



**Project Title:** “U.S. Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish FishSource Profiles Update”

**Grantee:** Gulf & South Atlantic Fisheries Foundation, Inc.  
Frank Helies, Program Director  
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**Award Period:** November 5, 2012 - January 31, 2013

In 2011, Darden announced the first of three Fishery Improvement Projects to rebuild world fisheries. Through the Clinton Global Initiative, they created an alliance with Publix Super Markets and the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership (SFP) to improve the data gathering of grouper and snapper fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico. The goal was to assist in the various stakeholders' efforts to better manage the fishery and is a part of Darden's commitment to sustainability. The effort with Publix and SFP seeks to bring fisherman, wholesalers, distributors, buyers, and other fishery stakeholders together to improve the long-term condition of the Gulf of Mexico fishery.

One of the critical components of this effort was to assure there is accurate information available to manage the health of the grouper and snapper fisheries in the region against recognized indicators of sustainability. SFP hosts a database, FishSource ([www.fishsource.com](http://www.fishsource.com)), of publicly available data on global fisheries, used by many retailers and food service companies as the basis for their sustainability assessments.

Darden requested the Gulf and South Atlantic Fisheries Foundation, Inc.'s (Foundation) assistance in updating this database for Gulf of Mexico gag grouper, red grouper, and red snapper. The goal of these updates was to provide more information on the current status of the fish stocks to inform the development of the improvement project.

With input from SFP's FishSource Content Manager, the Program Director became acquainted with the FishSource online platform. All aspects of the 3 species' profiles were updated: ID page, Scores page, Summary page, Sustainability Info page, Parameters, and Sources. The overview summaries outlining the strengths, weaknesses, and improvement options for the 3 species are listed below:

### **Red Snapper - Overview Summary**

#### *Strengths:*

Red snapper have been the subject of multiple stock assessments since 1990. A new benchmark assessment is currently being conducted. A commercial individual transferable quota (ITQ) program for red snapper was implemented in 2007 and involves stringent reporting and

enforcement oversight. Since implementation, the commercial red snapper quota has not been exceeded. Shrimp fishing effort has declined substantially which has a positive impact on juvenile survival. According to fishers, the stock is larger than ever seen before.

*Weaknesses:*

The red snapper stock is overfished, but not undergoing overfishing. Historically, compliance in the fishery has been low, as quotas were routinely exceeded. However, the commercial fishery is currently prosecuted through an ITQ program, which has led to nearly perfect compliance since its inception in 2007. The recreational fishery continues to exceed its sector allocation. The projections show the stock will not be rebuilt until 2021.

*Options:*

Better estimates of bycatch and discards (including juveniles in the shrimp trawl fishery) in the fishery would improve assessment and management quality. Managers need to establish regulations that provide the recreational fishery with access to the resource, under an accountable fisheries management plan, to prevent the continual overage of the quota by the recreational sector.

**Red Grouper - Overview Summary**

*Strengths:*

The latest benchmark assessment was found to be a significant improvement over past assessments. Results from this assessment indicated that the red grouper stock was not overfished and overfishing was not occurring. Additionally, the stock was determined to be recovered in 2007 based on an estimated spawning stock in excess of the MSY level as of January 1, 2005. Projections in the update assessment show positive trends for SSB and landings. A commercial ITQ program for shallow water grouper and tilefish was implemented in 2009 and involves stringent reporting and enforcement oversight. Since implementation, the commercial red grouper quota has not been exceeded. Also, the recreational sector has not exceeded their quota in recent years.

*Weaknesses:*

Though the stock is not overfished, it was found to have declined since 2005. The decline was attributed to a severe red tide episodic mortality event. Additionally, both regulatory and non-target species discarding occurs in the fishery.

*Options:*

Better estimates of bycatch and discards in the fishery would improve assessment and management quality.

**Gag grouper - Overview Summary**

*Strengths:*

The latest benchmark assessment was conducted in 2006 with an update in 2009 and a rerun in 2010. A commercial ITQ program for shallow water grouper and tilefish was implemented in 2009 and involves stringent reporting and enforcement oversight. Since implementation, the commercial gag grouper quota has not been exceeded. Also, the recreational sector has not exceeded their quota in recent years. The stock is projected to rebuild in seven years.

*Weaknesses:*

The stock is estimated to be overfished and undergoing overfishing. Since 2004 spawning stock biomass has declined sharply, with the red tide event negatively affecting the stock. The reduction in catches since 2008 has been primarily attributed to a reduction in effort as a result of declining economic conditions rather than a decline in the gag population. Both regulatory and non-target species discarding occurs in the fishery and the recreational sector is estimated to have a larger impact on the gag stock.

*Options:*

Better estimates of bycatch and discards in the fishery would improve assessment and management quality.

Darden, Publix, and SFP convened a supplier roundtable on Wednesday, January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2013, from 11:30am to 3:00pm at the Seasons 52 Restaurant in Tampa, FL. The Foundation Executive and Program Directors were invited to attend and the Program Director presented the results of this project to the attendees (presentation document included).

**Recommendations:**

The Gulf of Mexico red snapper profile should be updated when the upcoming benchmark assessment reports are published (Fall 2013).

Other species and complexes, such as shallow water grouper, tilefish, vermilion snapper, amberjacks, and other reef fishes, will eventually need to be added to the database. The reef fish hook-and-line fishery in the Gulf of Mexico is a multi-species fishery. Non-targeted species are routinely landed. Many of these species, while technically bycatch, are brought to the marketplace. Expanding the database to include these species would help inform the retailer/consumer.

The future role of the Foundation in the Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Fishery Improvement Project can be explored as the results of the video monitoring pilot program are finalized.



## **Sustainable Fisheries Partnership - Fish Source**

### **Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Profiles**

#### **Red Grouper**

##### Stock Status:

Not overfished / not undergoing overfishing

##### Management:

- Commercial: ITQ program - Quota: 2013 - 5.53 mp gw (76% of TAC)
- Recreational: Bag limit, size limits, closed seasons - Quota: 2013 - 1.74 mp gw (24% of TAC)

##### Trends:

Landings: Declined since 2004 – red tide episodic mortality event negatively impacted the stock

Fishing Mortality: Declining since 2000

Biomass: Increasing since 1986 – declined sharply in 2005 due to red tide – steadily increasing again

##### Bycatch/Discards:

Commercial sector harvests other grouper/snapper species while targeting red grouper; however, shallow water grouper make up ~72% of trips targeting red grouper. Fishers able to lease red snapper shares to reduce red snapper discards as well.

##### Notes:

Stock is rebuilt and managed at the optimum yield level.

## **Gag Grouper**

### Stock Status:

Overfished / undergoing overfishing

### Management:

- Commercial: ITQ program - Quota: 2013 – 0.708 mp gw (39% of TAC)
- Recreational: Bag limit, size limits, closed seasons - Quota: 2013 - 1.29 mp gw (61% of TAC)

### Trends:

Landings: Declined sharply since 2004 (quota reductions) – red tide episodic mortality event negatively impacted the stock

Fishing Mortality: Increasing since 1984

Biomass: Decreased since 2001 – declined sharply in 2005 due to red tide

### Bycatch/Discards:

Commercial sector harvests other grouper/snapper species while targeting gag grouper; however, shallow water grouper make up ~60% of trips targeting gag grouper. Fishers able to lease red snapper shares to reduce red snapper discards as well.

### Notes:

Fishery is under a rebuilding plan. Stock is scheduled to be rebuilt in 7 years (2018). The recreational fishery has a larger impact on the gag grouper stock.

## **Red Snapper**

### Stock Status:

Overfished / not undergoing overfishing

### Management:

- Commercial: ITQ program - Quota: 2013 – 3.71 mp gw
- Recreational: Bag limit, size limits, closed seasons - Quota: 2013 – 3.95 mp gw

### Trends:

Landings: Fluctuated over time, recent years have seen 5-7 mp gw

Fishing Mortality: Increasing in recreational sector since 1980

Biomass: Increasing since 1980

Bycatch/Discards:

Currently, under the ITQ program, commercial discards are attributed to the 13" total length size limit and insufficient allocation as the stock increases and expands throughout the Gulf.

Recent landings suggest the recreational sector continues to overharvest the ACL and the fishing season length continues to shrink even though the ABC has increased. The recreational sector exceeded its quota by 1.26 mp in 2008 and by 2.17 mp in 2009.

NMFS estimates that the shrimp fishery bycatch equals 2 to 5 million juvenile red snapper annually. However, research on shrimp fishing effort has shown that shrimp trawling effort in the statistical areas (10-21) and depths (10-30 fathoms) where juvenile red snapper are found has experienced substantial reduction since 2002.

Notes:

Fishery is under a rebuilding plan. Stock is scheduled to be rebuilt by between 2021 and 2029. The recreational fishery has a larger impact on the gag grouper stock. Because the recreational sector has been experiencing short red snapper fishing seasons even though the quota has been increasing, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council will be discussing options for a regulatory amendment that would consider adjustments to the structure of the red snapper season by exploring weekend or weekday only red snapper fishing for both the regular snapper season and for any supplemental seasons that may occur.