

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: February 19, 2020
Subject: Draft Rule – State Reef Fish Survey

Purpose:

Obtain approval for advertising a draft rule that would replace the Gulf Reef Fish Survey (GRFS) with the State Reef Fish Survey (SRFS).

Why:

GRFS provides critical recreational harvest data for red snapper and other Gulf reef fish, and expires June 30, 2020. Replacing GRFS with SRFS would expand the benefits of better data and enhanced management opportunities realized through the GRFS statewide.

Top Points:

- 1) Because Florida has been delegated authority to manage recreational red snapper harvest in Gulf federal waters, continuation of a dedicated reef fish data collection program is crucial to successful management of this fishery by FWC.
- 2) This will provide better data to ensure sound management of 13 reef species.
- 3) Recreational fishers would be required to sign up for SRFS, at no cost, if they intend to fish for or possess certain reef fish species while aboard a private vessel in or on Florida waters.
- 4) This requirement would better define the population of private recreational reef fish harvesters for survey purposes, leading to improved recreational data, and improved fisheries management opportunities for reef fish statewide.

Affected Parties:

This rule would apply to recreational fishers that fish for or possess reef fish aboard a private vessel.

Summary:

Since 2015, recreational fishers in the Gulf of Mexico who fish for or possess certain reef fish when aboard a private vessel have been required to sign up for the GRFS. GRFS supplements the federal Marine Fisheries Recreational Information Program (MRIP) by providing timelier and more precise recreational harvest estimates for certain Gulf reef fish species. The survey has been funded by a five-year grant of Deepwater Horizon oil spill restoration funds. GRFS has provided the data required for FWC to manage the Gulf red snapper private recreational fishery in state and federal waters on a temporary basis for 2018 and 2019, while also generating improved recreational harvest estimates for many other Gulf reef fish. The proposed draft rule would require recreational fishers to sign up annually for SRFS to fish for or possess any of the following reef fish while aboard a private vessel in Florida waters: mutton, red, vermilion, or yellowtail snapper; black, gag, or red grouper; gray triggerfish; greater or lesser amberjack; banded rudderfish; almaco jack; or hogfish. Reef fish harvesters would be able to sign up for SRFS at no cost anywhere FWC licenses are sold (online, tackle shops, etc.). Persons under the age of 16 and harvesters aboard for-hire fishing vessels would be exempt from this requirement.

Staff Recommendation:

Approve draft rule as proposed.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Martha Guyas, Section Leader, Marine Fisheries Management