

# Recreational Initiative



## Meeting Summary

Steering Committee for the  
Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's Recreational Initiative  
May 17, 2024 (Virtual)

### Participants

#### Steering Committee

Carrie Simmons – Gulf Council Executive Director  
Andy Strelcheck – NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Administrator  
Russ Dunn – NOAA Fisheries Recreational Fishing Coordinator  
Dave Donaldson – Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission Executive Director  
Mike McDermott – Private angler (Mississippi), Council Member  
Ed Walker – Private/charter/commercial fisherman (Florida), Council Member

#### Pelagic Strategies

Willy Goldsmith  
Andy Loftus

#### Staff Support

John Froeschke – Gulf Council Deputy Executive Director  
Emily Muehlstein – Gulf Council Public Information Officer

### Initial Thoughts

Carrie Simmons highlighted the need to further discuss whether a Technical Working Group is needed to provide input regarding Recreational Initiative items #5 and #6 (described below).

Dave Donaldson expressed interest in better aligning and coordinating state and federal recreational data streams for the Gulf.

Andy Strelcheck reiterated the need to consider game-changing ideas to address highly controversial recreational management issues in the Gulf of Mexico.

### Discuss Priority Species

There was generally consensus among Steering Committee members that priority species should focus on those considered to be in a crisis from a stock status and/or management controversy standpoint. In addition, priority species should to the extent possible include those of interest to the broadest number of recreational anglers Gulf-wide. There was some discussion about potentially considering the inclusion of Coastal Migratory Pelagic (CMP) species such as king mackerel, Spanish mackerel, or cobia. The Committee eventually decided to maintain a focus on

reef species given that a concurrent special engagement effort is underway for CMP species and challenges for king mackerel are thought to be largely climate-driven. There was also consideration of including a deep-water species such as scamp grouper given the upcoming revision of management for that species and the opportunity to be forward-looking in approaches.

Ultimately, the Committee agreed that the Recreational Initiative should focus on the following **five priority species**:

- Gag Grouper
- Gray Triggerfish
- Greater Amberjack
- Red Grouper
- Red Snapper

## Prioritizing and Grouping Recreational Initiative Items

The Committee discussed whether any of the seven items included in the Initiative should be of particular priority as well as how those items might be considered/grouped together in the context of three Working Group meetings:

1. Development, review, and revision of goals and objectives for recreational fisheries management;
2. A review of the status of Federally managed species in the Gulf of Mexico that are highly sought after by recreational anglers, including recreational sources of directed and bycatch mortality;
3. A review of recreational management measures, including how management measures have changed over time;
4. Assessment of the performance and efficacy of recreational accountability measures and recommended improvements;
5. Evaluation and consideration of harvest control rules (i.e., pre-agreed guidelines) for setting bag, size, and season limits;
6. Scientific recommendations to the Council for addressing variability and uncertainty in recreational catch estimates, including use of multiple years of data, identification of catch estimates that are the result of low sample sizes or outliers, and statistical recommendations and guidance for how such approaches could be implemented; and,
7. Exploration of innovative new management strategies.

Ed Walker and Mike McDermott believed that item #6—addressing variability and uncertainty in recreational catch estimates—should be the Initiative’s top priority as it is most front-of-mind for anglers. Russ Dunn agreed on the importance of data issues for recreational management but emphasized that the group should not let those challenges impede progress on other critical items. John Froeschke added that even if there was no scientific uncertainty in recreational landings and discards, there were still access challenges for the recreational sector. The Committee agreed that while item #6 would be discussed over the course of the Recreational

Initiative given its importance as an overarching issue, it would not be the focal point of any of the three Working Group meetings.

Andy Strelcheck mentioned that items #5 and #6 are on parallel tracks for the Gulf Council to address and as a result may not need to be a key focus of this process. He believed that item #7—exploration of innovative new management strategies—should be a top priority of the Initiative and that it will likely relate to item #5—evaluation and consideration of harvest control rules—for the purposes of a Working Group meeting.

The Committee agreed that the first Working Group meeting should focus on item #1—development, review, and revision of goals and objectives for recreational fisheries management. Outlining what anglers want will set the stage for subsequent discussion and approaches. Russ Dunn added that an important issue associated with this item was considering how to address/maximize angler satisfaction in the face of ever-advancing technology and increasing effort. Carrie Simmons mentioned that items #2 and #3—a review of the status of key recreational species and a review of recreational management measures over time, respectively—will inform consideration of the other items in the context of the five priority species and may also help set the stage for item #1. The Committee was generally supportive of having the first Working Group Meeting focus on items #1, #2, and #3. However, Andy Strelcheck and Ed Walker noted that in doing so, the Committee should be cognizant of not overwhelming Working Group participants with too much lecture.

## Discuss Working Group Composition and Selection Process

Ed Walker expressed the need to carefully consider whether charter operators should be included in the Working Group; if so, the Committee would need to carefully evaluate them to ensure that they were considering the broader interests of the recreational community (private and for-hire). Carrie Simmons related that the proposed makeup of the Working Group, which was approved by the Council, includes charter operators. Russ Dunn added that, with the exception of red snapper, the charter and private sectors are managed together and so it makes sense to include both on the Working Group.

Carrie Simmons shared that the Council intends to solicit applications for Working Group members immediately following the June Gulf Council meeting. The Steering Committee should define the specific Working Group seats that should be filled to ensure that members are geographically diverse and represent the various roles and perspectives of the sector. The Steering Committee should discuss the proposed criteria and any modifications to the Working Group composition prior to the next meeting and then report out at the June 2024 Council meeting. The Council will select applicants.

## Next Steps

- The Steering Committee will meet on the second Friday of every month at 9:00 AM ET unless otherwise noted. **The next Steering Committee meeting will be held on Friday, June 14 at 9:00 am ET.**

- Willy Goldsmith and Andy Loftus will pursue the following prior to the next Steering Committee meeting:
  - Work with Council staff to confirm Working Group size and composition and to develop criteria for selection.
  - Further flesh out the proposed work plan for the three Working Group meetings, in coordination with Council Staff and the Steering Committee.
  - With Council staff, explore the potential for assembly of a Technical Working Group.
  - Develop slides and other materials to share with the full Council prior to presenting a Recreational Initiative update at the June Council Meeting (Briefing Book materials are due June 14). Items to present include:
    - Reef Fish Species of Priority.
    - Proposed make-up of Working Group and criteria for specific seats.
    - Work plan for three Working Group meetings including an outline of background materials.
    - Work plan for Initiative items 5 and 6.