



 **Red Snapper – Gulf of Mexico**
Final Public Hearing
April 16, 2015
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Division of Marine Fisheries Management

Version 2

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 12, resuming for Saturdays and Sundays in September and October as well as Labor Day. When October 31 falls on a Saturday, the last day of harvest would be Sunday, November 1.

Authors: Martha Bademan, Jessica McCawley, and Tony Bresnen

This presentation has been updated and reflects changes on slides 2, 3, 6, 8 and 9.

Report date: April 10, 2015

Background – Gulf Recreational Red Snapper Season

2014 Season

- **State:** open the Saturday before Memorial Day through July 14 (52 days) to optimize angler fishing opportunities
- **Federal:** open June 1 through June 9 (9 days)

2015 Proposed State Season

- Commission requested staff hold workshops on a state season option that would be open
 - The Saturday before Memorial Day through July 12,
 - Saturdays and Sundays in September and October (including Sunday, Nov. 1), and
 - Labor Day (first Monday in September)
- Resulting state season would be 70 days in 2015



In 2014, the Gulf state waters recreational red snapper season was open from the Saturday before Memorial Day (May 24) through July 14 to increase fishing opportunities for anglers over the holiday weekend resulting in a 52-day season. The 2014 season in federal waters was June 1 through June 9 (a nine-day season).

At the February 2015 FWC meeting, the Commission discussed season options for the 2015 season for Gulf state waters. The Commissioners selected a proposed season option that would set the recreational red snapper season in Gulf of Mexico state waters to be the Saturday before Memorial Day through July 12, resuming for Saturdays and Sundays in September and October as well as Labor Day (the first Monday in September). When October 31 falls on a Saturday, the last day of harvest would be Sunday, November 1. This would result in a 70-day state season for 2015. The Commission proposed this season option as a way to increase recreational red snapper fishing opportunities in Gulf state waters. In March, staff held workshops to gather stakeholder input on this season option.

2015 Federal Red Snapper Quota and Recreational Season Update



- Quota increase from 11 to 14.3 million pounds pending approval by U.S. Secretary of Commerce
- Preliminary federal recreational season estimates (assuming 70-day state season in Florida)
 - With sector separation
 - 7-11 days for private anglers
 - 40-46 days for federally-permitted for-hire
 - Without sector separation: 12-17 days
- Decision on sector separation expected April 16

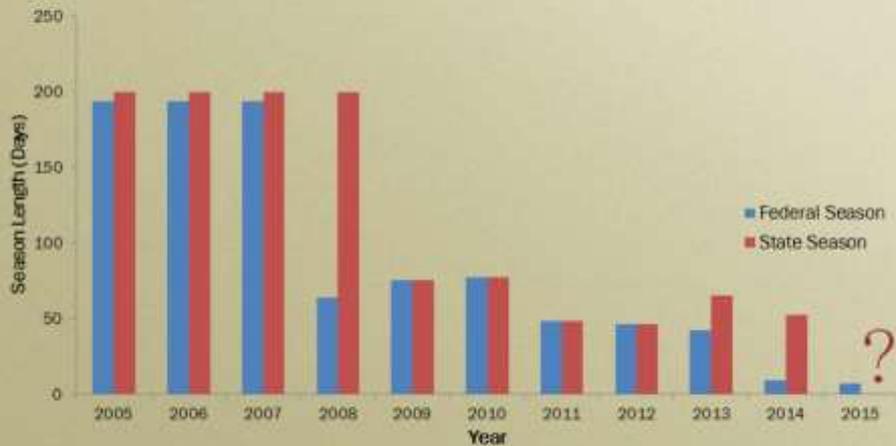


In early March, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) held a webinar meeting and approved a quota increase from 11 to 14.3 million pounds (mp). This quota increase is now pending approval by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce. If approved, the 14.3 mp quota would be split between the commercial and recreational sectors based on the current sector allocations, which are 51% commercial and 49% recreational. Based on this allocation, the recreational quota for 2015 would be 7.01 mp.

NOAA Fisheries will announce the final 2015 recreational red snapper season for Gulf federal waters by May 1, but preliminary season estimates were presented at the Council meeting. If sector separation and the quota increase is approved by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, NOAA Fisheries has estimated that the season for private recreational anglers will be seven to 11 days. In calculating this estimate, NOAA Fisheries assumed Florida would approve the 70-day season option being considered today, Louisiana would be open year-round beginning March 20, Mississippi would be open for the federal season and 3-day weekends in July and October, Texas would be open year-round, and Alabama would be consistent with the federal season. If sector separation is not approved, NOAA Fisheries estimates the federal season would be 12-17 days.

We expect a final decision on sector separation by April 16.

Florida State and Federal Recreational Gulf Red Snapper Season Lengths, 2005-2015



The graph above shows state and federal recreational red snapper season lengths in the Gulf of Mexico off Florida since 2005. The 2015 season length estimate for federal waters is for private anglers only (the season estimate for federally-permitted for-hire vessels is 45-46 days) assuming sector separation occurs and states keep seasons described on the previous slide. The Commission will be deciding on Florida's recreational red snapper season in Gulf state waters today. The Commission's current proposed season option would result in a 70-day state waters season in 2015.

FWC Recreational Red Snapper Workshops

Meeting Attendance

- Pensacola: 89
- Destin: 63
- Panama City: 65
- Carrabelle: 20
- St. Petersburg: 39



This portion of the presentation focuses on FWC public workshops held to get public input on the Gulf state waters season for the recreational red snapper fishery. These workshops were held at the request of the Commission. Workshops were held in Pensacola on March 9, Destin on March 10, Panama City on March 11, Carrabelle on March 12, and St. Petersburg on March 16.

FWC Red Snapper Workshops – Feedback

Meeting attendees supportive of the 70-day season option

- Felt this option would provide greater fishing opportunities and benefit local economies
 - Some suggestions to split up the summer season and add fishing days in the spring or fall, or spreading the season throughout the year

Meeting attendees opposed to the 70-day season option

- Suggested the state go consistent with the federal season or keep the status quo season
- Cited lack of red snapper in state waters and the importance of the federal season in waters off Southwest Florida
- Comments that season option would hurt charter for-hire business and risk a quota overage in 2015



In general, support for the 70-day proposed season came from private anglers in Pensacola, Destin, Panama City, and Carrabelle who felt an extended state season would provide them with greater fishing opportunities and have a positive impact on local economies. However, several meeting attendees suggested splitting up the summer season block (the Saturday before Memorial Day through July 12) to add more fishing days to the spring or fall. A suggestion from the Pensacola meeting was to spread out the fishing throughout the entire year and open the fishery for 10 days a month. Meeting attendees who wanted the season spread throughout the year noted that a season open throughout the year could provide more long-term economic benefits and also allow local red snapper populations in state waters to recover from fishing pressure more quickly than if the season was open for most of the summer.

Meeting attendees who opposed the 70-day proposed season included private anglers from Carrabelle and St. Petersburg and many federally-permitted for-hire captains. In Carrabelle and St. Petersburg, private anglers spoke of the lack of red snapper in state waters and how this state season option would reduce their fishing opportunities for red snapper in federal waters. Federally-permitted for-hire captains who attended these workshops noted that an extended season in Florida's Gulf state waters would hurt their business and risk a quota overage in 2015. Many private anglers and federally-permitted for-hire captains suggested the state go consistent with the federal season or stay with the status quo option (Saturday before Memorial Day through July 14) for 2015.

Detailed comments from each workshop are available in the 2015 Gulf Red Snapper Season Workshop Report.

Proposed Rule

68B-14.0038 Recreational Snapper Seasons

- Set the recreational harvest season for red snapper in all state waters of the Gulf of Mexico to be
 - The Saturday before Memorial Day through July 12,
 - Saturdays and Sundays in September and October
 - Labor Day (first Monday in September)
- If Oct. 31 falls on a Saturday, the last day of harvest would be Sunday, Nov. 1

Resulting 2015 state season would begin on May 23 and be 70 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 be the Saturday before Memorial Day through July 12, resuming for Saturdays and Sundays in September and October as well as Labor Day. When October 31 falls on a Saturday, the last day of harvest would be Sunday, November 1.

Retaining the Saturday before Memorial Day opening for red snapper for recreational harvest in the Gulf of Mexico would continue to provide harvest opportunities for anglers fishing in state waters over Memorial Day weekend. By opening the season for weekends in September and October, the Commission could provide anglers opportunities to fish for red snapper during the cooler months during weekends only, which has been a popular option among many anglers in the past. Finally, opening the season for Labor Day could create additional harvest opportunities for anglers during another important holiday. If this proposed season is approved by the Commission, the 2015 Gulf recreational red snapper season would first open Saturday, May 23 for a total of 70 days.

State Season Considerations



- Large portion of Gulf recreational harvest occurs off Florida with significant harvest in state waters
- State waters harvest occurs primarily in the Panhandle
- State season provides opportunities for anglers fishing from private and state-licensed for-hire vessels
- All season days are not created equal
- FWC Gulf Reef Fish Survey began April 1
 - Commission update at November 2015 meeting



There are many factors to consider when setting the recreational red snapper season in Gulf state waters. Florida accounts for a large portion of the annual Gulf-wide recreational red snapper harvest. There is significant harvest from Florida 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 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.

It is also important to keep in mind that all season days are not created equal. Fishing effort is typically higher on weekends, during peak fishing season (summer in the Panhandle), and on good weather days. This means that seasons centered around high effort fishing days may pose a greater risk of a quota overage than a season with the same number of days that occurs when fishing effort is lower.

Finally, the FWC's Gulf Reef Fish Survey (formerly titled Gulf Reef Fish Data Reporting System) begins in April and will help the FWC identify Gulf reef fish anglers and track Florida's recreational harvest of red snapper in the Gulf. Data from this program will be presented at the Commission's November 2015 meeting.

How Does the Proposed State Season Affect the Federal Season?

- 2015 Gulf federal season to be announced around May 1
 - Current estimate is 7-11 days for private anglers and assumes 70-day Florida state season
 - Federal season length dependent on Secretarial approval of sector separation
- Federal season could be lengthened if state waters season matches federal season
- Federal season estimate could be reduced if state waters season exceeds the current 70-day proposed season option



NOAA Fisheries will announce the 2015 recreational red snapper season for Gulf federal waters around May 1. Currently, NOAA Fisheries estimates the federal season length for private recreational anglers will be 7-11 days, assuming sector separation and the red snapper quota increase are approved by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce. This estimate assumes Florida approves the 70-day season for Gulf state waters. If sector separation is not approved, the federal season is estimated to be 12-17 days for all recreational anglers.

The federal season may be lengthened if Florida's state waters season matches the federal season, but any increase in days would be modest. If all state seasons matched the federal season, NOAA Fisheries estimates a nine to 16-day season for private anglers if sector separation is approved, and a 15 to 21-day season if sector separation is not approved.

If the Commission increases the length of the recreational harvest season beyond the proposed 70-day proposed season option, the federal season could be shortened to account for additional state waters harvest during the time that state waters are open but federal waters are closed. This potentially could affect both the federal private angler and for-hire seasons if sector separation occurs. 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. This is an important point, especially considering that the portion of the recreational quota that would be allocated to private anglers under sector separation is lower than what private anglers have harvested in recent years.

Staff Recommendation

Approve the proposed rule

- To open the Gulf recreational state waters harvest season
 - The Saturday before Memorial Day through July 12,
 - Saturdays and Sundays in September and October (including Sunday, Nov. 1), and
 - Labor Day
- For 2015, the last day of harvest would be Sunday, Nov. 1
- Would result in a 70-day season

If approved, make rule effective May 23, 2015



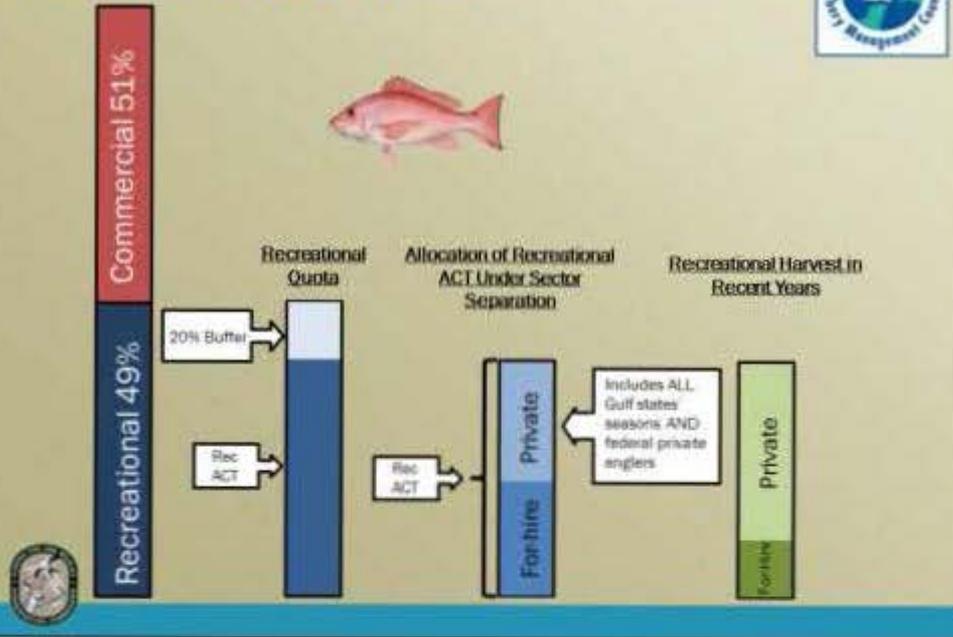
Staff recommends approving the proposed rule to modify the recreational harvest season for red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico. This would set the recreational harvest season for red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico to be the Saturday before Memorial Day through July 12, Saturdays and Sundays in September and October, and Labor Day. For 2015, the season would begin Saturday, May 23, and would be 70 days long, with the last day of harvest being Sunday, Nov. 1.

If approved, staff recommends making the rule effective May 23, 2015. Staff has evaluated the rules under the standards of 68-1.004, FAC, and found them to be in compliance.

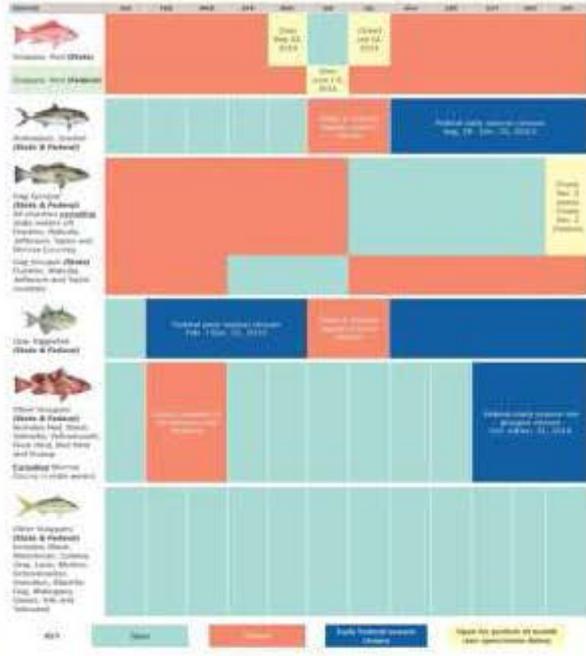
The following slides are considered backup material and are not anticipated to be part of the Commission meeting presentation

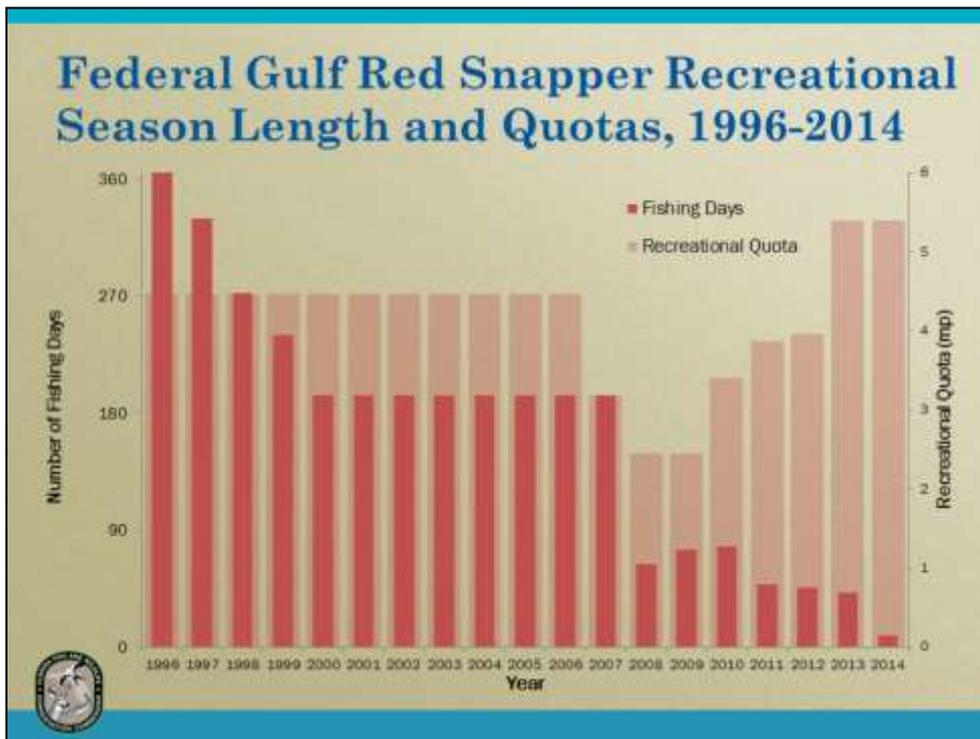


Gulf Red Snapper Quota

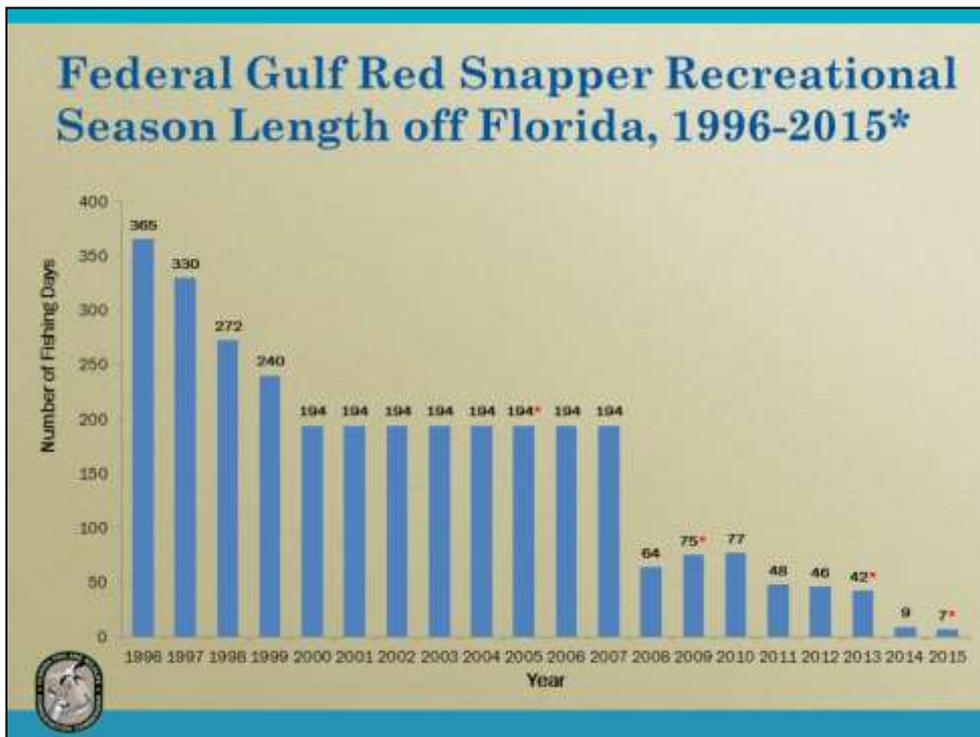


Gulf Reef Fish Recreational Seasons





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. The amount of the 2014 quota shown in this graph that was actually available to recreational fishers was reduced by 20% by NMFS as an accountability measure. This available catch target (ACT) was 4.312 million pounds.



The graph above shows federal recreational red snapper seasons in the Gulf of Mexico off Florida since 1996. The 2015 season length estimate is for private anglers only (the season estimate for federally-permitted for-hire vessels is 45 days) and could change depending on Secretarial approval of sector separation and state waters seasons in the other Gulf states.

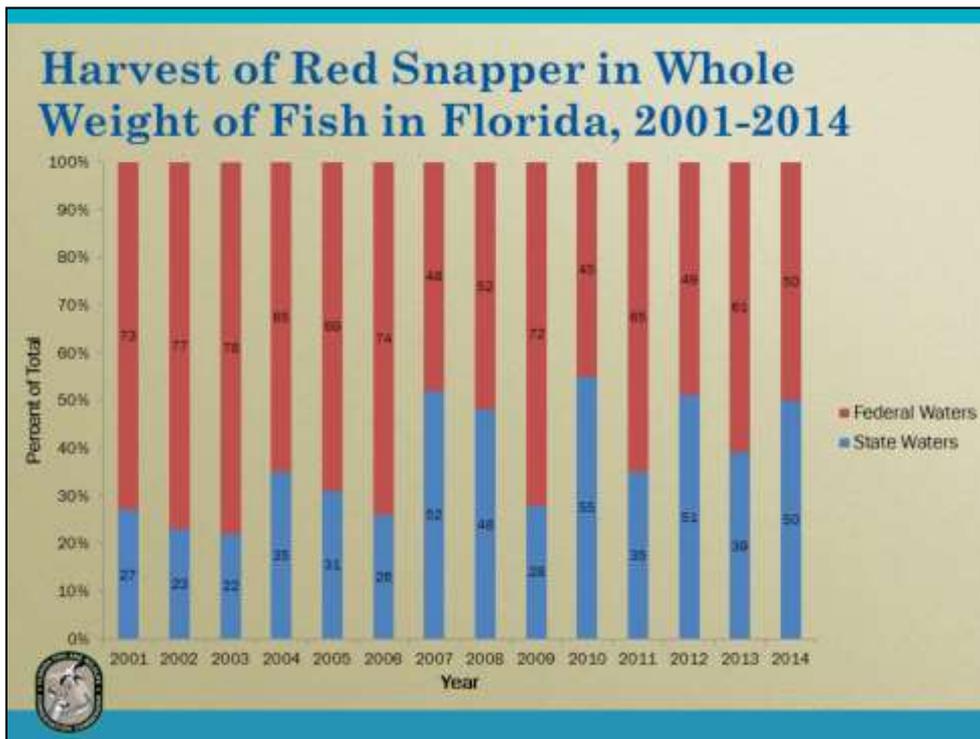
Although the red snapper quota has increased over the past several years, the federal season has gotten shorter because both fishing effort and the average weight of red snapper landed by anglers has increased, which has resulted in the quota being caught faster. Colored asterisks represent years of 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 and again in 2015.

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 |
| 2010 | June 1 - July 23; Oct. 1 - Nov. 22 (3-Day Weekends) | June 1 - July 23; Oct. 1 - Nov. 22 (3-Day Weekends) | 77 | 77 |
| | June 1 - July 18 | June 1 - July 18 | | |
| 2011 | June 1 - July 18 | June 1 - July 18 | 48 | 48 |
| 2012 | June 1 - July 16 | June 1 - July 16 | 46 | 46 |
| 2013 | June 1 - July 14 | June 1 - June 28 | 65 | 42 |
| | Oct. 1 - Oct. 21 | Oct. 1 - Oct. 14 | | |
| 2014 | May 24 - July 14 | June 1 - July 10 | 52 | 9 |
| 2015 | TBD | TBD | TBD | TBD |

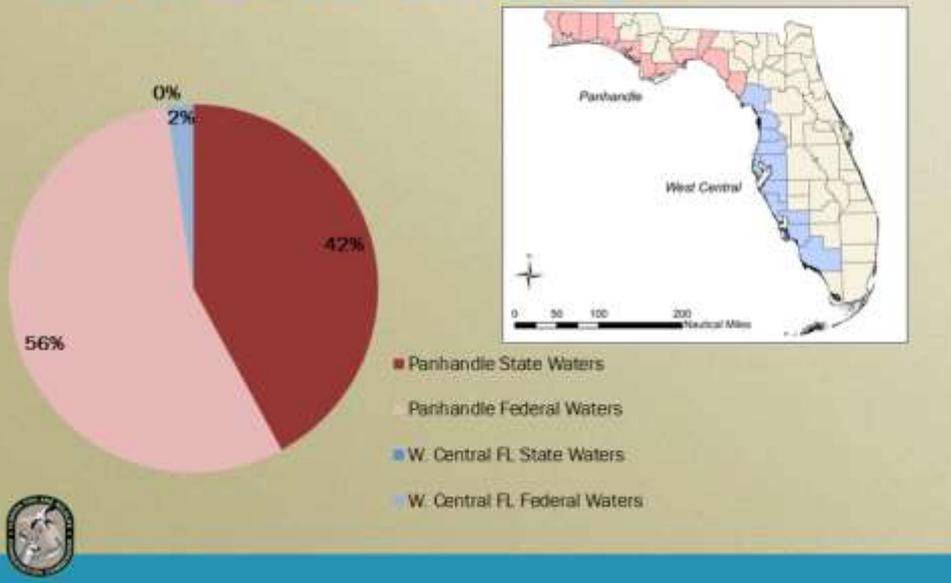


Shaded areas indicate years the Commission adopted a consistent red snapper season.



Recreational harvest data from the 2014 red snapper season is preliminary.

Recreational Catch of Red Snapper in the Gulf by Region, 2004-2013



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

2014 Recreational Red Snapper Season – Preliminary Landings



- Landings data incomplete, but 85% (3.69 of 4.312 mp) annual catch target (ACT) reported caught
- Includes data through December 31 for
 - Preliminary MRIP landings (FL, AL, MS)
 - LA landings
 - Preliminary headboat landings (Gulf-wide)
 - EFP headboat landings
- Does not include
 - Any Texas private angler or charter landings
- 2014 ACT expected to be met



Based on data from NOAA Fisheries, preliminary landings from the 2014 recreational red snapper season indicate that 85% of the 4.312 million pound (mp) ACT has been reported as harvested. However, some data sources are not included in this estimate; therefore, actual landings are higher.

Landings that are accounted for in the preliminary data through December 31 include: Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) landings data for private anglers and charter boats in Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi; Louisiana landings; Gulf-wide headboat landings, and landings from headboats participating in the exempted fishing permit program (EFP).

This preliminary landings estimate does not include any landings from Texas private anglers and charter boats. Although landings data are incomplete, the available landings show that the ACT projections of harvest are on target. The 2014 ACT is expected to be reached once all data sources are included.

2015 Recreational Red Snapper Regulations in Other Gulf States

| State | 2015 Open Season | Bag Limit | Minimum Size Limit |
|-------------|--|-----------|--------------------|
| Texas | Year-round | 4 fish | 15 inches |
| Louisiana | Open 7 days a week beginning March 20, 2015 | 2 fish | 16 inches |
| Mississippi | June 1-9, 3-day weekends in July and 3-day weekends from Oct. 3 - Nov. 2 | 2 fish | 16 inches |
| Alabama | June 1-9, 3-day weekends in July | 2 fish | 16 inches |



This table shows 2014 state red snapper recreational harvest regulations for each of the Gulf states. In 2014, all five Gulf states allowed red snapper harvest outside of the federal season, which was June 1-9. 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.