

Gulf Fishery News

A publication of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council



Winter 2017
Volume 39 Issue 1

Reflections on the 2016 Recreational Fishing Season - *Baiting the Hook for 2017*

A new fishing year has arrived! Once again our annual catch limits have been re-set and we start harvesting anew. For many of our “most wanted” species the fishing season has re-opened and will remain open until the 2017 annual catch limits are projected to be met. Before we begin our look ahead to this new year, let’s first take a moment to reflect on last year’s harvest.

In 2016 we experienced quota closures for three of the fish we manage; red snapper, gray triggerfish, and greater amberjack. Not surprisingly, all three of these species are considered to be overfished, and are currently in rebuilding plans.

The 2016 recreational red snapper season opened on June 1 and closed on June 11th for private anglers, and on July 16th for federal for-hire anglers. The commercial season for red snapper did not close,

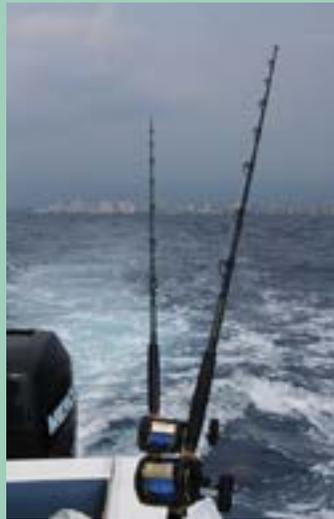


Photo: NOAA- Meehan



Photo: Capt. Mark Murphy

nor is it likely to do so in the future, because the commercial red snapper fishery is managed under an Individual Fishing Quota program, rather than through traditional seasons.

Both gray triggerfish and greater amberjack closed to recreational fishing on June 1 for the regularly scheduled closure, and never re-opened because the recreational annual catch limits for both species had already been met. The commercial season for greater amberjack closed on July 17th

after the commercial annual catch limit was harvested. The commercial gray triggerfish season remained open for the duration of 2016 because the commercial annual catch limit was not projected to be met.

You may be asking yourself why we are having trouble managing these three species to ensure ample fishing opportunity, especially since you’re seeing more of them now than you have in recent years.



Photo: Troy Frady

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Did you know?

The Gulf Council encourages and accepts public testimony at every stage of the fishery management plan process. Comment opportunities go beyond scoping meetings and public hearings. The Council also takes open public comment during each Council meeting and accepts written comments throughout the process. Written comments can be emailed to: gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org or mailed to:

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
2203 N. Lois Avenue
Suite 1100
Tampa, Florida 33607

Questions?
Call Emily at
813-348-1630

Reflections, cont.

Red snapper, greater amberjack, and gray triggerfish are all rebuilding. The stocks are rebounding, but still require conservative catch limits. A result of a rebuilding program is that as a stock gets healthier and more abundant, fish become easier to catch. As catch rates increase fishermen tend to fish more often and new fishermen enter the fishery. In addition, some stocks even expand their range as they rebuild so more fishermen across the coast are able to access to them.

Once a shortened fishing season is announced, fishing effort can intensify as some fishermen fish harder during the open days. Consequently, annual catch limits are often harvested more quickly. This issue is compounded further in rebuilding stocks that are managed with a payback accountability measure. If an annual catch limit is exceeded, then the following year's annual catch limit must be reduced to account for the overage, further reducing the annual catch limit from the previous year.



Photo: Mark Miller

This is exactly the cycle we are stuck in for gray triggerfish.

In fact, there will be no recreational gray triggerfish season

in 2017 because the recreational harvest for 2016 is estimated to be double the annual catch limit. The resulting payback has left the 2017 recreational sector with an annual catch limit too low to allow for any season at all.

So, when do we expect these stocks to rebuild? As of 1999, the federal law that oversees fisheries management in the United States, the Magnuson-Stevens Act, mandated that we rebuild overfished stocks within 10 years unless the biology of the stock, other environmental conditions, or international agreements dictate otherwise.



Photo: Amber Von Harten

Red snapper has been in a rebuilding plan since the development of the first Gulf reef fish management plan amendment in 1990. This stock is an exception to the 10-year rebuilding timeline because red snapper are such a long-lived fish. The rebuilding timeline is set at the time it would take to rebuild the stock in the absence of fishing mortality (estimated 12 years) plus one mean generation time (estimated 19.6 years). The rebuilding plan was established in 2000 and is expected to rebuild the stock by 2032.

The greater amberjack rebuilding plan was initiated in 2003. A 2014 stock assessment determined that the stock continued to be overfished, so, the Council set new annual catch limits and increased in the minimum size limit for recreational anglers from 30 to 34 inches fork length. The stock is expected to rebuild by 2019 and the Council expects to receive the results of a stock assessment update this spring.

Gray triggerfish has been overfished since 2006. A 2011 stock assessment indicated that the stock was not rebuilding quickly enough to make the 10-year rebuilding timeline, so the Council was required to revise the gray triggerfish rebuilding plan. The Council decreased annual catch limits and closed commercial and recreational sectors during the spawning season in an attempt to rebuild by 2017. In 2015, a stock assessment indicated that the gray triggerfish is not rebuilding on schedule and continues to be overfished despite efforts to rebuild.

The Council is currently working on Reef Fish Amendment 46, which considers extending the rebuilding timeline for gray triggerfish. The Council's current preferred alternative is to maintain the current annual catch limits and annual catch targets. The Council is also looking at modifying the recreational closed season, bag limit, and increasing the minimum size limit.



Reflections, cont.

As you can expect, 2017 will bring another year of tough limits for red snapper, greater amberjack, and gray triggerfish. As these stocks continue to improve, we continue to work towards finding management solutions that will provide the best recreational and commercial fishing opportunities possible.

Of course, we do manage numerous other fish. The chart on page 6 shows unadjusted 2017 annual catch limits and allocations for our most popular fish in the Gulf of Mexico. It should lend some insight into the coming fishing year. Similarly, the [recreational season calendar](#) on our website will show you which species you can harvest throughout the year.



Photo: Scott Hickman



Photo: Ryan Rindone



Photo: istock



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Stay up to date on Gulf of Mexico Fishery issues - visit our blog - Gulf Currents.

Gulf Currents will keep you in the loop and prepare you to participate effectively in the fishery management process by educating you about current events, possible management considerations, regulatory changes, the fisheries management process, and more.

Check it out at: www.gulfcouncil.blogspot.com



On the Dock for 2017

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council has recently taken final action on a few fishery management measures. Once final action is taken, the proposed management measure is forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for rule making. During rule making, a proposed rule is published and a final comment period is opened to the public. The Secretary of Commerce reviews the proposed rule and any feedback received through public comment before deciding to approve, disapprove, or partially approve a proposed fishery management measure. If a measure is approved, NOAA Fisheries will publish the final rule and implement the new regulation.

The following fishery management measures have been approved by the Council and are awaiting approval and implementation:

Hogfish

A stock assessment indicated that the hogfish stock in the Southeast United States is divided into three genetically distinct stocks with their own overfishing/overfished status. Within the Gulf Council's jurisdiction, the West Florida stock was considered healthy and the East Florida/Florida Keys stock was found to be overfished. As a result of these findings the Council has suggested the following hogfish management measures:

- Define the Gulf Council's hogfish management unit as the West Florida Stock which ranges in all waters of the Gulf of Mexico north of a line that extends from west 25° 09' north latitude (Cape Sable). This gives jurisdiction of the East Florida/Florida Keys stock, which begins south of the Cape Sable line, to the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council.
- Set standard criteria to determine whether the hogfish stock is overfished or experiencing overfishing.
- Increase the hogfish annual catch limit to 219,000 pounds.
- Increase the commercial/recreational hogfish minimum size limit to 14 inches.
- Disallow the use of powerheads on hogfish in the stressed area of the Gulf.



Photo: Emily Muehlstein

Yellowtail Snapper

It is burdensome for fishermen to abide by different regulations in areas where jurisdictional boundaries meet. In the Gulf, the use of circle hooks is required when fishing for reef fish using natural bait. In the South Atlantic, commercial snapper-grouper permit fishermen are not required to use circle hooks south of 28° 00' north latitude.



Photo: Mike Larkin

Moreover, the yellowtail snapper seasons differ in the South Atlantic and Gulf. Yellowtail snapper fishing in the Gulf primarily occurs near the jurisdictional boundary shared with the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council. The Gulf Council, therefore, has suggested the following yellowtail snapper management measures:

- Remove the circle hook requirement when commercial fishing with natural bait for yellowtail snapper south of 25° 09' north latitude on the west coast of Monroe County, Florida
- Modify the yellowtail snapper fishing year for commercial and recreational yellowtail snapper fishing to align with the South Atlantic's fishing year which runs from August 1 through July 31.



2017 continued

King Mackerel

In addition to determining that the stock is healthy, a recent stock assessment revised the mixing zone between Gulf and South Atlantic Groups of king mackerel. As a result, the Council’s scientific advisors revised the king mackerel acceptable biological catch levels and the Council decided to reallocate quota in the commercial zones and increase the recreational bag limit.

The Council suggested the following king mackerel management changes:

- Redefine the Gulf and South Atlantic king mackerel boundary so that there is a single year-round boundary at the eastern edge of the mixing zone (the Dade/Monroe County line).
- Adjust the Annual Catch limit.
- Revise the Gulf commercial zone quotas as follows:

Zone	% Allocation
Western Zone	40%
Northern Zone	18%
Southern Zone Handline	21%
Southern Zone Gillnet	21%

- Increase the recreational bag limit to 3 king mackerel per person.



Photo: Jason Descant

Once the Secretary of Commerce approves and implements any of these suggested management measures the Council will update the regulations and publish a press release announcing the changes.

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Photo: Northern Gulf of Mexico-NOAA NOS Sentinel Site Program



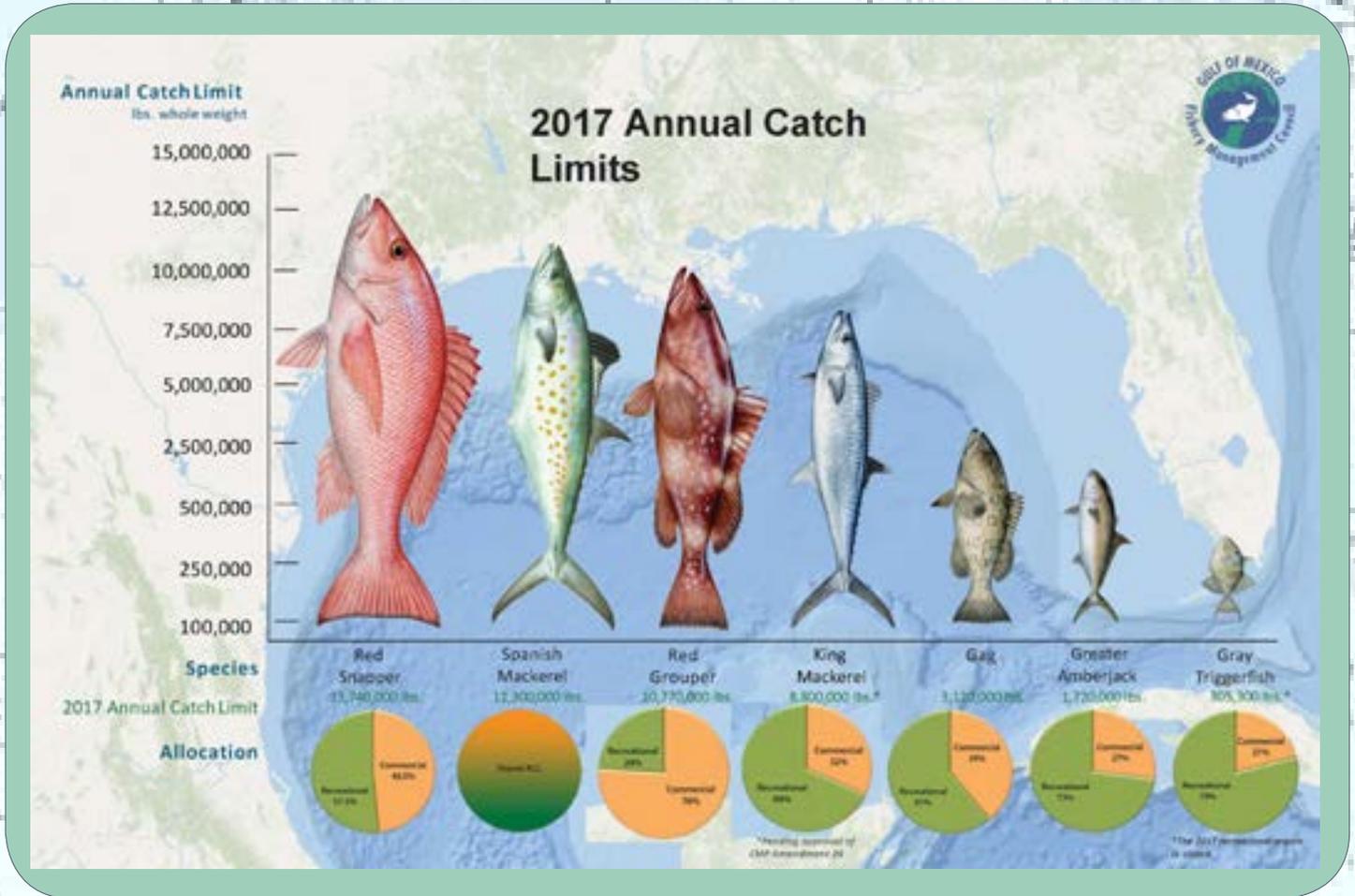


Photo: Shane Cantrell

More information regarding Gulf of Mexico Recreational Landings and Annual Catch Limits (ACLs) is available from NMFS at: http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable_fisheries/acl_monitoring/recreational_gulf/index.html

For more information regarding seasonal closures visit: http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable_fisheries/seasons_closures/gulf_of_mexico/index.html



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button in the left column.



January Council Meeting Reminder

The next Council meeting is scheduled for the week of January 30 - February 2, 2017 at the Astor Crowne Plaze, New Orleans, Louisiana.

To help ensure that Council members have sufficient time to consider your written testimony for a specific Council meeting, please submit your comments at least seven business days prior to the start of the Council meeting.

Note that all written comments will be posted on the Council's website for viewing by Council members and the public.

Comments can be submitted online by clicking the thermometer on the Council's homepage - www.gulfcouncil.org. Find your topic of interest and click on the "Submit Your Comments here" link.

Materials submitted to Council members or staff for distribution prior to or during a Council meeting will be treated as all other written comments and will be posted to the web site.

Oral or written communications provided to the Council, its members, or its staff that relate to matters within the Council's purview are public in nature. These communications will be made available to the public in their entirety and will be maintained by the Council as part of the permanent record. Further, knowingly and willfully submitting false information to the Council is a violation of Federal Law.

A draft agenda will be posted on the Gulf Council web site at www.gulfcouncil.org.

Reef Fish Advisory Panel Member Named Champion of Change for Sustainable Seafood

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's Reef Fish Advisory Panel member, Jason DeLaCruz, has been named a "White House Champion of Change for Sustainable Seafood." During National Seafood Month, October, 2016, the President's administration recognized 12 individuals from different parts of the country for their leadership, innovation and commitment to United States fisheries and seafood. Champions are selected as individuals who are doing extraordinary things to empower and inspire members of their communities in the ongoing recovery of America's fishing industry.

Jason is the President of Wild Seafood Co., which provides high quality sustainable fish to eco-minded customers. In addition to sitting on the Reef Fish Advisory Panel, he is also the Executive Director of Gulf Wild, a company dedicated to setting the standard for genuine, responsibly caught, traceable and reliable wild domestic seafood, and the Vice President of the Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders' Alliance, a strategic non-profit fishermen's organization that is working to protect the Gulf's fish and fishermen for today and for future generations. He is a commercial fisherman and lives in Florida with his wife Vicky. Congratulations, Jason!



Source: www.whitehouse.gov/champions



Send us Your Fishing Photos!

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

Whether from a spear fishing adventure, a charter trip, or a commercial effort, we'd like to see your photos and possibly use them on our website or in our publications.

Our photo library is in need of updating! 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, along with a description and proper photo credit, then simply attach the image and send.

NOTE: Photo descriptions may be edited for grammar, clarity, and/or length. Photos must be in JPEG format and cannot exceed 1.5 MB (200 ppi). By submitting photos, you understand that your photo may be used on our website, in our newsletter, or other publications. Photo credit will be given.



Photo: Emily Muehlstein



Upcoming Meetings to Gather Public Input

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council will hold scoping or public hearings beginning in February, to take comments on the following:

Shrimp Amendment 17B - Establishing optimum yield, target number of permits, permit pool, and addressing transit provisions.

Reef Fish Amendment 46-Gray Triggerfish Rebuilding Plan

Reef Fish Amendment 36A - Commercial IFQ Program Modifications

Coral Amendment 7 - Coral areas identified as priority habitat

Please check our website periodically for exact dates and locations as they become available. <http://gulfcouncil.org/>

Read the Amendments at

http://gulfcouncil.org/fishery_management_plans/scoping-thru-implementation.php



Submit Your Comments!

Use the online public comment forms available for each proposed Amendment as listed on our website. 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_plans/scoping-thru-implementation.php



Photos: Emily Muehlstein and Jeff Carter

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For more information on federal fishing regulations, visit www.gulfcouncil.org/fishing_regulations/index.php



Gulf Council to Meet in New Orleans, Louisiana

The Gulf Council will hold its next meeting at the Astor Crowne Plaza, in New Orleans, Louisiana, January 30- February 2, 2017. Here's a quick look at some of the issues the Council will consider:



Mackerel

The Council is slated to take final action of CMP Amendment 29- Allocation Sharing and Accountability Measures for Gulf King Mackerel, which considers allocation sharing strategies between recreational and commercial sectors and associated accountability measures for Gulf migratory group king mackerel.

[Read the document here](#)

[Watch the video here](#)

[Read comments here](#)

Data Collection

The Council is scheduled to take final action on a generic amendment to require electronic reporting of for-hire vessels in the Gulf of Mexico. The Council is considering modifying the frequency and mechanism of data reporting, requiring trip level notification, and requiring hardware/software (NMFS approved) requirements and the real time or archived location tracking.

[Read the document here](#)

[Read comments here](#)

Gray Triggerfish

The Council will review a public hearing draft of Amendment 46, which considers modifying the gray triggerfish rebuilding plan. A recent stock assessment indicated that the gray triggerfish stock continues to be overfished and the Council's scientific advisors revised the acceptable biological catch levels. Along with determining new catch levels for the stock, the Council will consider changes to the recreational bag limits, size limits, and closed season(s); and modify commercial trip limits.

[Read the document here](#)

[Read comments here](#)

[Submit comments here](#)

Modifications to the Commercial Individual Fishing Quota Programs

The Council will review the public hearing draft of Amendment 36A which includes actions for hail-in requirements, inactivated shareholder accounts, and mid-year quota changes.

[Read the document here](#)

[Read comments here](#)

[Submit comments here](#)

Minimum Stock Size Threshold for Reef Fish Stocks

The Council will review the public hearing draft of Amendment 44 which considers a standard way to determine minimum stock size threshold for species in the reef fish management unit.

[Read the document here](#)

[Read comments here](#)

[Submit comments here](#)

Shrimp

The Council will review the public hearing draft of Shrimp Amendment 17B- Establishing optimum yield, target number of permits, permit pool, and addressing transit provisions through federal waters.

[Read the document here](#)

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In the News

National Academies Releases New MRIP Review, Recognizes NOAA Fisheries for Making "Impressive Progress"

In January the National Academies of Sciences released a comprehensive follow-up review to its 2006 independent, expert analysis of NOAA Fisheries' saltwater recreational information collection efforts. The Academies recognized the agency for making "impressive progress" over the past 10 years, including "major improvements" to the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) survey designs. The review also highlighted some remaining challenges and offered a series of recommendations for continued improvements to MRIP surveys.

The MRIP is the state-regional-federal partnership responsible for developing, improving, and implementing surveys that measure how many trips saltwater anglers take, and how many fish they catch. This vital information- combined with other data, such as commercial catch and biological research- enables scientists and managers to assess and maintain sustainable U.S. fish stocks.

The agency requested this follow-up review to measure progress made toward implementing recommendations from the Academies' 2006 report. This review and its findings will help NOAA further refine recreational fisheries information collection efforts and prioritize improvement efforts to best meet the evolving needs of fisheries scientists, stock assessors, managers, and stakeholders.

The review specifically noted that methods used in the Access Point Angler Intercept Survey are "a vast improvement over the previous sampling and estimation procedures and reflect state of the art methods in survey sampling." The Academies also acknowledged that the methodologies associated with the new, mail-based Fishing Effort Survey are "major improvements" over those used with the current Coastal Household Telephone Survey.

The National Academies is the nation's premier source of independent, expert advice on scientific, engineering, and medical issues. The service to government by the Academies has become so essential that Congress and the White House have issued legislation and executive orders that reaffirm its unique role.

To read the National Academies' press release and report, "A Review of the Marine Recreational Information Program," click [here](#). You can find a summary at this [link](#). To learn more about the review, visit the [National Academies' project page](#).



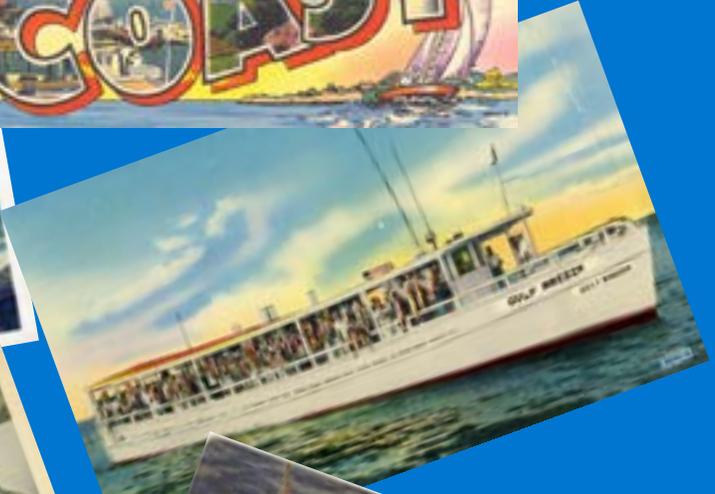
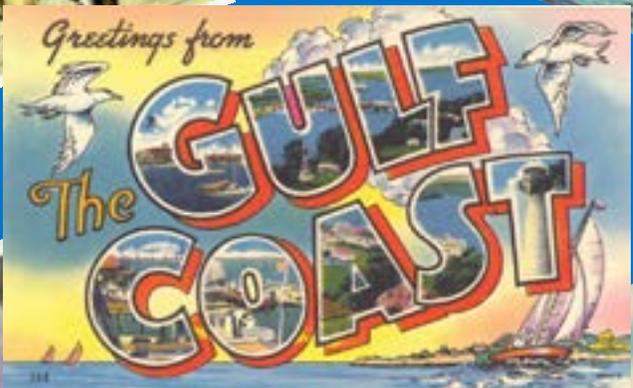
Photo: Mark Miller

Source: Newscast- The Newsletter of the Marine Recreational Information Program
http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/Assets/New-MRIP/newscasts/2017-01-10_T1_NAS_Review



Postcard Panorama

A look back at fishing in the Gulf of Mexico



The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

Protecting our marine resources

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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, 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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