

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: December 12, 2019
Subject: Draft Rule – Gulf Red Snapper

Purpose:

Obtain approval of proposed draft rules that would allow FWC to manage harvest of red snapper by private recreational anglers in Gulf federal waters. Obtain Commission direction on the 2020 recreational Gulf red snapper season dates.

Why:

The U.S. Secretary of Commerce recently approved delegating certain aspects of Gulf red snapper management for private recreational anglers in federal waters to the Gulf states. The Gulf recreational red snapper season is set annually.

Top Points:

- 1) Changes to FWC rules are needed to extend Florida's regulations for Gulf recreational red snapper harvest (i.e., seasons, bag limits, and size limits) into Gulf federal waters for 2020 and beyond.
- 2) As part of delegation, the red snapper season must be set such that Florida's quota is not exceeded.
- 3) Staff will provide an update on the 2019 season, 2020 season projections, and stakeholder input for Commission consideration.

Affected Parties:

These regulations would apply to anglers fishing in Gulf state and federal waters, as well as for-hire operations that have FWC permits to fish in state waters, but do not have permits to fish in Gulf federal waters.

Summary:

For the past two years, FWC has managed Gulf red snapper harvest by private anglers in federal waters on a trial basis through an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) issued by NOAA Fisheries, in addition to managing all recreational harvest in state waters. Because this has been successful, FWC has been delegated long-term authority to control some aspects of Gulf red snapper management of private anglers in federal waters. As part of this delegation, Florida receives 44.822% of the private recreational quota for the Gulf of Mexico. FWC must set regulations such that its quota, which includes harvest in both state and federal waters, is not exceeded. Florida would be required to pay back any 2020 overage in 2021.

The proposed draft rule would extend Florida's recreational bag limit of 2 fish, size limit of 16 inches total length, and season into Gulf federal waters. The proposed draft rule would also streamline the process used to set the season and allow federally-permitted for-hire vessels, which have their own season set by NOAA Fisheries, to possess (but not harvest) red snapper in state waters while the federal for-hire season is open but state waters are closed.

Staff Recommendation:

Approval of the proposed draft rules. Provide direction on 2020 Gulf recreational red snapper season dates.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Martha Guyas, Section Leader, Marine Fisheries Management