



Gulf Red Snapper

Final Public Hearing
April 13, 2016

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Division of Marine Fisheries Management

Version 1

This is a final public hearing for Gulf of Mexico red snapper. Red snapper are regulated as reef fish in Chapter 68B-14, Florida Administrative Code (FAC). This action would set the 2016 recreational red snapper season in Gulf of Mexico state waters.

This presentation also includes a progress report on Florida's Gulf Reef Fish Survey, and addresses red snapper issues discussed at the April 2016 Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) meeting. This presentation will be updated following the Council meeting.

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Red Snapper Update from April Council Meeting



- Council considering extending or removing sector separation sunset
 - Currently sunsets after 2017 season
- Discussions on separate management of charter boats and headboats will continue
 - Options include traditional and allocation-based management tools
- Council considering a mechanism to allow recreational season to potentially reopen in the fall if the annual catch target is not met during summer season



The Council is scheduled to discuss several potential management changes for the red snapper fishery at its April meeting. The Council will discuss extending or removing the three-year sunset on sector separation. Currently, sector separation is scheduled to sunset after the 2017 season. Meanwhile, the Council will continue to consider options for separate management of charter boats and headboats, including allocation-based tools like individual fishing quotas (IFQs) and traditional tools like seasons and bag limits.

Finally, the Council will discuss a possible mechanism to potentially allow the recreational red snapper fishery to reopen in the fall if the year's annual catch target is not met during the summer season. Details will be developed at future Council meetings and any approved changes are unlikely to take effect until at least the 2017 season.

This slide will be updated following the April Council meeting.

Gulf Reef Fish Survey: Year One

- 2015 red snapper season was the first season with the GRFS in place
- Angler interviews at access points likely to be used by reef fish anglers
 - GRFS increased the number of survey assignments on the Gulf more than 4 fold
 - May-Dec 2015 more than 4900 fishing parties interviewed representing >12,000 anglers
- Targeted monthly mail survey
 - >330,000 registrants
 - >20,000 surveys mailed
 - Mean response rate >20% during May-Nov 2015



The Gulf Reef Fish Survey (GRFS) became mandatory for Gulf anglers harvesting reef fish, including red snapper, in 2015. There are two GRFS components: angler interviews at access points used to estimate catch per trip and a monthly mail survey used to estimate number of trips targeting reef fish species.

Estimating Recreational Harvest: GRFS and MRIP

Access Point
Intercept Surveys
(In-person
interviews)
Result in catch per
trip estimates

- GRFS samples more offshore access points than MRIP



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Effort Surveys
(Phone or mail)
Result in trip
estimates

- GRFS uses directed mail survey
- MRIP uses phone survey of coastal households

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Total Harvest

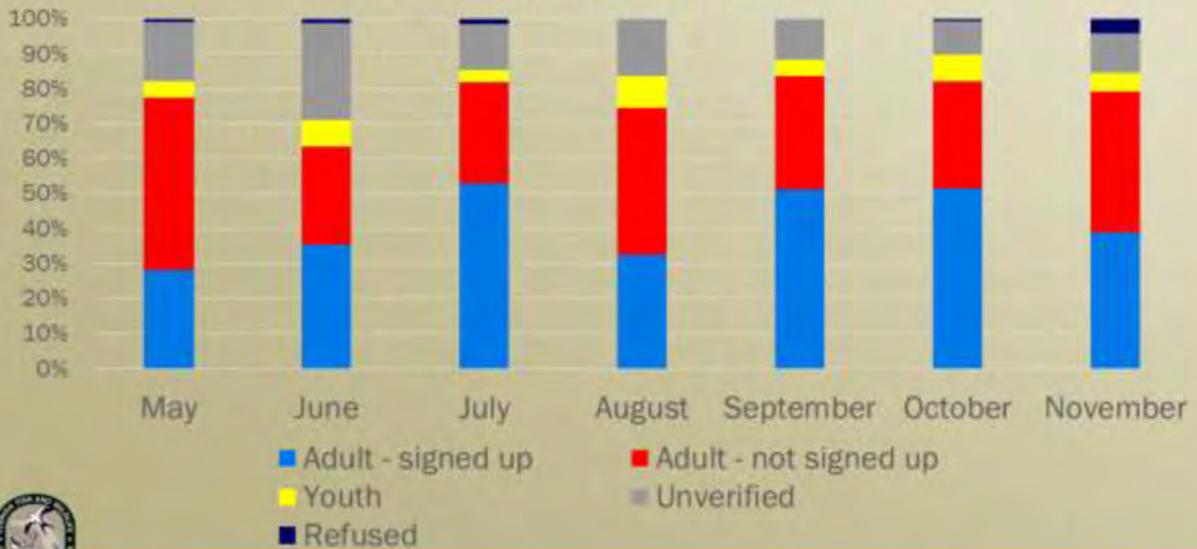


Recreational harvest of red snapper and reef fish by private anglers on vessels fishing off Florida's Gulf coast was estimated in 2015 by both the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) and the Gulf Reef Fish Survey (GRFS). Both of these programs use statistical sampling in two surveys to estimate harvest: 1) random selection of access point sites (places people return to after fishing) where FWC staff interview anglers in person, and 2) a phone or mail survey that gathers information on number of fishing trips taken, and mode of fishing (shore, private/rental boat or charter). The sampling strategy for the access point survey uses weights to sample areas of heavy fishing more frequently. Although MRIP is a national program, FWC staff conduct both the MRIP and the GRFS surveys in Florida. The GRFS focuses only on Gulf anglers targeting reef fish from private/rental boats while MRIP provides harvest estimates for all modes targeting all saltwater fish (not just reef fish).

The GRFS seeks to improve the harvest estimates for Gulf reef fish caught offshore by sampling a higher number of offshore access points relative to the MRIP. The GRFS is a directed monthly mail survey of Gulf Reef Fish Anglers that is used to estimate number of fishing trips taken (effort) monthly in state and federal waters. MRIP uses a bi-monthly phone-based survey of coastal households, and information collected in the access point survey is used to determine what proportions of trips were made in state and federal waters.

MRIP plans to transition to a mail-based survey, called the Fishing Effort Survey (FES) by 2018. In MRIP pilot studies in four states, mail survey estimates of total effort were 2-6 times higher than Coastal Household Telephone Survey (CHTS) estimates.

Sign-up Status of Gulf Reef Fish Anglers Interviewed in Dockside Surveys



Information on the status of Gulf Reef Fish Survey sign-ups was gathered during in-person interviews with anglers from May-Nov 2015.

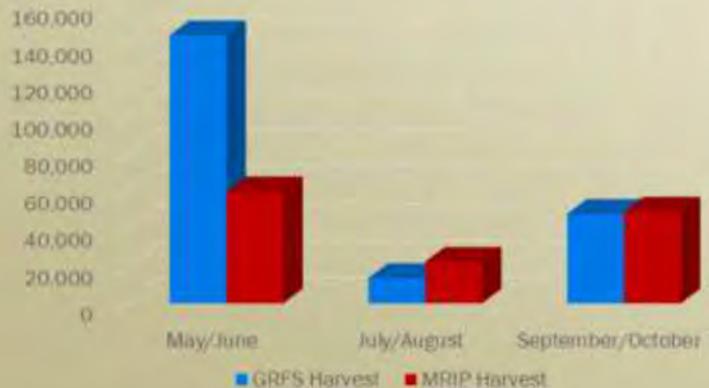
During this first year of implementation, approximately 30-40% of anglers interviewed and targeting reef fish indicated that they had not signed up for the survey. In order to calculate estimates of red snapper harvest, we have to adjust for these anglers that have not signed up for the GRFS. This adjustment is made by assuming that the anglers not signed up for the survey had similar levels of effort as those that did sign up for the survey.

Refused = declined to answer; Unverified = angler not sure.

Gulf Red Snapper Harvest: GRFS and MRIP

- May/June estimates from GRFS much higher than MRIP
- High adjustment in GRFS for May due to high proportion of anglers not registered
- Relatively high catch per trip in May
- Mail surveys have consistently resulted in higher effort estimates than phone surveys

2015 Gulf Red Snapper Harvest by Wave



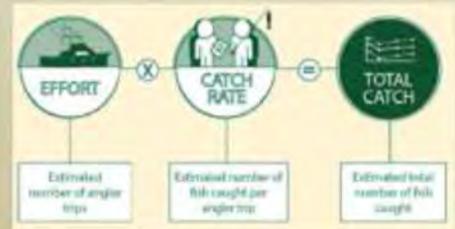
This slide shows estimates of 2015 recreational Gulf red snapper harvest from the GRFS and the MRIP. Note that this comparison only applies to the private/rental boat fishing mode, since that is the focus of the GRFS.

For the period May-October 2015, red snapper harvest estimates from GRFS were about 56% higher than those for MRIP private boat mode.

The higher harvests are also due to the tendency for mail surveys to generate effort estimates two to six times higher than the effort estimates from the coastal household telephone survey. Note that a direct comparison of effort estimates between GRFS and MRIP is not possible since GRFS effort is for reef fish only while MRIP effort is for all species.

Gulf Reef Fish Survey and MRIP: The Future

- GRFS effective April 1, 2015 – June 30, 2020
- The GRFS design has been developed in close partnership with NMFS and their statisticians
- GRFS will undergo a certification process which will allow the data to be incorporated into official harvest estimates
- Red snapper surveys in TX, LA, AL and MS also undergoing certification process
- MRIP scheduled to transition to the mail fishing effort survey in 2018 (bimonthly and all species)



As requested by the Commission, the Gulf Reef Fish Survey program ends on June 30, 2020, unless reauthorized by the Commission. In the meantime, GRFS will seek MRIP certification, which allows data from GRFS to be integrated into official harvest estimates for reef fish, including red snapper. Other Gulf states have dedicated survey programs for red snapper and they are also undergoing the MRIP certification process.

2016 Federal Recreational Season Update



- Federal season dates not yet available
- 2016 ACL is 7.192 mp
 - Private angler quota: 4.150 mp
 - Federally-permitted for-hire quota: 3.042 mp
- 2015 recreational ACT met but quota not likely exceeded
 - No payback likely in 2016, but federal season could be adjusted to keep harvest within ACT



The length of the 2016 recreational red snapper season in federal waters will depend on harvest during the 2015 season and recreational red snapper seasons in Gulf states' waters. As of March 24, 2016, the 2016 federal waters season dates were not yet available. In 2016, for the first time, all five Gulf states will manage all waters within nine miles of their shorelines as state waters (previously only Florida and Texas managed out to nine miles from shore). This shift could affect the federal recreational harvest season length, as more landings could be attributed to state waters when various state seasons are open but the federal season is closed.

The overall annual catch limit (ACL) for 2016 is 7.192 million pounds (mp), which results in a private angler ACL of 4.150 mp and a federally-permitted for-hire ACL of 3.042 mp. Annual catch targets (ACTs) are set 20 percent below the private angler and federally-permitted for-hire subquotas as an accountability measure to help prevent quota overages in the recreational fishery. In addition, if the 2015 ACL is exceeded, the quotas in 2016 would be reduced to account for that overage. In 2015, the ACL was 7.07 mp for the entire recreational sector, 4.043 mp for private anglers, and 2.964 mp for federally-permitted for-hire vessels. Preliminary 2015 recreational harvest data indicates that the recreational sector met its ACT for 2015 but the quota was not exceeded. This means that the recreational sector will not likely have to "payback" any quota overage from 2015.

The 2016 ACL for the recreational sector was increased slightly (from 6.840 mp to 7.192 mp) because sector reallocation was approved by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce. Previously, the red snapper fishery was allocated 51 percent to the commercial sector and 49 percent to the recreational sector. With sector reallocation now in place, the new red snapper allocation split is 48.5 percent to the commercial sector and 51.5 percent to the recreational sector.

Proposed Final Rule

68B-14.0038 Recreational Snapper Seasons

- Set the recreational harvest season for red snapper in all state waters of the Gulf of Mexico to be open:
 - Saturdays and Sundays in May beginning May 7
 - Continuously beginning the Saturday before Memorial Day through July 10
 - Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays in September and October including Labor Day

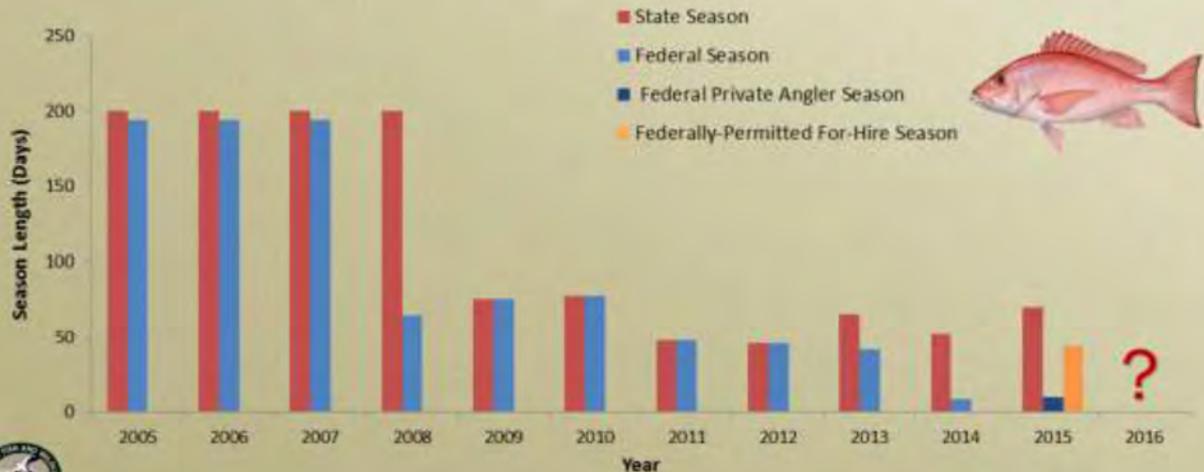
Results in a 78-day season for 2016



The proposed final rules would modify 68B-14.0038, FAC, to set the recreational red snapper season for Gulf state waters. The season would open starting May 7 for Saturdays and Sundays in May, then open continuously from the Saturday before Memorial Day (May 28 in 2016) through July 10. Finally, the season would reopen for Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays in September and October including Labor Day. This would result in a 78-day season for 2016.

This season would build on last year's season structure and increase recreational harvest opportunities during late spring.

Florida State and Federal Recreational Gulf Red Snapper Season Lengths, 2005-2016



The graph above shows state and federal recreational red snapper season lengths in the Gulf of Mexico off Florida since 2005. The 2015 season for private anglers fishing in Gulf federal waters was 10 days (shown in dark blue), from June 1 through June 10. Federally-permitted for-hire vessels had a 44-day season in 2015 (shown in orange), from June 1 through July 14. The Commission will set the 2016 state season today.

State Season Considerations



- Large proportion of Gulf recreational red snapper harvested off Florida
 - State waters harvest primarily in the Panhandle
- All season days are not created equal
- State season landings are counted toward private angler allocation
- Federally-permitted for-hire may only fish in state waters when state and federal waters are both open
- Federal season for private anglers and for-hire may be shortened to account for inconsistent state seasons
- 2015 landings data incomplete, but 106% of private angler ACT reported caught
- 85% of private angler ACL caught



There are many factors to consider when setting the recreational red snapper season in Gulf state waters. Florida accounts for a large portion of the annual Gulf-wide recreational red snapper harvest. There is significant harvest from Florida state waters, so Florida plays an important role in the Gulf red snapper rebuilding plan. The state season for red snapper would provide fishing days for private anglers and state-licensed for-hire vessels that fish off Florida's Panhandle, but would not benefit anglers fishing off central and southwest Florida. This is because red snapper are often caught in state waters off the Panhandle, but rarely caught in state waters off central and southwest Florida.

It is also important to keep in mind that all season days are not created equal. Fishing effort is typically higher on weekends, during peak fishing season (summer in the Panhandle), and on good weather days. This means that seasons centered around times of high effort may pose a greater risk of a quota overage than a season with the same number of days that occurs when fishing effort is lower. Because of sector separation, all state waters landings from private anglers and state-permitted for-hire vessels are counted towards the private angler quota. Federally-permitted for-hire vessels can only fish in state waters if state and federal waters are both open, but these landings go towards the federally-permitted for-hire quota and not the private angler quota.

The federal red snapper season for private anglers and federally-permitted for-hire vessels may be shortened to account for inconsistent state seasons. The length of the federal season will depend on NOAA estimates of harvest during state open seasons. The federal season for private anglers would be set based on the amount of quota left after accounting for anticipated state waters landings. If state landings are expected to exceed the amount of the private angler sub-quota, then the season for federally-permitted for-hire vessels would be shortened to account for anticipated state waters landings so that the overall recreational quota is not exceeded. Based on data from NOAA Fisheries, preliminary landings from the 2015 recreational red snapper season, which includes data through Oct. 31, indicate that 106% of the 3.234 mp ACT for private anglers has been reported as harvested. This means that the ACT was exceeded, but NOAA Fisheries estimates that only 85% of the 4.043 mp ACL has been reported as harvested. However, some data sources are not included in this estimate; therefore, actual landings are higher.

Staff Recommendation



Set the recreational harvest season for red snapper in all state waters of the Gulf of Mexico to be open for a 78-day season:

- Saturdays and Sundays in May beginning May 7
- Continuously beginning the Saturday before Memorial Day through July 10
- Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays in September and October including Labor Day



Staff recommends the Commission set the recreational red snapper season for Gulf state waters to open starting May 7 on Saturdays and Sundays in May, then open continuously from the Saturday before Memorial Day through July 10. Finally, the season would reopen for Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays in September and October including Labor Day. This would result in a 78-day season for 2016.

If approved, staff recommends making the rules effective on or before May 7, 2016. Staff have evaluated the proposed rules under the standards of 68-1.004, FAC, and found them to be in compliance.