

Gulf Fishery News

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Fishery Management
Council

*Protecting our marine
resources*

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Fishery Management Areas in the Gulf of Mexico

You've probably noticed that there are areas in the federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico that have different fishing regulations. It's also possible that you've never thought much about the different types of areas or the agencies responsible for them because you realize that an area with fishing regulations has the same effect on your ability to fish, no matter what. However, knowing more about the different types of areas and agencies may equip you with the knowledge you need to either support the regulations and their purpose, or influence future consideration for them. Numerous agencies including: NOAA Fisheries, the National Marine Sanctuaries, and the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council), have different responsibilities and mechanisms for creating protections that regulate habitat or species-specific protections. The following is a brief description of different fishery management areas in the federal waters that the Gulf Council can influence:



Photo: Sea Grant

Marine Protected Area (MPA) – the most general classification for a protected area, MPAs are areas of the marine environment that have been reserved by federal, state, territorial, tribal, or local laws to provide lasting protection for natural or cultural resources. Most MPAs in the Gulf of Mexico do not have associated fishing regulations. However, the Gulf Council has created a few areas that do restrict fishing activity. For example, bottom fishing is prohibited year-round in Madison Swanson and Steamboat Lumps to protect gag grouper spawning aggregations.

Gear Restricted Areas – areas with regulations specific to fishing gear. The Gulf Council has created a number of different gear-based closures. Powerheads and roller trawls are prohibited in the reef fish stressed area to protect the reefs found within the area. Bottom longlining is prohibited in the eastern Gulf (east of 85 degrees West Longitude) inside the 35-fathom break from June through August each year to reduce interactions with sea turtles when they are most frequently found in the area. Additionally, spiny lobster traps are prohibited in areas of the Exclusive Economic Zone off the Florida Keys where the presence of the threatened *Acropora* corals has been identified.

Sector or Species-Specific Management Zones – areas with regulations specific to certain species, sectors, and gear types. The Gulf Council has created a variety of different management zones to maximize the benefits of fishing regulations for fishermen and fish. For example, commercial king mackerel is managed by zone with separate quotas, trip limits, and gear restrictions; recreational shallow-water grouper is closed when fishing beyond the 20-fathom break in February and March; and private recreational red snapper is managed by each Gulf state.



Fishery Management Areas in the Gulf of Mexico cont.

Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) –defined as waters and substrate necessary to fish for spawning, breeding, feeding or growth to maturity. Each fishery management plan developed under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery and Conservation Management Act must identify and describe EFH and minimize, to the extent practicable, adverse effects on these habitats caused by fishing. One of the most obvious effects of EFH classification is that any federal agency authorizing, funding, or undertaking an activity that may adversely impact the EFH must consult with NOAA Fisheries.

The consultation allows NOAA Fisheries to advise how to avoid, reduce, or compensate for any adverse impacts a project may have on fish habitat. The Gulf Council has identified EFH for all the species it manages. A majority of the Gulf of Mexico is considered to be EFH because different species utilize every habitat type available. For example, all submerged aquatic vegetation, coral reef, and hard bottom is considered to be EFH as they provide food and refuge to juvenile fish.

Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPCs) – a subset of Essential Fish Habitat, the HAPC designation requires that the area meets one or more of the following criteria:

- 1) the area provides an important ecological function;
- 2) the area or habitat is sensitive to human-induced degradation;
- 3) the habitat is stressed;
- 4) the habitat is considered rare.

Not all existing HAPCs have associated fishing regulations and not all fishing regulations are consistent across HAPCs. An HAPC designation does not automatically guarantee any additional specific protections to designated areas, but can be used to focus attention on those areas when a NOAA Fisheries consultation considers measures to minimize adverse impacts to fish habitat. Additionally, HAPCs enable the Gulf Council and NOAA Fisheries to communicate habitat conservation priorities to non-fishing ocean users even though the agencies lack the authority to regulate non-fishing activities. Finally, a HAPC designation can serve as a tool for focusing habitat research and monitoring efforts. The Gulf Council has designated numerous HAPCs. Pulley Ridge, the deepest known photosynthetic coral reef in the United States is designated as a HAPC. The Gulf Council established the following fishing regulations for Pulley Ridge: limited bottom longline, bottom trawl, buoy gear, pots and traps, and bottom anchoring from fishing vessels to protect the habitat. These measures help protect the habitat structure created by the corals, thereby providing shelter to economically important fish species.



Photo: NOAA-FGBNMS

Marine Sanctuaries – areas of the marine environment designated and protected because of their special national significance due to their conservation, recreational, ecological, historical, scientific, cultural, archeological, educational, or esthetic qualities. Generally, activities that could harm habitat and living marine resources are regulated in Sanctuary areas. Fishing activity and anchoring can be regulated within Sanctuary boundaries. The Gulf Council does not have regulatory authority over Sanctuaries, but the Sanctuaries do consult with the Gulf Council before establishing fishing regulations in federal waters. The Gulf of Mexico is home to two sanctuaries: the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary and the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

This [map tool](#) will show you the locations and regulations associated with different management areas under the Gulf Council’s purview in the federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Each of the different agencies with regulatory authority over fishing areas heavily relies on public input when considering new regulations. We appreciate your perspective and your feedback, so don’t hesitate to contact the [Gulf Council](#), [NOAA Fisheries](#), or [National Marine Sanctuaries](#) to learn more about how you can get involved and influence current or new fisheries management area regulations.

What Fisheries Management Areas are Currently Being Considered in Federal Waters?

Fishing Access in Madison-Swanson and Steamboat Lumps Marine Protected Areas

Both established in 2000, the Madison-Swanson and Steamboat Lumps MPAs cover a combined 219 square nautical miles off west central Florida. The areas were established to protect gag spawning aggregations and bottom fishing is prohibited year-round. Recently, the Reef Fish Advisory Panel and public comment indicated that allowing trolling in those areas may make the prohibition of bottom fishing hard to enforce. The Gulf Council is considering modifying fishing access in those areas to reduce illegal fishing and protect spawning aggregations.



Photo: NOAA- FKNMS

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary Expansion

Found off the coast of Texas, the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary protects reefs and banks along the edge of the continental shelf in the northern Gulf of Mexico. It is currently proposing to add 15 additional areas, totaling nearly 383 square miles of reef and bottom features that provide habitat for fish. The Gulf Council has commented on the expansion and provided guidance on appropriate fishing regulations in the expansion areas. The proposed expansion is currently under interagency review.

Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Restoration Blueprint

Found along the Florida Keys, the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary protects the only barrier coral reef in the continental United States. The alternatives in this proposal include considerations to expand the sanctuary boundary, update sanctuary-wide regulations, modify marine zones and zone-specific regulations, and update the management plan. After consultations with its various stakeholder groups, the Gulf Council provided specific recommendations to the Sanctuary including the consolidations and clarification of regulatory language and to enhance justification of its proposed actions.

Scenes from the Sanctuaries



FGBNMS

Photo: NOAA/ONMS/Hickerson



FGBNMS

Photo: NOAA



FKNMS

Photo: NOAA/Bill Goodwin



FGBNMS

Photo: NOAA



FKNMS

Photo: NOAA



FGBNMS

Photo: NOAA



Recent Regulatory Changes and Information

[Reef Fish Amendment 50A - State Management Program for Recreational Red Snapper](#)

This amendment delegates some management authority for recreational fishing of red snapper by private anglers in federal waters to the Gulf states. Each state is allocated a portion of the red snapper private angling quota and has authority to set the private angling fishing season, bag limit, and minimum size limit (between 14-18 inches). **This final rule is effective as of February 6, 2020.**



[Recreational Closure of Gray Triggerfish in Federal Waters of the Gulf of Mexico](#)

- The Gulf of Mexico recreational gray triggerfish season currently has two fixed closed seasons: January and February and June and July. The fixed June-July closed season was established to protect spawning gray triggerfish due to their unique reproductive behavior of building demersal nests in the sand and guarding the fertilized eggs from predators. Recreational harvest of gray triggerfish in federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico opened at 12:01 am on March 1, 2020 and will close at 12:01 am, local time, on May 2, 2020, which corresponds to when NMFS has projected that the quota will be caught.
- The 2021 recreational fishing year begins January 1, 2021. Recreational harvest will reopen March 1, 2021, following the January and February annual closure.



[Commercial Hook-and-Line Harvest of King Mackerel in Federal Waters in the Gulf of Mexico Southern Zone Closed](#)

- Commercial hook-and-line harvest of king mackerel in federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico (Gulf) Southern Zone will **closed at 12:01 a.m., local time, on March 4, 2020.**
- Commercial hook-and-line harvest will reopen in the Gulf of Mexico Western and Southern Zones at 12:01 a.m., local time, on July 1, 2020.



[Shrimp Amendment 18- Modifying the Shrimp Effort Threshold](#)

This amendment increases the allowable amount of shrimp trawl fishing effort in the area of federal waters monitored for juvenile red snapper bycatch. This area in shrimp statistical zones 10-21 is found in federal waters 10-30 fathoms deep roughly off the coasts of Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas. **This final rule is effective as of March 9, 2020.**



[Framework Amendment 7 - Modifications to Gulf of Mexico Migratory Group Cobia Size and Possession Limits](#)

This framework amendment increases the recreational and commercial minimum size limit for cobia in the Gulf of Mexico to 36 inches fork length. **This final rule is effective March 25, 2020.**



[NOAA Announces the 2020 Gulf of Mexico Red Snapper Recreational For-Hire-Season](#)

The 2020 red snapper fishing season for vessels with federal for-hire reef fish permits is 62 days in federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

- **The season for federally permitted for-hire vessels will begin at 12:01 a.m., local time, on June 1, 2020, and will close at 12:01 a.m., local time, on August 2, 2020.**
- Private Anglers Note: Each Gulf state will set the private angling season for state and federal waters for red snapper. Please check with your state agency for specific dates.



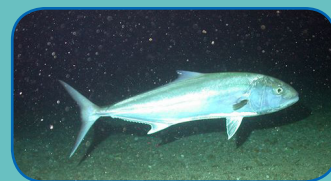
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Recent Regulatory Changes and Information cont.

2020 Greater Amberjack Season

NOAA Fisheries announced that they expect the recreational greater amberjack season to be **open in May 2020**. The fishing year begins on August 1st, so the quota is renewed before the August – October fishing season. Preliminary landings show that only 32% of the recreational annual catch limit was harvested through October 2019. The quota that remains can be harvested in the May 2020 recreational fishing season.



Welcome New Council Staff Member, Carly Somerset

The Gulf Council welcomes Carly Somerset as our new staff Fisheries Outreach Specialist. Carly comes to us from the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR) where she served as a Biological Program Coordinator and a Marine Administrator.

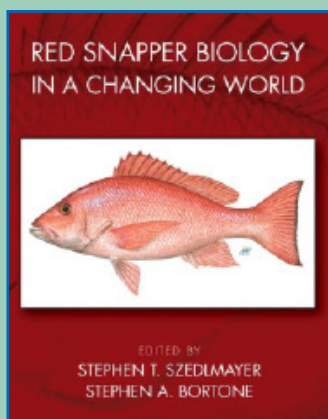
Carly is originally from Panama City, Florida. She graduated from the University of West Florida with a bachelor's degree in Marine Biology and obtained her master's degree from University of Southern Mississippi Gulf Coast Research Laboratory in Coastal Sciences. She gained experience acting as a port sampler for the Southeast Region Headboat Survey and through overseeing electronic reporting of red snapper at MDMR.

As the Council's Fisheries Outreach Specialist, she will provide a communication link between the Council and its constituents by assisting with the development of outreach and education materials pertinent to the Gulf Council's mission. Working closely with the Public Information Officer, Emily Muehlstein, Carly will organize and conduct outreach and education stakeholder meetings, workshops, and other events. She will also assist in the development and review of technical documents.



Carly Somerset

Gulf Council Staff Author Chapter in Recently Published Volume



Gulf Council Executive Director, Dr. Carrie Simmons, and Fishery Biologist-SEDAR Liaison, Ryan Rindone, have co-authored, along with Dr. Michael F. Larkin, a chapter in [Red Snapper Biology in a Changing World](#), recently published by CRC Press.

The volume is a compendium of many papers presented at the 147th annual meeting of the American Fisheries Society, held in 2017 in Tampa, Florida. It also includes additional research completed as a result of the symposium.

Chapter 12, "Management Strategies Influencing Recreational Red Snapper, *Lutjanus campechanus*, Effort in the Gulf of Mexico: Why Can't We Agree?", focuses on the contentious nature surrounding management of red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico and efforts to address the needs of private fishers while still meeting the rebuilding plan for red snapper as mandated by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

Former Gulf Council Executive Director, Dr. Stephen Bortone edited the volume and former Essential Fish Habitat Specialist, Claire Roberts is also a contributor. The book is essential reading for fisheries scientists and managers, ichthyologists, resource and environmental managers, and policymakers who are involved with coastal fisheries.



Dr. Carrie Simmons



Ryan Rindone



In the News

How NOAA Works to Restore Coral Reefs

Coral reefs provide coastal protection for communities, habitat for fish, and millions of dollars in recreation and tourism, among other benefits. But corals are also severely threatened by rapidly worsening environmental conditions. Hundreds of millions of people depend on coral reefs for food, livelihoods, cultural practices, and a variety of economic benefits. Corals also provide habitat for fish and other marine species and protection for valuable coastal infrastructure.

The [NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program](#) leads the agency's coral research, conservation, and restoration efforts. The program's [strategic plan](#) outlines a framework for reducing the main threats to coral reef ecosystems: climate change, fishing impacts, and land-based sources of pollution; this includes damage from changing water temperatures, ocean acidification, invasive species, changing weather patterns, and physical impacts from ship groundings and storms. The plan also recognizes coral reef restoration as an important focus with four primary strategies:

- *Improving habitat quality for corals.*
- *Preventing loss of corals and their habitat.*
- *Enhancing coral population resilience.*
- *Improving coral health and survival.*

The [NOAA Restoration Center](#) works with other NOAA offices and partners to help corals recover. Their efforts include activities such as:

- *Planting nursery-grown corals back onto reefs.*
- *Making sure habitat is suitable for natural coral growth.*
- *Building coral resilience to threats like climate change.*



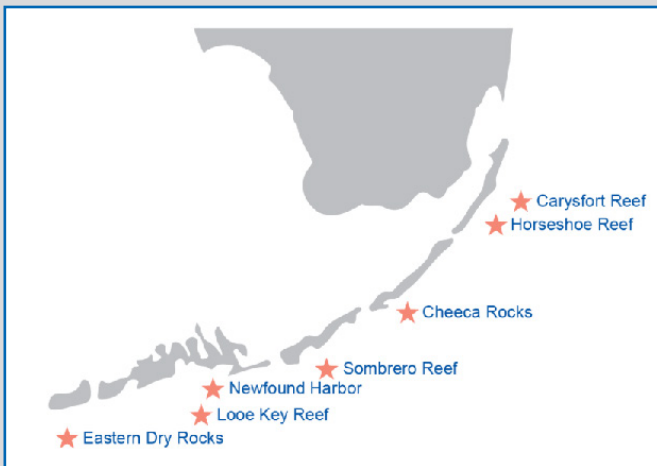
Photo: NOAA

Growing and Planting Healthy Corals

NOAA facilitates, leads, funds, and implements efforts to grow corals in protected conditions. They work with partners to collect detached corals—whether broken fragments or fully-formed colonies—and grow them in dense coral nurseries. The corals are then reattached to reefs piece by piece with cement, zip ties, and nails. NOAA is also exploring the use of innovative techniques for growing and planting resilient, genetically diverse populations of key coral species that can adapt to evolving environmental conditions.

Removing Invasive Species

Many coral reefs are overrun with non-native algae, which smothers coral and blocks light from getting to them. Through algae removal and reintroduction of natural predators, they clear the invasive species and help coral reefs thrive.



Responding to Emergencies

NOAA established a contract-based emergency response system to address ship groundings and other physical impacts to corals. This system has responded to hundreds of incidents, saving tens of thousands of corals.

The NOAA Restoration Center serves as a lead on coral restoration work, in conjunction with NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program, the [Damage, Assessment, Remediation, and Restoration Program](#), and other NOAA offices.

A Mission to Recover the Coral Reefs of the Florida Keys

As part of a new effort, NOAA and partners are working to implement a first-of-its-kind approach to restoring corals at seven ecologically and culturally significant reef sites in [Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary](#),

Mission: Iconic Reefs. By the end of this effort, coral cover across the seven sites will be restored from 2 percent to an average of 25 percent. Read more about this unprecedented, decades-long coral reef restoration effort [here](#).

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

Carrie Simmons Executive Director
John Froeschke Deputy Director

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Deidre Warner-Kramer Designee for David Hogan OES/OMC 202-647-2337	Dave Donaldson GSMFC 228-875-5912

Upcoming Meetings

Council Meeting	
When: March 30, 2020, 10:15 am, CST, through April 2, 2020, 4:00 pm, CST	Where: The Lodge at Gulf State Park 21196 East Beach Blvd. Gulf Shores, Alabama 36542 Register for the Webinar
Shrimp Advisory Panel	
When: March 24, 2020, 8:30 am - 5:00 pm, EST	Where: Gulf Council Office 4107 W. Spruce Street, Suite 200 Tampa, Florida 33607 Register for the Webinar
Standing, Reef Fish, Mackerel, Ecosystem, & Socioeconomic MRIP SSC Meeting	
When: April 14-15, 2020, 8:30 am – 5:30 pm	Where: Renaissance Tampa International Plaza Hotel 4200 Jim Walter Blvd, Tampa, FL Register for the Webinar
Ad Hoc Red Snapper and Grouper-Tilefish IFQ Advisory Panel	
When: April 21, 2020, 8:30 am - 5:00 pm, EST	Where: Gulf Council Office 4107 W. Spruce Street, Suite 200 Tampa, Florida 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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