

SPORTS

Red snapper season dates finalized

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Last week NOAA Fisheries published a rule implementing an increase to the commercial and recreational quotas for red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico through 2017.

For 2015, the red snapper allowable catch is increasing from 11.0 million pounds whole weight to 14.3 million pounds. The commercial and recreational sector quotas will be based on the current 51 percent commercial and 49 percent recreational allocation. The commercial quota will increase to 7.29 million pounds the recreational quota will increase to 7.01 million pounds.

The red snapper commercial sector is managed under an individual fishing quota program. The increase to the commercial quota will be distributed to shareholders on or shortly after the effective date of the final rule.

However, to better ensure the recreational sector does not exceed its quota, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council recently established a recreational catch target that is less than the recreational quota, and asked NOAA Fisheries to base the length of the recreational fishing season on this catch target instead of the quota.

Late last year NOAA Fisheries also established a federally permitted charter for-hire (charter/headboat) component and a private angling component within the recreational sector. This allocates the red snapper recreational quota and annual catch target between the components, and establishes separate seasonal closure provisions for the two components.

The resulting annual catch targets for each component are 2.371 million pounds for the federally permitted for-hire component and 3.234 million pounds for the private angling component of the recreational sector.

This year the private recreational angler federal waters red snapper season will be from June 1 – June 10, while the charter for hire season for federally permitted charter boats will be from June 1 – July 14.

The Florida state waters season is set for 70 days and will start the Saturday before Memorial Day (May 23) and run through July 12, resume for all of Labor Day weekend (September 5-7) and finish with Saturdays and Sundays throughout the rest of September and all of October, with the last day of harvest being Sunday, November 1.

Florida state waters in the Gulf of Mexico are from shore to nine nautical miles out and are managed by the FWC. Federal waters extend from where state waters end, out to about 200 nautical miles and are managed by NOAA Fisheries.

The red snapper bag limit will remain the same in both state and federal waters at two fish per person with a 16-inch minimum total length size limit.