

## IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

NMFS Permits and Regulations Branch 727-570-5326  
(see below for tuna permit applications)

NMFS nationwide federal  
fishing violations hotline 800-853-1964

NMFS 24-hour tuna information line 888-USA-TUNA  
(also for tuna permit applications)

NMFS Highly Migratory Species Division 301-713-2347

South Atlantic Fishery Mgmt. Council 843-571-4366

Gulf States Marine Fisheries Comm. 228-875-5912

U.S. Coast Guard, 7th District 305-536-5654

(Florida east of St. Marks)

U.S. Coast Guard, 8th District 504-589-6237

(St. Marks, Florida to Texas)

NMFS Enforcement Field Offices

Niceville, FL 850-729-8628

Carriere, MS 601-798-9535

Austin, TX 512-916-5401

Galveston, TX 409-766-3701

Harlingen, TX 956-423-3450

Marathon, FL 305-743-2093

### State Agencies:

Alabama Dept. of Conservation and Marine Resources

information or to report state fishing 334-861-2882

violations 334-968-7576

24 hr voice mail to report state 334-476-1256

fishing violations

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

information 850-487-3122

to report state fishing violations 850-488-9924

800-DIALFMP

800-342-5367

cellular phone - \*FMP

Louisiana Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries

information 225-765-2925

to report state fishing violations 800-442-2511

Mississippi Department of Marine Resources

information 228-374-5000

Texas Parks and Wildlife Dept.

information 800-792-1112

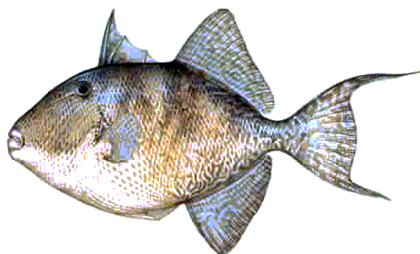
to report state fishing violations 512-389-4848

or 713-649-0708

or 800-792-GAME

# RECREATIONAL FISHING REGULATIONS FOR GULF OF MEXICO FEDERAL WATERS

## January 2001



Gray triggerfish (*Ballistes capriscus*)

**Gulf of Mexico  
Fishery Management Council  
The Commons at Rivergate  
3018 U.S. Hwy. 301 N., Suite 1000  
Tampa, Florida 33619-2266**

**813-228-2815**

**888-833-1844 (TOLL-FREE)**

**813-225-7015 (FAX)**

**e-mail: [gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org](mailto:gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org)**

**web page: [www.gulfcouncil.org](http://www.gulfcouncil.org)**



This leaflet was prepared for general informational purposes in January 2001 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 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.

This is a publication of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council pursuant to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Award No. NA17FC1052.

**RECREATIONAL REGULATIONS - as of January, 2001**

Species	Minimum Size Limit (Unless otherwise indicated)	Closed Season	Recreational Daily Bag and Possession Limit
<b>SHELLFISH</b>			
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).
<b>COASTAL MIGRATORY PELAGICS</b>			
Cobia (ling)	33" fork length	none	2/person
King Mackerel	24" fork length	none	2/person including captain and crew of for-hire vessels.
Spanish Mackerel	12" fork length	none	15/person.
<b>REEF FISH</b>			
<u>Snappers</u> Red Snapper	16" total length	Season to open at 12:01 AM April 21, 2001 and close at 12:00 midnight October 31, 2001.	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	10/person in aggregate bag limit.  Includes all snappers except red, vermilion, and lane.
<u>Groupers</u> Black Gag Red Yellowfin Scamp Yellowmouth Rock Hind Red Hind Yellowedge Misty Snowy  Speckled Hind Warsaw	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 none none none none none none none none none none none	5/person in aggregate of all groupers except Jewfish and Nassau grouper.  1 per vessel 1 per vessel
<u>Protected Groupers</u> Jewfish Nassau Grouper	Harvest prohibited Harvest prohibited		
Hogfish Gray Triggerfish	12" fork length 12" total length	none none	5/person Included in 20 reef fish aggregate limit.
Greater Amberjack Lesser Amberjack Banded Rudderfish	28" fork length (recreational) 14" to 22" fork length slot limit 14" to 22" fork length slot limit	none none none	1/person 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.

- 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
<b>OTHER SPECIES</b>			
Red Drum	Illegal to harvest or possess in federal waters.		
<b>HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES</b>			
Tuna Bluefin	<u>Size Categories</u> school - 27" to < 47" CFL large school - 47" to < 59" CFL small medium - 59" to < 73" CFL large medium - 73" to < 81" CFL giant - 81"+ 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. Telephone the NMFS Highly Migratory Species Management Division's toll-free 24 hour information line for updates on bag limits and quotas: 1-888-USA-TUNA (1-888- 872-8862).  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 Atlantic Bonito	27" CFL 27" CFL none none none none	none none none none none none	none 3/person none none none none
Billfish 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 none none
Swordfish	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	none
<b>SHARKS</b> Atlantic sharpnose other sharks	none 54" fork length	none none	1/person 1/vessel in aggregate
<b>Prohibited Sharks-Recreational Harvest</b> 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.
<b>CORAL AND CORAL REEFS</b>			
Allowable Octocorals	Attached substrate within 1 inch of octocoral is allowed.	Season closes when quota of 50,000 colonies is reached.	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).		

<b>ADDITIONAL RULES</b>	
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.
Red snapper	Exact dates of the red snapper season opening and closing dependant on the NMFS projections. Contact the NMFS Fishery Operations Branch at 727-570-5305 for further details.
Allowable Octocorals	Allowable octocoral means an erect, nonencrusting species of the subclass Octocorallia, except the seafans Gorgonia flabellum and G. ventalina, 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.
Tuna - Bluefin	Tuna permit holders are required to report by telephone all recreationally caught bluefin tuna. Call 1-888-USA-TUNA (1-888-872-8862) and select the catch reporting option. For information about fishing under the NMFS tag and release program when bag limits are closed, call 1-800-437-3936.
Tuna - others	All tunas must be landed in round or eviscerated form with one pectoral fin intact. Head removal allowed. Caudal fin must be intact on bluefin.
Billfish	No retention unless taken by rod and reel. Sale prohibited. Head, fins, and bill must be intact through landing. Those people conducting a tournament involving score keeping or awards for Atlantic highly migratory species (whether or not retained), must register their tournament with the Fisheries Service's Southeast Fisheries Science Center: attn: "Tournament Registration", 75 Virginia Beach Drive, Miami, FL 33149. The registration must be in writing, at least four weeks prior to commencement of tournament fishing. A tournament registration form is available upon request from the above address or can be requested by FAX (305-361-4219).
Swordfish	dressed = gutted, headed, and finned.

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.
Charter vessel/headboat reef fish permit	Charter vessels and headboats fishing for snappers, groupers, amberjack, tilefish, hogfish, and gray triggerfish.
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.
General category Atlantic bluefin tuna permit Charter vessel/headboat Atlantic bluefin tuna permit Angling category Atlantic bluefin tuna permit	Vessels fishing for Atlantic bluefin tuna require one of these permits. An Atlantic bluefin permit will not be issued for more than one category.
Charter vessel/headboat other tuna permit	Charter vessels and headboats fishing for albacore, Atlantic bonito, bigeye tuna, skipjack tuna or yellowfin tuna (An Atlantic bluefin permit is also valid to harvest other tuna).
Recreational other tuna permit	Vessels other than charter and headboats engaged in recreational harvest of albacore, Atlantic bonito, bigeye tuna, skipjack tuna or yellowfin tuna (An Atlantic bluefin permit is also valid to harvest other tuna).

Applications for 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), except for tuna permits, which may be obtained by telephoning 888-USA-TUNA.

### OTHER REQUIREMENTS

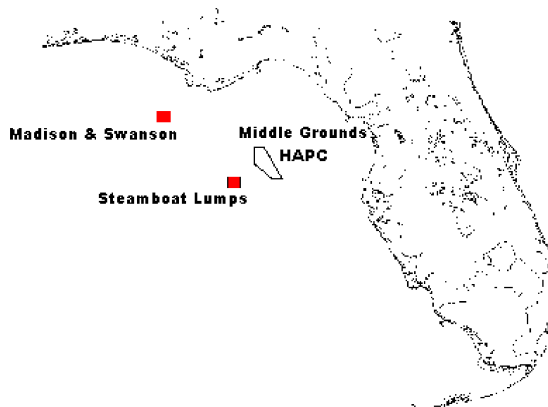
- o A state may regulate vessels that are registered in that state and are fishing in federal waters for species for which there are no federal fishery management plans or applicable federal regulations, or for which the appropriate fishery management plan has delegated management to the state and the state rules are consistent with federal regulations.
- o 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.
- o Riley's Hump near the Dry Tortugas is closed to all fishing in May and June.
- o Area closures: The Madison and Swanson sites and Steamboat Lumps site off the west central coast of Florida are closed to all fishing. The boundaries of the areas are as follows:

#### Madison and Swanson Sites

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

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.



### HOW ARE RECREATIONAL STATISTICS COMPILED?

It is impossible to count every fish caught by each recreational fisherman in the Gulf of Mexico. Recreational catch statistics are derived from surveys that are designed to sample a statistically representative cross section of the recreational sector. Monitoring of the recreational fishery is accomplished primarily through a combination of three surveys:

**Marine Recreational Fishery Statistics Survey (MRFSS):** This survey covers all Gulf states except Texas, and consists of an intercept survey (where catches are examined by surveyors at the docks and fishing piers to characterize species, size and catch-per-unit-effort), and a telephone survey (to estimate total angler effort and proportion of the public that fishes). Multiplying the observed catch data from the intercept survey by the total effort data from the telephone survey provides estimates of total recreational catch. Estimates are further divided into private/rental boats, charter vessels/headboats, and shore mode.

**NMFS Headboat Survey:** Intercept surveys conducted dockside and occasionally at sea provide estimates of species, sizes of fish caught, and other biological materials. Logbooks kept by vessel crews provide catch by species, number of anglers, fishing location, etc. This survey provides estimates of landings by party boats.

**Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Coastal Sport Fishing Survey:** Texas does not participate in the MRFSS, but it conducts its own survey which provides similar data.

Other surveys which may be used include the Atlantic bluefin tuna recreational survey, the southeast charterboat survey, and recreational billfish tournament and non-tournament sampling programs.

Because of the time needed to compile the recreational data and generate landings estimates, recreational catch estimates do not become available for several weeks or even months. Consequently, the Council generally does not know until the following year whether its recreational management measures have been effective.

### 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.