

Gulf Fishery News

A publication of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council



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Gulf of Mexico
Fishery Management
Council

*Protecting our marine
resources*

2203 N. Lois Avenue
Suite 1100
Tampa, Florida 33607
Phone: 813.348.1630
Fax: 813.348.1711

www.gulfcouncil.org

New Additions to Coral Portal on Council's Website

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's Coral Portal was developed through a grant awarded by NOAA's Coral Reef Conservation Program. The portal contains interactive maps of habitats and fishery management areas; resources highlighting issues under consideration; and educational materials to support the public's understanding of corals, habitats, and associated species.

The following storyboards have recently been added to the portal:

Causes and Consequences of Coral Reef Decline

This storyboard provides an overview of the threats to corals in the Gulf of Mexico. Learn about the challenges these corals are experiencing as they face unprecedented rates of ocean changes. Visit <http://portal.gulfcouncil.org/CoralDecline.html>.

NOAA Southeast Deep Coral Initiative

Hear from the crew aboard the NOAA Deep-sea Coral Research and Technology Program's research expedition on the west Florida Shelf. Experience the efforts by the Gulf Council to consider areas for designation as habitat areas of particular concern (HAPC).

Learn more at <http://portal.gulfcouncil.org/noaaSEDCI/>.

Let's Talk Closed Areas

Marine protected areas are not all created equally. This storyboard aims at clearing up some of the confusion about what a marine protected area (MPA) is. Learn more about MPAs and how they vary at <http://portal.gulfcouncil.org/closedAreas/>.

The Gulf of Mexico Ecosystem and Its Management

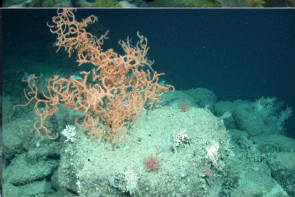
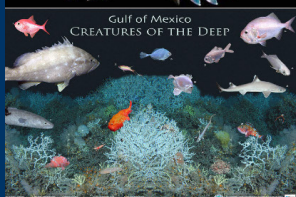
The Gulf of Mexico is considered a "large marine ecosystem." Learn how the Gulf Council manages the resources within it by using an ecosystem approach to fisheries management (EAFM). Visit <http://portal.gulfcouncil.org/ecosystem/>.



The Coral Portal



Home Resources ▾



The Portal Blog

April 2018 Council Meeting Update

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council met in Gulfport, Mississippi, April 16- 20, 2018. The following is a summary of the Council's actions:

Recreational Red Snapper Season

The Council received an update from NOAA Fisheries on the recreational red snapper season for 2018.

- Federally permitted for-hire season: The federally permitted for-hire season will be open for 51 days in 2018. The season will open at 12:01 AM local time on June 1 and remain open until 12:01 local time on July 22, 2018.
- Private angler season: NOAA Fisheries has issued exempted fishing permits which allow each of the five Gulf States to set their own season for red snapper in state and federal waters during 2018 and 2019. When fishing for red snapper in federal waters, private anglers will need a permit or license for the state in which they wish to land and that state's season in federal waters must be open. Anglers can fish anywhere in federal waters, including in federal waters off a state with a closed season, if the state where they intend to land is open. Private anglers must abide by all other requirements for landing in the state and follow the federal bag limit of two fish per person and minimum size limit of 16 inches total length. State license for-hire vessels without a federal Gulf Charter/Heaboat Permit for Reef Fish may not fish for or possess red snapper in or from federal waters.

*See page 7 of this newsletter for contact information for each of the five Gulf states.

State Management Program for Recreational Red Snapper

The Council continued work on a series of documents that would enable each Gulf state to manage recreational harvest of red snapper federal waters. The Council removed all allocation alternatives with time series that terminate in the year 2009 and added a new alternative that would establish state management allocations for private anglers only, based on the allocations set in the five exempted fishing permits for recreational red snapper fishing in 2018 and 2019. The Council also modified language in the post-season accountability measure for all five individual state amendments to ensure that in the case of a quota overage or underage, state specific annual catch limits would be adjusted by the amount of the overage or underage in the following year. The Council also selected preferred alternatives for the Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi documents that would allow them to set the bag limit, minimum size limit (within the range of 14-18 inches), and maximum size limit, and to remove the prohibition on for-hire crew from retaining a bag limit. The Council plans to continue work on these documents at its next meeting in June.



Photo: NOAA

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Coral/Habitat

The Council reviewed a Public Hearing Draft of Coral Amendment 9 which considers creating protections for 15 areas in the Gulf that are known to have an abundance or high diversity of corals that make them unique and sensitive to human impacts. The Amendment also considers designating an additional eight new areas for Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC) status without fishing regulations and prohibiting dredge fishing in all existing HAPCs with regulations.

The Council heard recommendations from its scientific advisors, the Scientific and Statistical Committee, and added a new preferred alternative that would establish a HAPC without fishing regulations named the West Florida Wall. The Council plans to host public hearings on Coral Amendment 9 before taking final action in June.

Shrimp

The Council heard the updated stock assessments for pink, brown, and white shrimp. All stocks are healthy and are not overfished nor experiencing overfishing.

The Council approved the annual Texas shrimp closure for 2018. 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.

The Council also decided to host a joint meeting of the Shrimp and Coral Advisory Panels and Scientific and Statistical Committees as it begins to discuss Coral Amendment 10 which will consider additional areas that have been recommended for Habitat Area of Particular Concern status.

Council Update, cont.

Cobia

The Gulf and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils jointly manage cobia in the Coastal Migratory Pelagics Fishery Management Plan. The South Atlantic Council has requested to remove the Atlantic migratory group of cobia from the management plan, as federal management does not appear to be constraining landings below the annual catch limit. The South Atlantic Council would like to allow the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission to manage cobia in state waters and in federal waters in the absence of federal regulations. The Gulf Council selected the same preferred alternative as the South Atlantic Council that would remove the Atlantic migratory group of cobia from the federal management plan. The South Atlantic Council plans to take final action on Amendment 31 at its June 2018 meeting in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida.



Photo: Mark Miller

After hearing concern from fishermen that the cobia population is in decline, the Council directed staff to begin working on a Framework Action that will consider reducing the possession limit and increase the minimum size limit for cobia in federal waters.

Commercial Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Programs

Staff presented the Council with the grouper tilefish IFQ program 5-year review. After reviewing the recommendations provided by the Scientific and Statistical Committee and the Council's Ad Hoc Red Snapper/Grouper Tilefish IFQ Advisory Panel, the Council recommended to accept the review and suggested that in the future red snapper and grouper-tilefish IFQ program reviews could be conducted jointly.

The Council continued work on Amendment 36B which considers modifications to commercial IFQ programs. The Council passed a motion supporting the creation of a quota set-aside from non-activated accounts to run a NMFS quota bank for addressing commercial discards. The Council will use an advisory panel to advise in the administration of the program. The Council also removed further consideration of a lease-to-own provision and added an action to the amendment to consider ways to increase the accuracy of landings estimates provided in advanced landing notifications. The Council plans to review a revised draft of this amendment in a subsequent meeting.

Status Determination Criteria and Optimum Yield for Reef Fish and Red Drum

The Council reviewed a public hearing draft of Reef Fish Amendment 48/Red Drum Amendment 5 which considers establishing measurable reference points that can be used for setting management targets and determining the status of the stocks. The document considers the Maximum Sustainable Yield Proxies, Minimum Stock Size Threshold, Maximum Fishing Mortality Threshold, and Optimum Yield for all managed stocks. The Council discussed the document at length and chose to remove an action that considers changing the Maximum Sustainable Yield proxy for red snapper. The Council plans to review an updated draft of the document at a subsequent meeting.

Policy Statement on the Use of Descending Tools and Venting Devices

The Council reviewed revisions to a draft policy statement and strengthened the language to strongly encourage the use of descending devices and/or venting tools as appropriate when releasing reef fish to decrease fishing mortality and lead to increased fish population abundance. The Council also asked staff to include a table that summarizes discard mortality estimates used in current stock assessments and outline discards by sector for red snapper and other key reef fish species. Finally, the Council asked staff to provide preliminary estimates of the reduction in mortality for these species that may occur if descending and venting tools are actively used in the fishery.

Exempted Fishing Permits

The Council was presented with two exempted fishing permits. The first, requested authorization for exploratory fishing for two years to test if a small-scale fishery for golden crab would be viable in the Gulf of Mexico. The Council chose to recommend that NOAA Fisheries service approve the permit and requested that traps not be set near corals and that traps be placed in depths that won't impact royal red shrimping. The second permit request sought authorization to test the viability of a small-scale aquaculture cage array to raise almaco jack for two years. The Council chose to recommend that NOAA Fisheries service approve the permit and asked that Council recommendations relative to the impact of hurricanes, cage lighting, baseline benthic substrate assessment, genetic testing, and potential for biofouling be considered.



Gulf Council Executive Director to Retire

Doug Gregory, Executive Director of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council will be retiring in June. Serving as Executive Director since 2013, Doug also served as staff biologist/statistician for the Council from 1984-1991 and as a member of the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee from 1991 until 2013. The Council thanks Mr. Gregory for his contributions to the Council operations and wishes him the best in his future endeavors. An official recognition of Mr. Gregory's service will be held at the next Council meeting, June 18-21, in Key West, Florida.



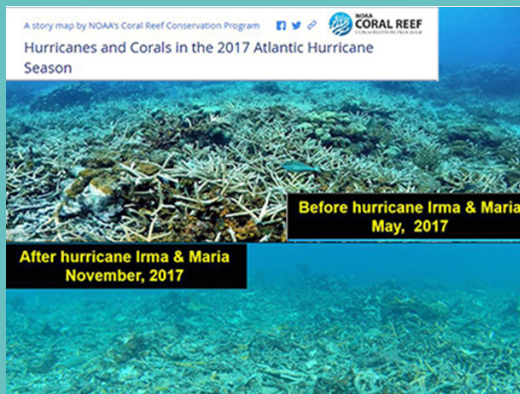
New Executive Director Announced

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council announces the selection of Dr. Carrie Simmons at its new Executive Director. Dr. Simmons, currently the Council's Deputy director, will take the helm on June 1, 2018. Dr. Simmons worked as a fishery biologist for the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council from 2008 through 2013, prior to her appointment as Deputy Director. "Dr. Simmons' deep understanding of our Gulf fisheries has already proven to be an asset to the Council process," said Leann Bosarge, Chairman of the Gulf Council. "Her experience with the fishery management process, coupled with her fisheries science expertise, will most certainly propel the Council towards success as she takes on the Executive Director role."



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In The News Hurricanes and Corals in the 2017 Atlantic Hurricane Season



The impacts of the 2017 Atlantic Hurricane Season were historic for communities in Florida, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico. While coral reefs- the first lines of protection for these coastal communities- stood strong against the storms, many were heavily impacted. NOAA is working alongside local agencies, community members, and a group of military veterans to study and restore thousands of corals. NOAA's Coral Reef Conservation Program has released a new story map to showcase these impacts and efforts. Learn more here.

Source: NOAA Habitat News, April, 2018, Issue 31

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/>

Calling All Fish Folks!

We're always seeking new fishing and fishery-related photos!

We'd like to see your photos and possibly use them on our website or in our publications. To submit your photos, send an e-mail with "Photo Library" in the subject line to gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org. Be sure to include your name, address, and phone number.



Photo: Paul Borowski

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Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

Doug Gregory
Executive
Director

Carrie Simmons
Deputy
Director

Appointed Voting Members

LeAnn Bosarge
Chair
Pascagoula, MS
228-762-0888

John Greene
Vice Chair
Daphne, AL
251-747-2872

John Sanchez
Homestead, FL
786-255-1880

Doug Boyd
San Antonio, TX
830-230-5032

Greg Stunz
Corpus Christi,
TX
361-825-3254

Phil Dyskow
Marco Island,
FL
239-821-7698

Dale Diaz
Biloxi, MS
228-523-4082

Thomas Frazer
Gainesville, FL
352-392-9230

Bob Shipp
Fairhope, AL
251-454-7481

Camp Matens
Baton Rouge, LA
225-769-9080

Ed Swindell
Hammond, LA
985-345-4614

State/Federal Voting Members

Robin Riechers
Lance Robinson,
Designee
Austin, TX
512-389-4645

Joe Spraggins
Paul Mickle,
Designee
Biloxi, MS
228-523-4104

Jessica McCawley
Martha Guyas,
Designee
Tallahassee,
FL
850-487-0554

Patrick Banks
Chris Schieble,
Designee
Baton Rouge,
LA
504-284-2035

Scott Bannon
Kevin Anson,
Designee
Dauphin Island,
AL
251-968-7576

Roy Crabtree
Sue Gerhart,
Designee
NMFS SERO
727-824-5305

Non-voting Members

Glenn Constant
Designee for
Cynthia Dohner
USF&WS
225-578-4243

LT Mark
Zanowicz
Designee for
RADM David
Callahan
USCG District 8
504-671-2101

Deidre
Warner-Kramer
Designee for
David Hogan
OES/OMC
202-647-2335

Dave Donaldson
GSMFC
228-875-5912

Recent Regulation Changes

The following fishery management measures have been approved and implemented by the U.S. Department of Commerce:

Commercial Harvest of Greater Amberjack

The latest report for commercial greater amberjack landings indicates 106.4% of the 277,651 lb quota has already been harvested. As a result, commercial harvest will not reopen in federal waters of the Gulf on June 1, 2018. Commercial harvest of Greater Amberjack will remain closed throughout the remainder of 2018. This closure is necessary to protect the greater amberjack population, which is considered overfished (the population size is too low) and undergoing overfishing (too many fish being harvested).

Recreational Greater Amberjack Fishing Year and Fixed Closed Season

NOAA Fisheries announced a final rule that modifies the greater amberjack recreational fishing year and fishing season. The rule makes two changes to recreational greater amberjack. First, the fishing year has been modified to begin on August 1 and run through July 31 of the following year. Meaning, the quota begins anew in August and any potential quota closers are more likely to affect the spring season. Second, the season has been changed so it will be open in May and again August- October.

Why is the recreational fishing year changing?

Fishing Year and Fixed Closed Seasons

Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul
OPEN									OPEN		

The change in fishing year is expected to improve recreational fishermen's access to greater amberjack. It is expected to provide an opportunity to harvest this species when other targeted reef fish species are prohibited from harvest (i.e. fall opening).

...continued next page

Get the Gulf of Mexico Fishing Regulations App

Keep up with the latest federal fishing regulations

Scan the appropriate QR code below or go to <http://gulfcouncil.org/fishing-regulations/federal/> to download your free App today!

Free QR Code Reader Apps are available in both the App Store and Android Market.

For more information on federal fishing regulations, visit <http://gulfcouncil.org/fishing-regulations/federal/>



Recent Regulation Changes cont.

Recreational Greater Amberjack Fishing Year and Fixed Closed Season cont.

The new fixed closed season of November 1 through April 30 and June 1 through July 31 is expected to protect the greater amberjack population during peak spawning and still allow for spring (May) and fall (August through October) recreational harvest.

Framework Action to Modify the Number of Unrigged Hooks Carried Onboard Bottom Longline Vessels

This final rule removes the 1000 hook limitation on the number of unrigged hooks allowed per bottom longline vessel in the eastern Gulf exclusive economic zone (EEZ), while retaining the limit of 750 hooks that can be rigged for fishing. Removing the restriction on the total number of hooks kept on board will make trips more economical by allowing fishing with the maximum number of hooks to continue without having to return to port or request additional hooks from other vessels. In addition, maintaining the current limit of 750 hooks rigged for fishing preserves the reductions in sea turtle interactions since the implementation of Amendment 31.

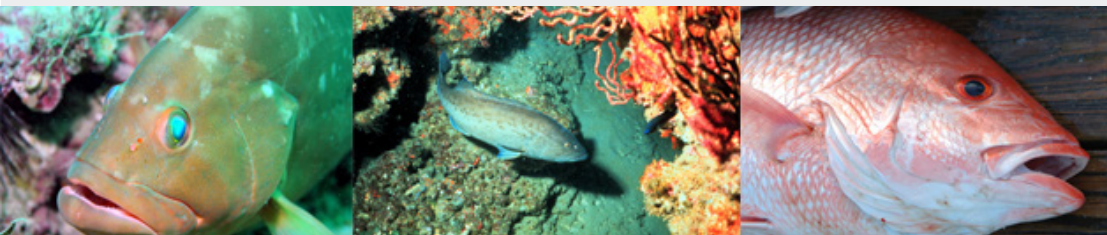


Reef Fish Amendment 44 – Minimum Stock Size Threshold (MSST) Revision for Reef Fish Stocks with Existing Status Determination Criteria

This amendment standardizes the minimum stock size threshold for certain reef fish species. Minimum stock size threshold is used to determine whether or not a stock is considered to be overfished; if the biomass of the stock falls below the threshold then the stock is considered to be overfished. The minimum stock size threshold for gag, red grouper, red snapper, vermillion snapper, gray triggerfish, greater amberjack, and hogfish is equal to 50% of the biomass at maximum sustainable yield. The minimum



stock size threshold change is not expected to have a major effect as fishing is primarily constrained by the overfishing definition. As long as overfishing is prevented, a stock biomass should never drop to the MSST level.



Upcoming Public Hearings to Gather Input

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council will hold public hearings to take comments on the following:

[Reef Fish Amendment 49 - Modifications to the Sea Turtle Release Gear and Framework Procedure for the Reef Fish Fishery](#)

May 31- via webinar-
6-9 pm, EST
Register [here](#).

[Coral Amendment 9 - Coral Habitat Areas Considered for Management in the Gulf of Mexico](#)

May 7- Brownsville, TX-
6-9 pm, local time

May 8- Palacios, TX & League City, TX- 6-9 pm, local time

May 22- via webinar- 6-9 pm, EST

June 4- Grand Isle, LA & Key West, FL- 6-9 pm, local time

June 5- D'Iberville, MS & St. Petersburg, FL- 6-9 pm, local time

June 6- Mobile, AL- 6-9 pm, local time

For detailed information check our website at <http://gulfcouncil.org/meetings/public-hearings-scoping-workshops/>

To submit and read comments visit our "[Amendments Under Development](#)" page.





Recreational Fishing for Red Snapper - the 2018 Season

Federally Permitted For-Hire Vessels: June 1, 2018, 12:01 a.m., local time, until July 22, 2018, at 12:01 a.m., local time.

Private Anglers: Gulf states will set seasons through exempted fishing permits.

For information on state regulations:

- Florida: 850-487-0554
- Alabama: <http://www.outdooralabama.com/saltwater-fishing/exempted-fishing-permit>
- Mississippi: <http://dmr.ms.gov/index.php/component/content/category/159-snapper-tails-n-scales> or 228-374-5000
- Louisiana: 504-284-2032
- Texas: 512-389-4620 or email Julie.hagen@tpwd.texas.gov



Announcing a New Marine Resource Education Program (MREP) for Offshore Aquaculture in the Gulf of Mexico

The Gulf of Maine Research Institute is pleased to announce the Marine Resources Education Program (MREP) for Offshore Aquaculture in the Gulf of Mexico. Interest in offshore aquaculture in the Gulf of Mexico is growing. Understanding the science, policy, and economics involved is key for effective participation within the industry.

MREP Aquaculture provides an opportunity for stakeholders in the Gulf of Mexico to learn how offshore aquaculture works, how it is managed, and what impacts and benefits it may bring to communities in the region. Commercial and recreational fishermen; fisheries scientists and managers; academics; and conservationists are invited to attend and learn about fish, shellfish, and algae aquaculture in the U.S. waters.

2018 MREP Aquaculture workshop schedule:

MREP Aquaculture Communities Tour

May 15-18, 2018

Portland, Maine

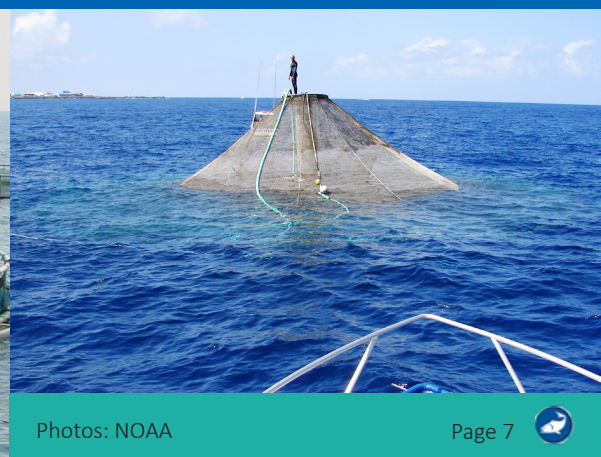
MREP Aquaculture Science and Policy

June 12-14, 2018

New Orleans, Louisiana

Applications to participate in the program can be found at at: gmri.org/mrep-aqua

Questions about the program should be directed to Alexa Dayton at the Gulf of Maine Research institute: adayton@gmri.org



Gulf Council Office to Relocate in June

The Gulf of Fishery Management Council office will be moving on June 8-10, 2018. Please note that office phones will be out of operation on Saturday, June 9, and Sunday, June 10. There should be no disruption of email or website service.

As of June 11, 2018 our new physical and mailing address will be:

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
4107 West Spruce Street, Suite 200
Tampa, Florida 33607



Upcoming Meetings

Next Council Meeting

June 18 – 21, 2018
Marriott Beachside
3841 N. Roosevelt Blvd.
Key West, FL 33040

Outreach and Education Technical Committee Meeting

May 10, 2018
Council Office
2203 N. Lois Avenue, Suite 1100
Tampa, FL 33607

Stock Assessment Meetings

Atlantic Cobia Stock ID- SEDAR 58
Stock ID Review Workshop
June 5-7, 2018

[Gulf Red Grouper Data Webinar-
SEDAR 61](#)
3:00 – 4:00 PM
May 1, 2018

Photos: Scott Hickman, Jason Whitaker



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, 2203 N. Lois Avenue, Suite 1100, 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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