



Gag Grouper Recreational Season – Big Bend

Draft Rule

April 20, 2017

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Division of Marine Fisheries Management

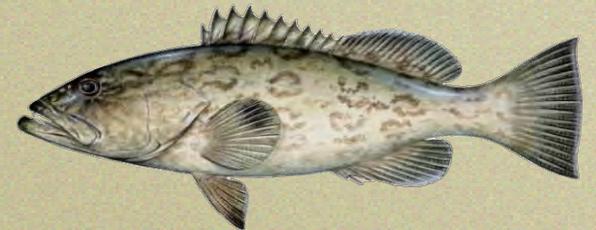
Background

- In February, the Commission directed staff to develop a draft rule to modify the recreational gag grouper season off the Big Bend (Franklin, Wakulla, Jefferson, and Taylor counties)
- Big Bend season (April 1 – June 30) established in 2012 to allow harvest when gag grouper are in state waters and to boost local economy
 - In 2012, the season elsewhere in the Gulf was July 1 – Oct. 31
 - Currently, the season elsewhere in the Gulf is June 1 – Dec. 31



Current Gag Grouper Recreational Regulations – Gulf State Waters

- Bag limit: 2 per person per day within the 4 grouper aggregate bag limit
- Minimum size limit: 24 inches total length
- Harvest seasons:
 - Big Bend: April 1 – June 30 (state waters off Franklin, Wakulla, Taylor, and Jefferson counties)
 - Other Gulf waters: June 1 – Dec. 31





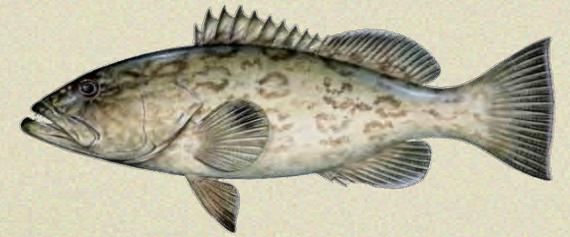
Gulf Gag Grouper



- Florida State Waters Boundary
- 4-County ("Big Bend") Regional Season Boundary
- Gulf State Waters Season Boundary
- Gulf Federal Waters
- Atlantic State and Federal Waters



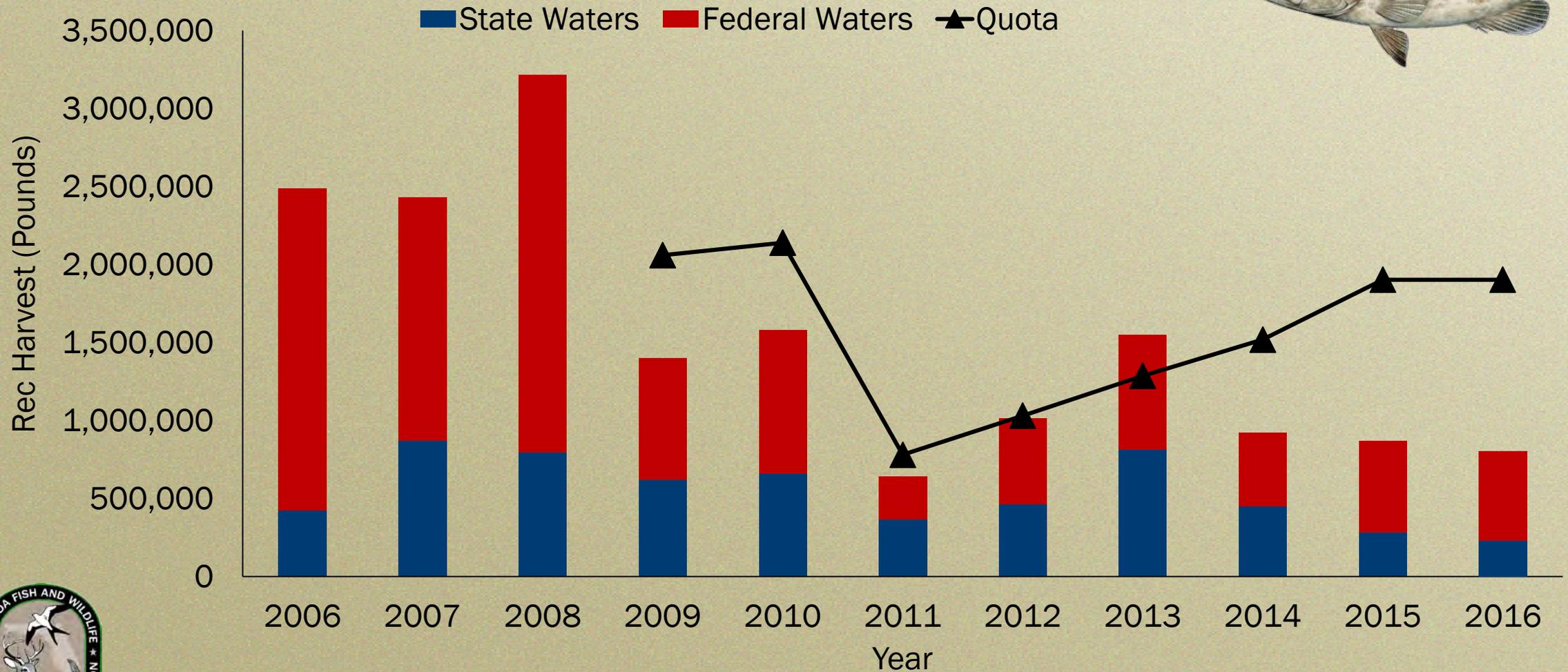
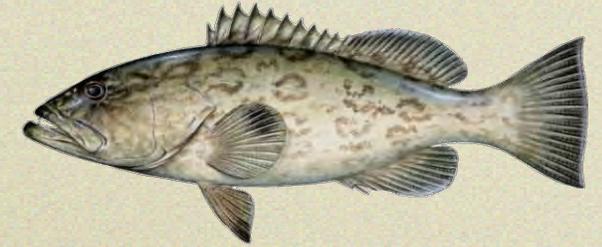
Gulf of Mexico Gag Grouper – Stock Status and Biology



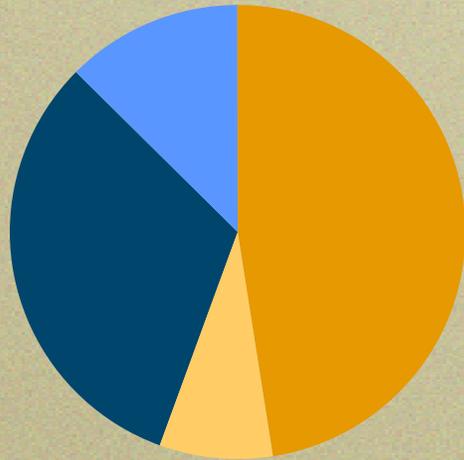
- Not overfished or undergoing overfishing, but 2017 assessment update results are very uncertain
- Form spawning aggregations from December through April
- Peak spawning in February and March
- Start life as females, then can transition to males
- Gag grouper smaller than 35 inches tend to be females; gag grouper larger than 45 inches tend to be males
- 50% of females are mature at 24 inches (3 years old)



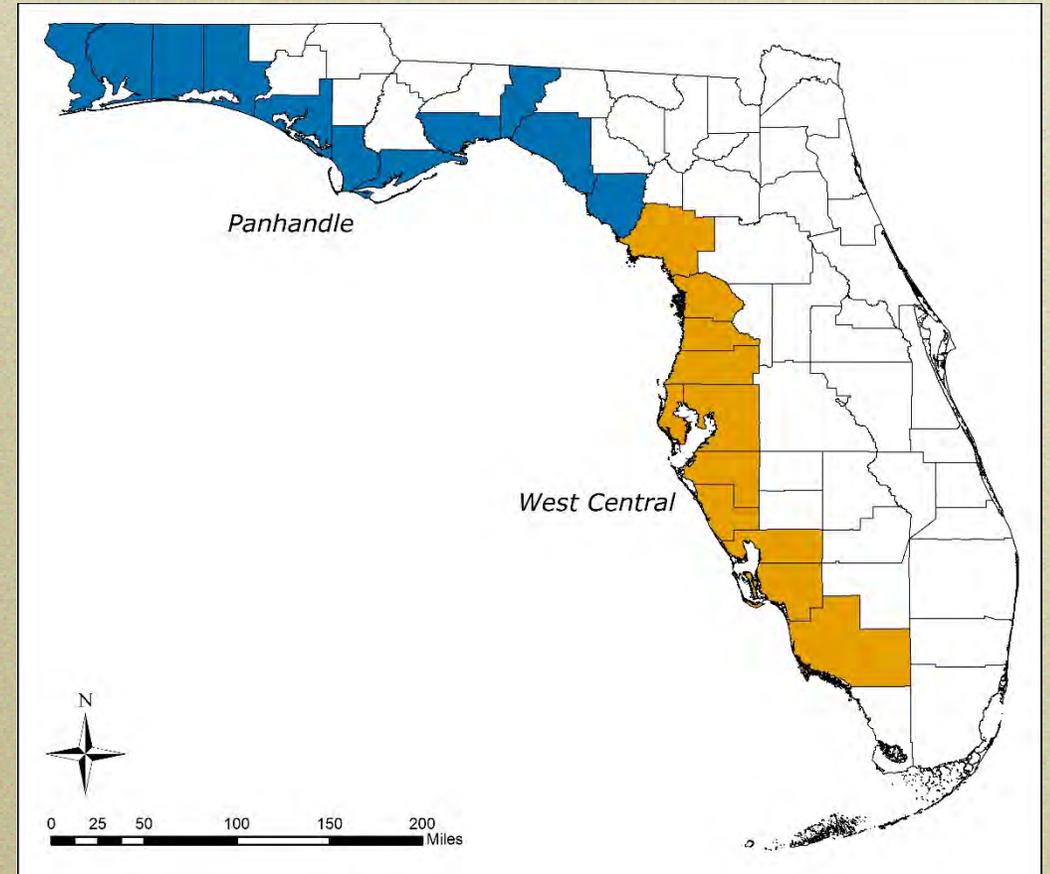
Recreational Harvest of Gulf Gag Grouper off Florida, 2006-2016



Recreational Harvest of Gulf Gag Grouper, 2006 - 2016



- Panhandle Federal Waters
- Panhandle State Waters
- West Central Federal Waters
- West Central State Waters



Stakeholder Feedback

- Public workshops held in March
 - Carrabelle
 - Perry
 - Tallahassee
- Comments also received via online commenting portal and email



Summary of Stakeholder Requests – Big Bend Season

- Open in Big Bend during the fall
 - September, October, November, and/or December
 - Potentially weekends
- Keep current spring season (some support)
- Keep harvest closed during spawning season (many support)
- Make season consistent Gulfwide (June 1 – Dec. 31)
- Do not extend season because of concerns about gag grouper stock



Recreational Gag Grouper Season Draft Rule

Modify season for Big Bend (Franklin, Wakulla, Jefferson, and Taylor counties)

- Continue April 1 – June 30 season
- Add Fall open season Sept. 1 – Dec. 31

Considerations

- Big Bend stakeholders largely support fall opening
- Weather and fish availability during spring season can be variable, but the early season provides valuable opportunities
- Fall opening would overlap with proposed state red snapper season
- Federal quota not being met despite longer seasons and quota increases
- Federally-permitted for-hire may only fish in state waters when state and federal waters are both open



Staff Recommendation

Modify season for Big Bend (Franklin, Wakulla, Jefferson, and Taylor counties)

- Continue April 1 – June 30 season
- Add open season Sept. 1 – Dec. 31

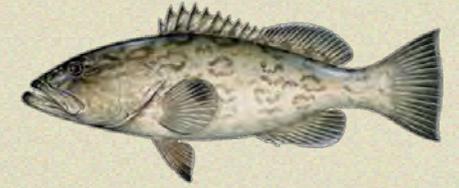
If approved and directed, return for a final public hearing on gag grouper at the July Commission meeting



The following slides are considered backup material and are not anticipated to be part of the actual presentation to the Commission



Gag Grouper Season History



Pre - 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Feb. 1 – March 31 annual spawning season closure (closed 2 months)
2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ State waters: closed Feb. 1 – March 31, June 1 – Sept. 15, and Nov. 16 – Dec. 31 (closed 7 months)▪ Federal waters: open Sept. 16 – Nov. 15 only (closed 10 months)
2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ State waters: open April 1 – June 30 off Franklin, Wakulla, Taylor, and Jefferson counties; open July 1 – Oct. 31 in all other Gulf state waters▪ Federal waters: open July 1 – Oct. 31 (closed 8 months)
2013 - 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ State waters: open April 1 – June 30 off Franklin, Wakulla, Taylor, and Jefferson counties; open July 1 – Dec. 3 in all other Gulf state waters▪ Federal waters: open July 1 – Dec. 2 (closed 7 months)
2016- present	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ State waters: open April 1 – June 30 off Franklin, Wakulla, Taylor, and Jefferson counties; open June 1 – Dec. 31 in all other Gulf state waters (closed 9 months for 4 counties; closed 5 months elsewhere)▪ Federal waters: open June 1 – Dec. 31 (closed 5 months)

