

Gulf of Mexico Red Snapper

Frequently Asked Questions

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Why is the Gulf of Mexico red snapper fishery such a hot topic?

- The red snapper stock has been overfished and undergoing overfishing since the late 1980s.
- The most recent red snapper stock assessment indicates continued overfishing is compromising the objectives of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's (Gulf Council) red snapper rebuilding plan. The red snapper assessment process and reports, as well as Amendment 27 to the Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) and Amendment 14 to the Shrimp FMP (Amendment 27/14), provide rationale for the current management actions and may be viewed using links provided at the end of this document.
- All fisheries that harvest red snapper as catch and/or bycatch contribute to total fishing mortality, including the commercial red snapper fishery, recreational red snapper fishery, and shrimp fishery.
 - Red snapper bycatch in the brown shrimp fishery, and red snapper catch and bycatch in the commercial red snapper fishery are the primary sources of red snapper mortality in the western Gulf of Mexico.
 - Red snapper catch and bycatch in the recreational red snapper fishery is the primary source of red snapper mortality in the eastern Gulf of Mexico.

What is a rebuilding plan?

- A rebuilding plan is a strategy used to manage harvest over a specified time period so that an "overfished" stock can increase in size to a legally mandated target level.

How and when was the current red snapper rebuilding plan implemented?

- The Gulf Council established the initial red snapper rebuilding plan through Amendment 22 to the Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan (Amendment 22).
- NOAA Fisheries Service implemented Amendment 22 in 2005.
- Harvest rates in the rebuilding plan were modified in Amendment 27/14 (implemented in early 2008) to allow quotas to be adjusted as the stock condition changes.

What does the current red snapper rebuilding plan require?

- The current rebuilding plan requires fishery managers end overfishing of red snapper between 2009 and 2010, and rebuild the population to sustainable levels by 2032.
- The rebuilding plan provides commercial and recreational red snapper fisheries a combined annual total allowable catch quota (TAC) of 5 million pounds (mp).
- Shrimp effort, and the associated bycatch discard mortality of juvenile red snapper, will be controlled, as needed, through time-area closures to ensure shrimp trawl bycatch mortality of red snapper is reduced 74 percent below the 2001-2003 time period. This reduction can be modified in the future as red snapper rebuild.
- The rebuilding plan also obligates the Gulf Council to periodically evaluate harvest and bycatch rates of red snapper relative to those allowed by the plan and to make adjustments, as needed, to ensure the population recovers on schedule.

How are the red snapper and shrimp fisheries currently managed?

- Recreational red snapper fishery:
 - 49 percent of TAC
 - Minimum size limit of 16 inches total length (TL)
 - Daily bag limit of two fish with a zero bag limit for the captain and crew of for-hire vessels
 - Seasonal closure (federal waters open June 1 to August 15 for 2009, but note these dates can differ from year to year)
- Commercial red snapper fishery:
 - 51 percent of TAC
 - Minimum size limit of 13 inches TL
 - Individual fishing quota (IFQ) program, which allocates the commercial quota among individual fishers and corporations (see link at end of this document)
- Commercial shrimp fishery
 - Bycatch reduction device requirement to reduce juvenile red snapper bycatch
 - Seasonal-area closure if necessary to achieve target bycatch reduction
 - Ten-year permit moratorium to stabilize effort

Why is it necessary to reduce the red snapper catch and bycatch rates of these fisheries?

- The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act requires fishery managers end overfishing, and achieve, on a continuing basis, the optimum yield (OY) from federally managed fish stocks.
- OY is the amount of fish that provides the greatest overall benefit to the nation, particularly with respect to providing food production and recreational opportunities, and protecting marine ecosystems.

What is the status of current action to address overfishing?

- In June 2007, the Gulf Council approved long-term measures to reduce red snapper harvest and bycatch.
- NOAA Fisheries Service implemented these long-term measures to reduce red snapper harvest and bycatch consistent with the objectives of the red snapper rebuilding plan in a December 2007 final rule.
- A stock assessment update will be conducted late in 2009 to evaluate the condition of the stock.

Links to additional information on red snapper management and rulemaking

- Red snapper assessment process and reports
(http://www.sefsc.noaa.gov/sedar/Sedar_Workshops.jsp?WorkshopNum=07)
- Regulations implemented in 2008 through Amendment 27/14 for Gulf of Mexico red snapper and shrimp fisheries (http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sf/RedSnapper/Amendment_27_14.htm)
- Commercial red snapper IFQ program (<https://ifq.sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/ifqrs/index.cfm>)
- Red snapper recreational quota closure
(<http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sf/RedSnapperClosure.htm>)