

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: February 19, 2020
Subject: Final Rule – Gulf Red Snapper

Purpose:

Obtain final approval of proposed rules that would allow FWC to manage harvest of red snapper by private recreational anglers in Gulf federal waters and finalize the 2020 Gulf recreational red snapper season.

Why: After FWC successfully managed the Gulf red snapper harvest by private anglers in federal waters during 2018 and 2019, NOAA Fisheries delegated FWC long-term authority to manage this fishery. As part of the delegation, FWC must codify regulations.

Top Points:

- 1) 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.
- 2) 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.
- 3) As part of delegation, the red snapper season must be set such that Florida's quota is not exceeded.
- 4) Staff will provide results from the 2019 season and ask for Commission input on finalizing the proposed 2020 season of June 11- July 25 (45 consecutive days).

Affected Parties:

These rules would apply to private recreational harvesters in Gulf state and federal waters, and for-hire operations that have FWC permits to fish in state waters, but do not have permits to fish in federal waters.

Summary:

For 2018 and 2019, FWC managed Gulf red snapper harvest by private anglers in federal waters 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 for private anglers in federal waters. As part of this delegation, Florida receives 44.822% of the Gulf private recreational quota. FWC must set regulations such that its quota is not exceeded. Any quota overages would be required to be paid back the following year.

The proposed final rule would extend Florida's recreational bag limit, size limit, and season into Gulf federal waters. The final rule will 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.

At the last Commission meeting, FWC set the draft 2020 Gulf recreational red snapper season to be June 11 – July 25 (45 days) to provide optimal harvest opportunities and help reduce the risk of an overage. If there is quota available after the summer season, FWC could reopen in the fall for a limited harvest.

Staff Recommendation:

Approve the proposed final rules and finalize the 2020 Gulf recreational red snapper season.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Martha Guyas, Section Leader, Marine Fisheries Management