

This is a draft rule 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 2015 recreational red snapper season in Gulf of Mexico state waters.

Authors: Martha Bademan, Jessica McCawley, and Tony Bresnen

Report date: February 2, 2015

Red Snapper – 2015 Gulf Federal Recreational Season



- Current estimate is 1 day (June 1) for private anglers, 33 days for federally-permitted for-hire vessels
- 2014 recreational ACT met but quota not likely exceeded
 - No negative impact on 2015 season
- Length of federal season will be based on:
 - Secretarial approval of sector separation
 - Gulf states' seasons
 - Quota increase expected from updated stock assessment

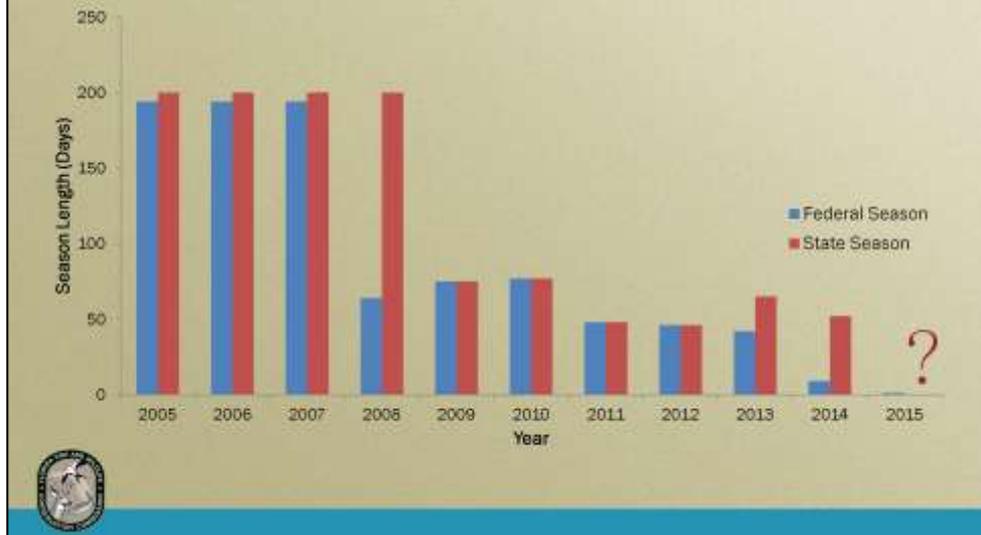


In federal waters, sector separation is estimated to result in a 1-day season for private anglers and a 33-day season for the federally-permitted for-hire industry if the recreational quota and states' seasons remain the same.

Preliminary 2014 recreational harvest data indicates that the recreational sector met its annual catch target (ACT) for 2014 but the quota was not exceeded. This is good news and means that harvest during the 2014 season should not have a negative impact on the 2015 season.

The length of the 2015 recreational red snapper season in federal waters will depend on if sector separation is approved by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, the amount of the quota increase based on the updated stock assessment, and recreational red snapper seasons in Gulf states' waters. The updated stock assessment shows that red snapper continues to rebuild. The Council will meet via webinar on March 3 to make a final decision on increasing the quota for red snapper.

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 33 days) and could change. The Commission is discussing options for the 2015 state season today.

2015 State Season Options



- **Status Quo:** Saturday before Memorial Day - July 14 (53 days in 2015)
- **Points to Consider:**
 - Lengthen season based on quota increase
 - Seasons ending on weekend or mid-week
 - Multiple open seasons
 - Weekends only
- **Possible Season Ideas to Increase State Waters Fishing Opportunities:**
 - Saturday before Memorial Day - July 19 (58 days)
 - Saturday before Memorial Day - July 12 plus Saturdays and Sundays starting Oct. 1 and ending Nov. 1 (61 days)
 - Saturday before Memorial Day - July 19 plus Labor Day and Saturdays and Sundays in September and October (81 days)
 - 3-day weekends from Memorial Day weekend through the end of the year (96 days)



The current season in Gulf state waters begins the Saturday before Memorial Day and ends July 14, which is a Tuesday. This would result in a 53-day season for 2015 and maintain existing state waters fishing opportunities for Gulf anglers. If the Commission is interested in increasing state waters fishing opportunities, several points should be considered. First, the Commission could increase the length of the season based on the expected quota increase from the updated stock assessment. The Commission should also decide if they want to maximize weekend fishing opportunities by ending the season on a weekend, or if a mid-week season closure is acceptable. The Commission may also want to consider multiple open seasons or a weekends-only season structure. Most people that attended the FWC Gulf red snapper workshops last summer supported having red snapper open for harvest during the summer, but some were also amenable to opening harvest during fall and spring. Many attendees supported multiple open seasons per year as a management tool for the red snapper fishery. There was less support for weekends only seasons; however, supplemental red snapper seasons held during fall weekends have been favored by anglers in the past.

This slide outlines some possible season ideas for increasing state waters fishing opportunities. Additional suggestions are welcome. The first option would extend the status quo season by five days so that the season ends on a weekend. The next option would allow fishing the Saturday before Memorial Day through Saturday, July 12, plus Saturdays and Sundays starting Oct. 1 and ending Nov. 1. The third option is similar to the first option, but also would allow harvest over weekends (Saturdays and Sundays, plus Labor Day) in September and October. The last option would set a weekends-only season starting Memorial Day weekend through the end of 2015.

State Season Considerations

- Large proportion of Gulf recreational red snapper harvested off Florida
 - State waters harvest primarily in the Panhandle
- All season days are not created equal
- Federal season for private anglers and for-hire may be shortened to account for inconsistent state seasons
- Portion of quota for private anglers under sector separation is lower than recent years private angler harvest
 - State season landings would be counted toward private angler allocation
- FWC Gulf Reef Fish Survey begins April 2015
 - Data compiled in late 2015



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.

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. 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.

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 compiled in late 2015.

Proposed Recreational Red Snapper Workshops

- Public workshops on Gulf recreational red snapper season would be held in March
 - Pensacola
 - Destin
 - Panama City
 - Carrabelle
 - St. Petersburg



If directed by the Commission, staff will hold several public workshops to gather input on the Gulf recreational red snapper season in state waters. These workshops would be held in March in Pensacola, Destin, Panama City, Carrabelle, and St. Petersburg. Specific dates, times, and locations would be announced following the Commission meeting.

Staff Recommendation

- Select possible season options and direct staff to hold public workshops before April Commission meeting
- If directed, return for final public hearing in April



Staff recommends selecting possible season options to be considered for the 2015 state waters recreational red snapper season. If directed by the Commission, staff could hold public workshops on these season options before the April Commission meeting to gather more stakeholder input.

If approved and directed, staff would return to the Commission for a final public hearing at the April Commission meeting in Tallahassee.

2015 State Season Options



- **Status Quo:** Saturday before Memorial Day - July 14 (53 days in 2015)
- **Points to Consider:**
 - Lengthen season based on quota increase
 - Seasons ending on weekend or mid-week
 - Multiple open seasons
 - Weekends only
- **Possible Season Ideas to Increase State Waters Fishing Opportunities:**
 - Saturday before Memorial Day – July 19 (58 days)
 - Saturday before Memorial Day – July 12 plus Saturdays and Sundays starting Oct. 1 and ending Nov. 1 (61 days)
 - Saturday before Memorial Day – July 19 plus Labor Day and Saturdays and Sundays in September and October (81 days)
 - 3-day weekends from Memorial Day weekend through the end of the year (96 days)



- Status Quo: Saturday before Memorial Day - July 14 (53 days in 2015)
- Points to Consider:
 - Lengthen season based on quota increase
 - Seasons ending on weekend or mid-week
 - Multiple open seasons
 - Weekends only
- Possible Season Ideas to Increase State Waters Fishing Opportunities:
 - Saturday before Memorial Day – July 19 (58 days)
 - Saturday before Memorial Day – July 12 plus Saturdays and Sundays starting Oct. 1 and ending Nov. 1 (61 days)
 - Saturday before Memorial Day – July 19 plus Labor Day and Saturdays and Sundays in September and October (81 days)
 - 3-day weekends from Memorial Day weekend through the end of the year (96 days)