

# Gulf Fishery News

A publication of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council



**Summer 2018**  
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## Staff Attend Council Coordination Committee Meeting

The Spring 2018 Council Coordination Committee (CCC) meeting was held May 22-24, at the Harrigan Centennial Hall in Sitka, Alaska. CCC's were established in 2007, with the reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. The committee consists of the chairs, vice chairs, and executive directors from each council, as well as other staff. The committee meets twice a year to discuss issues related to the implementation of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, policy directives and guidance, and issues that are relevant to all Councils.



Doug Gregory and other US Regional Fishery Management Council Executive Directors.



Council member, Johnny Greene (L), and Council Chair, Leann Bosarge (R)

Hosted by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, the meeting was attended by the Executive Director, Deputy Director, Public Information Officer, Council Chair, and Vice-Chair.

Topics covered during the meeting included electronic monitoring, ecosystem based fisheries management, use and review of exempted fishing permits, how best scientific information available (BSIA) determinations are made and documented, NMFS policy directives and research priorities, allocation reviews,

aquaculture policy updates, citizen science, and regional council program reviews.

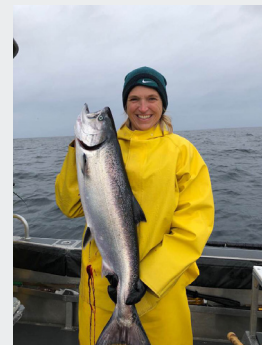
Doug Gregory, outgoing Gulf Council Executive Director, was recognized for his service from 2013 through 2018. Carrie Simmons, Deputy Director, led a presentation on lessons learned from the Gulf Council's Aquaculture Fishery Management Plan. Public Information Officer, Emily Muehlstein, presented an overview of platforms and metrics of social media sites the Gulf Council uses to the CCC's Communications Group.

Some Council members and staff had the opportunity to stay an extra day and charter fishing trips where they caught King Salmon, halibut, ling cod, and rockfish. Council staff chartered a boat from Anglers Unlimited; their Captain participates in the North Pacific Fishery Management Council process and exchanged numerous ideas about management and differences and similarities in the Council processes. The location of the meeting was beautiful and many attendees saw humpback whales, sea otters, and sea lions.

More information about the meeting can be found at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/event/2018-may-council-coordination-committee-meeting>.



Emily Muehlstein



Carrie Simmons

# June 2018 Council Meeting Update

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council met in Key West, Florida, June 18-21, 2018. The following is a brief summary of the Council's actions:

## Coral and Habitat

The Council took final action on Coral Amendment 9 after hearing a summary of comments collected during public hearings and listening to public testimony. The Council chose to designate 21 new areas in the Gulf of Mexico as Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPCs). Of those 21 areas, the Council selected to add fishing regulations to prohibit bottom-tending gear on 13 areas (Pulley Ridge South Portion A, West Florida Wall, Alabama Alps Reef, L&W Pinnacles and Scamp Reef, Mississippi Canyon 118, Roughtongue Reef, Viosca Knoll 826, Viosca Knoll 862/906, AT 047, AT 357, Green Canyon 852, Harte Bank, and Southern Bank). The Council decided to designate 8 of the remaining areas as HAPCs without adding fishing regulations (South Reed, Garden Banks 299, Garden Banks 535, Green Canyon 140/272, Green Canyon 234, Green Canyon 354, Mississippi Canyon 751, and Mississippi Canyon 885). The Council will transmit the Amendment to the Secretary of Commerce for approval and implementation and ask the Highly Migratory Species Division of NOAA Fisheries to implement consistent regulations. The Council also directed staff to develop an action to clarify its intent regarding "fishing" when fishing vessels are within coral HAPCs.

## Cobia

The Council approved the South Atlantic's preferred alternative for Coastal Migratory Pelagic (CMP) Amendment 31, which addresses the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's request to withdraw the Atlantic migratory group of cobia from the joint fishery management plan for coastal migratory pelagic resources. This will allow the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission to manage Atlantic cobia in state waters, with those management measures reflected in federal waters by NMFS. The South Atlantic Council will finalize and transmit the document to the Secretary of Commerce for approval and implementation.



Photo: Peter Henderson

The Council reviewed draft CMP Framework Amendment 7, which considers modifying the Gulf cobia minimum size and possession limits. The Council selected preferred alternatives that align with the State of Florida's recent changes that would decrease the recreational and commercial possession limit to one fish per day and create a commercial and recreational vessel limit of two cobia per day. Staff will continue to develop the document and the Council will gather public comment on the proposed changes before taking final action.



Photo: Sea Grant

## Sea Turtle Release Gear

The Council took final action on Amendment 49, which considers modifying sea turtle release gear and framework procedure for the reef fish fishery. The Council selected to allow the use of the new collapsible hoop net, dehooking device, and small turtle hoist, as well as clarify dimension requirements for currently required release gear for incidentally hooked sea turtles. The Council also selected to modify the reef fish framework procedure to allow changes to release gear and handling requirements for protected species to be addressed through framework actions in the future. The document will be transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for approval and implementation.

## Carryover of Unharvested Quota

Staff presented a draft amendment that considers allowing the portion of allowable catch that isn't harvested, due to an early quota closure, to be rolled over into the following year's allowable catch. The Council removed Individual Fishing Quota-related alternatives and will address them in a different document. The Council will review an updated draft of the amendment at a future meeting.

## Gulf Hogfish

The Council heard a summary of the most recent Gulf hogfish stock assessment. The update assessment shows that hogfish is not overfished and or undergoing overfishing.



## Council Update, cont.

However, the assessment resulted in reduced Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) levels for 2019-2021. Since the current Annual Catch Limit (ACL) is higher than the recommended ABC, the Council is required to initiate a framework action to adjust the ACLs. The Council chose not to include other management measures at this time because they had recently modified the minimum size limit and wanted to see the effect before making more adjustments.



Photo: Scott Hickman

### Red Snapper

The Council heard results from the most recent red snapper stock assessment. The assessment showed that the stock is neither overfished nor experiencing overfishing. The assessment also resulted in ABCs for the years 2019-2021 that are higher than the current ACLs. The Council initiated a framework action to increase red snapper catch levels.

The Council reviewed draft amendments for establishing state management programs for the recreational harvest of red snapper. The Council modified the alternatives that would allow states to manage the private angling component only, such that for those alternatives, the sunset on sector separation (currently set to occur in 2022) is also removed. The Council also selected a preferred alternative that would establish state allocations based on the allocations used in the state management exempted fishing permits, and selected the range of management alternatives that would be delegated to Texas. The Council will continue to work on an updated draft of the amendments at the next meeting.

The Council discussed a scoping document that considers reallocating red snapper among the commercial and recreational sectors as well as among the private and for-hire components of the recreational sector. At a subsequent meeting, staff will present the Council with a comparison of the Gulf Council's allocation policy and NMFS procedural directive on allocation.

The Council examined a draft Framework Action that considers modifying the red snapper annual catch targets (ACTs) for the federal for-hire and private angling components of the recreational sector. An ACT is the level of harvest, set by the Council, below the ACL to account for management uncertainty and reduce the chance that the ACL is exceeded. The Council selected preferred alternatives that, through the end of 2019, would apply the ACL/ACT Control Rule to set the for-hire component ACT 9% below its ACL. The private angling component ACT would remain at 20% below its ACL. The total recreational sector ACT would be 15% below the recreational sector ACL. The Council will post a video and collect public comment on this document before taking final action which is slated in August.

### Spiny Lobster

The Council reviewed a public hearing draft of Spiny Lobster Amendment 13, which considers modifying gear requirements and the cooperative management procedures for spiny lobster. The Council selected preferred alternatives that would align federal regulations with Florida's regulations and allow Florida to request changes to spiny lobster federal regulations through the NMFS rulemaking process. The Council also removed actions from the document that would modify requirements for degradable panels on traps and harvest on artificial habitat in the EEZ off Florida. The Council will host a public hearing via webinar on Thursday August 2nd.

### Gray Snapper

The Council was presented with a summary of the first stock assessment ever conducted on gray snapper. The assessment found that, based on current default status determination criteria, the stock is both overfished and undergoing overfishing. Fortunately, the recommended ABCs that resulted from the assessment are only slightly lower than the current gray snapper ACL, and landings in recent years are lower than the newly recommended ABCs. The Council initiated a plan amendment to adjust ACLs and set status determination criteria that are biological reference points used to determine the overfished and overfishing thresholds.



Photo: NOAA





# Minimum Stock Size Threshold (MSST) Revision for Reef Fish

Last year, the Council took action that, in large part, flew under the radar despite its importance. It's not terribly surprising since the subject matter is both dry and complicated – even for seasoned participants in the Council process.

The Amendment, which was approved in December of 2017, reduced the Minimum Stock Size Threshold (MSST), which is the threshold used to determine when a stock is overfished, for seven of the reef fish species managed by the Council. In addition to reducing the likelihood that a stock is declared overfished, the amendment effectively removed two reef fish stocks from overfished status; however, they are still in a rebuilding plan. Prior to the change red snapper, gray triggerfish, and greater amberjack were all considered overfished. Now, greater amberjack is the only species that remains with overfished status.

In the Amendment, "[Minimum Stock Size Threshold \(MSST\) Revision for Reef Fish Stocks with Existing Status Determination Criteria](#)," the Council set the MSST for gag, red grouper, red snapper, vermillion snapper, gray triggerfish, greater amberjack, and hogfish, at half of the spawning stock biomass that would be necessary if the stock were to be fished at maximum sustainable yield on a continuing basis ( $0.50 \times \text{BMSY}$  (or proxy)). Each of the stocks already had MSST levels defined by separate efforts, but the Council wanted to standardize the criteria and ensure that stocks with low natural mortality rates didn't alternate between overfished and rebuilt status due to natural variations such as environmental factors.



Photo: Troy Frady



Photo: Scott Hickman

The new MSST is set as far below the biomass of a stock being fished at maximum sustainable yield as is allowed our federal fishing law, National Standard 1 of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. It's also the lowest MSST ever set by the Gulf Council. This means that the biomass of a stock must dip relatively low to be considered overfished. This also means that the likelihood of a stock being declared overfished is very low, but if it happens, a very restrictive rebuilding plan would be required to bring the stock back up to a sustainable biomass.

So, you may be wondering what this all means for red snapper and gray triggerfish, the two species whose status was changed by this amendment. Both stocks are still under rebuilding plans so, catch limits don't automatically change. However, the most obvious change from an angler perspective is the removal of the "pay-back" provision. When red snapper or gray triggerfish are considered overfished the pay-back provision requires that any harvest over the annual catch

limit must be made up for by reducing the following years harvest by the amount of the overage. In recent years, this has been a major contributor to short seasons for both species. Without pay-back provisions, we should see more consistent annual catch limits and thus fishing seasons hopefully, allowing more fishing opportunities.

While the MSST Amendment didn't miraculously grow the size of the stocks in the Gulf, it did reduce the likelihood that one of the seven listed species is declared overfished. In fact, a red snapper stock assessment that was completed this year showed that red snapper is not overfished and even allows for an increase in harvest. The Council is currently working on another amendment that considers modifying status determination criteria including MSST for remaining stocks. "[Status Determination Criteria and Optimum Yield for Reef Fish and Red Drum](#)" is an amendment you may want to pay attention to since it also proves to have implications despite its dry, complicated subject matter.



Photo: Emily Muehlstein

# In The News

## New Recreational Fishing Effort Survey

NOAA Fisheries Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) recently completed a 3-year transition from the Coastal Household Telephone Survey (CHTS) to the mail-based Fishing Effort Survey (FES). Both surveys measure shore and private boat recreational fishing trips, or effort, on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, and it has been determined that the FES produces more accurate estimates.

In January of this year, NOAA ended the CHTS and moved completely to the FES. The FES is a mail survey delivered to households drawn from the U.S. Postal Service database and supplemented by state-based saltwater recreational angler license and registration information. The FES was developed to address critical and growing problems with the telephone survey, including declining response rates and an increasing proportion of households that do not use landline telephones. A calibration model was developed to ensure a scientifically sound transition from the CHTS to the FES and calibrated revised MRIP catch estimates (1981-2017) are now available. NOAA Fisheries is also releasing preliminary estimates for 2018 Wave 1 (Jan – Feb). All revised catch and effort estimates are available on the MRIP website at the [data downloads page](#) and also via the [data query tool](#), which will allow anyone to compare time series of legacy and calibrated estimates. Please visit the [MRIP website](#) for more details on the plan, improvements made through the FES, and related updates. The agency will host two webinars to discuss and answer questions, as well. Information and registration can be found on the [events page](#).

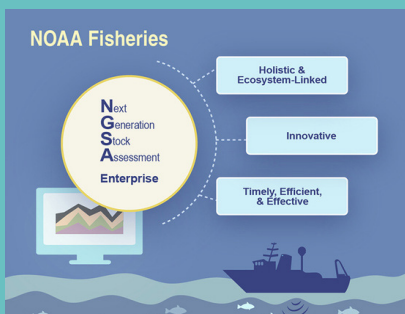


Photo: NOAA

Source: NOAA Fisheries MRIP Newscast, May 31 and July 10, 2018

# In The News

## NOAA Releases New Stock Assessment Improvement Plan



NOAA Fisheries released a new Stock Assessment Improvement Plan to provide strategic guidance for the population assessments conducted for fish stocks under the Magnuson-Stevens Act. The plan complements other strategic efforts to accomplish the mission of sustainable fisheries through science-based resource conservation and management. The new strategic document is titled [Implementing a Next Generation Stock Assessment Enterprise: An Update to NOAA Fisheries' Stock Assessment Improvement Plan](#).

This document describes the many challenges currently facing NOAA's stock assessment enterprise, and some of the innovative research and operations that will meet these challenges. More information is available at [NOAA Fisheries/News](#).

Source: NOAA Fisheries FishNews, June 6, 2018

## 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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## NOAA Fisheries Certifies Mississippi's Tails n' Scales Survey Design

NOAA Fisheries today announced that the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) has certified the designs of Mississippi's "Tails n' Scales" surveys of charter and private boat fishing for red snapper. The agency expects that Tails n' Scales will be included in the suite of implemented MRIP surveys. Mississippi developed these supplemental surveys to improve monitoring of red snapper catches. Read more [here](#).



Source: NOAA Fisheries Southeast News, June 27, 2018



## Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

Carrie Simmons TBA  
Executive Deputy  
Director Director

### Appointed Voting Members

LeAnn Bosarge <b>Chair</b> Pascagoula, MS 228-762-0888	John Greene <b>Vice Chair</b> 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

## Farewell to Council Members and Executive Director



A farewell reception was held for outgoing Gulf Council Executive Director, Doug Gregory, and Council members, Captain Johnny Greene and Camp Matens, at the June Gulf Council meeting in Key West, Florida.

Mr. Gregory has served the Council as Executive Director since 2013. He 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.

John (Johnny) R. Greene, Jr. of Alabama, completed

his third term on the Council. Captain Greene has been involved in fishery management since the late 1990s, and has served as the Chair of the Reef Fish, Data Collection, and Marine Reserve Committees, as well as Vice Chair of the Restoration Committee.

Campo (Camp) Matens, of Louisiana, has completed his second term on the Council. Mr. Matens most recently served as Chair

of the Council's Migratory Species Committee, Vice-Chair of the Red Drum and Personnel Committees. He has also served on the Council's Data Collection, Coral, and Sustainable Fisheries Committees.

The Council thanks Mr. Gregory, Mr. Greene, and Mr. Matens for their contributions to Council operations and the tireless hours of work spent on management solutions for Gulf resources. We wish them all the best in their future endeavors!



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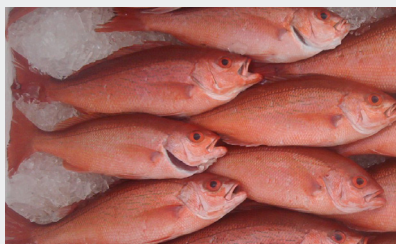
For more information on federal fishing regulations, visit <http://gulfcouncil.org/fishing-regulations/federal/>



# Recent Regulation Changes

## [Reef Fish Amendment 47 – Establish a Vermilion Snapper MSY Proxy and Adjust the Stock Annual Catch Limit](#)

This amendment sets the vermilion snapper annual catch limit at 3,110,000 pounds through the year 2021. It also sets the vermilion snapper maximum sustainable yield (MSY) proxy equal to the yield when fishing at F30% SPR. This final rule was effective June 13, 2018.



## [Reef Fish Amendment 36A – Modifications to Commercial Individual Fishing Quota Programs](#)

This Amendment requires all federally permitted vessels landing reef-fish to land at approved locations and hail-in at least 3 hours, but no more than 24 hours before landing. The Amendment returns red snapper and grouper/tilefish shares from non-activated individual fishing quota (IFQ) accounts to NMFS for redistribution and allows NMFS to withhold a portion of IFQ allocation at the start of the year equal to an anticipated quota reduction. The actions to return non-activated shares and withhold quota in the event of an anticipated quota decrease is effective July 12, 2018. The advance notice of landing requirement is effective January 1, 2019.

## [Framework Action to Modify Mutton Snapper and Gag Management Measures](#)



This amendment removes the annual catch target (ACT) for mutton snapper and decreases the annual catch limit (ACL) to 134,424 pounds for 2018 and 139,292 pounds for 2019. The amendment also sets the recreational mutton snapper bag limit at 5-snapper per day within the 10-snapper aggregate bag limit and increases the commercial and recreational minimum size limit to 18 inches. Finally, the amendment increases the commercial minimum

size limit for gag to 24 inches. This final rule is effective July 23, 2018.

## [Spiny Lobster Annual Catch Limits and Targets and Recreational Trap Prohibition in the South Atlantic](#)

This Amendment uses a longer time series of data, updates the spiny lobster MSY proxy and Maximum Fishing Mortality Threshold to equal the revised Over Fishing Limit of 10,460,000 pounds ww. The Amendment also sets the Annual Catch Limit (ACL) equal to the Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) at 9,600,000 pounds ww, and sets the Annual Catch Target 10% below that, at 8,640,000 pounds. This amendment also establishes a trigger mechanism to convene a review panel if a minimum value of landings is not met for two consecutive years. Finally, the amendment prohibits the use of traps for recreational harvest of spiny lobster in the South Atlantic federal waters. This final rule is effective July 23, 2018.



## Upcoming Meetings

### [Standing, Reef Fish, Mackerel and Shrimp Scientific and Statistical Committees \(SSC\)](#)

#### **When:**

Thursday, August 2, 2018:  
8:00 am- 5:30 pm EST

#### **Where:**

Hilton Tampa Airport Westshore  
Hotel  
2225 North Lois Avenue  
Tampa, FL 33607

### [Spiny Lobster Amendment 13 Public Hearing Webinar](#)

#### **When:**

Thursday, August 2, 2018:  
6:00-9:00 pm EST

[Register for Webinar](#)

### [Next Council Meeting](#)

#### **When:**

August 20-23, 2018

#### **Where:**

Omni  
900 N. Shoreline Boulevard  
Corpus Christi, TX 78401



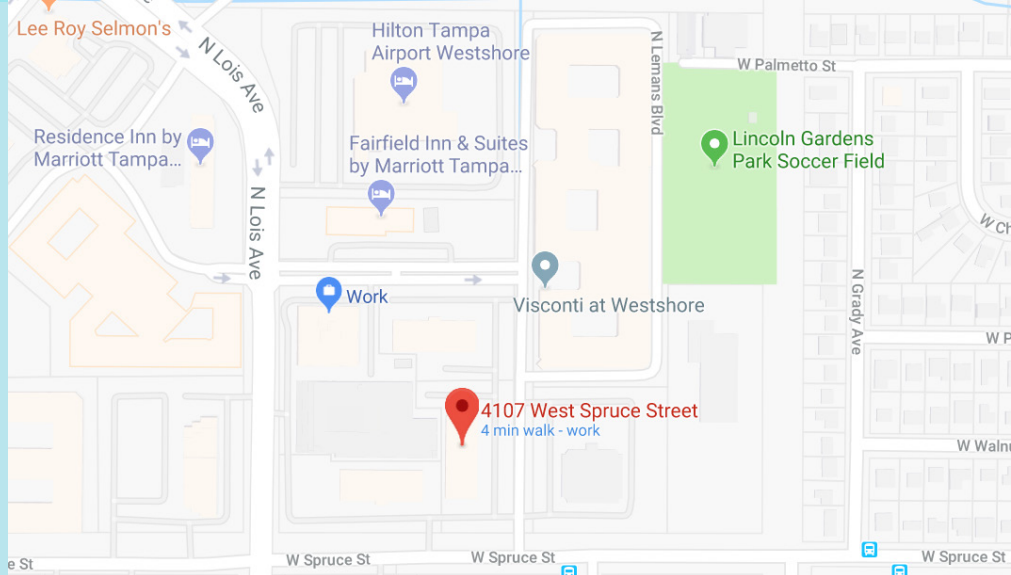


# Gulf Council Office Relocation

The Gulf of Fishery Management Council office has moved! Please note our new physical and mailing address:

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

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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](mailto: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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