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**NOAA increases Gulf of Mexico red snapper catch limit**  
*Population rebounds as overfishing ends*

Following an updated population assessment that shows overfishing of Gulf of Mexico red snapper has ended and the population is rebounding, NOAA is increasing the 2012 commercial and recreational fishing catch limits for the species from 7.53 million pounds to 8.08 million pounds. The new rule takes effect June 1.

"Fishermen should continue to see bigger fish and larger catches as the population rebounds," said Sam Rauch, NOAA's acting assistant administrator for fisheries. "I commend the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council and fishermen for their hard work and dedication, as red snapper truly is our most challenging fishery to manage in the Gulf."

However, as the population of red snapper grows and the fish get bigger, recreational fishermen catch their quota faster, resulting in a shorter season. The 2012 recreational season will last 40 days, from June 1 through July 10. Although this is shorter than the 48-day season in 2011, this year's recreational season would have been even shorter without the new catch increase.

Fishermen have targeted red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico since the late 1800s, and fishing pressure in the mid-1900's depleted the red snapper population. In response to the population decline, fishery managers took action, making adjustments to size limits and bag limits, and implementing a catch share program for the commercial sector.

In 2007, strict commercial and recreational management measures were used to end overfishing of red snapper and rebuild this depleted population. Fishermen are now seeing the benefits of these measures, and these actions are leading to increased catches.

NOAA begins work on a new population assessment for red snapper in August. The assessment involves three workshops to gather data, assess the fish population and review the results. The workshops include fishermen as well as state, federal and academic scientists. After the review, scientists will present the results to fishery managers on the Gulf Council.

"The upcoming assessment will help us continue to gain a better understanding of the red snapper population in the Gulf of Mexico," said Richard Merrick, chief science advisor for NOAA's Fisheries Service.

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Upcoming Gulf of Mexico red snapper population assessment:

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