



Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission 2026 Request for Contractor Support

The Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC) in collaboration with Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and NOAA Fisheries is looking for contractor support to conduct a methodological comparison of the MS Creel, AL Creel, and LA Creel survey programs with the Florida State Reef Fish Survey (SRFS). The primary purpose of this comparison is to assess whether private recreational catch and effort estimates produced by each program are statistically combinable without calibration for use in Gulf-wide stock assessment and fisheries management. This work will further serve to demonstrate the capacity of state survey programs to complement and, where appropriate, reduce dependence on MRIP-FES for reef fish estimates for Gulf of America fisheries management.

Statement of Work (SOW)

Accurate, timely, and regionally consistent recreational and for-hire catch and effort data are essential to effective fisheries management and are fundamental inputs to stock assessments conducted for Gulf of America reef fish species. The states of Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, and Florida each operate independent recreational survey programs: MS Creel, AL Creel, LA Creel, and Florida State Reef Fish Survey (SRFS), respectively — that collect intercept-based catch coupled with a separate effort survey from both the private recreational and for-hire (charter/headboat) sectors (with the exception of Florida SRFS, which does not include the for-hire sector). While these programs share broadly similar designs, differences in sampling frames, expansion methodologies, and stratification approaches raise a fundamental question for stock assessment and management: whether estimates of recreational and for-hire catch and effort produced by each program can be treated as statistically combinable across jurisdictions without requiring calibration.

The National Marine Fisheries Service's Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP), including its Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (APAIS) and Fishing Effort Survey (FES), currently serves as the primary source for Gulf-wide recreational estimates used in stock assessments and Council management actions. State programs represent an increasingly important complement to this federal data infrastructure, and the potential to combine state-level estimates into a coherent Gulf-wide dataset could meaningfully advance both the precision and responsiveness of fisheries management. This project, coordinated through the GSMFC GulfFIN program, seeks to conduct a methodological comparison of the MS Creel, AL Creel, LA Creel, and FL SRFS to determine whether recreational catch and effort estimates produced by these programs are combinable without calibration for stock assessment and management purposes, and to identify any conditions or protocol harmonization steps necessary to support that goal.

Tasks

The contractor will conduct a multi-stage analysis addressing the combinability of private recreational catch and effort estimates across the MS Creel, AL Creel, LA Creel, and FL SRFS programs. While the analysis isn't constrained to specific species, it should be limited to those that are federally managed, distributed across the region, and commonly observed in the recreational sector. More specifically the contractor will:

1. Survey Design Documentation and Comparison

A single kickoff meeting, convened with representatives from all four state partners, NOAA Fisheries, and GSMFC Staff, will initiate this process; subsequent coordination will occur remotely.

The contractor will conduct a comprehensive review of documentation and the sampling methodology employed by each of the four survey programs. Because existing documentation is largely available but varies in completeness across programs, the contractor will compile available materials and supplement any gaps through structured interviews and data requests with each State as needed.

More specifically, the contractor will:

- Compile and review all available sampling protocol documentation, published methodological reports, and prior GSMFC or peer-reviewed literature relevant to each program.
- Document, for each program, the following components: sampling frame construction and site selection; temporal and spatial stratification; intercept procedures; expansion and estimation methodology; QA/QC procedures; data dictionaries and field descriptions for all estimation and raw field survey data; and any significant methodological changes that have occurred over the program's history.
- Document history of state reef fish regulations during the time periods corresponding to provided estimation datasets
- Produce a standardized side-by-side methodological comparison matrix identifying areas of structural similarity and divergence across programs, with particular attention to features likely to affect the combinability of recreational estimates.
- Deliver a Task 1 memorandum summarizing findings, flagging methodological features likely to affect combinability for stock assessment and management purposes.

2. Variance and Precision Analysis

Using the methodological framework established in Task 1, the contractor will obtain and analyze recreational catch and effort estimates from each of the four survey programs. Because program histories vary considerably — the MS and AL Creel programs are relatively recent, while the LA Creel and FL SRFS have longer operational records — the reference period for comparison in the case studies will necessarily be constrained to 2024-2026 for estimated effort and 2025-2026 for estimated landings across all four programs. The contractor will document this constraint explicitly and assess its implications for the robustness of combinability conclusions. Program-generated expanded estimates with associated variance measures are the primary analytical data product; raw trip-level intercept data may be requested secondarily where additional diagnostic detail is needed to explain observed patterns in the estimates.

More specifically, the contractor will:

- Coordinate with each state partner to establish the common period of data availability and obtain recreational estimates at the finest temporal and spatial resolution the data support, documenting the resolution achieved for each program and any asymmetries across programs.
- Calculate or compile means, coefficients of variation (CVs), standard errors, and confidence intervals for key estimate domains — including total trips, catch and mean effort by species — within each program over the common reference period.
- Compare variance and precision across programs for recreational sector, identifying domains of consistent reliability versus those characterized by high uncertainty.
- Assess whether precision differences across programs are attributable to design features or implementation issues such as sample size and document the implications of those differences for combinability in a stock assessment or management context.
- Deliver a Task 2 memorandum summarizing findings, flagging methodological features likely to affect combinability for stock assessment and management purposes.

3. Statistical Combinability Assessment

Building on the methodological comparison and variance analysis completed in Tasks 1 and 2, the contractor will conduct a formal statistical assessment of whether recreational and effort estimates produced by the MS Creel, AL Creel, LA Creel, and FL SRFS can be combined across programs without calibration for purposes of stock assessment and Gulf-wide management. The contractor is not required to apply a specific statistical framework but must clearly justify the approach selected, demonstrate its appropriateness for the design characteristics of the programs under comparison, and acknowledge limitations imposed by the short common reference period available for the MS and AL programs.

More specifically, the contractor will:

- Apply a statistically appropriate, justified methodology to assess the combinability of recreational catch and effort estimates, across the available temporal and spatial domains.
- Produce a combinability determination — the framing and structure of which the contractor shall recommend based on the analytical findings — addressing the conditions under which each state’s estimates can or cannot be combined for stock assessment and management purposes.
- If estimates are found to be combinable, document the scope of that finding, the assumptions required to maintain its validity over time, and any implications for its use in formal stock assessment processes.
- If estimates are found to not be combinable, define the magnitude and directionality of the differences. Describe the methodological gap(s), identify the specific design or estimation features driving the differences, and provide potential solutions to alleviate methodological gaps.
- Deliver a Task 3 Analytical report summarizing combinability, analytical framework, findings, and characterization of any identified methodological gaps.

4. Recommendations and Reporting

The contractor will synthesize findings from Tasks 1–3 into a final technical report and deliver a formal presentation of results to the Gulf Council’s SSC. The report will be a single document with a non-technical executive summary at the front followed by the full technical findings and statistical documentation.

More specifically, the contractor will:

- Circulate a draft final report to the GSMFC technical team and all state partners for a structured comment period prior to finalization. The contractor will respond to comments in writing and revise accordingly before submitting the final report.
- Include an executive summary at the front of the final report, suitable for Gulf Council members and agency leadership, presenting the combinability determination, its scope and limitations, and key management recommendations.
- Deliver a formal presentation of findings to the Gulf Council SSC, with slide materials provided to GSMFC and State partners at least two weeks in advance.
- Submit all data and analytical files used in the analysis in a documented, reproducible format as part of the final deliverable package.

Deliverables

The contractor shall produce the following deliverables, each subject to formal acceptance by GSMFC staff in consultation with state partners:

- Task 1 and Task 2 Memos — The contractor shall produce interim technical memos summarizing findings from the methodological comparison and variance analyses at their discretion. Such memoranda are encouraged as coordination tools but are not required formal deliverables.
- Task 3 Analytical Report — Formal statistical combinability assessment for recreational estimates, including the analytical framework, findings, and characterization of any identified methodological gaps. (Formal interim deliverable)
- Final Report — Technical report with executive summary, incorporating all task findings along with a structured state partner comment period.
- Gulf Council SSC Presentation — Slide materials delivered to GSMFC no fewer than two weeks prior to the scheduled Council meeting, followed by formal presentation at a Gulf SSC meeting.
- Reproducible Analytical Package — All data and analytical files used in the analysis, submitted in a documented and reproducible format concurrent with the final report.
- Contingency Progress Reporting — In the event that a task milestone is delayed beyond its contractual completion window or encounters significant methodological challenges, the contractor shall provide a written status update to GSMFC Staff within 10 business days of identifying the issue, describing the nature of the delay, its projected impact on the overall timeline, and proposed corrective action.

Timeline

The contract period of performance is 215 days from the date of award. The contractor shall propose a detailed project timeline in their submission and the final timeline will be included in the contractual agreement. The following milestone structure represents the expected sequence and approximate schedule:

- **Days 1–15** — Contract initiation; execution of data access agreements with state partners; kickoff meeting with all state program coordinators and GSMFC staff.
- **Days 15–45** — Documentation review, structured interviews as needed, and development of the methodological comparison matrix. Task 1 Memorandum due by Day 90 (optional but encouraged).
- **Days 45–100** — Data acquisition from state partners for the common reference period; variance and precision analysis for recreational estimates. Task 2 Memorandum due by Day 180 (optional but encouraged).
- **Days 100–150** — Statistical combinability assessment for recreational estimates; state partner consultation on preliminary findings. Task 3 Analytical Report due by Day 270.
- **Days 150–200** — Draft final report circulated to GSMFC technical team and state partners for comment; contractor response and revision.
- **Days 200–215** — Final report submission; Gulf Council SSC presentation scheduled in coordination with GSMFC; reproducible analytical package delivered.

General Proposal Information

All proposals must be submitted to the GSMFC GulfFIN Program Manager in the following standard format:

- Applicant Name(s): Identify the name(s) of the applicant.
- Project Title: A brief statement to identify the project.
- Requested Award Amount: Provide the total requested amount of proposal.
- Requested Award Period: Provide the total time period of the proposed project. Reimbursable work cannot extend beyond December 31, 2027.
- Approach: List all procedures necessary to accomplish the desired tasks.
- Cost Summary (Budget): Detail all costs to be incurred in this project, including, but not limited to: personnel, equipment, supplies, travel ,indirect costs.
- Principal Investigator (PI): List the PIs and their experience in conducting the proposed sampling

Applicants should be willing to work closely with the GSMFC, state, and federal partners. Proposals will be reviewed by a technical team with representatives from each state partner, NOAA Fisheries and the Commission. The technical team will make final decisions on project awards. The review and evaluation of all written proposals will take into consideration the description of eligible projects, funding availability and ability to complete the project in the established timeframe. The entities that receive project funding must abide by the established reporting requirements. If accepted for funding, this project must comply with all federal government audit principles/procedures and the Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions.

The following criteria will be used to evaluate proposals:

- Qualifications of personnel assigned to project
- Range of similar activities performed by applicant
- Description of approaches including the statistical validity of those approaches
- Cost of proposal

All proposals must be submitted by August 28, 2026. Proposals must be submitted in electronic format (.pdf preferred) and delivered to gbray@gsmfc.org. We encourage all submitters to confirm submission with a separate email. If you have any questions please contact:

Gregg Bray, GulfFIN Program Manager
Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission
2404 Government Street
Ocean Springs, Mississippi 39564
Phone: (228) 875-5912 FAX: (228) 875-6604
E-mail: gbray@gsmfc.org