



 **Red Snapper – Gulf of Mexico**  
Final Public Hearing  
April 17, 2013  
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission  
Division of Marine Fisheries Management

Version 3

This is a final public hearing for Gulf of Mexico red snapper. Red snapper are regulated as reef fish in Chapter 68B-14, Florida Administrative Code (FAC). This action would set the 2013 recreational red snapper season in Gulf of Mexico state waters to June 1 through July 14 (44 days), as proposed by the Commission at the February Commission meeting. Because the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) will be meeting and discussing red snapper management the same week as the April Commission Meeting, this document may be updated with additional information about red snapper issues.

Authors: Martha Bademan, Jessica McCawley, and Tony Bresnen

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## Red Snapper – 2013 Federal Recreational Season



- Gulf-wide season initially estimated to be 27 days
  - Bag limit will stay 2 fish
  - Increased quota for 2013, but quota is expected to be caught faster due to increased catch rates and larger fish size
- Season length will likely change based on upcoming assessment and states' consistency
  - Supplemental season possible




As of the February Commission Meeting, NOAA Fisheries Service had projected the 2013 recreational red snapper season in the Gulf of Mexico to be 27 days with a bag limit of two fish. The 2013 season is expected to be shorter than last year's 46-day season due to an increasing amount of effort in the fishery and the larger size fish that are being caught.

The Council increased the quota for the upcoming 2013 season based on the acceptable biological catch (ABC) recommendation of 8.46 million pounds (mp) from the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee. Based on the current 49% commercial and 51% recreational allocation for red snapper, the 2012 commercial quota was 4.121 mp and the recreational quota was 3.959 mp. If approved by the Secretary of Commerce, the 2013 quota will be 4.315 mp for the commercial sector and 4.145 mp for the recreational sector. This is a 4.7% quota increase relative to 2012.

A benchmark assessment for red snapper is currently underway and is scheduled to be presented to the Council in the spring. If the assessment is positive, another quota increase for 2013 may be warranted, which could allow for additional recreational fishing days. If such a quota increase is warranted, the Council will consider an emergency rule in April that will increase harvest quotas for 2013 and could allow for a supplemental recreational fishing season. It is unlikely that the emergency rule would be approved in time to add days to the end of the regular June recreational harvest season, so the Council would also need to set when the supplemental season would open.

Recreational red snapper regulations in each of the Gulf states' waters will also affect the federal season length off each state. The next two slides outline updated estimates of how each of the Gulf states' regulations will affect the season in federal waters that are adjacent to each state.

## Emergency Rule - 2013 Federal Red Snapper Season



- Emergency rule approved to allow NOAA Fisheries to shorten federal season off states with inconsistent regulations
  - 28-day season estimated for federal waters off states with consistent regulations
  - 44-day proposed state waters season estimated to result in 21-day federal season off Florida

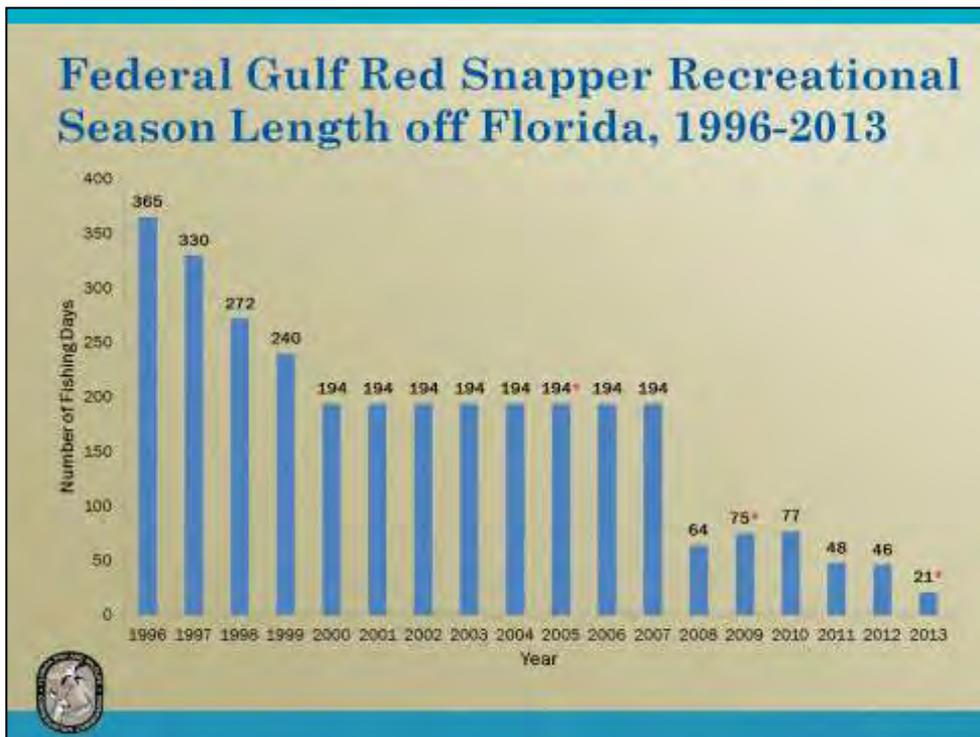


At the February Council meeting, the Council approved an emergency rule that grants NOAA Fisheries the authority to shorten the federal recreational red snapper season off states that adopt inconsistent red snapper regulations in their state waters. This emergency rule is pending approval by the Secretary of Commerce. The federal waters season off states that have regulations that are consistent with federal recreational red snapper regulations is estimated to be 28 days. NOAA Fisheries estimates that if Florida approves the 44-day state recreational season for Gulf red snapper that was proposed by the Commission in February, the season in federal waters off Florida would be shortened from 28 to 21 days. This shorter federal season would compensate for the additional harvest that would occur in state waters when the state season is open but the federal season is closed.

## 2013 State and Federal Red Snapper Seasons – Current Estimates



The 2013 federal recreational red snapper season dates depend on regulations set in state waters by each Gulf state. Texas and Louisiana have approved inconsistent regulations for the 2013 season. To account for this, the federal season lengths in waters off Texas and Louisiana have been reduced to account for increased harvest in state waters. If Florida approves the 44-day proposed season, the federal season off of Florida is estimated to be 21 days. Mississippi and Alabama would both have the full 28-day federal season because their state regulations match federal rules.



The graph above shows federal recreational red snapper seasons in the Gulf of Mexico off Florida over the past 18 years. Colored asterisks represent years of red snapper SEDAR benchmark stock assessments and stock assessment updates. Benchmark assessments for Gulf of Mexico red snapper occurred in 2005 and 2013. An update to the 2005 benchmark stock assessment was performed in 2009. A descriptive recreational red snapper season history for Florida state and federal waters from 2008 through 2012 can be found on slide 15 of this presentation.

## Proposed Rule

### 68B-14.0038 Recreational Snapper Seasons

- Change the recreational fishing season for red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico to June 1 through July 14 (44 days)



The proposed rule would modify Chapter 68B-14.0038, FAC, (Recreational Snapper Seasons) to set a June 1 through July 14 recreational harvest season for red snapper in state waters of the Gulf of Mexico. When the Commission approved this draft rule in February and at the time of this writing, NOAA Fisheries Service had not yet released an official federal season ending date. The current federal season estimate for Florida is 21 days based upon the proposed 44-day state season.

## Other State Season Considerations

- Approximately 40% of Gulf recreational red snapper harvested off Florida
  - Significant harvest in state waters
- 44-day season provides additional fishing days for Panhandle private anglers, but limits access for others
  - Nearly all harvest off West Florida peninsula occurs in federal waters
  - Federally-permitted for-hire vessels must follow federal season, even in state waters
- If the ABC is exceeded, scheduled quota increases could be held back in future years



There are many other points to keep in mind when selecting the season for recreational red snapper in Gulf state waters. From 2001-2011, approximately 40% of Gulf recreational red snapper harvest occurred off Florida, and a large portion of this harvest occurred in state waters, so Florida plays an important role in the red snapper rebuilding plan. The Commission's proposed 44-day season would provide additional fishing days for private anglers that fish off Florida's Panhandle because red snapper are available in Panhandle state waters. However, an inconsistent season would limit opportunities to catch red snapper in federal waters because the federal season off Florida would be shortened to 21 days to compensate for harvest in state waters when federal waters are closed. Nearly all red snapper that are caught off the West Florida peninsula are harvested in federal waters, which means that a longer state season would not benefit anglers that fish out of this area. Additionally, federally-permitted for-hire vessels must follow the federal season, even in state waters, so an inconsistent season would limit fishing opportunities for tourists and anglers fishing from federally-permitted for-hire vessels. If the acceptable biological catch (ABC) for red snapper is exceeded, scheduled quota increases in future years could be withheld. This could affect both commercial and recreational harvesters, and would again lead to shorter future recreational seasons.

## Staff Recommendations

### Approve the proposed rule

- A 44-day recreational harvest season open June 1 through July 14
- If approved, make the rule effective June 1, 2013

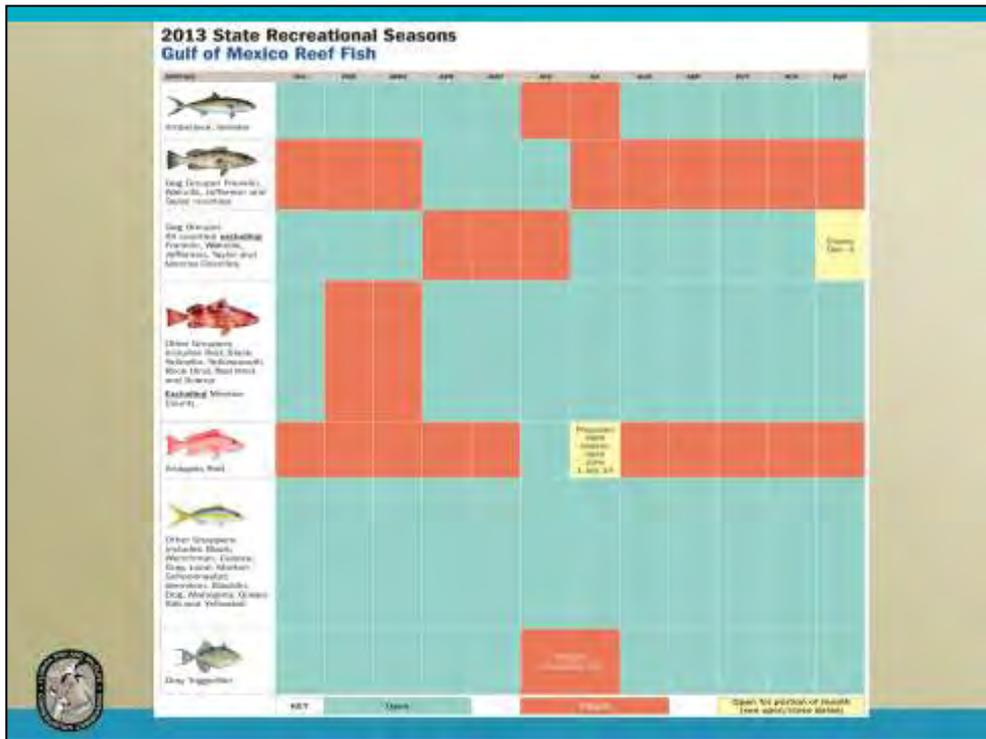


Staff recommends approving the proposed rule to modify the recreational harvest season for red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico. This would establish a June 1 through July 14 harvest season (44 days) for red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico.

If approved, staff recommends making the rule effective June 1, 2013. Staff has evaluated the rules under the standards of 68-1.004, FAC, and found them to be in compliance.

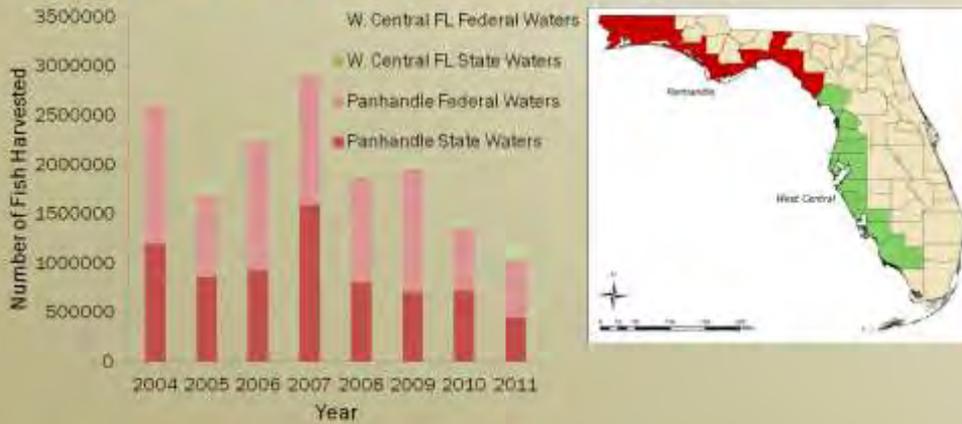
The following slides are considered back up material and are not anticipated to be part of the Commission meeting presentation



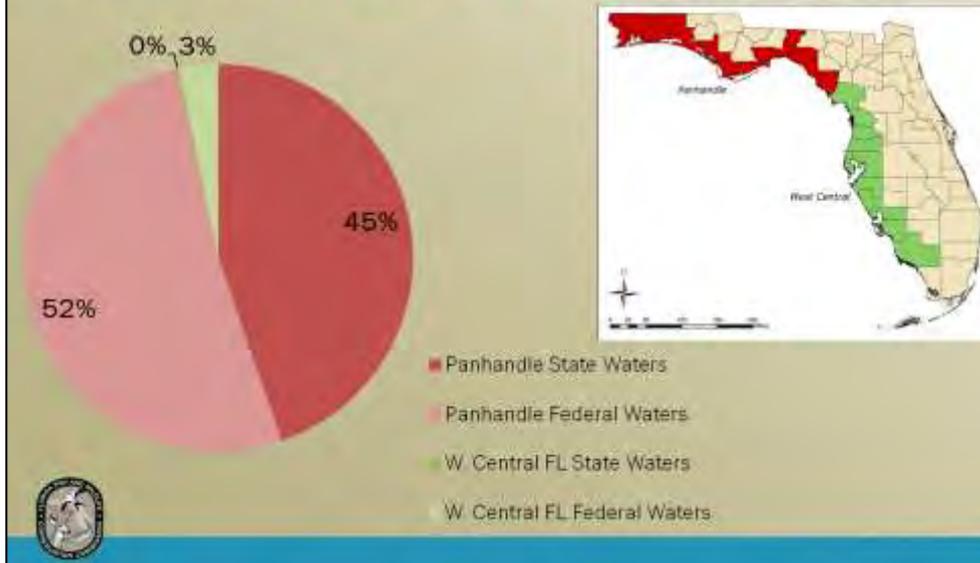


The chart above has been updated to reflect the Commission’s approval of the 2013 gag season in Gulf state waters, as well as the approval of the June – July spawning season closure for gray triggerfish.

# Recreational Catch of Red Snapper in the Gulf by Region



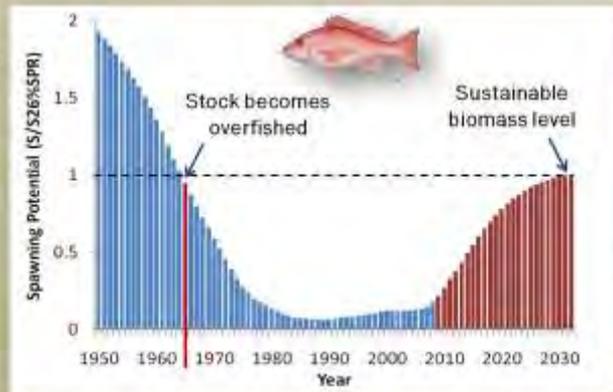
## Recreational Catch of Red Snapper in the Gulf by Region, 2004-2011



Note: Catch of red snapper in West Central Florida state waters is 0% due to rounding. The actual value is approximately 0.2%.

## Red Snapper Rebuilding Schedule

- Not easy to rebuild a stock that has been overfished for so long and has so many age classes (they live to be 57)
- Need to rebuild:
  1. Spawning Biomass (SPR)
  2. Age Structure: provides stability and resilience

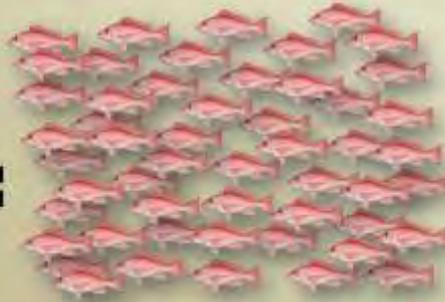


The long-term nature of the Gulf red snapper rebuilding plan is due to two main factors: 1) the fact that the stock has been estimated to have been overfished since the mid-1960's (i.e., with stock biomass below the levels considered sustainable), and 2) the fact that a healthy red snapper population is expected to have a fully-rebuilt age structure (50+ age classes given that red snapper live to be 57-years-old). Rebuilding the spawning biomass provides the level of reproduction needed to replenish the stock and keep it at sustainable levels. Rebuilding the age structure provides population stability and resilience against negative environmental events and other episodic impacts. The figure above is based on data through 2008, and was used in the 2009 stock assessment update for Gulf red snapper. Updated data from the ongoing red snapper assessment are not yet available.

## Size, Age, and Reproductive Value



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One 24-inch female  
produces as many eggs as...

**212** 17-inch females



Older, larger red snapper make a disproportionate contribution to the stock's reproductive potential when compared to younger, smaller counterparts. For example, a single 24-inch-long red snapper has been estimated to produce as many eggs as 212 17-inch-long snappers. This is largely because eggs are produced in proportion to a fish's volume, which is proportional to the cube of its length.

## Red Snapper Season History

### 2008

- Federal season (shortened): June 1 - September 30
- *FWC kept state season as is: April 15 - October 31*
- Federal response to state season: June 1 - August 5 (65 days)

### 2009

- *FWC adjusts state season: June 1 - September 30*
- Federal (response to overharvest): June 1 - August 14
- *FWC matched federal season: June 1 - August 14 (75 days)*

### 2010

- Federal and state seasons: June 1 - July 23 (53 days)
- Supplemental season for state and federal waters: October 1 - November 22 (weekends only - 24 days)

### 2011

- Federal and state seasons: June 1 - July 18 (48 days)

### 2012

- Federal and state seasons: June - July 10 (40 days)
- Additional 6 days added for bad weather



Red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico is overfished. In February 2008, the Commission adopted a consistent recreational bag limit but retained the existing recreational season in state waters of April 15 through Oct. 31. In March 2008, to account for the longer state season (and associated increase in catch), NOAA Fisheries Service shortened the recreational season in federal waters to June 1 through Aug. 5 (65 days). In 2008, the recreational harvest exceeded an established catch limit of 2.45 million pounds by 1.22 million pounds. Part of this harvest overrun was due to the longer state season, as well as larger, heavier red snapper being landed in 2008 compared to previous years.

In February 2009, at the request of the Council, NOAA Fisheries Service, and representatives of the northwest Florida charter industry, the Commission reconsidered and approved state consistency with the original federal season of June 1 through September 30 (122 days). In May 2009, NOAA Fisheries Service shortened the recreational red snapper season as an accountability measure to offset the excessive harvest of 2008. The dates of the federal season were again dependent on Florida adopting a consistent recreational red snapper season in state waters. The Commission approved state consistency and the 2009 season in state and federal waters was June 1 through Aug. 14 (75 days).

The 2010 federal and state seasons were shortened to 53 days, resulting in a June 1 through July 23 season. The Council increased the allowable harvest for the Gulf red snapper fishery from 5.0 million pounds (mp) to 6.945 mp for 2010. However, federal fisheries managers predicted that if the season length was kept the same as 2009, the allowable harvest for red snapper would have been exceeded because of the high level of recreational fishing effort in the Gulf. A shortened season was created to help avoid a harvest overrun and allow future increases in harvest. On April 20, 2010, the Deepwater Horizon oil rig exploded causing approximately 4.9 million barrels of oil to flow into the Gulf of Mexico before the well was capped on Sept. 19, 2010. More than half of the Gulf of Mexico was closed to fishing during red snapper season due to the oil spill, which resulted in lower than expected recreational red snapper landings. Federal fishery managers approved a 24-day supplemental red snapper season which allowed fishing for red snapper on weekends only from Oct. 1 through Nov. 22, 2010.

The 2011 Gulf recreational red snapper season was June 1 through July 18 (48 days). The Council increased the ACL to 7.185 mp for 2011, which resulted in a recreational ACL of 3.521 mp and a commercial ACL of 3.664 mp. Despite this ACL increase, the 2011 season was shorter than the 2010 regular season because of high predicted fishing effort and larger, heavier red snapper.

The 2012 Gulf recreational red snapper season was originally June 1 through July 10 (40 days). The Council increased the annual catch limit (ACL) for 2012 to 8.080 million pounds (mp). Despite this ACL increase, the 2012 season was shorter than the 2011 season because fishing effort for red snapper is high and red snapper are getting larger, which means the catch limit is being reached faster. Due to the inclement weather caused by Tropical Storm Debby, the 2012 season was extended by six days to account for lost fishing days. As a result, the 2012 season was 46 days total and ran through July 16.

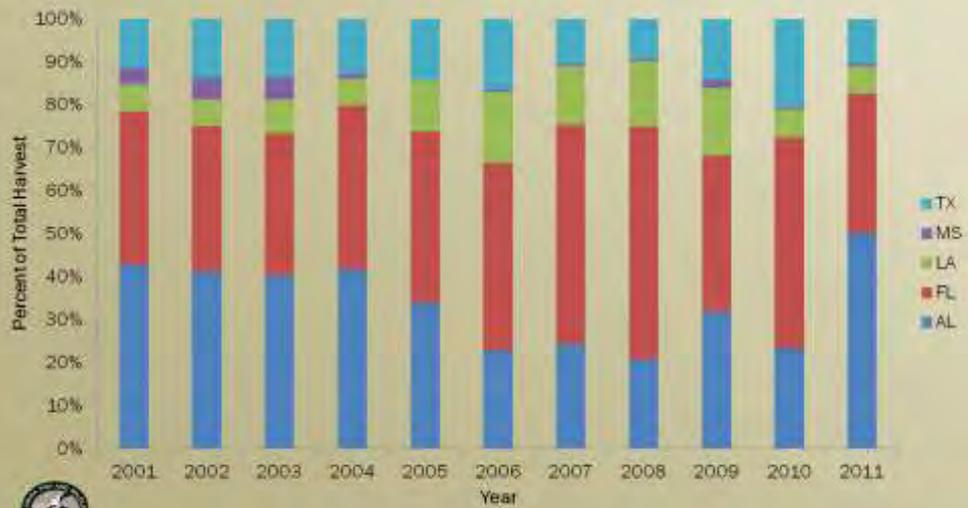
## Inconsistent Recreational Red Snapper Regulations in Other Gulf States

State	2013 Open Season	Bag Limit	Minimum Size Limit
Texas	Year round	4 fish	15 inches
Louisiana	3 day weekends from Saturday preceding Palm Sunday through Sept. 30 including Memorial Day and Labor Day (88 days)	3 fish	16 inches

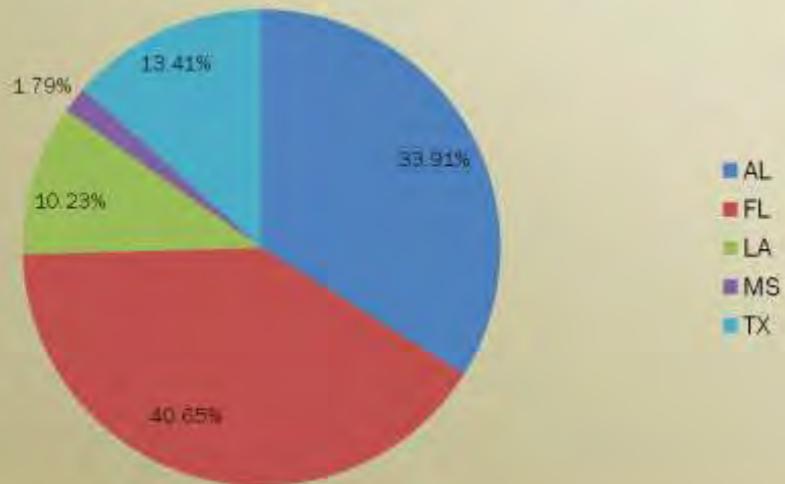


This table shows state red snapper recreational harvest regulations for Texas and Louisiana, which have both indicated that they will be inconsistent with federal red snapper regulations in 2013. For comparison, the federal season off consistent states is currently scheduled to begin on June 1, and is estimated to be 28 days. The federal bag limit is two fish per person per day and the minimum size limit is 16 inches total length. In 2011, 10.5% of the Gulf recreational red snapper quota was landed in Texas and 6.2% of the quota was landed in Louisiana.

## Harvest of Red Snapper in Whole Weight of Fish by State, 2001-2011



## Average Harvest of Red Snapper in Whole Weight of Fish by State, 2001-2011



# Harvest of Red Snapper in Whole Weight of Fish in West Florida, 2001-2011

