

Gulf Fishery News

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Council

*Protecting our marine
resources*

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Recreational Data Collection

Data collected from recreational anglers plays an important role in determining the health of fish stocks. Harvest, especially as it relates to fishing effort, can help fisheries scientists identify trends in fish populations over time. These fisheries-dependent data are also used to predict future fishing behavior as fishing seasons are set based on past trends in fishing activity. Finally, these data are used to monitor harvest during a fishing year, which is particularly important for species that are managed with a quota. In-season monitoring of fishing activity prevents overfishing because a season can be closed when a quota is met.



Photo: NOAA

The recreational fishing sector includes both private fishermen and fisherman on for-hire trips. The Council and NOAA Fisheries are currently working to implement new electronic reporting requirements for all federally permitted for-hire vessels in the Gulf. By the end of 2019, all for-hire vessels will need to be equipped with hardware that, at minimum, archives vessel location once per hour. Federal for-hire operators will also

be required to hail-out each time their vessel leaves the dock and submit an electronic fishing report for each trip prior to offloading fish. These new data collection requirements are expected to vastly improve our understanding of the catch and effort from anglers for-hire fishing trips.

Unfortunately, the collection of private recreational fishing data is more complicated. The universe of recreational fishermen and their fishing effort is hard to define, and directly tracking the activity and harvest of such a large, diverse population is not practical.

Why is it hard to figure out how much recreational fishing there is?

Many people assume that private recreational fishing effort can be quantified by simply counting fishing licenses. Unfortunately, it's more complicated than that. For starters, not all fishermen are required to be licensed; in many states, you don't need a license if you're over 60 or under 16. Also, licenses don't distinguish between fishermen targeting federal species and fishermen targeting state managed species. Finally, some fishermen fish frequently and some fish only on rare occasions; the actual fishing effort of different anglers cannot be estimated based on possession of a license.

There is a surprisingly simple way to determine what the private recreational sector is catching on average: Fishing Effort x Catch = Harvest. For years, the federal Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) was used to collect information on the average effort and average catch of anglers across all coasts of the United States. Since it's not practical to ask every private recreational angler what they've caught each time they go fishing, fisheries scientists use a sample of the entire population of anglers to estimate the activity of the entire fishery. Fishing effort is determined using mail surveys, and average catch is determined by sampling angler catch as a fishing trip is completed.

...continued on next page



Recreational Data Collection cont.

However, this recreational data collection system has been criticized because it relies on a sample to determine the behavior of the entire population.

At this point, there is no practical way to get information about the activity of every single private recreational fisherman. In recent years however, each of the Gulf states have developed their own data collection programs to enhance our understanding of recreational harvest. In fact, Louisiana's program has replaced MRIP in its state and the other state programs supplement the current MRIP data. Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida have all been certified by MRIP for at least some species. This means the data they collect are useful for management. Texas has always collected and reported its own recreational data and continues to do so. The following is an overview of the different private angler data collection programs used in the Gulf:

Texas Parks and Wildlife Creel Survey

TPWD produces harvest estimates for all salt water species through a combination of trip-end interviews and roving counts of empty boat trailers and wet slips at boat-access sites. The program conducts over 13,200 interviews and 120 roving counts per year.



Louisiana LA Creel



LWDF produces weekly harvest estimates of all saltwater species based on interviews at public fishing access points coupled with phone and email surveys. Each week, the department completes 31 access point assignments and surveys 1,200 inshore anglers and 400 offshore anglers.

Mississippi Tails and Scales

MDMR collects red snapper specific catch and effort data using a mandatory electronic reporting system validated by dockside intercepts. This system creates a near real-time estimate of harvest that is reported to NOAA Fisheries on a bi-weekly basis. One angler per vessel trip is required to hail-out and declare when they will be fishing for red snapper and where they'll be launching. This generates an authorization code that allows them to retain red snapper. Upon completion of the trip, anglers must report their red snapper to 'close' the trip. Anglers are not authorized for a new trip until their last trip report is finalized.



Alabama Snapper Check



Alabama Marine Resource Division requires the captain/owner of recreational or charter vessels to report harvest of red snapper before landing. Reports can be submitted via online web page, smart phone application, standard touch tone telephone, or by written forms placed in drop boxes provided at certain boating access locations. Alabama Marine Resources Division staff visit coastal marinas and boat launches to validate reports by interviewing anglers with red snapper catches.

Florida Gulf Reef Fish Survey

FWC requires anglers targeting reef fish species in the Gulf to sign up for the Gulf Reef Fish Survey. FWC then uses the database of Gulf reef fishermen to conduct a mail survey to estimate fishing effort on a monthly basis. FWC also uses dockside interviews to determine the number and type of fish landed and released, and also to collect information on size, weight, and age of fish harvested.



The Council, NOAA Fisheries, and each Gulf State continue to work to find new, innovative ways to improve the accuracy of private recreational angler data. Self-reported angler information, offshore fishing permits, electronic logbooks, and many other methods are being considered as ways to enhance our recreational data collection. Improved fishery-dependent data will contribute to more accurate stock assessments and allow for more precise quota monitoring.

April 2019 Council Meeting Update

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council met April 1- 4 in Biloxi, Mississippi. The following is a brief overview of what was accomplished:

State Management of Private Recreational Red Snapper

The Council took final action on Reef Fish Amendment 50: State Management for Recreational Red Snapper. The Council chose to delegate management authority of the private angling component for recreational red snapper fishing to each state. Each state will be allocated the portion of the recreational quota it initially requested in the 2018-2019 exempted fishing permit application, with the remaining 3.78% distributed between Florida and Alabama. Those values are as follows:

Alabama	Florida	Louisiana	Mississippi	Texas
26.298%	44.822%	19.120%	3.550%	6.210%

The Council also elected to delegate authority for establishing or modifying the bag limit, minimum size limit within 14-18 inches total length, and maximum size limit. Finally, the Council selected to allow a state to close areas of federal waters adjacent to the state by requesting that NMFS implement the closure. These suggested management changes will be transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for approval and implementation.

Red Grouper

The Council took final action to modify the red grouper annual catch limits and annual catch targets. The Council chose to set the red grouper annual catch limits and annual catch targets based on landings from the 2017 fishing season as follows:

Year	Total ACL	Commercial ACL	Commercial ACT	Recreational ACL	Recreational ACT
2019+	4,150,000	3,160,000	3,000,000	1,000,000	920,000

*Values expressed in pounds, gutted weight.

Last fall, the Council was presented with results from an interim analysis that could be used to provide harvest recommendations for red grouper while awaiting the results of the stock assessment that is currently underway. Landings in recent years have been significantly below the annual catch limits, indicating that the stock may not be large enough to sustain current harvest levels.

NOAA Fisheries is currently working to implement the emergency rule, and has withheld a portion of commercial quota equal to the proposed reduction to the commercial ACL in anticipation of the reduced catch levels. This framework amendment will continue catch limit reductions beyond the expiration of the emergency rule and in anticipation of stock assessment results that will inform longer-term management decisions. This document will be transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for approval and implementation.



Photo: Dylan Hubbard

Shrimp

After hearing a summary of public comments, the Council took final action on Shrimp Amendment 18, which considers increasing the amount of shrimp effort allowed in the special area that is monitored for juvenile red snapper bycatch. The Council decided to reduce the allowable shrimp effort to 60% below the baseline years and revise the framework procedure to allow future changes to shrimp effort thresholds to be accomplished through the standard open framework documentation process. The amendment will be transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for approval and implementation.

The Council heard the updated stock assessments for pink, brown, and white shrimp. None of the stocks are considered to be overfished nor experiencing overfishing.

The Council approved the annual Texas shrimp closure for 2019. The closure is part of a cooperative seasonal closure with the State of Texas and runs concurrent with its mid-season closure. The shrimp fishery is closed annually off Texas to allow shrimp to reach a larger and more valuable size prior to harvest.



April 2019 Council Meeting Update cont.

Historical Captain Permits

Council took final action to allow people with historical captain permits the option to replace them with standard for-hire permits. Each newly issued for-hire permit will have the same permit capacity as the historical captain permit it would replace. Only valid historical captain permits as of October 25, 2018 (last day of the October Council meeting) would be eligible for replacement with standard permits. Outstanding letters of eligibility will be invalid as of the implementation date of this action. These suggested management changes will be transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for approval and implementation. NOAA Fisheries will contact historical captain permit holders and notify them of their eligibility for a standard for-hire permit.

Carryover of Unharvested Quota

The Council heard a summary of comments on a draft amendment that considers carrying over uncaught quota from one year to the next when harvest has not reached the annual catch limit. The Council delayed final action and requested further analysis on how species, and specifically those in rebuilding plans, would be affected by instances of carryover and overharvest. The Southeast Fisheries Science Center will produce simulations to show these effects, which will be reviewed by the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee at the earliest available opportunity.

Modifications to the Individual Fishing Quota Programs

The Council reviewed draft actions for Amendment 36B, which considers modifying the commercial individual fishing quota programs. The proposed actions include requiring shareholders to have a federal permit, distributing shares that have been reclaimed by NMFS, establishing a quota bank, and requiring accuracy in the weight estimates provided in advance landing notifications. The Council requested that the Chair of the Law Enforcement Technical Committee attend the next Council meeting to discuss law enforcement's concerns regarding estimated weights in advance landing notifications. The Council also specified that the program goal to address issues with derby fishing has been achieved.

Greater Amberjack Commercial Trip Limits

The Council reviewed a draft Framework Action that considers reducing the commercial greater amberjack trip limit. In recent years, the commercial sector has regularly exceeded its quota and as a result, the season has closed prematurely year after year. The Council selected a preferred alternative that would reduce the commercial trip limit from 1,500 pounds gutted weight to 500 pounds gutted weight. The Council also decided to add an alternative that would decrease the trip limit to 250 pounds once 75% of the annual catch target is projected to be harvested. The Council will solicit public comments before taking final action on this amendment at its next meeting in June.

Allocation Review Triggers

In response to NOAA Fisheries Fishery Allocation Review Policy, the Council finalized a letter outlining criteria that would trigger allocation reviews in the Gulf of Mexico. Time-based triggers would serve as the primary triggers, and public interest-based triggers identified through the Council's public comment process would serve as secondary triggers. The Council also directed staff to convene a working group that would assist in developing the methods and procedures for allocation reviews.

Red Snapper Reallocation

The Council reviewed an amendment that considers reallocating the red snapper annual catch limit between commercial and recreational fishing sectors. The Council decided to postpone further action on this document until August 2019 in hopes that by then, the Modern Fish Act and revised MRIP recreational landings will provide further insight on how to move forward with reallocation.



Photo: NOAA, GP Schmal

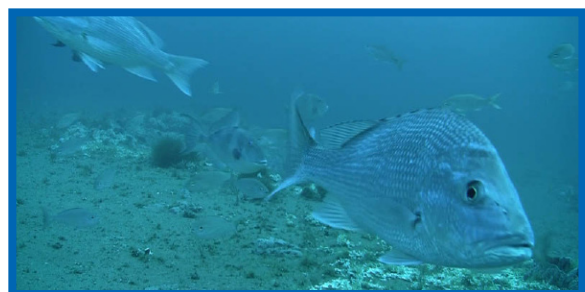


Photo: NOAA, Teacher at Sea

April 2019 Council Meeting Update cont.

Modifications to the Red Snapper ACT

The Council directed staff to begin work on a document that would consider reducing the buffer between the red snapper annual catch limit and annual catch target for the for-hire component of the recreational sector. In a previous amendment, the Council reduced the buffer between the annual catch limit and annual catch target from 20% to 9% for the 2019 fishing year. This document would consider modifying the buffer on a more permanent basis. The Council will be presented with a draft document at its next meeting in June.

Golden Crab Exempted Fishing Permit

The Council reviewed and Exempted Fishing Permit that would explore the viability of a golden crab fishery in an area of the Gulf of Mexico adjacent to the West Florida wall. After reviewing known coral areas, shrimping, and long-lining activity, the Council recommended that NOAA Fisheries approve the Exempted Fishing Permit.

Gulf Council Chair Named Florida's Chief Science Officer



Congratulations to Gulf Council Chair, Dr. Tom Frazer, on being named the first Chief Science Officer of Florida by Governor Ron DeSantis on April 1, 2019! In January of this year, Governor DeSantis announced major water policy reforms for the state of Florida. One of these initiatives called for the appointment of a Chief Science Officer to coordinate and prioritize scientific data, research, monitoring, and analysis needs to address major environmental concerns in the state.

"I am incredibly honored by this appointment and I thank Governor DeSantis for naming me Florida's first Chief Science Officer," said Dr. Frazer. "Our environment and waterways make Florida unique. I look forward to working with the Governor and the Department of Environmental Protection on ways we can use sound science and research to improve our state's water quality and protect the environment."

Dr. Frazer is Professor and Director of the School of Natural Resources and Environment at the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Prior to this position, he served as Associate Director of the School of Forest Resources and Conservation and the Leader of the Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences Program.

In February 2019, Dr. Frazer participated as a panel witness at the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee's Environment Subcommittee oversight hearing titled "Sea Change: Impacts of Climate Change on Our Oceans and Coasts." Dr. Frazer provided a witness statement to the committee regarding the science of climate change and suggestions for addressing transformation change. Information about the Committee hearing can be accessed at <https://tinyurl.com/y6hj6bmw>

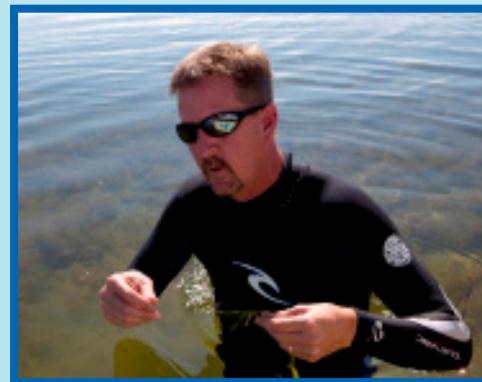


Photo: FL SeaGrant

You can read more about Dr. Frazer's state appointment on the Florida Governor's website at <https://tinyurl.com/y2ok42xt>



Federal Fishing Regulations are available on the FishRules App

 Apple App Store

 Google Play Store

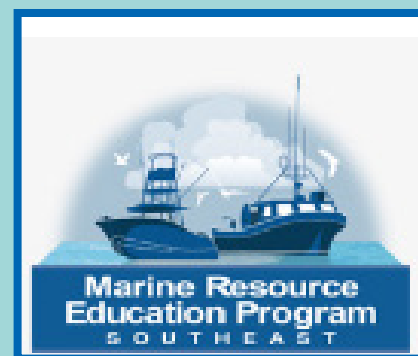


MREP Southeast to Hold Fisheries Science Workshops

The Marine Resource Education Program (MREP) Southeast was created by Fishermen for Fishermen. It runs through the fishery science and management process, demystifies the acronyms and vocabulary, and equips fishermen with tools to engage with tough issues facing the managers of our Fishery. In a neutral setting, fishermen work through the process, meet the people behind the agency jobs, and share important feedback from the fishing community.

The program is offered as a series of workshops that build upon each other: a three-day Fishery Science Workshop followed by a three-day Fishery Management Workshop. The 2019 Fisheries Science Workshop will be held in St. Petersburg, FL on May 7-9, and the Fishery Management Workshop will be held in Tampa, FL, on November 19-21.

More information and to sign up for the workshops go to <https://gmri.org/our-work/fisheries-convening/mrep-southeast/apply>



Gulf Council Asks for Information on Gray Triggerfish



Photo: Troy Frady

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council would like to gain a better understanding of gray triggerfish in the Gulf of Mexico. It is seeking information from anglers and divers about trends or "strange things" that scientists and managers may need to know.

A scientific stock assessment of gray triggerfish is scheduled to begin soon, and the Council would like to know if you have noticed anything "fishy" about gray triggerfish, or gray triggerfish fishing, in recent years. The information provided will help inform scientists and managers as they formulate a current understanding of the gray triggerfish stock.

Please visit our ["Something's Fishy with Gray Triggerfish"](#) questionnaire before May 10th, to report anything you've noticed about gray triggerfish in the Gulf of Mexico.

In The News

NOAA Fisheries Habitat Science Projects Story Map

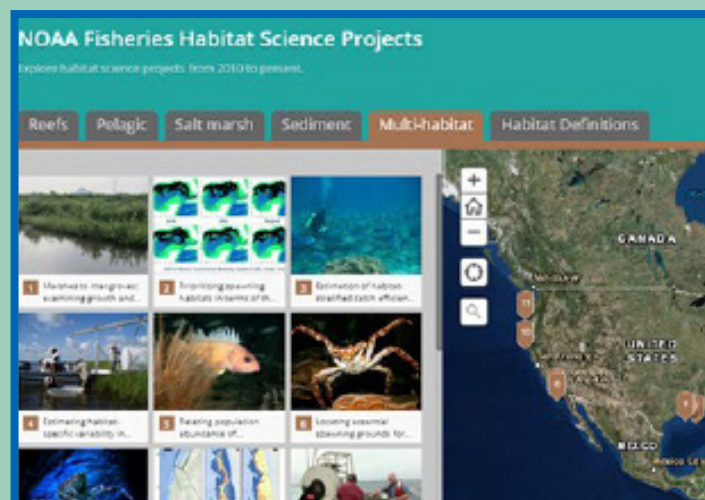
Find out what NOAA Fisheries is doing to better understand the role habitats plays in our nation's fishery species in a storymap. U.S. fisheries generate over \$200 billion in sales impacts annually.

Healthy habitats provide the foundation for these economically vital fisheries as well as a diverse array of marine life that live along our coasts. Habitats provide all the necessities for fishery and marine species to survive and thrive.

There are four projects currently ongoing in the Gulf of Mexico.

- Marshes to mangroves: examining growth and patterns of habitat use by penaeid shrimp in a changing marsh landscape to inform stock assessments
- Prioritizing spawning habitats in terms of their relative contribution to recruitment success
- Estimation of habitat-stratified catch efficiency of fishery-independent reef fish survey methodologies to improve estimates of stock size
- Estimating habitat-specific variability in growth rates of juvenile penaeid shrimps for incorporation into stock assessment models

Check them out [here](#).



Source: NOAA Habitat News, April 2019



Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

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Deidre Warner-Kramer Designee for David Hogan OES/OMC 202-647-2335	Dave Donaldson GSMFC 228-875-5912

Upcoming Meetings

Reef Fish Advisory Panel

When:	Where:
Thursday, May 9, 2019, 10:00 am - 12:00 pm, EST	Webinar- Register here

Standing Reef Fish, Mackerel, and Socioeconomic SSC

When:	Where:
Thursday, May 9, 2019, 2:00 pm- 5:00 pm, EST	Webinar- Register here

Next Council Meeting

When:	Where:
June 3- 6, 2019 Register for Webinar	Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort 9300 Emerald Coast Parkway W. Miramar Beach, FL 32550

Submit Your Comments!

Use the online public comment forms available for each proposed Amendment as listed on our website. For general fishery comments not related to a specific amendment, use the "Submit General Fishery Comments" button at the bottom of the page.

Comments submitted using the online form are immediately posted to the Council's website and available for all Council members and the public to view.

Submit your comments regarding any proposed fishery action online at <http://gulfcouncil.org/fishery-management/proposed-amendments/>



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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. Gulf Fishery News is a publication of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council. Any material in this newsletter may be reprinted or reproduced; however, please credit the Council when reprinting articles from this newsletter.

