 am, central time, July 1, 2020



- **Commercial harvest of gray triggerfish in federal waters closed at 12:01 a.m. (local time) on November 26, 2019.**
- Commercial harvest will reopen at 12:01 a.m. (local time) on January 1, 2020.



Visit [NOAA Fisheries' Rules & Regulations web page](#) to learn more about recently proposed and finalized regulations in the Gulf of Mexico and Southeast regions.



Summer 2019 Fishing in the Gulf!



Photos: Dylan Hubbard and Emily Muehlstein

Gulf Council Launches Redesigned Coral Portal Website to Enhance Understanding of Corals, Habitats, and Related Species

The Gulf Council has reinvented its Coral Portal website. The newly designed site features improved visuals with the following resources:

- Interactive maps displaying locations of corals, habitats, and fishery management areas in the Gulf of Mexico
- Tools used to support fisheries management decisions
- Educational resources designed to enhance your understanding of corals, habitats, and fish species that depend on them
- Downloadable supporting files, metadata, and related publications.

Development of the site is funded by the NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program. This project aims to share environmental information associated with corals and fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico with stakeholders across the Gulf that engage in business, recreation, and research.

Visit the site at: <http://portal.gulfcouncil.org/>

Contents will be added regularly to the Coral Portal. We encourage you to contact us at portal@gulfcouncil.org if you have any questions, comments, or suggestions.



In The News

NOAA Fisheries Recommends Source of Recreational Catch Statistics for Assessing Gulf Reef Fish Stocks

In August 2019, the [Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review](#) (SEDAR) Steering Committee discussed a region-specific [white paper](#) (PDF, 31 pages) that documents NOAA Fisheries' recommended path forward regarding the most appropriate source of marine recreational catch statistics for the upcoming assessment of gray triggerfish, vermilion snapper, and other Gulf of Mexico reef fish stocks.

Currently, seven surveys are available to estimate recreational catch in the Gulf of Mexico: three [general surveys](#) that monitor catch of all finfish species encountered, and four [specialized, state-specific surveys](#) that monitor catch of certain species by anglers fishing in certain modes. Because some of these surveys have produced different catch estimates, questions have been raised about how the data they collect should be used in fisheries science.

The accurate assessment of stocks requires catch estimates that can be compared across the historical time series. NOAA Fisheries' recommended path forward is the only option currently capable of producing such statistics, and involves converting estimates derived from state-specific surveys into the "common currency" of the Marine Recreational Information Program's (MRIP's) general survey designs. While we are working to develop methods that will allow us to calibrate "common currency" estimates against state-specific surveys and to integrate state surveys to produce one set of statistics for the shared species they cover, these methods are not expected to be peer-reviewed until 2020 or later.

NOAA Fisheries has participated in a series of workshops with state and regional partners to explore differences in the catch estimates produced by different surveys. While it's reasonable to expect different surveys to produce different estimates—even when these surveys are conducted side-by-side—learning more about the factors that influence these differences will help improve sampling and estimation methods across the region.

Source: NOAA Fisheries Newscast, August 2019

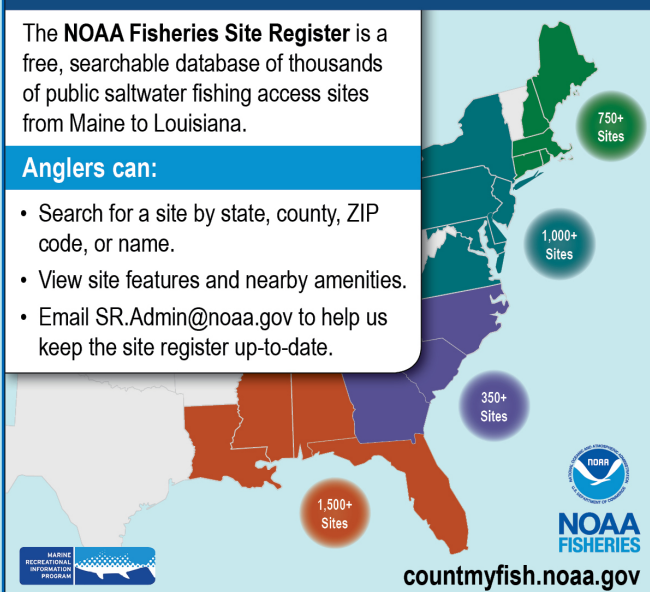
Marine Resource Information Program (MRIP) Offers Information on NOAA Fisheries Site Register

Did You Know?

The **NOAA Fisheries Site Register** is a free, searchable database of thousands of public saltwater fishing access sites from Maine to Louisiana.

Anglers can:

- Search for a site by state, county, ZIP code, or name.
- View site features and nearby amenities.
- Email SR.Admin@noaa.gov to help us keep the site register up-to-date.



The [Marine Recreational Information Program](#) (MRIP) is a state-regional-federal partnership that develops, improves, and implements a network of surveys to measure total recreational fishing catch.

MRIP would like to make anglers more aware of the [NOAA Fisheries Site Register](#), a searchable database of thousands of public saltwater fishing access sites. Gulf coast anglers looking for a new place to fish can find more than 1,500 public saltwater fishing access sites from Florida to Louisiana through the Site Register. Click "Guest Login" to use this online database — which lists thousands of sites along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts — to find fishing locations and nearby amenities, including restaurants and tackle shops.

Because the Register helps NOAA Fisheries determine where field samplers will conduct the shoreside intercept surveys that are an important part of estimating recreational catch, it is updated regularly with input from samplers, field supervisors, state fisheries staff, and anglers. If you find missing, incomplete, or inaccurate information, e-mail SR.Admin@noaa.gov. To learn more about how the recreational fishing data that support the cycle of science and management are collected and used, visit [countmyfish.noaa.gov](#).

Source: MRIP



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Upcoming Meetings

Council Meeting

When:	Where:
January 27, 2020, 8:30 am, CST, through January 30, 2020, 4:00 pm, CST	Hyatt Centric French Quarter 800 Iberville Street New Orleans, LA 70112 Register for the Webinar

Standing, Coral, Reef Fish, and Socioeconomic SSC Meeting

When:	Where:
January 9, 2020, 9:00 am-4:00 pm, EST	Gulf Council Office 4107 W. Spruce Street, Ste. 200 Tampa, FL 33607 Register for the Webinar



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, 4107 W. Spruce Street, Suite 200, 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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