

# MEMORANDUM



**To:** Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners  
**From:** Gil McRae, Fish and Wildlife Research Institute  
**Date:** December 12, 2018  
**Subject:** Update on Recreational Saltwater Data Collection Programs

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**Purpose:**

To provide an update on current programs in place to collect catch and effort data for Florida's saltwater recreational fisheries, including the Gulf Reef Fish Survey (GRFS) and potential future approaches.

**Summary:**

Recreational saltwater anglers take 30 million fishing trips per year in Florida contributing more than \$8.4 billion to the state's economy. Timely and accurate data are critical for managing the dozens of fish species that make up this valuable economic engine. A federal program called the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) provides data on recreational catch and effort of saltwater fish. However, because MRIP is a broad program covering dozens of species—for both inshore and offshore fisheries—it lacks the resolution needed to provide accurate recreational fisheries estimates for reef fish species such as red snapper, gag and red groupers, gray triggerfish, etc. (only 5-10% recreational fishing trips are focused on reef fish). In Florida, GRFS and similar programs provide data enhancements specifically for reef fish. These programs work in concert to provide accurate and precise data for management of inshore and offshore recreational fisheries. Such data are critical to accurate stock assessments and successful management, particularly for stocks that are managed under a federal quota.

GRFS is widely recognized as a success and has allowed for management opportunities that otherwise would not be possible. A national panel of survey experts gave GRFS a favorable review, and NOAA Fisheries is expected to certify GRFS for use as the primary source of recreational fishing data for Gulf reef fish in Florida. GRFS data collection allowed FWC to manage Gulf red snapper in state and federal waters through an Exempted Fishing Permit in 2018 and 2019. However, GRFS authorization and funding expires June 30, 2020. If FWC is delegated authority to manage Gulf red snapper through state management starting in 2020, continuing the enhanced data collection enabled by GRFS will be critical.

In the future, FWC data enhancements could improve reef fish management through demonstrated programs similar to GRFS and other innovative approaches such as angler reports through apps. Because reef fish management problems are not limited to the Gulf (e.g., South Atlantic red snapper has been mostly closed since 2010 with occasional very short fishing seasons since then), FWC is exploring options to extend the survey capability provided by GRFS statewide. This statewide initiative would expand the benefits of better data and management opportunities realized in the Gulf through GRFS to the Atlantic.

**Staff Recommendation:**

This presentation is informational in nature.

**Staff Contact and/or Presenter:**

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