



Gulf Red Snapper

Draft Rule

February 10, 2016

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Division of Marine Fisheries Management

Version 1

This is a draft rule 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.

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Red Snapper – Recent Stakeholder Engagement

- Stakeholders expressed preferred options for Gulf state waters red snapper seasons at FWC workshops
 - 2014 Gulf red snapper management
 - 2015 red snapper recreational season
 - 2015 statewide workshops
- Input provided by recreational anglers, for-hire captains, commercial harvesters, local businesses, and community leaders



In the past two years, stakeholders have provided input on the Gulf state red snapper season during three series of FWC workshops. During these workshops, staff received feedback from recreational anglers, for-hire captains, commercial harvesters, local businesses, and community leaders. The first workshop series was held in the summer of 2014 to gather input from stakeholders on how they would like the recreational red snapper fishery to be managed in the Gulf of Mexico at the state and federal level. Workshops were held in Pensacola, Destin, Panama City, Carrabelle, and St. Petersburg. In small groups, workshop participants discussed their expectations for the fishery and potential management methods they felt were appropriate. Workshop participants were also polled on the management options presented as well as management goals and ideas generated by workshop participants.

The second series of workshops was held in March 2015 to gather input on the proposed 70-day recreational red snapper season for Gulf state waters in 2015. This season was approved by the Commission in April 2015. Workshops were held in Pensacola, Destin, Panama City, Carrabelle, and St. Petersburg.

Finally, during July 2015, staff held open-topic workshops around the state. At workshops held in Naples, St. Petersburg, Crystal River, Pensacola, Destin, Panama City, Steinhatchee, and Carrabelle, stakeholders expressed opinions on the red snapper fishery and how they would like to see red snapper managed moving forward. At workshops in St. Petersburg, Panama City, and Carrabelle, stakeholders provided input on the Gulf state red snapper season.

Stakeholder Input on Past Seasons

- Break up the continuous season
- Begin the season June 1
- Multiple open seasons
- Weekends-only season
- Consider southwest Florida anglers who only catch red snapper in federal waters
- Summer opening is preferred over other times of year



Staff received significant stakeholder input at workshops for past recreational red snapper seasons. Some stakeholders have suggested splitting up the continuous summer season to spread out fishing opportunities and break up fishing effort on local reefs. In addition, stakeholders have suggested opening the season on June 1 because it is the same date the federal season opens. This could reduce confusion among anglers. Other stakeholders have supported multiple open seasons per year or a weekends-only season as a management tool for the red snapper fishery. Stakeholders in southwest Florida have noted that they rarely catch red snapper in state waters, and must rely on the federal season for fishing opportunities. Finally, most people that attended past Gulf red snapper workshops have stated they prefer to fish for red snapper during the summer over other times of the year. However, many anglers in the Panhandle have supported a fall weekends season option, which provides more fishing opportunities and economic benefit to coastal communities.

The majority of the feedback on this slide was collected during the 2015 Gulf recreational red snapper season workshops used to gather input on the proposed 70-day recreational red snapper season for Gulf state waters in 2015. This season was approved by the Commission in April 2015 and 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.

In general, support for the 70-day proposed season came from private anglers and state-permitted for-hire captains in the Panhandle who felt an extended state season would provide them with greater fishing opportunities. In contrast, federally-permitted for-hire captains along the Gulf coast and private anglers in St. Petersburg spoke of the lack of red snapper in state waters off southwest Florida and how this state season option would reduce their fishing opportunities for red snapper in federal waters.

State Season Options – Maintain Approximate 2015 Season Structure

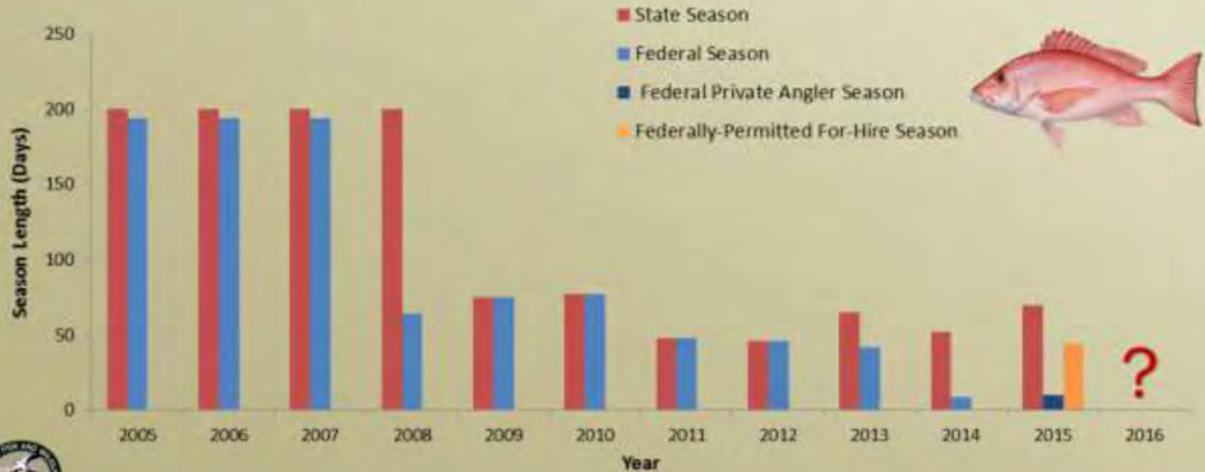
- **2015 Season:** Saturday before Memorial Day - July 12; Saturdays and Sundays in September and October including Labor Day (70 days in 2015)
 - Would result in 65-day season in 2016
- **Possible Season Modifications:**
 - Saturday before Memorial Day (May 28 in 2016) through July 10 (44 days)
 - Saturday before Memorial Day (May 28) through June 12 and reopen July 1 through July 31 (47 days)
 - June 1 through July 10 (40 days)
 - June 1 through June 12 and reopen July 1 through July 31 (43 days)
 - September and October weekends (Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays plus Labor Day) (28 days)



The 2015 season in Gulf state waters (above in blue) began the Saturday before Memorial Day and ran continuously through July 12 (the Sunday following Independence Day weekend), 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.

This slide outlines some possible alternative season ideas that maintain a season structure and fishing opportunities similar to the 2015 season. Additional suggestions are welcome. The first season option is to open the season from the Saturday before Memorial Day (like in 2015) through Sunday, July 10. This option would yield a 44-day season in 2016. Another option is to set the season to be the Saturday before Memorial Day through Sunday, June 12, with the season reopening for the month of July. This would break up the continuous summer season and allow for harvest over Independence Day weekend. Another option is opening the season on June 1, which is the same date the federal season opens. Several stakeholders have suggested opening the season on June 1 to reduce confusion among anglers who may fish in both state and federal waters. Another season option would open the season from June 1 through July 10 so that red snapper is open continuously in the middle of summer. Finally, the Commission could consider opening the season in the fall for weekends as during the 2015 season. In the past, anglers have supported fall weekends to allow for more fishing opportunities and economically benefit coastal communities in the Panhandle. In 2016, there are 28 weekend days (Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays including Labor Day) in September and October.

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 above in orange), from June 1 through July 14. The Commission is discussing options for 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 annual catch target reported caught
- 85% of private angler annual catch limit 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 very 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 high effort fishing days 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 October 31, indicate that 106% of the 3.234 million pound (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



- Consider modifying last year's season structure
 - **2015:** May 23 – July 12, Saturdays and Sundays in September and October (including Sunday, Nov. 1), and Labor Day (70 days)
 - Saturday before Memorial Day through July 10; Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays in September and October, and Labor Day (first Monday in September)
 - **2016:** May 28 – July 10; Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays in September and October, and Labor Day (72 days)

If approved and directed, return for a final public hearing at the April Commission meeting



Staff recommends the Commission consider modifying last year's season structure. The current recreational harvest season for red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico begins the Saturday before Memorial Day through July 12, reopening for Saturdays and Sundays in September and October, and Labor Day. In 2015, the season began Saturday, May 23, with the last fall weekend harvest day being Sunday, Nov. 1 for a 70-day season. If this same season structure is kept in place for 2016, the season would begin Saturday, May 28 and the last fall weekend harvest day would be Sunday, Oct. 30 for a 65-day season. To maintain fishing opportunities for 2016 while approximating last year's season structure, staff recommends the Commission consider setting the 2016 season to begin the Saturday before Memorial Day through July 10, and reopening for Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays in September and October, plus Labor Day (72 days).

If approved and directed, staff would return to the Commission for a final public hearing at the April Commission meeting.