



NEWSCAST

The Newsletter of the Marine Recreational Information Program

**NOAA
FISHERIES**



**August 25, 2016
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State-Federal Partnerships to Enhance Gulf Red Snapper Estimates

The **Marine Recreational Information Program**, or **MRIP**, is the state-regional-federal partnership responsible for developing, improving, and implementing surveys that measure how many trips saltwater anglers take, and how many fish they catch. This vital information – combined with other data, such as commercial catch and biological research – enables scientists and managers to assess and maintain sustainable U.S. fish stocks.

For More Information:

Dave Bard
NOAA Affiliate
(301) 427-8197
david.bard@noaa.gov

Working Together on Gulf of Mexico Red Snapper Surveys

Gulf of Mexico red snapper are highly sought after by recreational fishermen for good reason – they are fun to catch and make good table fare.

However, fisheries such as Gulf red snapper – where a lot of fishing takes place over a short amount of time – represent a special challenge for scientists and managers. For starters, it's difficult to sample enough anglers during the brief season to produce precise estimates of catch. In addition, under current methods, estimates cannot generally be produced until after the season is finished.

Thanks to a collaboration among NOAA Fisheries and Alabama, Florida, Mississippi, and Texas, along with the [Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission](#) and the [Gulf Fisheries Information Network \(GulfFIN\)](#) – which includes the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council – this situation may soon change.

For the past three years, NOAA Fisheries' Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) has been working closely with Alabama, Florida, Mississippi, Texas, and regional entities to jointly develop state-based surveys that address the specific needs of each fishery while supplementing the MRIP baseline catch surveys. The agency has been providing funding and/or technical support to each Gulf state to develop necessary tools to meet red snapper data needs, and to do so in a way that is both scientifically sound and statistically robust.

These developing state red snapper surveys have followed an extensive and collaborative process of identifying specific data needs and designing customized surveys to meet them.

For example, Alabama is testing a pilot program that requires all boats landing red snapper in its state waters to report those landings through its Snapper Check program. Florida is testing a program that requires permits for those vessels fishing for red snapper as well as other reef species. Mississippi is running a pilot in which one angler per boat needs to secure a red snapper landing permit that includes a unique code for reporting purposes. The Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies at Texas A&M – with support from Texas Parks & Wildlife – is experimenting with a statistical design that will provide expanded effort from a volunteer group using a modified version of the iSnapper smartphone app. MRIP will work with state and federal partners to develop a coordinated process for

consolidation and standardization of these designs that are supported in peer review, and identify data that may be needed in the future.

In the meantime, Alabama and Mississippi are working with MRIP support to peer review their surveys, determine if design modifications are needed, and implement necessary improvements as soon as possible. Florida will continue pilot testing its reef fish survey for a second year. Texas is conducting another year of its iSnapper survey.

After the new survey designs have been field-tested, evaluated, and deemed ready for implementation, NOAA experts will work closely with these states to develop standardized approaches to implement for supplemental monitoring of both private and charter boat catches of red snapper. In addition, they will develop detailed transition plans for integrating the supplemental surveys with the general MRIP surveys, ensuring that new catch estimates are seamlessly incorporated into existing management, science, and stock assessment processes.

Although Louisiana is not testing any supplemental surveys, the state developed a new general survey program, LA Creel. MRIP recently provided funding support for an independent expert review of the program and Louisiana has implemented some design improvements based on recommendations from that review. Louisiana is working collaboratively with MRIP to obtain certification of the LA Creel surveys and develop calibrations needed to account for any consistent differences between LA Creel and MRIP catch statistics. This collaboration will ensure that Louisiana catch statistics can be easily combined with MRIP statistics for other Gulf states to support future stock assessments and fisheries management.

All of these surveys, and the hard work and resources that have gone into them, will complement one another and ultimately help scientists and managers ensure healthy and sustainable fisheries while enhancing opportunities for recreational saltwater fishing.

Ask MRIP

Do you have questions about MRIP or our surveys? Ask us and we'll answer your question in an upcoming newsletter. If you've got a question about MRIP that you'd like answered, please e-mail Dave Bard at David.Bard@noaa.gov.

To learn more about improvements MRIP is making, visit our website at www.countmyfish.noaa.gov.