

# MEMORANDUM



**To:** Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners  
**From:** Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management  
**Date:** February 10, 2016  
**Subject:** 2016 Gulf Red Snapper Recreational Season – Draft Rule

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**Purpose:**

Staff will present several season options for the 2016 recreational red snapper season in state waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

**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. Staff will suggest several 2016 season options for Commission consideration. The first option would set the season to be the Saturday before Memorial Day (like in 2015) 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 would open 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. Finally, the Commission could consider opening the season again in the fall for weekends as during the 2015 season. In the past, many anglers have supported fall weekends which allow for more fishing opportunities and economically benefit coastal communities in the Panhandle.

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. Information about the 2015 season will be presented at the meeting as well as any preliminary information about the 2016 season.

**Staff Recommendation:**

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. If Oct. 31 is a Saturday (as was the case in 2015), the last day of harvest is Sunday, Nov. 1. 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. If approved and directed, staff will return for a final public hearing at the April Commission meeting.

**Staff Contact and/or Presenter:**

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