

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: April 13, 2016
Subject: 2016 Gulf Red Snapper Recreational Season – Final Public Hearing
Additional Red Snapper Related Items

Purpose:

Staff will present the proposed 2016 recreational red snapper season for state waters of the Gulf of Mexico, a progress report on Florida's Gulf Reef Fish Survey, and address red snapper issues discussed at the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (GMFMC).

Summary:

The 2015 recreational red snapper season in Gulf state waters began the Saturday before Memorial Day and ran continuously through July 12, reopening for Saturdays and Sundays in September and October, including Labor Day and Sunday, Nov. 1 for a 70-day state waters season. If this season was kept in place for 2016, this would result in a 65-day season in Gulf state waters. At its February meeting, the Commission approved a draft rule for a Gulf recreational season that includes additional fishing days during May weekends (Saturdays and Sundays) starting May 7, a continuous summer season beginning Memorial Day weekend and ending July 10, and fishing opportunities on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays in September and October, including Labor Day. This proposed season would increase fishing opportunities for anglers fishing for red snapper in state waters and be open for 78 days in 2016.

The state season for red snapper provides fishing days for private anglers and state-licensed for-hire vessels that fish off Florida's Panhandle, but largely does not benefit anglers fishing off central and southwest Florida. This is because red snapper are often caught in state waters off the Panhandle, but very rarely caught in state waters off central and southwest Florida. Red snapper are managed in state waters by the FWC and in federal waters by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, but fish harvested in state waters count towards federal quotas. Federally-permitted for-hire vessels must follow federal rules even when fishing in state waters and are unable to take advantage of the state season. Updated information about the 2015 season and available information about the 2016 federal season will also be presented.

This presentation will include a progress report on Florida's Gulf Reef Fish Survey. This Survey was created to enhance data collection from recreational fishers and many stakeholders believe the information should be used in making decisions about red snapper harvest. Staff will also report on GMFMC actions and discussions relating to red snapper. The Council is anticipated to discuss developing a mechanism that would allow the recreational season to possibly reopen in the fall if the annual catch target is not met during the summer; extending or removing the sunset on sector separation for the red snapper fishery, and separate management of red snapper for charter and headboat vessels. Other reef fish may be included in separate management for headboats.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends adopting a recreational harvest season for Gulf red snapper that would begin May 7 and open Saturdays and Sundays in May. The season would then open continuously beginning the Saturday before Memorial Day through July 10. Finally, the season would reopen for Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays in September and October including Labor Day. This would result in a 78-day season for 2016.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

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