

Gulf Fishery News

A publication of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council



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Council Member Leads Project to Conduct Independent Abundance Estimate of Red Snapper in Gulf of Mexico



Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council member, Dr. Greg Stunz, will lead a team of university and government scientists who will conduct an independent study to estimate the number of red snapper in the U.S. waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

Dr. Stunz, a professor at the Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies at Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi, will head the project team made up of 21 scientists from 12 institutions of higher learning, a state agency and a federal agency. The team

was selected by an expert review panel convened by the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium.

“We’ve assembled some of the best red snapper scientists around for this study,” said Dr. Stunz. “The team members assembled through this process are ready to address this challenging research question. There are lots of constituents who want an independent abundance estimate that will be anxiously awaiting our findings.”

Recreational anglers and commercial fishers will be invited to play a key role in collecting data by tagging fish, reporting tags and working directly with scientists onboard their vessels. “The local knowledge fishermen bring to this process is very valuable and meaningfully informs our study,” Stunz said.

Some stakeholder groups have expressed concerns that there are more red snapper in the Gulf than currently accounted for in the stock assessment. The team of scientists on this project will spend two years studying the issue.

The project team will determine abundance and distribution of red snapper on artificial, natural and unknown bottom habitat across the northern Gulf of Mexico.

More information may be found at: <http://masgc.org/news/article/scientific-team-selected-to-conduct-independent-abundance-estimate-of-red-s>

Source: MS-AL Sea Grant SeaGram, December 16, 2017



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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

January 2018 Council Meeting Update

The Gulf Council met January 29-February 1, 2018 in New Orleans, Louisiana. A summary of actions taken at the meeting is found below:

Search for New Executive Director

Mr. Doug Gregory is retiring from the Council this summer after serving 5-years as the Executive Director and 7 years as a Fishery Biologist in the 1980s. In the interim, he served the council as a member of the SSC. His experience and leadership will be missed. The Council is currently searching for a new candidate to fill his position.

Spiny Lobster

The Council reviewed the draft Options Paper for Spiny Lobster Amendment 13, which would make federal regulations for commercial spiny lobster bully netting consistent with regulations recently adopted by the State of Florida. This would allow Florida to directly submit proposed spiny lobster regulations to National Marine Fisheries Service without requiring Council action.



Photo: FL Sea Grant

The Council elected to amend language in some actions within the document for clarity and to maintain consistency with Florida regulations. The timeline of an enhanced cooperative management procedure may also be amended to be more consistent with the federal rulemaking process, if necessary. The South Atlantic Council will review the document at its April Council meeting.

Draft Options Paper – Carryover of Unharvested Quota

The Council received the SSC recommendations on this options paper that incorporates provisions to allow carryover of uncaught ACLs and appropriate adjustments to any quota carried over. The Council voted to remove an alternative that would not allow carryovers to stocks without a sector allocation and to remove an action that allowed adjustments to the carryover provision.

Public Hearing Draft Amendment 49 – Modifications to the Sea Turtle Release Gear and Framework Procedure for the Reef Fish Fishery

The Council reviewed a public hearing draft of Amendment 49 that would allow the use of new sea turtle release gears for commercial and charter vessel/headboats with federal Gulf reef fish permits. The document has been updated to include additional information and photographs of the new sea turtle release gear as recommended by the Law Enforcement Technical Committee. The Council selected preferred alternatives that would modify the regulations for commercial and charter/headboat Gulf reef fish permit holders to allow the use of newly released devices; and modify the reef fish framework procedure to include changes to release gear requirements and handling protocols for sea turtles and other protected resources. A public hearing will be held by webinar before the April Council meeting. The Council will review a final action on the amendment at the April Council meeting.

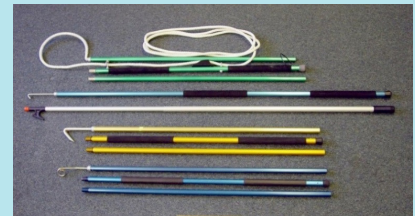


Photo: NOAA

Descending Devices and Venting Tools

The Council reviewed a draft policy statement that encourages the proper use of venting tools or descending devices, as appropriate, when releasing reef fish, and provides background information on barotrauma and the effectiveness of release devices. A proposed outreach program for the policy statement was also discussed. It was agreed that the Outreach and Education Technical Committee would be a valuable asset for implementing a program and they will be convened before the June recreational red snapper season.

The Council voted to send a letter to the Chair of the Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group supporting outreach programs that encourage a more widespread use of release devices, including distribution of descending devices, followed up by research on the utility of the devices and resulting fish survival.



Council Update, cont.

State Management for Recreational Red Snapper

The Council reviewed the program document and draft amendments for the five Gulf States that would enable each state to establish state management for the recreational harvest of red snapper in federal waters. The Council reviewed an approach to estimate red snapper biomass off each state, which will be used in one of the alternatives for allocating the red snapper quota among the states. The Council also reviewed an allocation decision tool for examining the various allocation alternatives.

The Council voted to exclude 2010 landings from all the historical landings time series alternatives for calculating state apportionments due to concerns with the data from the year of the oil spill. The Council also added options for the range of years to use fishing effort estimates as in the number of recreational fishing trips in the alternative that considers various weightings of biomass and number of trips by region. In response to letters from the states pertaining to delegation of management measures; a motion was passed to assess the requested delegation items, and determine what items can be delegated for inclusion of the next iteration of the documents.

Amendment 41 – Allocation-based Management for Federally Permitted Charter Vessels

The Council reviewed the current Council and AP preferred alternatives in draft Amendment 41. The current preferred alternatives would establish a permit fishing quota program that provides participants with shares and annual allocation that remain attached to the permit.

The Council concurred with the staffs suggested wording of a new action regarding reclamation of latent shares. Due to the potential for discrepancies in average fish weights from dockside sampling that would be used for converting pounds to number of fish, the Council added a new action regarding units of measure for quota distribution and reporting.



Photo: Doug Dodson

Amendment 42 – Reef Fish Management for Headboat Survey Vessels

The Council reviewed a draft of Amendment 42 and decided to review the document and select preferred alternatives at the April Council meeting. They requested that a decision tool be developed for both Amendments 41 and 42, so the Council and stakeholders could better assess the current range of alternatives.

Exempted Fishing Permits

The Council reviewed Exempted Fishing Permits (EFP) submitted to NMFS from the following: each of the five Gulf states for recreational red snapper management in 2018 and 2019; organizations regarding the testing of various traps for the commercial harvest of lionfish in the Gulf; and a private company that wanted to evaluate an offshore aquaculture operation in the Gulf.

The Council voted to recommend approval of each state's EFP, with the condition that if federal for-hire vessels are included in any state's EFP, it would not shorten the length of the federal for-hire season. The Council recommended that NMFS move forward with the implementation of the Florida Keys Commercial Fishing Association Lionfish EFP request and the Florida Keys Fisheries Lionfish EFP request with the recommended modifications to the sampling area and to add a one year update reporting requirement. The Council then directed staff to draft a letter outlining concerns regarding the aquaculture EFP application and forward the letter to NMFS.

Historical Captain Endorsements

The Council initiated development of an action to evaluate removing the historical captain endorsement to federal charter/headboat permits for reef fish and coastal migratory pelagic and to allow these permits to be fully transferable.



Recent Final Regulations

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

Gray Triggerfish

Amendment 46 establishes a 9-year rebuilding timeline for gray triggerfish and retains the annual catch limits and annual catch targets set in Reef Fish Amendment 37. Additionally, the amendment reduces the recreational bag limit to 1-fish per person per day, increases the recreational minimum size limit to 15-inches fork length, and creates a January – February recreational closed season in addition to the current June-July 31 closure during spawning for the commercial and recreational sector. Finally, the amendment also increases the commercial trip limit to 16-fish. This final rule became effective January 16, 2018.



Photo: Steven Cone



Photo: FL Sea Grant

Shrimp

Shrimp Amendment 17B defines an aggregate maximum sustainable yield of 112,531,374 pounds of tails and an aggregate optimum yield of 85,761,596 pounds of tails. This amendment allows for the creation of a Federal Gulf shrimp reserve pool permit when certain conditions are met. It also sets minimum threshold number of active shrimp permits at 1072 and mandates that the Council convene a review panel to review the details of a permit pool if the number of permits reaches 1,175. This amendment also allows vessels possessing shrimp to transit through federal waters without a federal permit if their trawl doors and nets are out of the water the bag straps are removed. This final rule became effective January 22, 2018.

Greater Amberjack

This amendment uses the ACL/ACT control rule to establish a 13% buffer for the commercial sector and a 17% buffer to the recreational sector. The greater amberjack annual catch limits and targets are as follows:

Year	Recreational		Commercial	
	ACL	ACT (quota)	ACL	ACT (quota)
2018	862,860	716,173	319,140	277,651
2019	1,086,970	902,185	402,030	349,766
2020+	1,309,620	1,086,985	484,380	421,411



Photo: Jim Green

The amendment also creates a recreational closed season from January 1 – June 30. This final rule became effective January 27, 2018.





Annual Catch Limit lbs. whole weight

2018 Annual Catch Limits

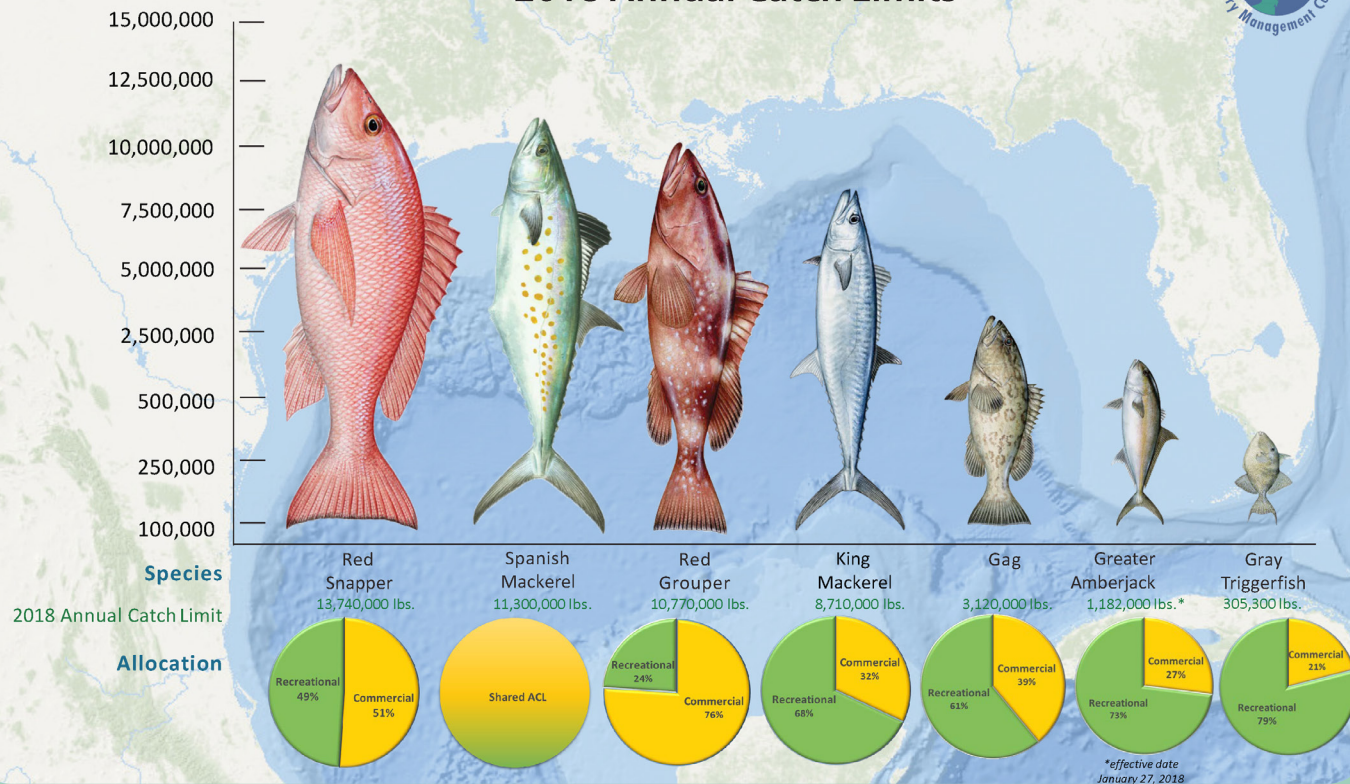


Photo: Emily Muehlstein

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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In the News

NOAA Fisheries Certifies LA Creel Survey Design

On December 29, 2017, NOAA Fisheries announced the certification of the Louisiana Recreational Creel (LA Creel) survey design. The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries uses LA Creel as an alternative general survey to estimate recreational fishing catch and effort, or number of angler trips. It was designed to provide catch estimates by state drainage basins, particularly for offshore fisheries, that are more precise than the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) general survey estimates, and also to provide preliminary estimates weekly during the fishing season.



Photo: LDWF

Since 2014, the State and NOAA Fisheries, along with outside consultants, have been working collaboratively to develop and refine the LA Creel sampling and estimation methods. Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries developed the survey design, and MRIP provided technical support for subsequent improvement. MRIP also coordinated the independent peer review of the design.

Now that the LA Creel survey design has been certified, it is eligible for federal funding to support ongoing improvements and implementation. Use of LA Creel catch statistics in stock assessments and management actions, requires their conversion into a “common currency” that makes them comparable to historical MRIP estimates. Implementation of such a conversion requires development of peer-reviewed scientifically valid methods.

LA Creel is one of several Gulf of Mexico surveys that has been developed by the states with technical support from MRIP. Survey designs to supplement MRIP catch and effort estimates for red snapper are currently under review for certification in Alabama and Mississippi. Additionally, Florida has developed a supplemental reef fish survey design that will be peer reviewed in February 2018.

The process of supporting the development and certification of new survey designs demonstrates MRIP’s commitment to working with our state and regional partners to meet their unique data needs and advance new methods and technologies. This is critical to improving recreational fishing data collection efforts and ensuring fishing opportunities for future generations.

Find out more about LA Creel at: <http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/lacreel>

Source: NOAA, MRIP Newscast, December 29, 2017



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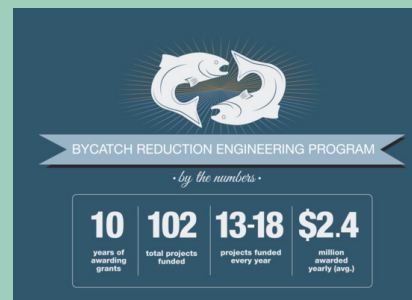
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In the News cont.

NOAA Fisheries is now accepting applications for the Bycatch Reduction Engineering Program (BREP)

High-priority areas for Fiscal Year 2018 projects include:

- Developing innovative and effective technologies; gear modifications; avoidance programs and techniques; and/or improved fishing practices in commercial and recreational fisheries and aquaculture to reduce bycatch impacts.
- Improving understanding and reduction of post-release and other indirect mortality, including barotrauma, predation, and unaccounted mortality in commercial and recreational fisheries and aquaculture. This includes target and non-target species of fish or protected species. Proposals addressing this priority may be projects that specifically test descending devices or identify high-priority release and discard mortality needs and provide baseline information for important discarded species (in particular, but not limited to red snapper, Atlantic cod, striped marlin, etc.).
- Developing techniques to reduce interactions between fishing gears and corals, sponges, and other structure-forming invertebrates. Proposals that specifically reduce impacts to essential fish habitats, deep-sea coral sites, and endangered tropical corals.
- Conducting comprehensive international bycatch analyses or research that will inform conservation engineering in U.S. commercial, recreational, and aquaculture fisheries.



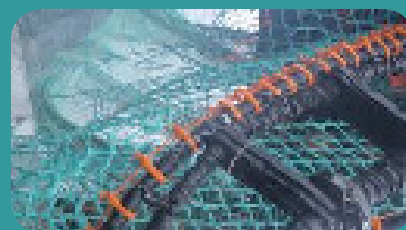
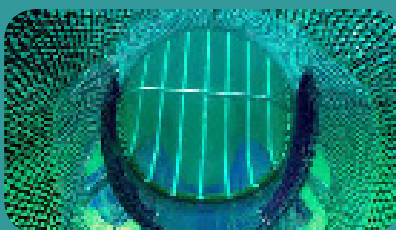
<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/bycatch/bycatch-reduction-engineering-program>

Full applications are due by March 30, 2018.

For more information, please visit the [BREP funding opportunity page](#) or contact Erin Wilkinson, National Bycatch Coordinator, at erin.wilkinson@noaa.gov.

Additional information about BREP is available [here](#).

Source: NOAA Fish News, January 3, 2018



Photos NOAA

In the News cont.

Voluntary Shortfin Mako Shark Measures

NOAA Fisheries requests that fishermen voluntarily adopt shortfin mako shark measures.



Photo: NOAA

NOAA Fisheries requests that fishermen voluntarily adopt internationally recommended measures for shortfin mako shark to decrease fishing mortality pending an upcoming emergency rulemaking. The most recent population assessment estimated that shortfin mako catches would need to be significantly reduced to prevent further declines. The assessment estimated shortfin mako catches would have to be significantly reduced to prevent further population declines.

View the complete article here:

https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/bulletin/voluntary-shortfin-mako-shark-measures?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery

Source: NOAA Fish News, January 17, 2018

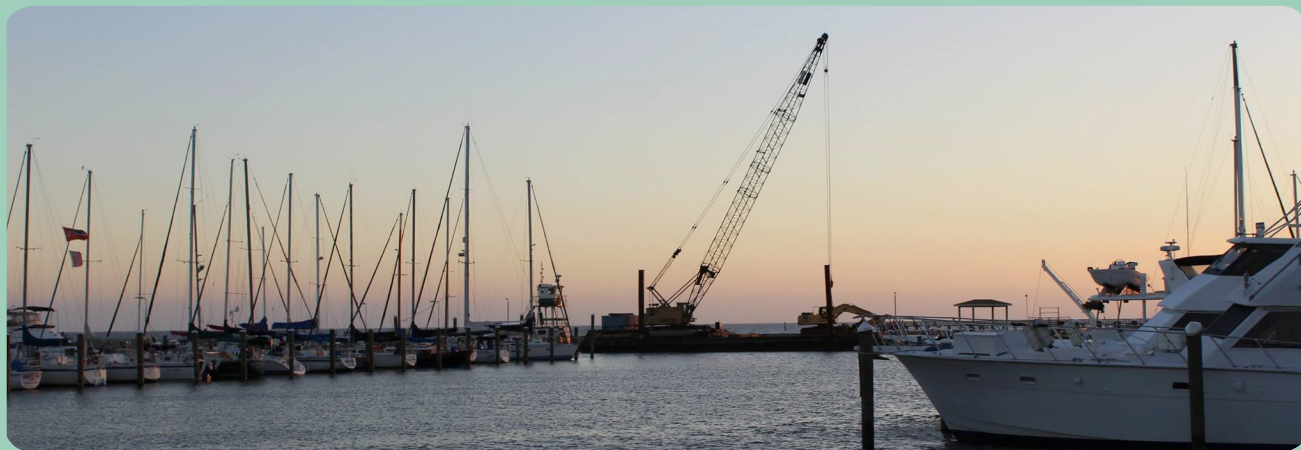


Photo: Sea Grant

Stay in the loop with Gulf Currents

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



In the News cont.

What Can I Do To Protect Coral Reefs?

Even if you live far from coral reefs, you can have an impact on reef health and conservation

Here are some things YOU can do:

- Corals are already a gift, don't give them as presents.
- Conserve water. The less water you use, the less runoff and wastewater that will eventually find its way back into the ocean.
- Volunteer in local beach or reef cleanups. If you don't live near the coast, get involved in protecting your watershed.
- Become an informed consumer and learn how your daily choices like water use, recycling, seafood, vacation spots, fertilizer use, and driving times can positively (or negatively) impact the health of coral reefs.

There are also many things you can do to ensure that you are environmentally conscious when you visit coral reefs or coastal areas. These include things such as hiring local guides to support the economy, removing all trash from an area, never touching or harassing wildlife in reef areas, and avoiding dropping your boat anchor or chain nearby a coral reef.

Finally, stay informed and spread the word! Educate yourself about why healthy coral reefs are valuable to the people, fish, plants, and animals that depend on them. Your excitement will help others get involved.

<h1>10 ways to protect CORAL REEFS</h1>	<p>Corals are already a gift. Don't give them as presents.</p> <p>It takes corals decades or longer to create reef structures, so leave them on the reef.</p> <p>Long-lasting light bulbs - ARE A - BRIGHT IDEA</p> <p>Energy efficient light bulbs reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Climate change is one of the leading threats to coral reef survival.</p>	<h2>EDUCATE</h2> <p>yourself about coral reefs & the creatures they support.</p> <p>When you further your own education, you can help others understand the fragility and value of the world's coral reefs.</p>
<h2>Choose sustainable seafood.</h2> <p>Learn how to make smart seafood choices at www.FishWatch.gov.</p>	<h2>IF YOU DIVE DON'T TOUCH.</h2> <p>Coral reefs are alive. Stirred-up sediment can smother corals.</p>	<h2>BE A MARINE DEBRIS CRUSADER.</h2> <p>In addition to picking up your own trash, carry away the trash that others have left behind.</p>
<h2>CONSERVE WATER</h2> <p>The less water you use, the less runoff and wastewater that eventually find their ways back into the ocean.</p>	<h2>Volunteer!</h2> <p>Volunteer in local beach or reef cleanups. If you don't live near the coast, get involved in protecting your watershed.</p>	<h2>Practice safe boating.</h2> <p>Anchor in sandy areas away from coral and sea grasses so that the anchor and chain do not drag on nearby corals.</p>
<h2>Don't send chemicals into our waterways.</h2> <p>Nutrients from excess fertilizer increases algae growth that blocks sunlight to corals.</p>	<p>oceanservice.noaa.gov</p>	

Upcoming Meetings to Gather Public Input

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council will hold in-person and webinar public hearings in the near future, 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](#) (via webinar)

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

Please check our website periodically for exact dates and locations as they become available.

<http://gulfcouncil.org/>

Read the Amendments at

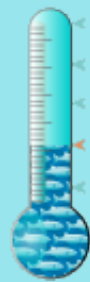
http://gulfcouncil.org/fishery_management_plans/scoping-thru-implementation.php

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



Send us Your Fishing Photos!

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: Michael Trahan



Be in the Know When on the Go!

Gulf of Mexico Fishing Regulations App is Available

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!

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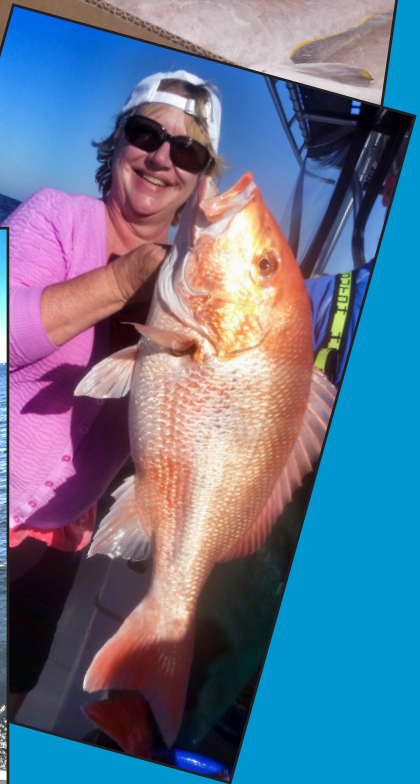
Free QR Code Reader Apps are available in both the App Store and Android Market.

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



Recent Snapshots

See our new photo library acquisitions



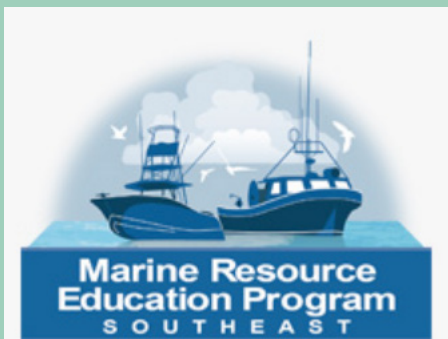
MREP Southeast Seeking Applicants for 2018 Workshops

The Marine Resource Education Program (MREP) Southeast was created by fishermen for fishermen. Fishermen can learn more about the fisheries science and management processes that are used in the Gulf of Mexico and the South Atlantic regions. Through a workshop setting, fishermen engage with scientists and marine resource specialists, network with agency personnel, and share ideas and important feedback from the fishing community.

Participants include commercial, charter, and recreational fishermen, as well as marine wholesale and retail business owners, chefs, media, and other interested parties. Presenters are solicited from NMFS Regional Office and Science Center, the Fishery Management Councils, research institutions, and the fishing community. Workshops are designed and held as a collaborative effort, and they leave participants prepared to engage confidently in fishery management and to critically evaluate the science affecting their fishery.

Online applications for the 2018 workshops are currently being accepted and will be reviewed in March.

Participation is limited and applicants will be selected based on their stated interests and their unique contribution to the group.



Fisheries Science Workshop

April 24–26, 2018

Hotel Indigo

234 3rd Ave. N.

St. Petersburg, FL

Fisheries Management Workshop

November 14-16, 2018

The Westin

7627 W. Campbell Causeway

Tampa, FL

Apply today at <https://www.gmri.org/our-work/fisheries-convening/mrep-southeast>



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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