

PROPOSED RULE: SHALLOW-WATER GROUPER RECREATIONAL FISHING MEASURES FOR GULF OF MEXICO FEDERAL WATERS Framework Action

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

February 2013



What is being proposed in this rule?

- The gag recreational fishing season would open on July 1 and would close when the annual catch target is projected to be caught.
- The shallow-water grouper season closure from February 1 through March 31 would be modified so that it only applies to waters deeper than 20 fathoms.

Why does the gag season need to be adjusted?

- Gag is in a rebuilding plan that allows annual catch limits and targets to increase each year as long as the annual catch limit is not exceeded.
- For 2013, the recreational annual catch target can be increased from 1.031 to 1.287 million pounds.
- Projections indicate that the season length can be extended 10 to 32 days from October 31, the last day of the current season.

Annual Catch Limits

The amount of fish that can be harvested from the stock each year.

Annual Catch Targets

A harvest level set lower than the Annual Catch Limit to create a buffer so that overharvest does not occur.

Accountability Measures

Measures taken to prevent harvest from exceeding the Annual Catch Limit and if exceeded can mitigate or correct the overage.

Why is there a proposal to modify the shallow-water grouper February 1 through March 31 closure?

- The original recreational shallow-water grouper closure was part of a suite of measures designed to achieve target harvest levels for red grouper and gag, and to end overfishing of gag.
- The closure also protects spawning of many shallow-water grouper species, and in particular gag.
- The effectiveness of the closure was questioned because:
 - Gag is now managed under a separate fishing season.
 - Gag is the only grouper species considered overfished and undergoing overfishing.
 - All grouper species are managed with annual catch limits and accountability measures to reduce the chance of overfishing.
- Restricting the closure to deeper waters where most shallow-water grouper species spawn would continue to protect spawning fish, but still allow some grouper fishing in February and March.

Species in the Recreational Shallow-Water Grouper Complex

- Black Grouper
- Red Grouper
- Gag
- Yellowfin grouper
- Scamp
- Yellowmouth grouper

Will the modified shallow-water grouper February 1 through March 31 closure apply to 2013?

- No. The modified closure will be in effect for 2014 if the final rule publishes.

What are the coordinates for the 20-fathom boundary used in the closure?

- The 20-fathom boundary and coordinates are presented in Figure 1.
- For the Gulf of Mexico east of Cape San Blas, the coordinates follow the longline-buoy gear 20-fathom boundary.
- For the Gulf of Mexico west of Cape San Blas, new coordinates were developed because the longline-buoy gear boundary moves out the 50 fathoms.

How can I submit comments on the proposed rule?

- NOAA Fisheries will be taking public comments on the proposed rule for the framework action from February 21, 2013, through March 25, 2013.
- Instructions on how to submit comments on the proposed rule for the framework action can be found at http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/fishery_bulletins/documents/pdfs/2013/fb13-012_gulf_swg_management_proposed_rule.pdf.

Related Links:

- Fishery Bulletin FB13-012: NOAA Fisheries is Seeking Comments on a Proposed Rule to Establish the Gag Recreational Season and Modify the Recreational Shallow-water Grouper Closure
http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/fishery_bulletins/documents/pdfs/2013/fb13-012_gulf_swg_management_proposed_rule.pdf
- 2012 recreational shallow-water grouper framework action.
http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sf/pdfs/Gulf_2013_swg_Management.pdf
- Frequently Asked Questions on Gulf of Mexico Grouper Management in Federal Waters
<http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sf/pdfs/Gulf%20Grouper%20FAQs%20Feb%202010.pdf>

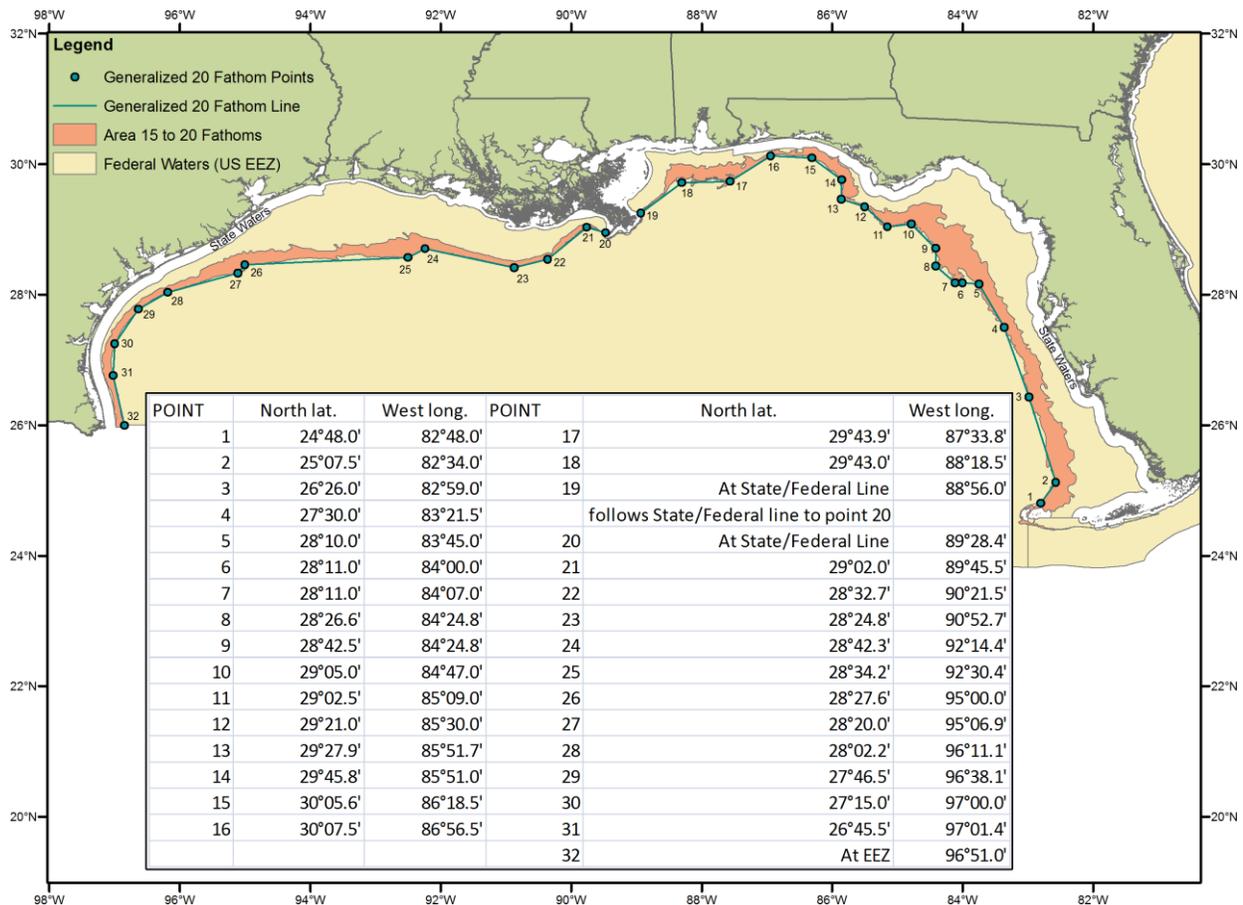


Figure 1. 20-fathom boundary line for the modified shallow-water grouper closure. Points 1 to 12 follow the existing longline and buoy gear 20-fathom boundary. Points 13 to 32 extend the 20-fathom boundary to the rest of the Gulf of Mexico. Across part of Louisiana (between points 19 and 20), the boundary follows the state-federal boundary because the 20-fathom isobath is within state waters.