

Gulf Council Issues



Review and Discussion
December 7, 2017



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Version 1

This is a review and discussion of actions and discussions from the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's (Council) Aug. 7-10 meeting in San Antonio, TX and Oct. 2-5 meeting in Biloxi, MS. Council discussions on red snapper and greater amberjack will be reviewed in the agenda items on these topics.

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Unless otherwise noted, images throughout the presentation are by FWC.

Public Hearings to be Held on Potential Offshore Management Areas to Protect Deepwater Corals



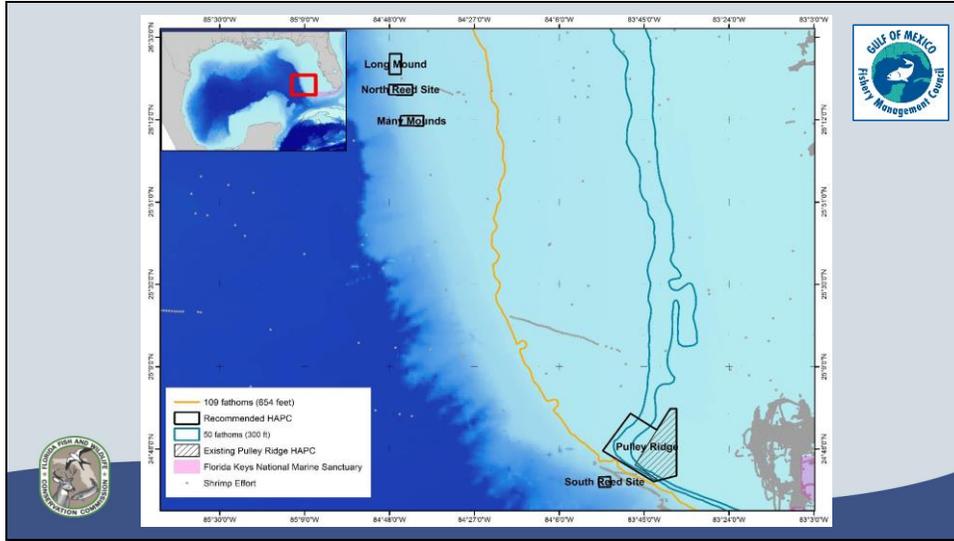
- Council considering limiting fishing at 15 areas, and is working with fishermen and scientists to refine areas and associated regulations
- Florida areas under consideration:
 - **Pulley Ridge Expansion** – would include prohibition on use of traps, trawls, and anchoring; bottom longlines would still be allowed
 - **Long Mound, Many Mounds, and North Reed** – would prohibit all bottom gear and anchoring
- Public hearings to be held in Madeira Beach and Key West in early 2018



In October, the Council voted to hold public hearings on creating several management areas, known as Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPCs), to protect deepwater coral habitats. These areas are far offshore in federal waters. The Council is considering limiting fishing at 15 areas and has been working with fishermen (largely shrimpers and reef fish fishermen) and scientists to refine the boundaries of these areas and determine if special regulations are warranted for each area. An additional eight areas are being considered for HAPC designation, but would not have additional regulations.

Four areas off Florida are being considered for additional regulations to protect deepwater corals. The first area would be an expansion of an existing protected area called Pulley Ridge, which is located west of the Dry Tortugas and is home to a large number of diverse coral species. All bottom gear and anchoring by fishing vessels are prohibited in the existing protected area. Unlike in the existing protected area, the Council is proposing that bottom longlining be allowed in the Pulley Ridge expansion. This is because the commercial reef fish bottom-longline fleet has historically fished this area for grouper when other areas of the Gulf of Mexico are seasonally closed to bottom longlines. Otherwise, use of bottom gear including traps and trawls, as well as anchoring by fishing vessels, would be prohibited in the Pulley Ridge expansion. This area is not known to be fished by the shrimp, lobster, or stone crab industries, so adverse impacts to these fisheries should be minimal. Recent research documented deepwater coral coverage at three sites off southwest Florida known as Long Mound, Many Mounds, and North Reed, which are also being considered for additional regulations. Bottom gear and anchoring by fishing vessels would be prohibited at these sites, but they are not known to be fished by vessels using bottom gear. One additional area off Florida, known as South Reed, could be created without additional regulations. These areas are mapped on the following slide.

Public hearings on these potential management areas will be held around the Gulf coast in early 2018. Florida meetings will be held in Madeira Beach and Key West.



The map above shows the areas off Florida the Council is considering designating as HAPCs to protect deepwater corals. These areas occur far offshore in very deep water. The Council is considering limiting bottom gear at Long Mound, North Reed, Many Mounds, and the Pulley Ridge expansion. The existing protected area at Pulley Ridge is shown as the hashed area. The proposed Pulley Ridge expansion is the box adjacent to this area. No additional regulations are proposed for South Reed.

Other Council Discussions



Spiny Lobster

- Gulf and South Atlantic councils considering regulations for spiny lobster that are consistent with Florida regulations, including recent bully net regulations

Descending Devices

- Council developing policy to support use of descending devices or venting tools on vessels possessing reef fish to reduce discard mortality
- Outreach program being developed to encourage use of these tools



The Council also discussed regulations for spiny lobster. The Gulf and South Atlantic councils are considering updating federal spiny lobster regulations to be more consistent with FWC regulations, including recent bully net management changes. Historically, the councils have set federal regulations for spiny lobster based on Florida regulations because this fishery occurs almost entirely off Florida. The councils will also discuss ways to streamline the process by which federal regulations are updated to match FWC regulations. Both councils will discuss these changes at future meetings.

Finally, the Council decided to develop a policy to support use of descending devices or venting tools on vessels possessing reef fish to reduce discard mortality. The Council will also develop an outreach program to encourage use of these tools. FWC staff will coordinate with the Council on this effort.

No Direction Requested



- Input on Council items is welcome
- Next Gulf Council meeting is Jan. 29 – Feb. 2 in New Orleans, LA



No direction is requested on Council items at this time. However, input on Council items is always welcome. The next Gulf Council meeting is Jan. 29 through Feb. 2 in New Orleans, LA.