



 **Gulf Offshore Recreational Fishing Permit**
Review and Discussion
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Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Fish and Wildlife Research Institute

Version 1

This is a review and discussion of a proposal to develop and implement a Gulf Offshore Recreational Fishing Permit in support of more accurate, precise, and timely catch and effort estimates for offshore recreational fisheries off Florida's Gulf coast. Staff will discuss the issue and seek Commission direction on whether to proceed with the development and implementation of the permit and associated fisheries surveys.

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Recreational Fishing Survey (MRIP)

- MRIP – survey used to estimate recreational fishing harvest and effort in saltwater fisheries throughout FL and most of the southeast
- Two main components:
 - Dockside surveys estimate catch
 - Telephone survey estimate effort
- Data used in stock assessments and management (e.g., quota management, predicting season lengths)



Data on the recreational fisheries harvest, number of fish caught and released, and fishing effort (number of recreational fishing trips) is collected through NOAA Fisheries' Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) in most southeastern states. In Florida, MRIP surveys are conducted by FWC biologists. The MRIP survey collects information through two main components: 1) information on catch is obtained from onsite surveys, and 2) information on fishing effort is obtained from phone surveys of residents in coastal counties using random digit dialing. These data are used in stock assessments and in analyses associated with the evaluation of fisheries regulations such as quota management and predicting the length of fishing seasons.

Offshore Species Data Collection Needs

- MRIP telephone survey suffers from :
 - Poorly defined universe of offshore reef fish anglers for telephone surveys (currently using random calls of coastal households to estimate fishing effort)
 - Low number of dockside intercepts on sites originating offshore fishing trips
- Growing number of Gulf reef fish anglers asking for data collection improvements that provide:
 - More accurate and timely estimates of fishing effort
 - More reliable, credible, and timely catch estimates
- Louisiana recently developed survey and Offshore Recreational Fishing Permit to improve recreational data collection for offshore species including reef fish



About 16 million saltwater angling trips are taken from the Gulf Coast of Florida each year. About one-half are offshore trips for species like red snapper, grouper, and amberjack. The current MRIP effort sampling methodology does not adequately sample the offshore component of these fisheries. Although there have been recent improvements to the MRIP survey, additional enhancements to the effort survey could improve recreational effort estimates for offshore fisheries. A growing number of Gulf reef fish anglers have been asking for data collection improvements that would provide more accurate and timely estimates of fishing effort as well as more reliable, credible, and timely catch estimates.

Recently, the Gulf states have been discussing ways to improve recreational fishery data collection, particularly for the red snapper fishery. The State of Louisiana has already introduced data collection program improvements in their state that include a special recreational fishing permit for species like red snapper and yellowfin tuna. This permit has been used successfully to identify a universe of anglers targeting these species and generate more accurate estimates of offshore fishing effort in Louisiana.

FWC's NFWF Proposal



- Enhanced angler survey and scientific data collection for offshore Gulf of Mexico fisheries
- Addresses data needs for-hire, recreational and commercial sectors
- \$24 Million total award, spread over 5 years
- Enhanced fisheries data collection program includes proposal for Gulf Offshore Recreational Fishing Permit
- New survey associated with the permit would be tested as a 5-year pilot project



The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) created the Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund in early 2013 as the vehicle to receive and administer funds resulting from remedial orders in the plea agreements between the U.S. Department of Justice and BP and Transocean. In Florida, grant-funded projects developed in consultation with FWC, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, and federal resource agencies, are designed to remedy harm and reduce the risk of future harm to natural resources that were affected by the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill. The FWC was awarded \$24 million from NFWF to be used over five years. One of the FWC projects funded by NFWF is focused on addressing the need for enhanced high-resolution recreational fishery survey and monitoring efforts that complement and expand existing data collection programs. This project aims to test the feasibility of using a Gulf Offshore Recreational Fishing Permit to better define the universe of offshore recreational anglers and increase the timeliness and accuracy of recreational fisheries catch and effort estimates. This project would be tested as a pilot during the grant period of five years.

FWC Proposal Goals

- Improve the quality of fisheries data being used for stock assessment and fisheries management
- Enhance current recreational harvest and effort data collection for Florida's offshore reef fish species, including red snapper, via targeted angler surveys
- Establish a Gulf Offshore Recreational Fishing Permit to better identify universe of offshore reef fish anglers



The overarching goal of FWC's proposal is to improve the quality of recreational fisheries data used for assessment and management of recreational fisheries off Florida's Gulf coast. This is to be achieved by 1) implementing more intense and targeted angler surveys in sites originating offshore fishing trips, and 2) enhancing the precision and accuracy of recreational fishing effort estimates by creating a well-defined universe of offshore anglers, 3) create a Gulf Offshore Recreational Fishing Permit to better identify universe of offshore reef fish anglers.

Proposed Data Collection Improvements

- **Catch:** More dock-side intercepts targeting sites with offshore boats over a longer time period
- **Fishing effort:** Identify offshore anglers through a permitting system. Surveys would target offshore anglers through snail-mail, e-mail, and then follow up phone calls



Proposed recreational fisheries data collection improvements include:

- 1) Additional targeted survey efforts to collect catch data from offshore private recreational fisheries. A comprehensive list of recreational fishing access points is currently maintained by FWC and used for the access point intercept survey portion of the MRIP. This site register will be used to identify a sub-set of sites throughout the west coast of Florida where private recreational boats return from offshore fishing trips. Offshore private boat fishing sites will be selected for supplemental assignments using valid statistical sampling approaches.
- 2) Focused fishing effort surveys based on a better-defined universe of offshore anglers obtained through the Gulf Offshore Recreational Fishing Permit. These surveys would involve a combination of regular mail, e-mail, and follow up phone calls.

Proposed Permit Structure



- Mandatory for private recreational anglers (i.e., not for-hire sector) fishing from a boat in the Gulf of Mexico to possess or land one or more of the following reef fish
 - Red snapper
 - Gag
 - Amberjacks/Rudderfish/Almaco jack
 - Red grouper
 - Black grouper
 - Vermillion snapper
 - Gray triggerfish
- Annual permit from date obtained
- No cost permit (funding for the first 5 years provided by NFWF Gulf restoration grant)
 - Continuation in future years would require additional funding



The proposed Gulf Offshore Recreational Fishing Permit would be mandatory for private recreational anglers fishing from a boat in the Gulf of Mexico (state and/or federal waters) to possess or land one or more of the following reef fish species: red snapper, gag, amberjacks/rudderfish/almaco jack (a complex of closely related jacks that are difficult to tell apart), red grouper, black grouper, vermilion snapper, and grey triggerfish. The permit will be free of charge but anglers that register for the permit will be required to provide their name, permanent mailing address, phone number, and e-mail address (if available) and must agree to submit to a survey whenever their permit number is selected. The permit must be renewed annually to insure that contact information remains up to date. Since implementation of the permit is associated with the enhanced data collection program funded by NFWF the permit will be free of charge to anglers during the first 5 years of the program (2014-2019). The Commission would need to secure funding to support continuation of the permit after the NFWF grant ends.

Additional Permit and Survey Components

- Coordinated with MRIP and other Gulf states—so Gulf-wide data can be used for stock assessments
- Could be expanded statewide in the future



Implementation of the permit and associated survey components is being coordinated with the MRIP program as well as other Gulf states so that data can be used for Gulf-wide stock assessments.

This first implementation phase (i.e., the first 5 years) is being supported by a NFWF Gulf restoration grant, so the permit and associated survey enhancements are being implemented on Florida's Gulf coast. The Commission may consider statewide expansion of the program in the future.

Next Steps

- If directed, continue development of permit concept
- Hold public workshops in March 2014
- Return to Commission with Draft Rule in April
- Possible target implementation date: summer 2014



If directed by the Commission today, staff will continue development of the Gulf Offshore Recreational Fishing permit concept and implementation strategy. Staff would also hold public workshops in March 2014 to get public input on the proposed permit structure. If the Commission wishes to consider making the Gulf Offshore Recreational Permit mandatory, staff would return to the Commission with a draft rule in April. We would like to have the program in place for 2014, but based on rulemaking timelines this year's permit may need to be voluntary with full implementation set for 2015.