



# Southeast Fishery Bulletin

National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, 263 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue South, St. Petersburg, Florida 33701

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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FB13-012

## NOAA Fisheries is Seeking Comments on a Proposed Rule to Establish the Gulf of Mexico Gag Recreational Season and Modify the Recreational Shallow-Water Grouper Closure

NOAA Fisheries is seeking public comment on a proposed rule that would establish a 2013 gag recreational fishing season that opens on July 1 and closes when the annual catch target is projected to be caught. The rule would also continue the February 1 through March 31 shallow-water grouper closure, but restrict the closure to depths deeper than 20 fathoms. The proposed rule will publish in the *Federal Register* on February 21, 2013, with the comment period ending March 25, 2013.

### Definitions

**Annual catch limit** is the highest level of landings that is acceptable to maintain a healthy stock size.

**Annual catch targets** provide a buffer to account for management uncertainty around the annual catch limit. If fishermen catch the annual catch target within the year, they cannot catch gray triggerfish until the next year. This makes gray triggerfish annual catch targets into quotas.

### Gag Recreational Season

The proposed rule would open the recreational gag season on July 1, 2013, and the season would close when the annual catch target is projected to be caught. Based on a 2013 annual catch target of 1.287 million pounds, preliminary projections, assuming compatible state regulations, indicate the season would be able to remain open until sometime between November 11 and December 3. A 2013 closure date will be projected after more complete 2012 recreational landings data are made available. If at any time during the gag season the landings are projected to exceed the 2013 annual catch limit of 1.495 million pounds, fishing for gag would close.

### Recreational Shallow-Water Grouper Closure

The proposed rule would also convert the fixed February 1 through March 31 shallow-water grouper closed season into a time-area closure by eliminating the fixed closed season in federal waters shoreward of the 20-fathom boundary. This allows grouper fishing to occur year-round while providing some protection to species that spawn during February and March. Figure 1 displays the boundaries.

### Request for Comments

NOAA Fisheries must receive comments on this proposed rule no later than March 25, 2013. We will address all comments specifically directed to the framework action or the proposed rule in the final rule. You may obtain electronic copies of the proposed rule and the amendment from the NOAA Fisheries Web site:

<http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sf/GrouperSnapperandReefFish.htm> or the e-Rulemaking Portal: [www.regulation.gov](http://www.regulation.gov).

### How to Submit Comments

You may submit comments on this document, identified by NOAA-NMFS-2013-0012, by any of the following methods:

**Electronic Submission:** Submit all electronic public comments via the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal. Go to

[www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2013-0012](http://www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2013-0012), click the "Comment Now!" icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments.

**Mail:** Submit written comments to Peter Hood, NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Regional Office, Sustainable Fisheries Division, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, Florida 33701-5505.

**Instructions:** Comments sent by any other method, to any other address or individual, or received after the end of the comment period, may not be considered by NOAA Fisheries. All comments received are a part of the public record and will generally be posted for public viewing on

[www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov) without change. All personal identifying information (e.g., name, address, etc.), confidential business information, or otherwise sensitive information submitted voluntarily by the sender will be publicly accessible. NOAA Fisheries will accept anonymous comments (enter "N/A" in the required fields if you wish to remain anonymous). Attachments to electronic comments will be accepted in Microsoft Word, Excel, or Adobe PDF file formats only.

Figure 1. Map showing the 20-fathom boundary for the shallow-water grouper time area closure

