

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Jessica McCawley, Director, Marine Fisheries Management
Date: May 14, 2020
Subject: Final Rule – State Reef Fish Survey

Purpose:

Obtain final approval of a proposed rule replacing the Gulf Reef Fish Survey (GRFS) with the State Reef Fish Survey (SRFS).

Why:

Replacing GRFS with SRFS would expand the benefits of better data and enhanced management opportunities statewide and allow the continued federal delegation for key species.

Top Points:

- 1) GRFS provides critical recreational data for Gulf reef fish only and expires June 30, 2020.
- 2) Recreational fishers would be required to annually sign up for SRFS if they intend to fish for or possess certain reef fish while aboard a private vessel in or on Florida waters.
- 3) SRFS would better define the population of private recreational reef fish harvesters for survey purposes and improve recreational data and management opportunities for 13 reef fish statewide.
- 4) Because FWC 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.

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 aboard a private vessel who fish for or possess certain Gulf reef fish have been required to sign up for GRFS. GRFS supplements federal data collection by providing timelier and more precise recreational harvest estimates for Gulf reef fish. GRFS provided data for FWC to successfully manage the Gulf red snapper private recreational fishery in federal waters temporarily in 2018 and 2019, and is necessary for continued, long-term management of this fishery. The Florida Legislature recently approved funding for FWC to establish SRFS, which would build on the success of GRFS.

The proposed final rule would require recreational fishers to annually sign up for SRFS to fish for or possess the following reef fish while aboard a private vessel in or on 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. Persons under 16 and harvesters aboard for-hire fishing vessels would be exempt from this requirement.

Staff Recommendation:

Approve the final rule as proposed.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Martha Guyas, Section Leader, Marine Fisheries Management