



NOAA NATIONAL OCEANIC AND
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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NOAA predicts below-average season for commercial harvest of brown shrimp in western Gulf of Mexico

Extreme flooding to blame for lower forecast

The harvest of brown shrimp in the western Gulf of Mexico is expected to be 42.8 million pounds, which is below the historical 54-year average of 56.5 million pounds, according to NOAA's annual forecast. The prediction covers the period from July 2015 through June 2016 for state and federal waters off Louisiana and federal waters off Texas.

This year, Texas and Louisiana experienced several weather fronts during the spring with record high rainfall, notably in May, that subsequently led to large freshwater discharges into the estuaries. Moreover, Texas' four-year drought ended in one month with May 2015 being documented as the wettest single month on record.

The unprecedented flooding in Texas forced young shrimp out of their nursery habitats, needed for growth and survival, and into the mouth of the bays. These extreme environmental factors may impact our forecast of harvest of brown shrimp this year since it is unknown whether survival of shrimp was reduced or shrimp just moved out of our sampling area, because of the reduced salinities.

NOAA scientists make the annual prediction of brown shrimp catches based on monitoring of juvenile brown shrimp abundance, growth estimates and environmental indicators. They predict shrimp catches for state and federal waters off Louisiana from west of the Mississippi River to the Texas-Louisiana border to be approximately 24.8 million pounds this season. The Texas portion of the catch is predicted to be 18.0 million pounds.

Most of the shrimp harvested in the U.S. – 68 percent – comes from the Gulf of Mexico, especially Texas and Louisiana. Total domestic shrimp harvest brought in \$518 million in 2011.

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Young brown shrimp begin entering estuaries in Texas and western Louisiana in mid-February and continue through July, with peak recruitment occurring from February through early April.

A wide array of environmental and biological factors affects the fate of young shrimp entering the estuaries. Three environmental variables: temperature, salinity, and tidal height, have been correlated with subsequent shrimp production.

Juvenile brown shrimp abundance and growth estimates are obtained by monitoring the inshore commercial shrimp fisheries in Texas and the inshore and nearshore fisheries in Louisiana. Data for these forecasts are obtained from NOAA Fisheries Galveston Laboratory, NOAA port agents, NOAA's National Climatic Data and Weather Centers, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and the commercial shrimp industry.

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