



This is a review and discussion of red snapper actions and discussions at the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's (Council) Oct. 20-23 meeting in Mobile, AL.

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Sector Separation – Final Action




- Splits red snapper recreational sector into private anglers and federal for-hire permit holders
- Quota and ACT allocation based on average annual landings from 1986-2013 and 2006-2013 (except 2010)
 - Federally-permitted for-hire: Approx. 44% (33-day season)
 - Private anglers and state for-hire: Approx. 56% (results in 1-day season if states keep status quo regulations or 14-day season if all states consistent with federal rules)
- Separate closures, but all harvest closes when recreational quota is met
- Sunsets after three years 



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graph TD
    A[Recreational quota] --> B[Federal for-hire permit holders]
    A --> C[Private anglers + state for-hire]
  
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The Council took final action to approve sector separation for the recreational red snapper fishery (Amendment 40) at its October meeting in a vote of 10-7. Based on Commission direction, the FWC’s representative on the Council voted against this action.

If approved by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, sector separation would divide the recreational quota and annual catch target (ACT) into federally-permitted for-hire and private angler sub-quotas and sub-ACTs, most likely starting in June 2015. The recreational quota and ACT would be allocated based on average annual landings from 1986-2013 and 2006-2013 (excluding 2010), which roughly equates to 44% for federally-permitted for-hire and 56% for private anglers and state for-hire vessels. This allocation takes into account historical trends in the fishery, while also considering more recent landings trends. The exact percentages that would be allocated to each component of the recreational fishery are currently being refined based on updates to MRIP data, but are expected to be close to current estimates. Under the current recreational ACT, this allocation is estimated to result in a 33-day season for federally-permitted for-hire vessels, while only allowing for a one-day federal season for private anglers if all Gulf states maintain their current state regulations. If all Gulf states match the federal regulations, the season for private anglers is estimated to be 14 days. Each component of the recreational fishery would close to harvest when their respective ACT is met, but all recreational harvest would still have to close when the total recreational quota is met, even if one component of the fishery has not met their ACT.

Before approving sector separation, the Council added a three-year sunset provision. This sunset was viewed by some as a compromise that implements sector separation on a trial basis and keeps other potential red snapper management systems, like regional management, as options for the long-term management of the recreational fishery.

Regional Management



- Options the Council may discuss at future meetings
 - Delegation of recreational quota to individual Gulf states for management OR allowing states to submit management proposals to NOAA Fisheries
 - Regional management for a component of the recreational fishery (private or for-hire)
 - Regional management for recreational sector as a whole after sector separation sunsets



Regional management was revisited at the October Council meeting and will continue to be discussed as an option for recreational red snapper management. Regional management would allow states to set recreational seasons and regulations (bag limits, size limits, closed areas) for red snapper in all waters (state and federal) off their state. This could allow regulations to be better tailored to local needs. The Council is now considering two systems for regional management: 1) delegation of some management authority to the states and 2) a system in which states submit state management plans to NOAA Fisheries for approval. This second system was introduced at the last Council meeting and is based on a management process used by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. The details of how this would work will be explored at future Council meetings.

Now that the Council approved sector separation, the Council will also need to decide how regional management would be applied to the recreational fishery. Under sector separation, regional management could be used to manage the private angler component of the fishery, the for-hire component, or both. The Council could also consider developing a regional management plan that applies to the recreational sector as a whole and takes effect after sector separation sunsets.

The earliest that regional management could be implemented is likely the 2016 season, but this depends on the options chosen by the Council.

What's Next for 2015?



- Length of federal season will be based on
 - Secretarial approval of sector separation
 - Results of updated stock assessment (due Jan. 2015)
 - Gulf states' seasons
- Stock assessment expected to show red snapper is rebuilding ahead of schedule
 - Quota increase likely
- 2014 recreational harvest expected to meet ACT but not exceed quota
 - Likely no negative impact on 2015 season
- One-fish bag limit to be considered for federally-permitted for-hire industry



Looking ahead to 2015, the length of the recreational red snapper season in federal waters will depend on if sector separation is approved by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, the results of the updated stock assessment, and recreational red snapper seasons in Gulf states' waters. Sector separation is estimated to result in a 33-day season for the federally-permitted for-hire industry and a 1-day season for private anglers in federal waters if the recreational quota and states' seasons remain the same. The updated stock assessment, which is scheduled to be released in January, is expected to show that the red snapper stock is rebuilding ahead of schedule. This improvement in the stock will likely warrant an increase in the red snapper quota.

Recreational harvest data from 2014 indicate that the recreational sector will meet its ACT this year but will not exceed its quota. This is good news and means that this year's harvest will likely not have a negative impact on the 2015 season.

Finally, the Council will consider a one-fish bag limit for the federally-permitted for-hire industry for the 2015 season. The Council will be getting input on this bag limit change at an upcoming red snapper for-hire advisory panel meeting and through public testimony.

2015 State Season



- Possible options for 2015 state season
 - Current season: Saturday before Memorial Day - July 14
 - Multiple open seasons in 2015
 - Fall or spring weekends
 - One-fish bag limit
 - Other ideas?



Direction requested on 2015 state season

Staff requests Commission direction on Florida's Gulf recreational red snapper season for state waters in 2015. The current season in Gulf state waters begins the Saturday before Memorial Day and ends July 14. This would result in a 53-day season for 2015.

Most people that attended the FWC Gulf red snapper workshops held last summer supported having red snapper open for harvest during the summer, but many workshop attendees were also amenable to opening red snapper harvest during spring and fall instead of summer. Many attendees supported having multiple open seasons per year as a management tool for the red snapper fishery. The Commission could also consider opening red snapper for weekends. This idea was generally rated as unfavorable at the red snapper workshops; however, supplemental red snapper seasons held during fall weekends have been favored by anglers in the past. The Commission could also consider setting a one-fish bag limit for red snapper in state waters, similar to the option the Council is considering for the federally-permitted for-hire industry. Stakeholders that attended the FWC red snapper workshops this summer generally did not support this option.

Staff requests direction on these options and welcomes other ideas for the 2015 state season.

State Season Considerations



- FWC Gulf Reef Fish Survey begins April 2015
 - Incomplete data until summer/fall 2015
- Large proportion of Gulf recreational red snapper harvested off Florida
 - State waters harvest primarily occurs in the Panhandle
- Federal season for private anglers and for-hire may be shortened to account for inconsistent state seasons, even with sector separation
 - Federal season length depends on NOAA estimates of harvest in Gulf states waters



There are many factors to consider when setting the recreational red snapper season in Gulf state waters. First, the FWC's Gulf Reef Fish Survey (formerly titled Gulf Reef Fish Data Reporting System) begins in April 2015 and will help the FWC identify Gulf reef fish (including red snapper) anglers and more accurately track Florida's recreational harvest of red snapper in the Gulf. Data from this program will be incomplete until late summer or fall 2015.

Over the past 10 years, Florida has accounted for as much as 60% of the annual Gulf-wide recreational red snapper harvest. A large portion of the harvest off Florida occurs in state waters, so Florida plays an important role in the Gulf red snapper rebuilding plan. The state season for red snapper would provide fishing days for private anglers and state-licensed for-hire vessels that fish off Florida's Panhandle but would not necessarily benefit anglers fishing off 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.

The federal red snapper season for private anglers and federally-permitted for-hire vessels (assuming sector separation occurs in 2015) may be shortened to account for inconsistent state seasons. The length of the federal season will depend on NOAA estimates of harvest during state open seasons. The federal season for private anglers would be set based on the amount of quota left after accounting for state waters landings. If state landings are expected to exceed the amount of the private angler sub-quota, then the season for federally-permitted for-hire vessels would be shortened to account for state waters landings so that the overall recreational quota is not exceeded.

Direction Requested



- 2015 state recreational red snapper season
 - Current season: Saturday before Memorial Day - July 14
 - Multiple open seasons in 2015
 - Fall or spring weekends
 - One-fish bag limit
 - Other ideas?
- Next Council meeting is Jan. 26-30 in Point Clear, AL



Staff request direction on the 2015 recreational red snapper season for state waters. The current recreational harvest season begins the Saturday before Memorial Day and ends July 14. The Commission may want to consider options such as a multiple open seasons in 2015, fall or spring weekends, and a one-fish bag limit. Staff also welcome other ideas for the 2015 season.

If requested, staff will develop a draft rule to modify the current Gulf recreational red snapper season for the Commission's consideration in February.

No additional direction is requested on Council issues at this time. The next Council meeting will be held in Point Clear, AL, on Jan. 26-30, which is the week before the February Commission meeting.