

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

NMFS Operations Branch	727-570-5305
NMFS Permits and Regulations Branch (see below for tuna permit applications)	727-570-5326
NMFS Southeast Region toll free public service line	866-570- 5301
NMFS nationwide federal fishing violations hotline	800-853-1964
NMFS 24-hour tuna information line (also for tuna permit applications)	888-872-8862 978-281-9260
NMFS Highly Migratory Species Division	301-713-2347
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 (Florida east of St. Marks)	305-415-6778
U.S. Coast Guard, 8th District (St. Marks, Florida to Texas)	504-589-6237
Regional 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 fishing violations	251-476-1256

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission	
information	850-487-0554
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 fishing violations	228-374-5000

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.

COMMERCIAL

FISHING REGULATIONS

FOR

GULF OF MEXICO

FEDERAL WATERS

January 2003



Gray Snapper (*Lutjanus griseus*)

**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: 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 recreational fishing regulations is available from the Council.

Report federal fishing violations:

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

This is a publication of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council pursuant to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Award No. NA17FC2203.

OTHER REQUIREMENTS

- o Reef fish taken under the recreational bag limit may not be sold.
 - o The use of longlines and buoy gear for reef fish is prohibited inside of lines approximating 50 fathoms west and 20 fathoms east of Cape San Blas, Florida. Vessels fishing within this zone and possessing longlines or buoy gear may not exceed the recreational bag limits and for reef fish without bag limits, 5 percent by weight of all fish aboard.
 - 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. In designated "stressed areas" use of fish traps, roller trawls, and power heads is prohibited.
 - 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 Entangling nets may not be used for directed harvest of reef fish.
 - o Vessels with shrimp trawls or entangling net gear aboard may not exceed the recreational reef fish bag limits.
 - o Vessels fishing traps other than fish traps, stone crab traps, or spiny lobster traps may not exceed the recreational reef fish bag limits.
 - o A reef fish trap endorsement is required for using traps, and vessels are limited to 100 traps. Traps must be returned to shore at the end of each trip and must have degradable panels, mesh no smaller than 1" x 2", 1.5" hexagon, or 1.5" by 1.5". Inside 300' contour, traps may not exceed 33 cu.ft. Two 2" x 2" escape windows required on two sides excluding the bottom (4 openings). Hinges and fasteners of degradable panel or access door must be constructed of either untreated jute string of no more than 3/16" diameter or magnesium alloy. Buoy and trap identification required. Traps (or the ends of a string of traps) must be buoyed and may not be tended at night. Pop up buoys are prohibited. Fish traps will be phased out after 2007.
 - 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.
 - o All fish except for bait and oceanic migratory species taken from federal waters must have heads and fins intact through landing. Legal size fish within a bag limit may be consumed at sea.
 - o Closed areas: EEZ portion of Tortugas North - fishing and anchoring of fishing vessels prohibited. Coordinates are 24°40' N. lat., 83°06' W. long./ 24°46' N. lat., 83°06' W. long./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 - fishing and anchoring of fishing vessels prohibited. Coordinates are 24°33' N. lat., 83°09' W. long./ 24°33' N. lat., 83°05' W. long./24°18' N. lat., 83°05' W. long./ 24°18' N. lat., 83°09' W. long.
The Madison and Swanson site and Steamboat Lumps site off the west central coast of Florida are closed to all fishing except for highly migratory species. Coordinates are 29°17' N. lat., 85°50' W. long./ 29°17' N. lat., 85°38' W. long./29°06' N. lat., 85°50' W. long./29°06' N. lat., 85°38' W. long. for the Madison and Swanson Site and 28°14' N. lat., 84°48' W. long./28°14' N. lat., 84°37' W. long./28°03' N. lat., 84°48' W. long./28°03' N. lat., 84°37' W. long. for the Steamboat Lumps site.
- Longlining for highly migratory pelagic is prohibited from the DeSoto Canyon area. Contact the National Marine Fisheries Service at 301-713-2347 for detailed coordinates.

COMMERCIAL REGULATIONS - as of January 2003

Species	Minimum Size Limit (unless noted differently)	Trip Limit	Quotas/Closed Seasons
COASTAL MIGRATORY PELAGICS			
Cobia (ling)	33" fork length	Daily bag and possession limit of 2/person	
King Mackerel	Minimum 24" fork length Maximum of 5% by weight may be undersized. Fork length: Tip of snout to fork of tail	EASTERN ZONE: FL east coast subzone 11/1-3/31 50 fish per trip until quota filled. 4/1 to 10/31 - South Atlantic regulations apply, refer to South Atlantic Council regulation pamphlet for Atlantic-group. FL west coast subzone: Gillnets 6:00 A.M. 1/16/2001 until gear quota - 25,000 lbs./trip. FL west coast subzone: Hook-and-line 7/1 until 75% gear quota - 1,250 lbs./trip. Then 500 lbs./trip until gear quota filled. WESTERN ZONE: 3,000 lbs./trip until quota filled	Quota (subdivided as shown): 3,264,000 lbs. Gulf group EASTERN ZONE: 2,252,160 lbs FL-east subzone 1,041,624 lbs. FL-west subzone 1,210,536 lbs. Northern Hook-and-line 168,912 lbs. Southern Gillnets 520,812 lbs. Southern Hook-and-line 520,812 lbs WESTERN ZONE: 1,011,840 lbs.
Spanish Mackerel	12" fork length	none	quota: 5.187 million lbs. Gulf group. Season opens 4/1 and closes when quota is filled.
REEF FISH			
<u>Snappers</u> Red Snapper	15" total length	2,000 lbs./trip with Class 1 red snapper license 200 lbs./trip with Class 2 red snapper license Commercial harvest prohibited without a Class 1 or 2 red snapper license in addition to a reef fish vessel permit.	quota = 4.65 million lbs. - 3.06 million lbs. on a Feb. 1 opening (open first 10 days of each month until sub-quota filled), remainder on a Oct. 1 opening (open first 10 days of each month until sub-quota is reached).
Vermilion Lane Gray (Mangrove) Mutton Yellowtail Mahogany Schoolmaster Dog Cubera Blackfin Queen Silk Wenchman	10" total length 8" total length 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 none	
		Total length: Tip of snout to tip of tail	
Deep-Water Groupers Misty Snowy Yellowedge Warsaw Speckled Hind	none none none none none	none none none none none	quota: 1.6 million lbs. Includes scamp after shallow-water grouper quota is filled.
<u>Shallow-Water Groupers</u> Black Gag Red Yellowfin Scamp Yellowmouth Rock Hind Red Hind	24" total length 24" total length 20" total length 20" total length 16" total length none none none	none none none none none none none none	quota: 9.8 million lbs. Includes all groupers other than those classified as deep-water groupers. Seasonal closure on commercial harvest and a prohibition on sale of gag, black, and red grouper from February 15 th to March 15 th .
<u>Protected Groupers</u> Jewfish Nassau grouper	Harvest prohibited Harvest prohibited		
Gray Triggerfish	12" total length	none	none
Hogfish	12" fork length	none	Fork length: Tip of snout to fork of tail none
Greater amberjack	(commercial) 36" fork length	none	Commercial closed season during March, April, and May
Lesser Amberjack Banded Rudderfish	14" to 22" fork length slot limit	none none	none none

Species	Minimum Size Limit	Trip Limit	Quotas/Closed Seasons
OTHER SPECIES			
Red Drum		Illegal to harvest or possess in federal waters.	
SHELLFISH			
Stone Crab	Minimum 2 3/4" claw	none	Season Closed 5/16 - 10/14
Spiny Lobster	Carapace more than 3" or Tail more than 5 1/2" Divers must measure in water.	none	Season Closed 4/1 - 8/5
Shrimp	None, but white shrimp taken in the EEZ and transported to Louisiana must comply with the minimum size limit of that state.	none	Royal red shrimp - 392,000 lbs. tail weight. Royal red shrimp season opens 1/1 and closes when quota is filled.
HIGHLY MIGRATORY SPECIES*			
Tuna Bluefin	<u>Categories</u> - <u>curved fork length (CFL)</u> General - 73" CFL Longline - 73" CFL Harpoon - 81" CFL with allowance of 1 fish per trip 73-81" CFL Purse seine - 81" CFL with few allowances for smaller fish	Quotas and trip limits vary by size, permit category and allowable days. Telephone the NMFS Highly Migratory Species Management Division's toll-free 24 hour information line for updates on closure notices, inseason quota adjustments, and updates of commercial landings for Atlantic bluefin tuna 888- 872-8862. For further information on tuna regulations, call the Highly Migratory Species Division at 978-287-9260. Curved fork length (CFL): Tip of the upper jaw to fork of tail measured along the contour of the middle of the body curved fork length	
Bigeye Yellowfin Blackfin Albacore Skipjack Bonito	27" CFL 27" CFL none none none none	none none none none none none	No quota.
<u>Billfish</u> Blue Marlin White Marlin Sailfish Longbill spearfish	99" LJFL 66" LJFL 63" LJFL none	Sale of billfish prohibited. Blue marlin, white marlin, and sailfish may be harvested by rod-and-reel recreational anglers only. Possession prohibited on board a vessel using or having on board a pelagic longline. Billfish must be released without removing them from the water. Lower jaw fork length (LJFL): tip of lower jaw to fork of tail.	
Swordfish	29" cleithrum to caudal keel, 47" LJFL, or 33 lbs., dressed weight (gutted, headed, and finned). No allowance for undersized fish.	<u>Directed limited access permit</u> - No limit during open season, 15 fish per trip during closed season if longline is aboard, 2 fish per trip if using handgear other than harpoon, or 0 fish per trip with harpoon. <u>Incidental limited access permit</u> - 5 fish/trip with trawl, 2 fish per trip any other gear. <u>Handgear limited access permit</u> - no limit during open season, 2 fish per trip during a closed season if not using a harpoon.	The fishing year is from June 1 to May 31. Quotas are adjusted annually based on over- and underharvests, overages of the dead discard allowance, and changes in the amount allocated to the U.S. Please call the Highly Migratory Species Division at 301-713-2347 for details.
<u>SHARKS</u>	Ratio of wet fins to dressed carcass not to exceed 5 Percent. Illegal to remove the fins and return remainder of shark to sea. Sharks not retained must be released uninjured. Trip reports required. Dealer permits required. Semi-annual quotas may be adjusted downward or upward to reflect over or under harvest in the preceding period.		
Large Coastal Ridgeback Non-Ridgeback	54" FL or 30" dressed length* ** none*	4,000 lbs dressed weight./trip-with <u>directed limited access permit</u> ; or 5 fish /trip- with <u>incidental limited access permit</u> *	quota: 1,285 metric tons dressed weight (mt dw)
Small Coastal	none*	no limit with <u>directed limited access permit</u> ;	quota: 1,760 mt dw
Pelagic	none	16 small coastal or pelagic sharks with <u>incidental limited access permit</u> *	quota: 580 mt dw Porbeagle quota: 92 mt dw Blue shark quota: 273 mt dw
<u>Protected Sharks</u> Atlantic angel Bigeye sixgill Caribbean reef Galapagos Night Sixgill	Basking Bigeye thresher Caribbean sharpnose Longfin mako Sand tiger Smalltail Whale Bigeye sand tiger Bignose Dusky Narrowtooth Sevengill White	Harvest prohibited	*Listed species, minimum size limits, and quota limits for highly migratory species are subject to changes. For up to date information, contact the National Marine Fisheries Service at 1-301-713-2347. ** Dressed length is measured from origin of 1 st dorsal fin to pre-caudal pit.
CORALS AND CORAL REEFS			
Allowable Octocorals			quota: 50,000 colonies (Gulf and Atlantic)
Live Rock	Harvest or possession of wild live rock is prohibited. Harvest and possession of aquacultured live rock allowed by permitted individuals.		
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 Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission for more information (850-488-9924).		

ADDITIONAL REMARKS:																															
Stone Crab	Stone crab traps must have a biodegradable panel, and must be permanently marked with their Florida stone crab permit number and color or their federal number and color. Traps must meet Florida construction guidelines.																														
Spiny Lobster	Only diving, bully nets, hoop nets, and traps not to exceed 2'x2'x3' allowed. Bycatch of 5% allowed with trawls. Removal of spiny lobster tail allowed only when fishing exclusively in the EEZ on a trip of 48 hours or more, and requires a tailing permit.																														
Shrimp	Bycatch reduction devices required west of 85°30' W. Long; Prohibited areas to shrimping include the Tortugas Shrimp Sanctuary, Texas Flower Gardens, and the Florida Middle Ground (see next page for other protected areas); Traps are prohibited for the harvest of royal red shrimp.																														
Cobia (ling)	Drift gill nets are prohibited.																														
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	Allowable gear: rod and reel (including downriggers), handline, harpoon, bandit gear, and purse seine nets. Incidental catch allowed with purse seine nets, fixed gear, traps, and longline.																														
Tuna - others	Allowable gear: rod and reel (including downriggers), handline, harpoon, bandit gear, purse seine nets, and longline.																														
Billfish	Retention prohibited on longline vessels; must be released in water alive.																														
Swordfish	Allowable gear: Longline, handline, harpoon, rod-and-reel, and bandit.																														
Reef Fish	Sea basses, grunts, and porgies have been removed from federal management, and may be subject to state regulations even if caught in federal waters.																														
Sharks:	<p>Large Coastals:</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>Ridgeback Species:</td> <td>Sandbar</td> <td>Silky</td> <td>Tiger</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Non-Ridgeback Species:</td> <td>Blacktip</td> <td>Spinner</td> <td>Lemon</td> <td>Bull</td> <td>Great hammerhead</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>Nurse</td> <td>Smooth hammerhead</td> <td>Scalloped hammerhead</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table> <p>Small Coastals:</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td></td> <td>Atlantic sharpnose</td> <td>Blacknose</td> <td>Bonnethead</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table> <p>Pelagics:</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td></td> <td>Shortfin mako</td> <td>Thresher</td> <td>Oceanic whitetip</td> <td>Blue</td> <td>Porbeagle</td> </tr> </table>	Ridgeback Species:	Sandbar	Silky	Tiger			Non-Ridgeback Species:	Blacktip	Spinner	Lemon	Bull	Great hammerhead		Nurse	Smooth hammerhead	Scalloped hammerhead				Atlantic sharpnose	Blacknose	Bonnethead				Shortfin mako	Thresher	Oceanic whitetip	Blue	Porbeagle
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COMMERCIAL PERMIT REQUIREMENTS: (Earned income qualification criteria apply to mackerel, reef fish, and shark permits.) 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 888-872-8862 or 978-281-9260.																															
Permit	Required For:																														
Spiny lobster federal vessel permit or Florida commercial harvester license and certificates	Florida commercial harvester license and certificates required for harvest or possession in excess of the bag limits in the EEZ off Florida or to land or sell in Florida. Federal vessel permit required for harvest or possession in excess of the bag limits in the EEZ other than off Florida or sale other than Florida.																														
Stone crab federal vessel permit or Florida commercial harvester license and certificates	Florida commercial harvester license and certificates required for harvest or possession in excess of the bag limits in the EEZ off Florida or to land or sell in Florida. Federal vessel permit required for harvest or possession in excess of the bag limits in the EEZ other than off Florida or sale other than Florida.																														
Spiny lobster tail-separation permit	Possession of a separated spiny lobster tail in or from the EEZ aboard a vessel. Also requires a spiny lobster federal vessel permit or Florida state license and certificates.																														
Shrimp	Permit required for all vessels that intend to fish for shrimp in EEZ waters of the Gulf of Mexico.																														
Mackerel vessel permit	Harvest of king or Spanish mackerel under quota and in excess of the bag limits. Issuance of new king mackerel permits is under a moratorium until October 15, 2005 but existing permits are transferable. There is no moratorium on issuance of Spanish mackerel permits, but these permits are not transferable.																														
King mackerel gillnet endorsement	Harvest of king mackerel in the Florida west coast subzone using a gillnet. Also requires a mackerel vessel permit.																														
Reef fish vessel permit	Harvest and sale of all reef fish listed in the Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan under quota (where applicable) and in excess of the bag limits (where applicable), except jewfish and Nassau grouper (for which all harvest is prohibited). Issuance of new reef fish permits is under a moratorium until December 31, 2005. Existing permits are transferable.																														
Red snapper Class 1 or 2 license	A Class 1 red snapper license is required in addition to a reef fish permit to harvest red snapper at the 2,000 pound trip limit. A Class 2 red snapper license is required in addition to a reef fish permit to harvest red snapper at the 200 pound trip limit. Other reef fish permitted vessels are prohibited from commercial harvest. No new red snapper licenses are being issued, but existing red snapper licenses are transferable.																														
Fish trap endorsement	Required in addition to a reef fish permit to harvest reef fish using fish traps. No new fish trap endorsements are being issued. Endorsements are non-transferable except to another vessel owned by the endorsement holder, immediate family members or in case of death or disability of the endorsement holder. After February 7, 2007, all fish trap endorsements become invalid and the use of fish traps to harvest reef fish will be prohibited.																														
Aquacultured live rock permit	Possession or harvest of cultivated live rock. Appropriate Florida state permits are also required to land live rock in Florida. Wild live rock possession or harvest is prohibited.																														
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.																														
<u>Commercial tuna categories:</u> General, Incidental catch, Charter/headboat, Purse seine boat, Harpoon boat, Charter/headboat	Vessels must have one of these permits to sell Atlantic bluefin tuna, albacore, Atlantic bonito, bigeye tuna, skipjack tuna or yellowfin tuna. Separate quota and gear restrictions apply to each category. For further information on required permits for tuna and other highly migratory species, contact the NMFS HMS Management Division at 978-281-9260.																														
Swordfish vessel permit	Vessels must have a directed or incidental limited access permit for commercial harvest and sale of swordfish under quota.																														
Shark vessel permit	Vessels must have a directed or incidental limited access permit for harvest and sale of sharks listed in the management unit of the Atlantic Sharks Fishery Management Plan under quota and in excess of the bag limits.																														
FISH LENGTHS																															
Fork length: Tip of snout to fork of tail	Curved fork length: Tip of the upper jaw to fork of tail measured along the contour of the middle of the body																														
Total length: Tip of snout to tip of tail	Carcass length: Curved measure from posterior edge of gill opening to anterior portion of caudal keel																														
Dressed weight: Fish has been gutted and the head and fins removed, but is otherwise in whole condition																															