

Gulf Fishery News

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What's Inside?

2018 Year in Review	1
January 2019 Council Meeting Preview	3
Saltonstall-Kennedy Grant Program	4
2019 Annual Catch Limits	5
For-hire Reporting Requirements Workshops	6
In the News	6
Upcoming Meetings	7

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**Gulf of Mexico
Fishery Management
Council**

*Protecting our marine
resources*

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2018 Year in Review

We've made another trip around the sun and once again, we have an opportunity to look back on the year behind us and look forward to the year ahead. 2018 was yet another fascinating year in fisheries management. We're working on major changes in the management of red snapper and we tweaked cobia and greater amberjack regulations. Not surprisingly, 2019 is already shaping up to be an action-packed year with red snapper and red grouper management taking center stage in the Gulf of Mexico. Keep reading for a perspective on what we have accomplished in 2018 and where we're headed in 2019.

Red Snapper

Red snapper management is usually pretty exciting, thankfully, the excitement of 2018 seems to be a bit more optimistic than it has been in years past. The year started off on the right foot, a stock assessment determined that red snapper is not considered overfished, nor is it experiencing overfishing. As a result, the Council increased the red snapper annual catch limit by 1.25 million pounds, allowing up to 15.1 million pounds of harvest. The Council also decided to reduce the buffer set between the federal for-hire annual catch limit and annual catch target from 20% to 9%. For 2019, this should permit those anglers to catch more of their allowance of red snapper without putting them in jeopardy of overharvesting their annual catch limit.



Photo: Dylan Hubbard

Next, the Council continued its work to allow the Gulf states more management control over recreational red snapper. In 2018, while the Council focused on developing its State Management documents, the management of the private angling component of the recreational red snapper sector was handled by the states through Exempted Fishing Permits. The red snapper private angling allocation was divided among the states, and each state set its own season in the federal waters of the Gulf. These same Exempted Fishing Permits extend through the 2019 fishing season. Also in 2019, the Council will work to finalize Reef Fish Amendment 50, which would allow the states some management authority over recreational red snapper on a more permanent basis.

Red Grouper

Over the course of 2018, the Council heard from fishermen who expressed concern for what appears to be a declining red grouper stock. While there is a red grouper stock assessment underway, the results of that assessment aren't expected until late 2019. In light of this, the Council requested an interim analysis that could be used to provide harvest recommendations while awaiting the stock assessment results. That analysis showed that landings have been significantly below the annual catch limits, which indicates that the stock may not be large enough to sustain current harvest levels. After hearing recommendations from its scientific advisors, the Council requested that NOAA Fisheries implement an interim rule to establish annual catch limits based on 2017 landings.

...continued on next page



2018 Year in Review cont.

For 2019, NOAA Fisheries has already announced that it is withholding a portion of commercial red grouper IFQ as it works to publish the interim rule to reduce the annual catch limit. The Council has initiated a framework amendment to reduce the catch limits beyond the interim rule until it can provide longer term catch recommendations based on the stock assessment. We expect that red grouper will be in the spotlight throughout much of 2019 so, stay tuned.



Photo: Jim Green

Greater Amberjack

You probably noticed that a new recreational greater amberjack season hit the books in 2018. From here forward, the recreational season is scheduled to open for the month of May and again August through October. The only complicating factor is that the fishing year has also changed so the quota renews on August 1st, rather than on January 1st like the rest of our reef fish. This means that any quota overages are more likely to affect the May season then the August – October fall season since the quota starts anew in August.

Cobia

In 2018, the Council decided to increase the cobia minimum size limit to 36 inches fork length for both commercial and recreational sectors. This decision came after the Council heard from anglers that believe that the cobia stock is struggling. We're anxiously awaiting the cobia stock assessment which is scheduled to begin in 2019 and the new size limit is expected to be implemented sometime in the new year as well.



Photo: Emily Muehlstein

For-Hire Electronic Reporting

Two years ago, the Council finalized an Amendment to require federally permitted charter and headboat vessels to electronically report their catch for each trip before offloading fish. The Amendment also requires each vessel to have a device permanently affixed to the vessel that, at a minimum, archives vessel position data. The new reporting requirements are expected to come online in 2019. The requirement to report catch will begin sometime in spring/summer and the requirement to have positioning hardware will begin in the fall. The Council is partnering with NOAA Fisheries to host workshops and mail informational materials to all federally permitted for-hire operators in the Gulf. If this action affects you, stay tuned for more information on what you'll be required to do.



Photo: Dylan Hubbard



Photo: Emily Muehlstein



Photo: Ed Walker

January 2019 Council Meeting Preview

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council will meet January 28 – 31, at [Perdido Beach Resort](#) in Orange Beach, Alabama. You're welcome to join us in person or you can [watch a live broadcast](#) of the meeting. Public comment will be held on Wednesday, January 30th from 1:30 – 4:30 PM. If you can't testify in person visit our "[Amendments Under Development](#)" webpage to learn about the different issues we're working on and submit your comment.

The meeting [agenda](#) will help you prepare for the meeting. The following is a summary of some issues the Council plans to address:

Historical Captains Endorsements

Final Action was scheduled for this amendment. However, due the partial-government shut-down the Council is unable to take final action at this meeting. Instead, the Council will hear public comments on a draft of an abbreviated framework action that considers converting historical for-hire captain endorsements to federal for-hire permits. There are currently 31 historical captains with both reef fish and coastal migratory pelagic (CMP) permits, and one captain with a CMP permit. The Council is considering converting these historical endorsements into standard charter/headboat permits.

[Read the Document](#)

[Watch the Video](#)

[Submit Comment](#)

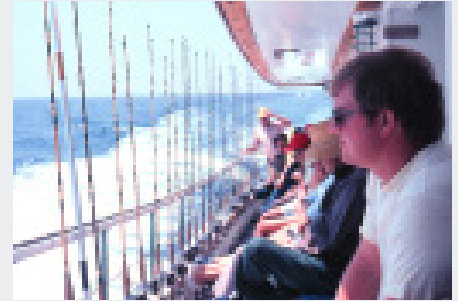


Photo: NOAA-Ralph Kresge

State Management of Recreational Red Snapper

This amendment was scheduled for final action. However, due the partial-government shut-down the Council is unable to take final action at this meeting. The Council will hear comments gathered during public hearings and review the suite of documents that consider allowing each Gulf state to manage a portion of the recreational red snapper quota in federal waters.

[Watch the Video](#)

[Read the Public Hearing Guide](#)

[Submit Comment](#)

Carryover of Unharvested Quota

The Council will review a public hearing draft that considers allowing uncaught annual catch limit to be carried over and added to the next year's harvest for reef fish and coastal migratory pelagics. Quota available for carryover would have to be adjusted to account for natural mortality and other factors such as management uncertainty.

[Read the Document](#)

[Submit Comment](#)

Shrimp

The Council will look at a public hearing draft of an amendment that considers increasing the amount of shrimp effort allowed in the special area that is monitored for juvenile red snapper bycatch. Analysis shows that the effort reduction threshold, which currently requires that shrimp effort in the area monitored for juvenile red snapper be 67% below the effort in the baseline years of 2001-2003, can be reduced to 60% without affecting the rebuilding of the red snapper stock.

[Read the Document](#)

[Submit Comment](#)

Gray Snapper

The Council will review an amendment that considers the criteria used to determine the overfishing and overfished status of gray snapper, and the annual catch limits for the stock. A recent gray snapper stock assessment determined that, gray snapper is experiencing overfishing and may be overfished. The actions in the document will establish Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY), Optimum Yield (OY), and Minimum Stock Size Threshold (MSST) values that will be used to determine stock status for gray snapper. The Council is also considering alternatives that would reduce the annual catch limits necessary to end overfishing.

[Read the Document](#)

[Submit Comment](#)



January 2019 Council Meeting Preview cont.

Red Grouper

The Council will take a first look at a Draft Framework Action that considers reducing the red grouper annual catch limit until it can suggest management measures based on the results of the stock assessment that is currently underway. At its last meeting, the Council was presented with the results of an interim analysis that could be used to provide updated harvest recommendations for red grouper while awaiting the results the next stock assessment. Landings in recent years have been significantly below the annual catch limits, indicating that the stock may not be large enough to sustain current harvest levels. After hearing recommendations from its scientific advisors and listening to public testimony that indicated the stock is struggling, the Council requested that the National Marine Fisheries Service implement an interim or emergency rule to establish an annual catch limit based on the total 2017 landings.

Red Snapper Reallocation

The Council will continue to consider a Draft Amendment that considers reallocating the red snapper annual catch limit between recreational and commercial sectors, as well as the for-hire and private angling components of the recreational sector.

For-Hire Reporting Requirements

The Council will host a Workshop on For-Hire Reporting Requirements that are expected to be implemented this year. The workshop will begin at 5:45 PM on Monday, January 28th at the Orange Beach Community Center.

Saltonstall-Kennedy Grant Program Feedback Session

NOAA Fisheries will host a feedback session to solicit suggestions on improving communications for a grant program

The Saltonstall-Kennedy Grant Program

Each year, NOAA Fisheries holds a federally funded project opportunity known as the Saltonstall-Kennedy (S-K) Grant Program competition. The S-K Grant Program funds research projects that address the needs of fishing communities, optimize economic benefits by building and maintaining sustainable fisheries, and increase other opportunities to keep working waterfronts viable.

In 2018, selected grant applicants received total funding for 38 projects for almost \$9 million under the 2018 S-K Program. The list of projects fell into four categories: Marine Aquaculture; Adapting to Environmental Changes and Other Long Term Impacts in Marine Ecosystems; Promotion, Development and Marketing; and Terrestrial Science.

This year, the long-standing program added an emphasis on funding science initiatives that track closely with industry priorities:

- Promotion, Development, and Marketing
- Marine Aquaculture
- Support of Science that Maximizes Fishing Opportunities, Revenue and Jobs in U.S. Fisheries While Ensuring the Long-Term Sustainability of Marine Resources

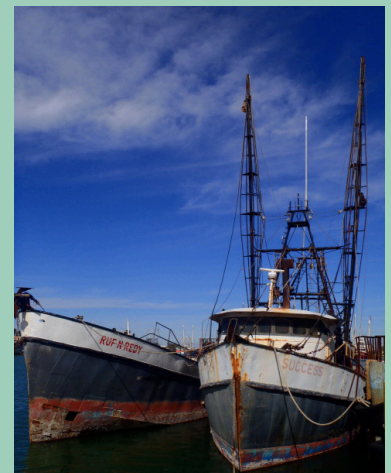


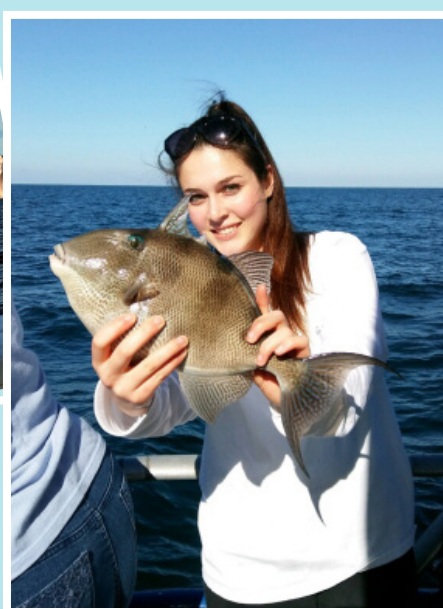
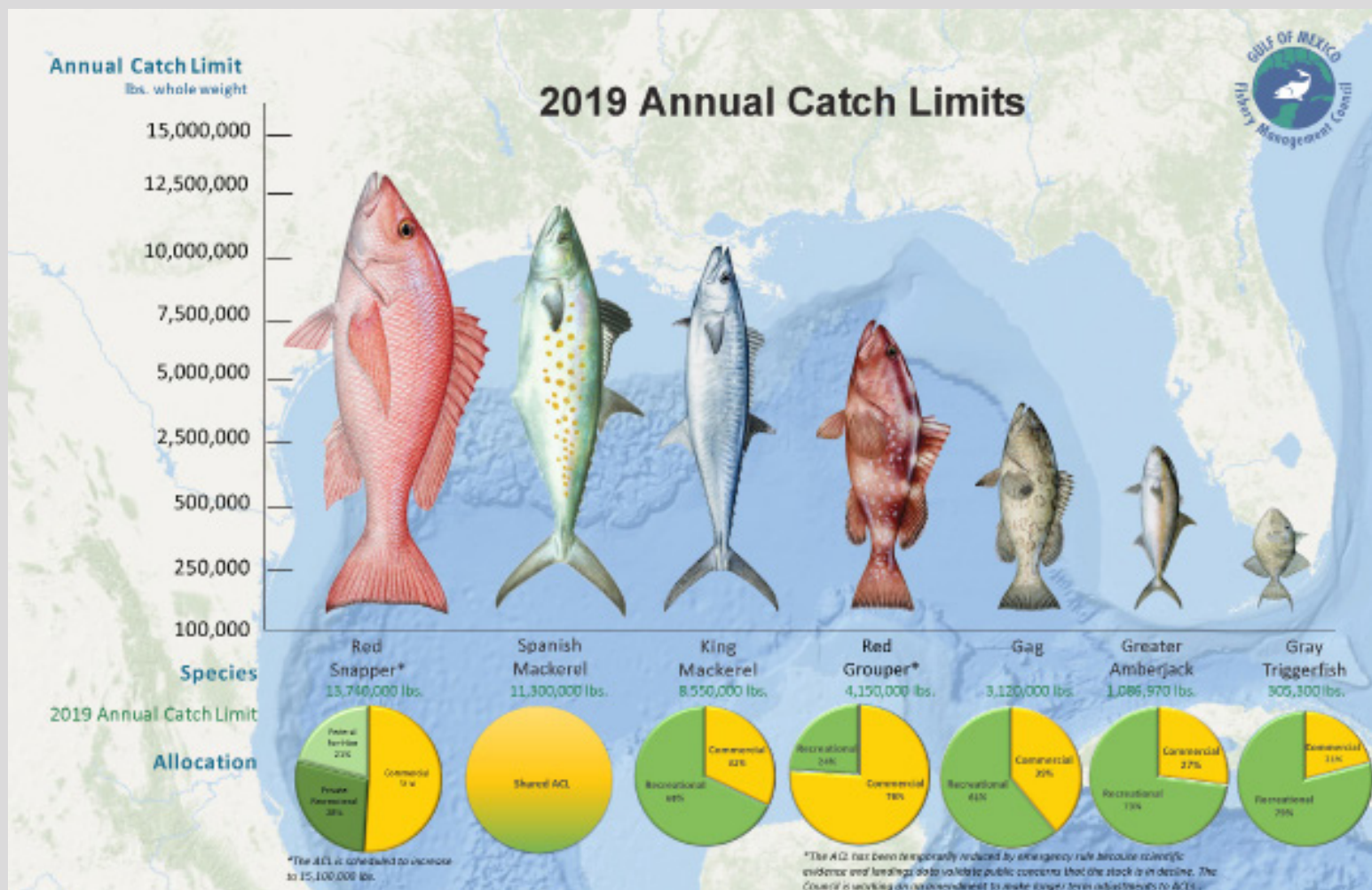
Photo: Emily Muehlstein

The 2019 S-K Grant Program application process closed in November 2018, and selected grantees will be announced in Fall, 2019.

National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) staff will conduct a presentation about the S-K Research Program on January 28, 2019 at the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) meeting in Orange Beach, Alabama. NMFS will also host a feedback session to solicit suggestions on improving program communication on Tuesday, January 29, 2019, immediately following the Council's Reef Fish Committee portion of the Council meeting. Further information about these events can be found on our [website](https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/grant/saltonstall-kennedy-grant-program). Additional information about the S-K Grant Program can be found at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/grant/saltonstall-kennedy-grant-program>

2019 Annual Catch Limits

An Annual Catch Limit (ACL) is the level of annual catch of a stock or stock complex that, if met or exceeded, triggers accountability measures such as a seasonal closure or quota closure. Learn more about ACL's and accountability measures (AMs) on our website at <http://gulfcouncil.org/fishing-regulations/federal/>



Photos: Dylan Hubbard



Gulf Council to Hold For-hire Reporting Requirements Workshops

New reporting requirements for federally permitted charter and head-boat vessels will be implemented this year. For-hire operators will have to electronically report their catch for each trip before offloading fish, and will have to have a device permanently affixed to the vessel that, at a minimum, archives vessel position data.

Gulf Council staff will host eight workshops this spring to educate for-hire owner/operators about the new reporting requirements. Dates and locations of the workshops are listed below. Information about the workshops can be found on the Council's [website](#).

Additional information regarding the new requirements can be found at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/bulletin/reminder-new-requirements-commercial-reef-fish-permitted-vessels>



Workshop Dates and Locations

All meetings begin at 6:00 pm, local time.

Thursday, January 24, 2019 Fish and Wildlife Research Institute 100 8th Ave SE St. Petersburg, FL 33701	Thursday, February 14, 2019 Hale Boggs Federal Building 500 Poydras St. New Orleans, LA 70130
Monday, January 28, 2019 Orange Beach Community Center 27235 Canal Road Orange Beach, AL 36561	Monday, February 25, 2019 Galveston Yacht Basin 715 N. Holiday Dr. Galveston, TX 77550
Friday, February 1, 2019 City of Destin Community Center 101 Stahlman Ave. Destin, FL, 32541	Thursday, March 7, 2019 Harvey Government Center 1200 Truman Ave. Key West, FL 33040
Wednesday, February 13, 2019 Mississippi Department of Marine Resources 1141 Bayview Ave. Biloxi, MS 39530	Monday, March 11, 2019 Hyatt Place Fort Myers at the Forum 2600 Champion Ring Rd. Ft. Myers, FL 33905

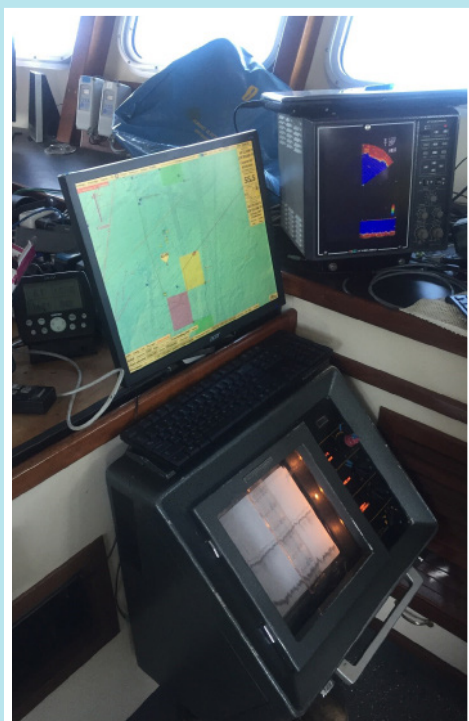


Photo: NOAA

In The News

NOAA Fisheries, Gulf States Prioritize Integrating, Calibrating Recreational Red Snapper Data

The Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) partnership has moved toward delivering more timely and precise estimates of Gulf of Mexico recreational red snapper catch and effort. At a fall workshop co-hosted by MRIP and the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, scientists and managers from state agencies, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, NOAA Fisheries, and independent statistical consultants sought to identify the best way to use data collected by specialized and general state-federal surveys to monitor recreational catches of Gulf red snapper, as needed to support stock assessments and fishery management. Read more about what was accomplished [here](#).



Photo: Dylan Hubbard

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Upcoming Meetings

[Public Hearings: Amendment 50-State Management of Recreational Red Snapper](#)

When:	Where:
Monday, January 14, 2019 6:00-9:00 pm, CST	Courtyard by Marriott Brownsville 3955 North Expressway Brownsville, TX 78520
Tuesday, January 15, 2019 6:00-9:00 pm, CST	Omni Hotel 900 North Shoreline Boulevard Corpus Christi, TX 78401
Wednesday, January 16, 2019 6:00-9:00 pm, CST	League City Civic Center 400 West Walker Street League City, TX 77573
Thursday, January 17, 2019 6:00-9:00 pm, CST	Via Webinar - Register here

[Council Meeting](#)

When:	Where:
January 28, 2019, 8:30 am, CST, through January 31, 2019, 4:00 pm, CST	Perdido Beach Resort 27200 Perdido Beach Blvd Orange Beach, AL 36561 Register for the Webinar

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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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. Gulf Fishery News is a publication of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council. Any material in this newsletter may be reprinted or reproduced; however, please credit the Council when reprinting articles from this newsletter.

