

RECREATIONAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

**Current Issues Facing Recreational Fisheries in
the Gulf of Mexico**

GULF STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

March 15, 2017

Gulfport, Mississippi



Number 271

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CURRENT ISSUES FACING RECREATIONAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission • 67th Annual Meeting
Gulfport, Mississippi
March 15, 2017 • 8:00 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.

Agenda

- 8:30 Welcome and Introductions – *Dave Donaldson/Gregg Bray (Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission)*
- 8:40 Current Challenges Facing Recreational Fisheries Management – *Russ Dunn (NOAA Fisheries)*
- 9:00 Current Challenges Facing Recreational Marine Data Collection – *Gordon Colvin (NOAA Fisheries MRIP)*
- 9:20 Stock Assessment Data Needs for the Gulf Region – *Dr. David Gloeckner (NOAA Fisheries SEFSC)*
- 9:40 *Break*
- 10:00 Gulf Angler Focus Group Initiative: Alternative Management Options? – *Ken Haddad (American Sportfishing Association)*
- 10:20 Gulf of Mexico For-Hire Electronic Logbook Research – *Bob Gill (Gulf Seafood Institute)*
- 10:40 Alternative Management – Can Management Fit the Available Data – *Dick Brame (Coastal Conservation Association)*
- 11:00 Q & A with Speakers - *All*
- 11:30 Closing Remarks – *Gregg Bray (Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission)*
- 11:45 *Adjourn*

Summary

Recreational landings are a significant component for several of the managed marine fish species in the Gulf of Mexico. Some of those species are currently overfished or undergoing overfishing. For this reason, recreational fisheries data collection and management are important topics for discussion. GSMFC invited six speakers to the spring 2017 annual meeting to discuss issues and challenges facing marine recreational fisheries management and data collection.

The general session started with three presentations from NOAA Fisheries. Russ Dunn, National Policy Advisor on Recreational Fisheries, gave the first presentation discussion on the current challenges facing fishery management. He stated that NOAA's overall goal is to provide maximum access to the resource while still managing for conservation as guided by the law. He stated that population growth coupled with the increase in fishing activity has presented major challenges under the current management practices, which require following annual catch limits for many federal species. Gordon Colvin representing MRIP provided a presentation highlighting the challenges facing MRIP data collection efforts. Obtaining sufficient funding to maintain base sampling levels, improving accuracy of discarded catch, implementing electronic logbooks for the for-hire sector, and dealing with accuracy issues for reef fish and rare event species are all extremely big challenges at this point. Dave Gloeckner from the Southeast Fishery Science Center provided a presentation on stock assessment needs for our region. Stock assessment scientists need more data on size and age data, depth information on live discards, and calibrated estimates for the multiple surveys being completed to produce a single time series of landings for the Gulf of Mexico.

Ken Haddad representing the American Sportfishing Association gave a presentation on alternative management strategies. This was the result of a focus group of private anglers, for-hire captains, NGO's, and state and federal fishery scientists. The purpose was to consider a suite of management options that could provide reasonable access and sustainable harvest of Gulf reef species. The group did not provide recommendations, but options that warrant further analysis and review. Options included status quo management, maximizing days within current framework, harvest tags, depth/distance based management, and a reef fish season. It was concluded that likely a hybrid of options would be best and significant modeling and analyses are necessary first to find the best solution.

Bob Gill representing the Gulf Seafood Institute provided a presentation on the electronic for-hire logbook project being tested by CLS America. The goal is to improve charter for-hire data collection in the Gulf of Mexico to produce trip level catch and effort data. Currently 234 vessels have volunteered to participate and additional vessels in Louisiana will be added in 2017. Current findings show that difficulty exists in matching trip reports with validation data collection. In the future, it will be important to more clearly define logbook trips to make matching more successful. They also found that a large amount of communication is necessary in the beginning and keeping the data collection tool simple is also important.

Dick Brame, Coastal Conservation Association Regional Fisheries Director, gave the final presentation highlighting the difficulties in using harvest estimates to manage species under an annual catch limit. Often times when the population is increasing, the ACL is exceeded, resulting in reductions and closures. When the population is decreasing, the ACL is not exceeded, and everything appears fine. These are non-credible management outcomes. He suggested managing recreational fisheries using the fishing

mortality rate and also measuring abundance annually or semi-annually.

After all the presentations were completed we held an open discussion to allow the audience to ask questions to the presenters. We received a large number of questions mostly focused around current challenges and how the proposed management alternatives might be investigated and evaluated. Several members of the audience expressed an interest in being able to continue these discussions into the near future.

GSMFC received many positive comments during and after the general session. The Commission has agreed to make efforts to continue these positive discussions to help facilitate solutions to recreational fisheries problems. The goal is to continue to explore ways to better manage our recreational fisheries and promote a collaborative approach between data collection and management.

Abstracts

Current Challenges Facing Recreational Fisheries Management

Mr. Russ Dunn, NOAA Fisheries

The Gulf of Mexico contributes a significant portion of landings and expenditures for marine recreational fisheries in the United States. NOAA Fisheries overall goal is to provide maximum access to the resource while still managing for conservation as guided by the law. Population growth coupled with the increase in fishing activity has presented major challenges under the current management practices which require following annual catch limits for many federal species. Some of the current issues are differing state and federal management regulations, data precision and timeliness, increasing numbers of recreational discards, and time lags between ACL management and accountability measure impacts.

Current Challenges Facing Recreational Marine Data Collection

Mr. Gordon Colvin, ESC Federal in Support of NOAA Fisheries MRIP

Marine recreation data collection is facing multiple challenges to provide high quality data for science and management. Obtaining sufficient funding to maintain base sampling levels continues to be difficult. Improving accuracy of discarded catch is important and recreational fishing seasons get shorter. Implementing electronic logbooks for the for-hire sector is becoming an important topic for the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic. Dealing with accuracy issues for reef fish and rare event species are also big challenges at this point.

Stock Assessment Data Needs for the Gulf Region

Dr. David Gloeckner, NOAA Fisheries Southeast Fishery Science Center

Marine recreational fisheries account for a large number of trips and expenditures in the Gulf of Mexico. Over one third of all trips in the U.S. are taken in the Gulf of Mexico. Over 50% of total landings and discards of reef fishing come from charter and private boats. Stock assessment scientists need more data on size and age data, depth information on live discards, and calibrated estimates for the multiple surveys being completed to produce a single time series of landings for the Gulf of Mexico.

Gulf Angler Focus Group Initiative: Alternative Management Options?

Mr. Ken Haddad, American Sportfishing Association

In order to provide substantive and consistent input and better influence decision-making by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, angler organizations including the American Sportfishing Association, Coastal Conservation Association, Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, and Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, organized and convened a Gulf Angler Focus Group Initiative. The purpose of this work was to consider a suite of management options that could provide reasonable access and sustainable harvest of Gulf reef species. This was the result of a focus group of private anglers, for-hire captains, NGO's, and state and federal fishery scientists. The group did not provide recommendations, but options that warrant further analysis and review. Options included status quo management, maximizing days within current framework, harvest tags, depth/distance based management, and a reef fish season. It was concluded that, likely, a hybrid of options would be best and significant modeling and analyses are necessary first to find the best solution.

Gulf of Mexico For-Hire Electronic Logbook

Mr. Bob Gill, Gulf Seafood Institute

Improving charter for-hire data collection in the Gulf of Mexico has been an emerging priority from stakeholders over the last several years. Moving towards electronic reporting technology to increase timeliness and accuracy is essential. The goal of this research was to improve charter for-hire data collection in the Gulf of Mexico to produce trip level catch and effort data. Currently, 234 vessels have volunteered to participate and additional vessels in Louisiana will be added in 2017. Current findings show that difficulty exists in matching trip reports with validation data collection. In the future, it will be important to more clearly define logbook trips to make matching more successful. They also found that a large amount of communication is necessary in the beginning and keeping the data collection tool simple is also important.

Alternative Management – Can Management Fit the Available Data

Mr. Dick Brame, Coastal Conservation Association

Concerns exist that commercial and recreational fisheries are being managed with the same goals and tools even though they are fundamentally different activities. The problem is using harvest estimates to manage quotas is difficult considering current time lags and many species have large standard errors. Hard ACL management can lead to non-credible management outcomes. Often times when the population is increasing, the ACL is exceeded, resulting in reductions and closures. When the population is decreasing, the ACL is not exceeded, and everything appears fine. These are non-credible management outcomes. He suggested managing recreational fisheries using the fishing mortality rate and also measuring abundance annually or semi-annually.

Panel Round Table – Current Issues Facing Recreational Fisheries Management

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