

2018 Gulf of Mexico Red Snapper Recreational Season Length Estimates for the For-Hire Component

NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Regional Office

Introduction

Red snapper are managed in Gulf of Mexico (Gulf) federal waters from the west coast of Florida to Texas by NOAA Fisheries and the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council). The recreational sector in the Gulf includes a private angling component and a federal for-hire component. The federal for-hire component includes charter vessels and headboats with a federal charter/headboat permit for reef fish, allowing these vessels to fish in federal waters. For-hire vessels without a federal permit are restricted to fishing for red snapper in state waters only. Recreational fishing for red snapper is managed with a 16-inch total length minimum size limit, two-fish bag limit, and a federal season beginning on June 1 and ending when the component quota is projected to be caught.

A 2015 framework action revised the recreational accountability measures (AM) for red snapper by establishing a recreational annual catch target (ACT) and quota overage adjustments for red snapper because the recreational quota had been exceeded in 3 of the previous 4 years. The red snapper recreational ACT is set by applying a 20% buffer to the recreational annual catch limit (ACL). Therefore, the red snapper recreational season closure date is based on when the recreational ACT is projected to be met instead of the recreational ACL. This serves as an in-season AM and reduces the probability of exceeding the recreational quota during a fishing year from 50% to 15%. The quota adjustment (payback) provision only applies when the red snapper stock is in an overfished status. If the stock is overfished and the recreational ACL is exceeded, then in the following year the recreational quota will be reduced by the amount of the overage in the prior fishing year. This will also reduce the ACT to maintain the 20% buffer between the ACL and ACT.

Amendment 40 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Reef Fish Resources of the Gulf of Mexico (FMP) proposed to increase flexibility in managing red snapper landings and minimize the chance of recreational ACL overruns. Prior to implementation of Amendment 40, recreational management measures were applied to the recreational sector as a whole, without distinguishing between the private angling and federal for-hire components. Amendment 40 defined two distinct components of the recreational sector as 1) a private angling component that includes private anglers fishing from privately owned vessels, as well as operators of state-permitted for-hire vessels that do not have a federal permit, and 2) a federal for-hire component that includes operators of federally permitted for-hire vessels. The amendment allocated the red snapper recreational ACL between the private angling (57.7%) and federal for-hire (42.3%) components. The ACT is 20% less than the ACL for each component. In addition, Amendment 40 established season closure provisions for both components, where the component ACT is used to project the respective federal red snapper component season length. Amendment 40 included a provision for adjusting the component quotas: if an overage of the total recreational ACL occurs and the stock is overfished, the appropriate component quota(s) must be adjusted to reflect the adjustment to the total quota. Amendment 40 included a provision to sunset the

separate quotas and AMs for the two components after three years (2017), but Amendment 45 to the FMP extended the provision an additional 5 years, to be effective through the end of 2022.

The overfished status determination criterion for red snapper was recently revised in Amendment 44. Following the new criterion, the red snapper status changed from overfished to not overfished, but still rebuilding. Since the stock is not overfished, there will be no quota adjustment in 2018 as a result of the overage in 2017.

The red snapper federal for-hire and private angling recreational fishing seasons open each year on June 1 and close when their respective ACTs are projected to be reached. In 2018, each Gulf state submitted an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) application that would allow that state to set the private angler season for red snapper recreationally caught and landed from state and federal waters during 2018 and 2019. The purpose of the EFPs is to allow states to demonstrate the effectiveness of state management of recreationally caught red snapper and data collection methods through a 2-year pilot program. NOAA Fisheries approved the EFPs and issued them to the states on April 16, 2018. The EFPs include the following provisions:

- States will establish seasons when red snapper can be landed.
- Recreational fishermen with the appropriate licenses, permits, or registration from a state can land fish caught in federal waters during that state's season.
- States will require fishermen to land their red snapper following state-specific rules.
- States will monitor red snapper landings and close their seasons if a state's assigned quota is reached or projected to be reached

Although the states will set seasons for the private angling component in state and federal waters, NOAA Fisheries must still set a season throughout federal waters for the federal for-hire component. Prior to June 1 each year, NOAA Fisheries projects the federal for-hire season closing date and notifies the public of the closing date for the upcoming season. If subsequent data indicate that the ACT has not been reached, NOAA Fisheries may re-open the season. The purpose of this report is to project the 2018 recreational red snapper federal for-hire fishing season length, and to characterize the uncertainty of those projections.

Analysis and Projections

The amount of red snapper (in pounds whole weight [lbs ww]) available for the for-hire component after the 20% buffer is applied to the ACL is 2,278,400 lbs ww (**Table 1**).

Table 1. The 2018 Gulf of Mexico For-Hire red snapper ACL and ACT in pounds whole weight.

Management Target	Landings (lbs ww)
ACL	2,848,000
ACT	2,278,400

Federal for-hire catch rates were calculated by dividing the annual for-hire landings by the number of days the federal for-hire season was open. Catch rates (lbs/day) are calculated for each state. Federal for-hire catch rates for the previous three years have remained fairly consistent (**Table 2**).

Table 2. Federal for-hire sector catch rates (lbs/day) from the last three years for each state and the total for all states. Catch rates were calculated by dividing the annual for-hire federal landings by the number of days the federal for-hire season was open.

Year(s)	AL	FL	LA	MS	TX	Total
2017	14,901	17,659	4,101	693	7,356	44,710
2016	16,464	17,883	3,904	407	7,791	46,449
2015	15,894	19,643	3,538	238	8,297	47,611
Average 2015-17	15,753	18,395	3,848	446	7,815	46,257
Average 2016-17	15,682	17,771	4,003	550	7,574	45,580

Source: MRIP SEFSC Recreational ACL Database [February 28, 2018]. 2017 landings are preliminary.

Season length projections were determined by cumulatively summing the state-specific catch rates until the ACT was projected to be met. Season lengths were projected using federal for-hire catch rates from the past year, past two years, and past three years. The projected for-hire season length was between 49 and 51 days (**Table 3**).

Table 3. Projections of season lengths to reach the federal for-hire component ACT (lbs ww) using catch rates (lbs/day) from the previous year (2017) or an average of either the last two or three years. These calculations used catch rates from all of the Gulf states.

Years	Catch Rate	ACT	Number of Days
2017	44,710	2,278,400	51
Average 2016-17	45,580	2,278,400	50
Average 2015-17	46,257	2,278,400	49

Source: MRIP SEFSC Recreational ACL Database [February 28, 2018]. 2017 landings are preliminary.