



 **Red Snapper – Gulf of Mexico**
Final Public Hearing
April 16, 2014
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Division of Marine Fisheries Management

Version 2

Update: This document has been updated to include the most recent information on the federal recreational red snapper season and actions taken by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council.

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 recreational red snapper season in Gulf of Mexico state waters to be the Saturday before Memorial Day through July 14.

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Background – Gulf Recreational Red Snapper Season

- In recent years, recreational red snapper season in Gulf state and federal waters has started June 1
- Commission requested to start 2014 state season the Saturday before Memorial Day to optimize angler fishing opportunities
 - 2014 season would start May 24 (52 days)



Over the last several years, the recreational red snapper season in state and federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico has started on June 1. Last November, the Commission requested a draft rule that would instead start Gulf state red snapper season on the Saturday before Memorial Day to increase fishing opportunities for anglers over the holiday weekend. This would equate to a 52-day season with a start date of May 24 for 2014.

2014 Gulf Federal Recreational Season – Emergency Action



- Council approved 20% buffer on 5.39 mp recreational quota in response to federal lawsuit
- Federal season projection dropped from 40 days to 11 days (June 1-11)
 - Season calculation now includes 2013 data and assumes
 - “30B” requirement stays in place
 - MS and AL rules match federal rules
 - FL approves proposed 52-day state season
 - TX and LA keep same inconsistent state rules
- Federal season will be shortened or eliminated in response to change in LA state season from weekends only to year round



In response to the lawsuit, the Council approved an emergency rule that would apply a 20% buffer on the 5.39 million pound (mp) recreational quota. Essentially, this would create a recreational annual catch target of 4.312 mp. NOAA Fisheries is expected to promulgate this rule by May 15.

In late 2013, NOAA Fisheries announced that the 2014 Gulf federal recreational red snapper season would begin June 1 and remain open through July 10, which is when the recreational quota was expected to be reached. Last week, NOAA Fisheries estimated that the 2014 federal season would be 11 days based on the 20% buffer and changes in the way NOAA Fisheries calculates the season length. Originally, 2013 recreational catch rate estimates were not used to project the 2014 season length because of unresolved issues with MRIP data from the 2013 season. The court found that these data should have been used to calculate the 2014 season, so these data were used for the 11-day season projection.

NOAA Fisheries also changed some assumptions in calculating the 2014 season. First, NOAA Fisheries assumed that the requirement that federally-permitted for-hire vessels to follow federal reef fish rules when fishing in state waters (commonly referred to as “30B”) would remain in effect. This is very likely, because at the April Council meeting, the Council voted to keep the “30B” requirement in place. NOAA Fisheries also continued to assume that Mississippi and Alabama state rules would match federal rules. However, in this round of calculations, NOAA Fisheries assumed that Florida would have a 52-day season (previously they assumed Florida would match the federal season). NOAA Fisheries also assumed that Texas and Louisiana would keep the same inconsistent state recreational red snapper regulations for their state waters. Just last Friday, Louisiana announced that its state waters would be open year round instead of for three-day weekends. This means that the federal season will have to be shortened, or possibly eliminated, to ensure that the Gulf-wide recreational quota is not exceeded.

2014 Gulf Federal Recreational Season – Harvest Projections



Projected breakdown of how 4.312 mp will be harvested:

- 2.5 mp projected to be harvested Gulf-wide during 11-day federal season
- Projections for inconsistent state waters seasons:
 - 1.2 mp from FL during 52-day season
 - <100,000 lbs. from TX
 - 240,000 lbs. from LA (assuming weekends only season)
- 286,000 lbs. from Headboat Cooperative EFP



With the 20% buffer on the 5.39 million pound (mp) recreational quota, the recreational annual catch target would be 4.312 mp. NOAA Fisheries estimates that 2.5 million pounds (mp) would be harvested during the 11-day federal season. An estimated 1.2 million pounds is expected to be harvested in Florida state waters, assuming a 52-day season, when state waters are open and federal waters are closed. NOAA Fisheries estimates that less than 100,000 pounds would be harvested in Texas state waters during its year round state season. Texas also has a four-fish bag limit and 15 inch minimum size limit, unlike the two-fish bag limit and 16 inch minimum size limit in federal and other state waters. NOAA projected that 240,000 pounds would be harvested from Louisiana state waters, but assumed that Louisiana state waters would be open for three-day weekends. Now that Louisiana state waters are open year round for recreational red snapper harvest, the amount of fish harvested from Louisiana waters will go up and likely result in a shortened or eliminated federal season. Finally, headboats participating the in Headboat Cooperative Exempted Fishing Permit are expected to harvest 286,000 pounds of red snapper.

Gulf Red Snapper State and Federal Season Dates and Lengths

Year	State Season Dates	Federal Season Dates	State Season Length (Days)	Federal Season Length (Days)
2000	April 15 - Oct. 31	April 21 - Oct.31	200	194
2001	April 15 - Oct. 31	April 21 - Oct.31	200	194
2002	April 15 - Oct. 31	April 21 - Oct.31	200	194
2003	April 15 - Oct. 31	April 21 - Oct.31	200	194
2004	April 15 - Oct. 31	April 21 - Oct.31	200	194
2005	April 15 - Oct. 31	April 21 - Oct.31	200	194
2006	April 15 - Oct. 31	April 21 - Oct.31	200	194
2007	April 15 - Oct. 31	April 21 - Oct.31	200	194
2008	April 15 - Oct. 31	June 1 - Aug. 3	200	64
2009	June 1 - August 14	June 1 - Aug. 14	75	75
	June 1 - July 23; Oct. 1 - Nov.22 (3-Day Weekends)	June 1 - July 23; Oct. 1 - Nov. 22 (3-Day Weekends)		
2010	June 1 - July 18	June 1 - July 18	48	48
2011	June 1 - July 15	June 1 - July 15	46	46
2012	June 1 - July 14; Oct. 1 - Oct. 21	June 1 - June 28; Oct. 1 - Oct. 14	65	42
2013	May 24 - July 14	June 1-11	52	11
2014*				

Shaded years indicate years the Commission adopted a consistent reef snapper season

*Dates for the 2014 state and federal season are preliminary



This table shows Gulf red snapper state and federal season dates and lengths from 2000-2014. From 2000-2007, the federal season was 194 days and the Florida state season was 200 days. Both seasons opened in April and ended on Oct. 31 each year. In 2008, the federal season was reduced to 64 days and opened June 1, but the state season remained at 200 days (April 15 – Oct. 31). From 2009-2012, the recreational red snapper season in Gulf state waters matched the federal season, and the number of days declined from a high of 77 days to 46 days. Last year, Gulf state waters were open for a total of 65 days and federal waters were open for 42 days, including both the summer season and fall supplemental season. This year, the Commission is considering a 52-day season opening May 24. The federal season was estimated to be 11 days, but this estimate was made before Louisiana changed their state waters season from three-day weekends to year-round.

Proposed Rule

68B-14.0038 Recreational Snapper Seasons

- Set the recreational fishing season for red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico to the Saturday before Memorial Day through July 14 each year
- Resulting 2014 state season would begin on May 24 and be 52 days



The proposed rule would modify Chapter 68B-14.0038, FAC, (Recreational Snapper Seasons) to set the recreational fishing season for Gulf of Mexico red snapper to begin the Saturday before Memorial Day through July 14. Opening red snapper for recreational harvest in the Gulf of Mexico the Saturday before Memorial Day rather than June 1 would allow additional harvest opportunities for anglers fishing in state waters over Memorial Day weekend. A July 14 ending date in 2014 would allow for two weekends of fishing in July, which is an important tourist season in the Gulf. The 2013 recreational red snapper season in Gulf state waters also ended on July 14. If this proposed season is approved by the Commission, the 2014 Gulf recreational red snapper season would open Saturday, May 24 for a total of 52 days.

If the recreational season opens the Saturday before Memorial Day in future years, the start date and number of harvest days would fluctuate from year to year since Memorial Day is observed on the fourth Monday of May instead of the same day each year. For example, the Saturday before Memorial Day in 2015 will be May 23 (resulting in a 53-day season) and in 2016 will be May 28 (resulting in a 48-day season).

How Does the Proposed State Season Affect Federal Season?



- 11-day federal season estimate assumed 52-day Florida state season
- NOAA Fisheries will release updated federal season length that accounts for LA and FL state seasons following FWC decision
- Federal season could be lengthened if state waters season matches federal season
- Federal season could be reduced or eliminated if state waters season exceeds proposed 52 days



The 11-day federal season estimate generated by NOAA Fisheries assumed Florida would implement a 52-day state waters season. However, the federal season will likely be shortened further since NOAA Fisheries also assumed Louisiana would have a weekends only season, but Louisiana state waters are now open 365 days. NOAA Fisheries is now expected to release an updated federal season estimate sometime after the Commission sets the season for Florida state waters.

The federal season could be lengthened if Florida's state waters season matches the federal season, but it is difficult to predict how much since Louisiana's year-round season will reduce the length of the federal season. Before Louisiana changed their state season, NOAA Fisheries had estimated that if Florida recreational red snapper rules matched federal rules, including the season length, the federal season could be lengthened to 17 days. NOAA Fisheries had also predicted that the federal season could be 13 days if the Commission chose a 44-day season that started June 1 and ended July 14 (like 2013). Because of Louisiana's state waters season change, the federal season would likely be shorter than these estimates if the Commission chose a consistent season or a 44-day season.

If the Commission increases the length of the recreational harvest season beyond the proposed 52-day season, it is likely that the federal season could be shortened or eliminated to account for state waters harvest during the time that state waters are open but federal waters are closed. The longer the state season is open while federal waters are closed, the higher the uncertainty and difficulty in accurately estimating state waters landings.

State Season Considerations



- Large proportion of Gulf recreational red snapper harvested off Florida
- Early opening provides additional fishing days for Panhandle private anglers, but could limit opportunities for others
 - Federal season may be shortened to account for inconsistent state season
 - Federally-permitted for-hire vessels must follow federal season, even in state waters
 - State waters harvest is regional



There are other factors to consider when setting the season for recreational red snapper in Gulf state waters. Over the past 10 years, Florida has accounted for approximately 40-60% of the annual Gulf-wide recreational red snapper harvest. A large portion of this harvest occurred in state waters, so Florida plays an important role in the Gulf red snapper rebuilding plan. Thus, Florida's state season could affect the length of the federal season.

An inconsistent season would limit opportunities to catch red snapper in federal waters if the federal season is shortened to compensate for the additional red snapper harvest occurring in state waters when federal waters are closed. 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. Finally, the Commission's proposed 52-day season would provide additional fishing days over Memorial Day weekend and the following week for private anglers that fish off Florida's Panhandle but would not benefit anglers fishing off of central and southwest Florida. This is because red snapper are often caught in state waters off the Panhandle, but very rarely caught in state waters off central and southwest Florida.

Staff Recommendation

Approve the proposed rule

- To open the Gulf recreational harvest season the Saturday before Memorial Day through July 14
 - For 2014, this would be a 52-day season
- If approved, rule would be effective May 24, 2014

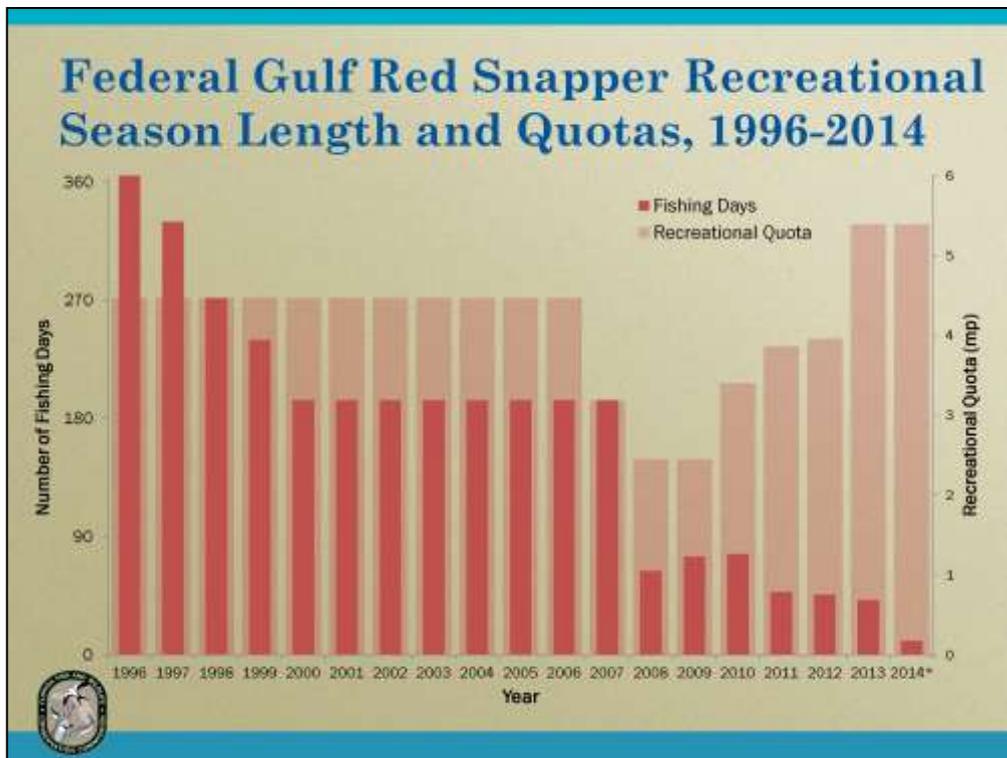


Staff recommends approving the proposed rule to modify the recreational harvest season for red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico. This would set the recreational harvest season for red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico to begin on the Saturday before Memorial Day through July 14. For 2014, the season would begin Saturday, May 24, and would be 52 days long.

If approved, staff recommends making the rule effective May 24, 2014. Staff has evaluated the rules under the standards of 68-1.004, FAC, and found them to be in compliance.

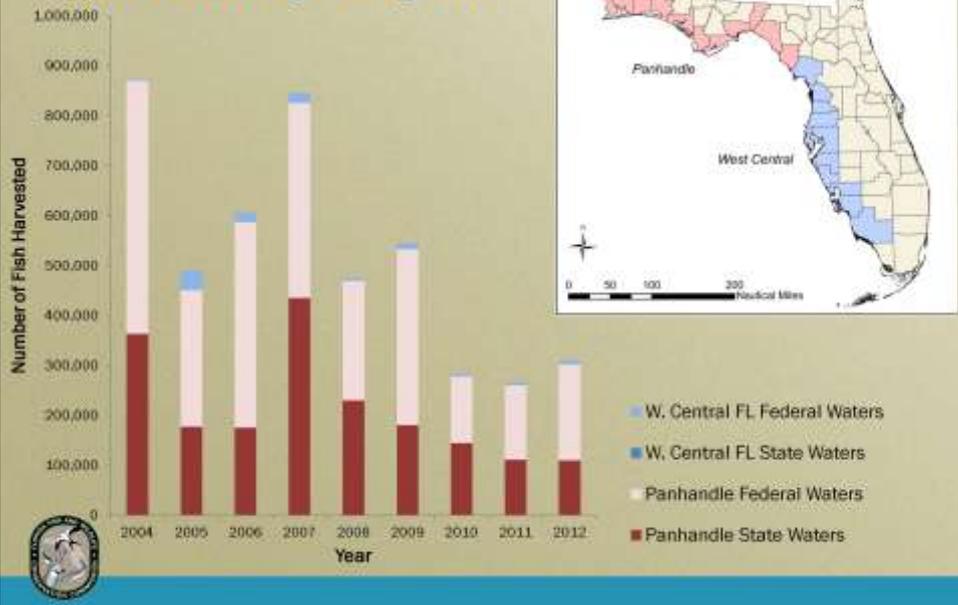
The following slides are considered back up material and are not anticipated to be part of the Commission meeting presentation



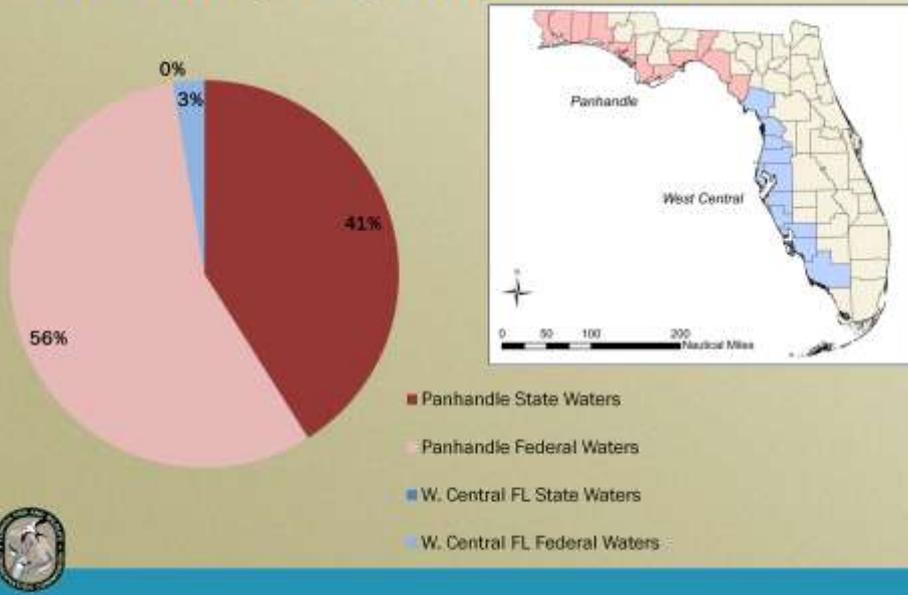


The graph above shows Gulf federal recreational red snapper seasons (red) and quota (pink) since 1996. Although the red snapper quota has increased over the past several years, the federal season has gotten shorter because both fishing effort and the average weight of red snapper landed by anglers has increased, which has resulted in the quota being caught faster. Details of the recreational red snapper season for Florida state and federal waters from 2008 through 2013 can be found on slide 12 of this presentation.

Recreational Catch of Red Snapper in the Gulf by Region



Recreational Catch of Red Snapper in the Gulf by Region, 2004-2012



Note: Catch of red snapper in West Central Florida state waters is 0% due to rounding. The actual value is approximately 0.0002%.

Red Snapper Season History

2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Federal season (shortened): June 1 – Sept.30 ▪ FWC kept state season as is: Apr. 15 – Oct. 31 ▪ Adjusted federal season: June 1 – Aug. 5 (65 days)
2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ FWC adjusts state season: June 1 – Sept.30 ▪ Federal (response to overharvest): June 1 – Aug. 14 ▪ FWC matched federal season: June 1 – Aug. 14 (75 days)
2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Federal and state seasons: June 1 - July 23 (53 days) ▪ Supplemental state and federal seasons: Oct.1 - Nov. 22 (weekends only - 24 days)
2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Federal and state seasons: June 1 - July 18 (48 days)
2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Federal and state seasons: June – July 16 (46 days)
2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ State season: June 1 – July 14 (44 days) ▪ Federal season: June 1-28 (28 days) ▪ State supplemental season: Oct. 1-21 (21 days) ▪ Federal supplemental season: Oct. 1-14 (14 days)



In February 2008, the Commission adopted a consistent recreational bag limit but retained the existing state recreational season of April 15 through Oct. 31. To account for the longer state season and associated increase in catch, NOAA Fisheries shortened the federal recreational season to June 1 – Aug. 5 (65 days). The 2008 recreational quota of 2.45 mp was exceeded by 1.22 mp. Part of this overrun was due to the longer state season, as well as heavier red snapper being landed in 2008 compared to previous years.

In early 2009, at the request of the Council, NOAA Fisheries, and representatives of the northwest Florida charter industry, the Commission approved state consistency with the original federal season of June 1 through Sept. 30 (122 days). In May 2009, NOAA Fisheries shortened the recreational red snapper season as an accountability measure to offset the 2008 harvest overrun. 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).

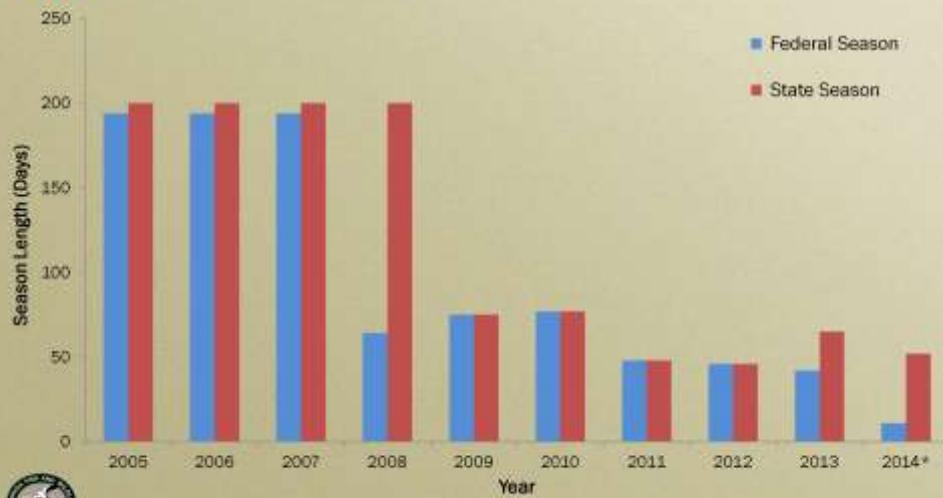
The 2010 federal and state seasons were shortened to 53 days, resulting in a June 1 – July 23 season. The Council increased the catch limit for the Gulf red snapper fishery from 5.0 to 6.945 mp for 2010. However, federal fisheries managers predicted that if the season length was kept the same as 2009, the catch limit would have been exceeded because of the high level of recreational fishing effort in the Gulf. More than half of the Gulf of Mexico was closed to fishing during the 2010 red snapper season due to the oil spill, which resulted in lower than expected recreational red snapper landings. Federal fishery managers and the Commission approved a 24-day supplemental season of weekends only from Oct. 1 – Nov. 22, 2010.

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

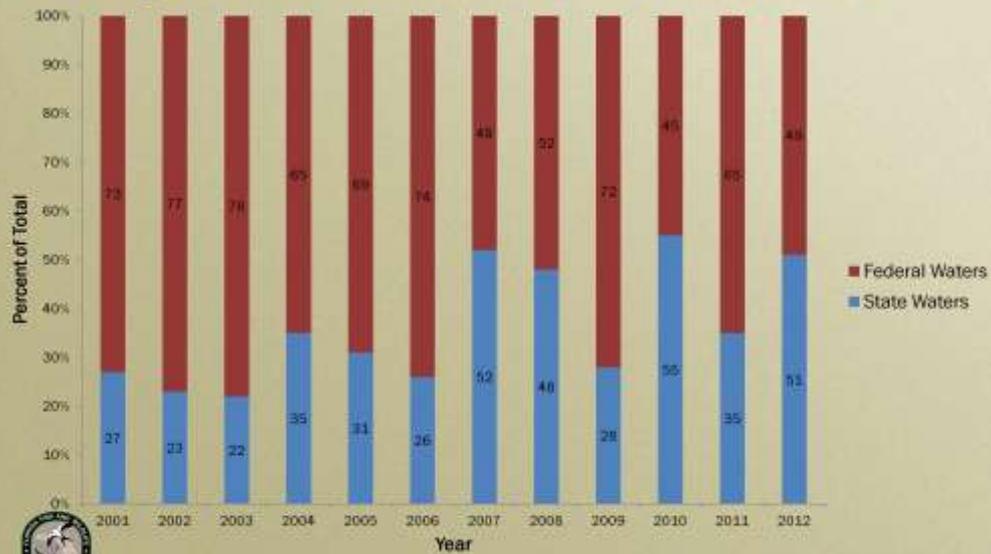
The 2012 Gulf recreational red snapper season was originally June 1 through July 10. The Council increased the catch limit for 2012 to 8.080 mp. Despite this increase, the 2012 season was shorter than the 2011 season because of high fishing effort and heavier fish. The 2012 season was extended by six days to account for lost fishing days during Tropical Storm Debby. As a result, the season was 46 days total and ran through July 16.

In 2013, an emergency rule granted NOAA Fisheries authority to shorten the federal recreational red snapper season off states that adopt inconsistent red snapper regulations in their state waters. The federal season off states with consistent regulations was set at 34 days. The federal season off Florida was set at 26 days because Florida had approved a June 1 – July 14 (44 days) state season. A U.S. District Court overturned the emergency rule, and as a result, a Gulf-wide federal season of June 1-28 (28 days) was established. In September, the red snapper catch limit was raised to 11 mp based on new stock assessment results. This quota increase allowed for a supplemental season. The state supplemental season was Oct. 1-21 and the federal supplemental season was Oct. 1-14.

Florida State and Federal Recreational Gulf Red Snapper Season Lengths, 2005-2014



Harvest of Red Snapper in Whole Weight of Fish in Florida, 2001-2012



Inconsistent Recreational Red Snapper Regulations in Other Gulf States

State	2014 Open Season	Bag Limit	Minimum Size Limit
Texas	Year round	4 fish	15 inches
Louisiana	Year round effective Apr. 14; was 3-day weekends (Friday, Saturday, Sunday) from Feb. 21 - Apr. 13;	2 fish	16 inches



This table shows current state red snapper recreational harvest regulations for Texas and Louisiana. Just last week, Louisiana changed their state waters season from a weekends only season (Friday, Saturday, Sunday) to a year round season. For comparison, the 2014 federal season is currently scheduled to be open June 1 through June 11, but this could be reduced because of the change in the Louisiana state season. The federal bag limit is two fish per person per day and the minimum size limit is 16 inches total length.

Harvest of Red Snapper in Whole Weight of Fish by State, 1986-2012

