

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

NMFS Operations Branch 727-570-5305
NMFS Permits and Regulations Branch 727-570-5326

(see below for tuna permit applications)
to apply for permits online: nrmfpermits.com

NMFS nationwide federal
fishing violations hotline 800-853-1964

NMFS 24-hour tuna information line 888-872-8862
(also for tuna permit applications) 978-281-9260

NMFS Highly Migratory Species Division 301-713-2347
NMFS Swordfish/Billfish Recreational Reporting 800-894-5528

South Atlantic Fishery Mgmt. Council 843-571-4366

Gulf States Marine Fisheries Comm. 228-875-5912

CCA fishing violation hotline 866- WE ENFORCE (933-6367)

U.S. Coast Guard, 7th District 305-415-6778
(Florida east of St. Marks)

U.S. Coast Guard, 8th District 504-589-6237
(St. Marks, Florida to Texas)

Regional NMFS Office for Law Enforcement 727-570-5344
NMFS Enforcement Field Offices

Marathon, FL 305-743-3110

Niceville, FL 850-729-8628

Stennis Space Center, MS 228-688-2920

Baton Rouge, LA 225-769-5477

Austin, TX 512-916-5401

Galveston, TX 409-770-0812

Harlingen, TX 956-423-3450

State Agencies:

Alabama Dept. of Conservation and Marine Resources
information or to report state fishing 251-861-2882
violations 251-968-7576
24 hr voice mail to report state 251-476-1256
fishing violations

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
information 850-488-4676
to report state fishing violations 850-488-9924
888-404-FWCC (3922)
cellular phone *FWC

Louisiana Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries
information 225-765-2800
to report state fishing violations 800-442-2511

Mississippi Department of Marine Resources
information and to report state 228-374-5000
fishing violations

Texas Parks and Wildlife Dept.
information 800-792-1112
to report state fishing violations 512-389-4848
or 281-842-8100
or 800-792-GAME

ERRATA AND UPDATE SHEET

A supplemental "errata and update sheet" will be periodically published to indicate changes in fishing regulations since this pamphlet was published. Contact the Gulf Council to obtain the most recent supplement.

RECREATIONAL FISHING REGULATIONS FOR GULF OF MEXICO FEDERAL WATERS

December 2004



Red Grouper (*Epinephelus morio*)

Gulf of Mexico
Fishery Management Council
The Commons at Rivergate
3018 N. U.S. Hwy. 301, Suite 1000
Tampa, Florida 33619-2272

813-228-2815

888-833-1844 (TOLL-FREE)

813-225-7015 (FAX)

e-mail: gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org

web page: <http://www.gulfcouncil.org>



This leaflet was prepared for general informational purposes in October 2004 and has no legal force or effect. Fishing regulations are subject to change. A separate summary of commercial fishing regulations is available from the Council.

Report federal fishing violations:

24 hour toll-free hotline: 1-800-853-1964

WHAT IS THE GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL?

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) is one of eight regional Fishery Management Councils that were established by the Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976. The Council prepares fishery plans which are designed to manage fishery resources within the 200-mile limit of the Gulf of Mexico.

The Council consists of 17 voting members who are: the Southeast Regional Administrator of NMFS (or his designee), the directors of the 5 Gulf state marine resource management agencies (or their designees), and 11 members who are nominated by the state governors and appointed by the Secretary of Commerce for three year terms (and can serve for a maximum of three consecutive terms). In addition, there are 4 nonvoting members representing the U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of State, and the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

The Council meets every two months at various locations around the Gulf coast. Before final action on any proposed rule change is taken, public hearings are held throughout the Gulf as well as public testimony at the Council meeting where final action is scheduled. Proposed rule changes are then submitted to NMFS for further review and approval before being implemented.

When reviewing potential rule changes, the Council draws upon the services of knowledgeable people from other state and federal agencies, universities and the public who serve on panels and committees (see below).

Advisory Panels: recreational and commercial fishermen, charterboat operators, buyers, sellers, and consumers who are knowledgeable about a particular fishery.

Scientific and Statistical Committees: economists, biologists, sociologists, and natural resource attorneys who are knowledgeable about the technical aspects of fisheries in the Gulf.

Stock Assessment Panels: biologists who are trained in the specialized field of population dynamics, and who assess the available biological data and advise the Council on the status of stocks and level of allowable biological catch.

Persons interested in joining any of the above panels should contact the Council for information on how to apply.

RECREATIONAL REGULATIONS - as of December 1, 2004

Species	Minimum Size Limit (Unless otherwise indicated)	Closed Season	Recreational Daily Bag and Possession Limit
SHELLFISH			
Stone Crab	Minimum 2 3/4" claw	5/16 - 10/14	See additional rules on next page
Spiny Lobster	More than 3" carapace. Divers must measure in water.	4/1 - 8/5 There is a special 2 day non-trap recreational season, to be the last consecutive Wednesday and Thursday in July.	6/person, and no transfer at sea between boats (During the 2-day special recreational season, 12/person off Florida except 6/person for Monroe County - Florida Keys).
COASTAL MIGRATORY PELAGICS			
Cobia (ling)	33" fork length	none	2/person
King Mackerel	24" fork length	none Fork length: Tip of snout to fork of tail	2/person including captain and crew of for-hire vessels.
Spanish Mackerel	12" fork length	none	15/person.
REEF FISH			
<u>Snappers</u> Red Snapper	16" total length	Season to open at 12:01 AM April 21 and close at 12:00 midnight October 31	4/person
Vermilion Lane	10" total length 8" total length	none none	Included in 20 reef fish aggregate limit. Included in 20 reef fish aggregate limit.
Gray Mutton Yellowtail Schoolmaster Cubera Dog Mahogany Queen Blackfin Silk Wenchman	12" total length 16" total length 12" total length 12" total length 12" total length 12" total length 12" total length none none none none	none none none none none none none none none none none none	10/person in aggregate bag limit. Includes all snappers except red, vermilion, and lane. Total length: Tip of snout to tip of tail
<u>Groupers</u> Black Gag Red Yellowfin Scamp Yellowmouth Rock Hind Red Hind Yellowedge Misty Snowy Speckled Hind Warsaw <u>Protected Grouper</u> Goliath Grouper (Jewfish) Nassau Grouper	22" total length 22" total length 20" total length 20" total length 16" total length none none none none none none none none none none none none Harvest prohibited Harvest prohibited	none none none none none none none none none none none none none none none none none none	5/person in aggregate of all groupers except goliath grouper and Nassau grouper. No more than 2 red grouper/person (counts as part of the 5 grouper aggregate bag limit) 1 per vessel 1 per vessel
Hogfish	12" fork length	none	5/person
Gray Triggerfish	12" total length	none	Included in 20 reef fish aggregate limit.
Greater Amberjack	28" fork length (recreational)	none	1/person
Lesser Amberjack Banded Rudderfish	14" to 22" fork length slot limit 14" to 22" fork length slot limit	none none	5-fish aggregate limit for lesser amberjack and banded rudderfish, excluded from 20 reef fish aggregate limit
<u>Aggregate Reef Fish Bag Limit Species</u> Vermilion Snapper Goldface Tilefish Tilefish Lane Snapper Almaco Jack Blackline Tilefish Gray Triggerfish Anchor Tilefish Blueline Tilefish			20/person of all listed species in aggregate.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Reef fish taken under the recreational bag limit may not be sold. o Stressed areas for reef fish begin at the shoreward boundary of federal waters and generally follow the 10 fathom contour from the Dry Tortugas to Sanibel Island; the 20 fathom contour to Tarpon Springs; the 10 fathom contour to Cape San Blas; the 25 fathom contour to south of Mobile Bay; the 13 fathom contour to Ship Island, Mississippi; the 10 fathom contour off Louisiana; and the 30 fathom contour off Texas. Use of fish traps, roller trawls, and power heads is prohibited in designated "stressed areas". o Reef fish gear is limited to no more than 3 hooks in a special management zone off Alabama. Nonconforming gear is restricted to bag limit or for reef fish without a bag limit to 5 percent by weight of all fish aboard. o Circle hooks are encouraged when angling for reef fish because they reduce mortality on released fish. 			

Species	Minimum Size Limit (unless otherwise indicated)	Closed Season	Recreational Daily Bag and Possession Limit																				
OTHER SPECIES																							
Red Drum	Illegal to harvest or possess in federal waters.																						
HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES																							
<p>All HMS species (except blackfin tuna) require an HMS Angling Category permit from NOAA Fisheries. Permits are available by calling 1-888-872-8862 or at http://www.nmfspermits.com. No sale permitted for HMS species caught under an angling permit. Additional recreational reporting requirements apply for swordfish, billfish and Atlantic bluefin tuna. For complete HMS regulations, contact the NOAA Fisheries HMS Management Division at 1-727-570-5447 or http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/.</p> <p>For updates on tuna quota monitoring and tuna retention limit adjustments, anglers may call the Atlantic Tunas Information Line at (888) 872-8862 or (978) 281-9305, or visit http://www.nmfspermits.com. For further information on tunas, contact the HMS Management Division located in Gloucester, Massachusetts at (978) 281-9260.</p> <p>Recreational swordfish and billfish landings should be reported at 800-894-5528.</p>																							
<u>Tuna</u> Bluefin	27" CFL	Bag limits are subject to sub-quotas by size and permit categories, change seasonally, and are reduced to zero when sub-quotas are filled. CFL - Curved fork length: Tip of the upper jaw to fork of tail measured along the contour of the middle of the body.																					
Bigeye Yellowfin Albacore Skipjack Blackfin	27" CFL 27" CFL none none none	none none none none none	none 3/person none none none																				
<u>Billfish</u> Blue Marlin White Marlin Sailfish Longbill spearfish	Minimum size lower jaw to tail fork 99" 66" 63" harvest prohibited	none none none	none none none																				
Swordfish	whole fish: 47" lower jaw to tail fork, or 29" carcass length or 33 lbs. dressed weight*. Carcass length is a curved measure from posterior edge of gill opening to anterior portion of caudal keel.	none	1/person up to a maximum of 3/vessel																				
<u>SHARKS</u> Atlantic sharpnose Bonnethead other sharks	none none 54" fork length	none none none	1/person 1/person 1/vessel in aggregate																				
<u>Prohibited Sharks-Recreational Harvest</u> <table><tr><td>Atlantic angel</td><td>Basking</td><td>Bigeye sand tiger</td><td>Caribbean reef</td><td>Caribbean sharpnose</td></tr><tr><td>Bigeye sixgill</td><td>Bigeye thresher</td><td>Bignose</td><td>Dusky</td><td>Galapagos</td></tr><tr><td>Longfin mako</td><td>Narrowtooth</td><td>Night</td><td>Sand tiger</td><td>Sevengill</td></tr><tr><td>Sixgill</td><td>Smalltail</td><td>Whale</td><td>White</td><td></td></tr></table>			Atlantic angel	Basking	Bigeye sand tiger	Caribbean reef	Caribbean sharpnose	Bigeye sixgill	Bigeye thresher	Bignose	Dusky	Galapagos	Longfin mako	Narrowtooth	Night	Sand tiger	Sevengill	Sixgill	Smalltail	Whale	White		Harvest prohibited for these species.
Atlantic angel	Basking	Bigeye sand tiger	Caribbean reef	Caribbean sharpnose																			
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Sixgill	Smalltail	Whale	White																				
CORAL AND CORAL REEFS																							
Allowable Octocorals	Attached substrate within 1 inch of octocoral is allowed.	Fishery season regulated by state of Florida rules	6 colonies per day																				
Live Rock	Harvest and possession of live rock is prohibited (except for permitted aquaculture operations).																						
Other Marine Life Organisms	Marine life organisms from the EEZ harvested or possessed by Florida residents or landed in Florida are subject to Florida's Marine Life Rule. Contact the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission for more information (850-487-3122).																						

ADDITIONAL RULES	
Charter vessels/Headboat 2-day bag limit allowance	Persons on qualified charter vessels or headboats with two captains for trips in excess of 24 hours may possess 2 days' bag limits of reef fish species, king mackerel and Spanish mackerel. 1-day bag limits apply on all other species and trips regardless of length.
Stone Crab	Claws may not be removed from egg-bearing females. Illegal to land whole crab. Florida daily limit of claws is 1gallon/person, 2gallons/vessel.
Spiny Lobster	Removal of tail prohibited at sea. See commercial regulations for trap use. No spears, hooks, or piercing devices. No taking of spiny or slipper lobsters that are berried (egg-bearing).
Cobia (ling)	The 2 day bag limit allowance for charter vessels and headboats <u>does not</u> apply to cobia.
Allowable Octocorals	Allowable octocoral means an erect, nonencrusting species of the subclass Octocorallia, except the seafans <i>Gorgonia flabellum</i> and <i>G. ventalina</i> , plus the attached substrate within 1 inch of an allowable octocoral. Note: An octocoral with attached substrate exceeding 1 inch is considered to be live rock and not allowable octocoral.

RECREATIONAL PERMIT REQUIREMENTS:	
Permit	Required For:
Charter vessel/headboat coastal pelagics permit	Charter vessels and headboats fishing for mackerels, cobia, little tunny, cero, dolphin, bluefish. Note: Issuance of new permits is under a moratorium effective June 16, 2003
Charter vessel/headboat reef fish permit Charter vessel/headboat coastal migratory pelagics permit	Charter vessels and headboats require a reef fish permit when fishing for snappers, groupers, amberjack, tilefish, hogfish, and gray triggerfish, and a coastal migratory pelagics permit when fishing for bluefish, cero, cobia, dolphin, little tunny, king mackerel, and Spanish mackerel
Allowable octocoral permit	Harvest or possession of allowable octocoral, other than allowable octocoral that is landed in Florida. Appropriate Florida state permits are required to land allowable octocoral in Florida
Highly migratory species (HMS) Charter/headboat permit	HMS Charter/headboat permit is required for all charter or headboats that fish for or possess an HMS.
HMS Recreational Angling Permit	Owners of vessels used to fish recreationally for Atlantic HMS Atlantic tunas (other than blackfin), billfish, sharks and swordfish)

Applications for permits other than HMS permits may be obtained from National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, Koger Building, 9721 Executive Center Drive, St. Petersburg, Florida 33702 (telephone 727-570-5326). HMS permits can be purchased online at <http://www.nmfspermits.com> or by calling 1-888-872-8862.

AREA CLOSURES

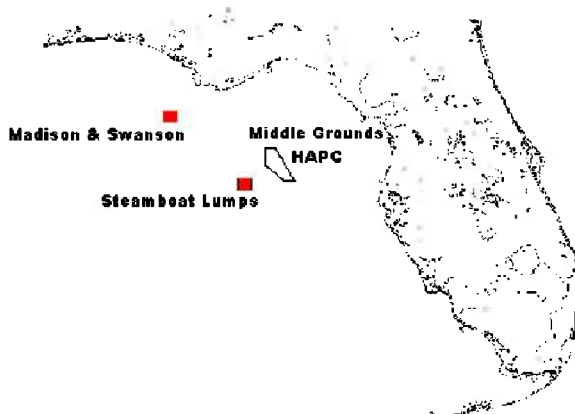
- The following locations off the west-central coast of Florida are closed to all fishing November 1 - April 30. Surface trolling for species other than reef fish is allowed May 1 - October 31.

Madison/ Swanson Marine Reserve

NW corner 29°17' N. lat., 85°50' W. long.
NE corner 29°17' N. lat., 85°38' W. long.
SW corner 29°06' N. lat., 85°50' W. long.
SE corner 29°06' N. lat., 85°38' W. long.

Steamboat Lumps Marine Reserve

NW corner 28°14' N. lat., 84°48' W. long.
NE corner 28°14' N. lat., 84°37' W. long.
SW corner 28°03' N. lat., 84°48' W. long.
SE corner 28°03' N. lat., 84°37' W. long.



STATE AUTHORITY IN FEDERAL WATERS

- A state may regulate vessels that are registered in that state and are fishing in federal waters for species for which there are no federal fishery management plans or applicable federal regulations, or for which the appropriate fishery management plan has delegated management to the state and the state rules are consistent with federal regulations.

- The following locations off the south coast of Florida are closed to all fishing. Anchoring of fishing vessels is also not allowed in the Tortugas sites. The boundaries of the areas are as follows:

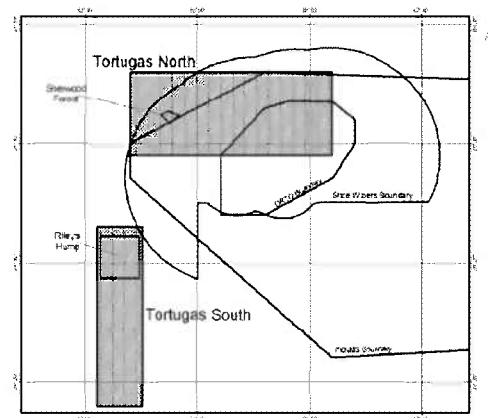
Gulf of Mexico EEZ portion of Tortugas North Ecological Reserve

NW corner 24°40' N. lat., 83°06' W. long.
NE corner 24°46' N. lat., 83°06' W. long.
SW corner 24°46' N. lat., 83°00' W. long.

thence along the seaward limit of Florida's waters to 24°40' N. lat., 83°06' W. long.

Tortugas South Ecological Reserve

NW corner 24°33' N. lat., 83°09' W. long.
NE corner 24°33' N. lat., 83°05' W. long.
SW corner 24°18' N. lat., 83°05' W. long.
SE corner 24°18' N. lat., 83°09' W. long.



HEAD AND FINS ATTACHED RULE

- All fish except for bait and oceanic migratory species taken from federal waters must have heads and fins intact through landing. Up to 1½ pounds of finfish per person is exempt from the head and fins intact rule for personal consumption provided the vessel is equipped to cook such finfish.