



F/SER29:MFL

MEMORANDUM FOR: The File

FROM: John C. McGovern, Ph.D.
Assistant Regional Administrator
Sustainable Fisheries Division

SUBJECT: 2023 Gulf of Mexico (Gulf) Red Grouper Recreational Season Closure

Red grouper in federal waters of the Gulf are managed under the Fishery Management Plan for the Reef Fish Resources of the Gulf of Mexico (Reef Fish FMP). In March 2013, the final rule for Amendment 38 to the Reef Fish FMP specified a red grouper accountability measure that closes the recreational sector to harvest of red grouper if the annual catch limit (ACL) is exceeded for the current year. Additionally when the recreational ACL is exceeded, then in the following year the recreational sector will close when landings meet or are projected to meet the annual catch target (ACT). In 2022 the red grouper recreational ACL was exceeded; therefore, in 2023 the recreational sector will close when the ACT is met or predicted to be met. Additionally, a final rule that was published on July 8, 2022, set the ACL to 2.02 million pounds (mp) gutted weight (gw) and the ACT to 1.84 mp gw.

Past Gulf red grouper recreational landings were obtained from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center on May 4, 2023. This dataset includes landings estimates from the Marine Recreational Information Program Fishing Effort Survey (MRIP-FES), Southeast Region Headboat Survey (Headboat), Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (Louisiana), and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (Texas).

A prediction of 2023 recreational red grouper landings is needed to determine if the red grouper 2023 ACT of 1.84 mp gw is expected to be met. It is assumed recent landings are a reflection of future landings. Recreational landings are available and complete for the recent past years of 2020, 2021, and 2022. There were closures to the recreational harvest of red grouper from September through December of 2021 and 2022. Therefore, predictions of the recreational sector closure for 2023 were made using landings data from January 1 through August 31. Predictions were made by two-month wave since the majority of the recreational landings are arranged by two-month wave. To account for variations in landings predictions, three different recreational scenarios were generated: 1) landings from 2022, 2) a two-year average by wave of landings from 2021 and 2022, and 3) a three-year average by wave of landings from 2020, 2021, and 2022. All of the landings by two-month wave are plotted in Figure 1 and shown in Table 1. The cumulative sum of the three landings scenarios predicts the ACT is expected to be met as early as July 21 and as late as August 15 (Table 2).



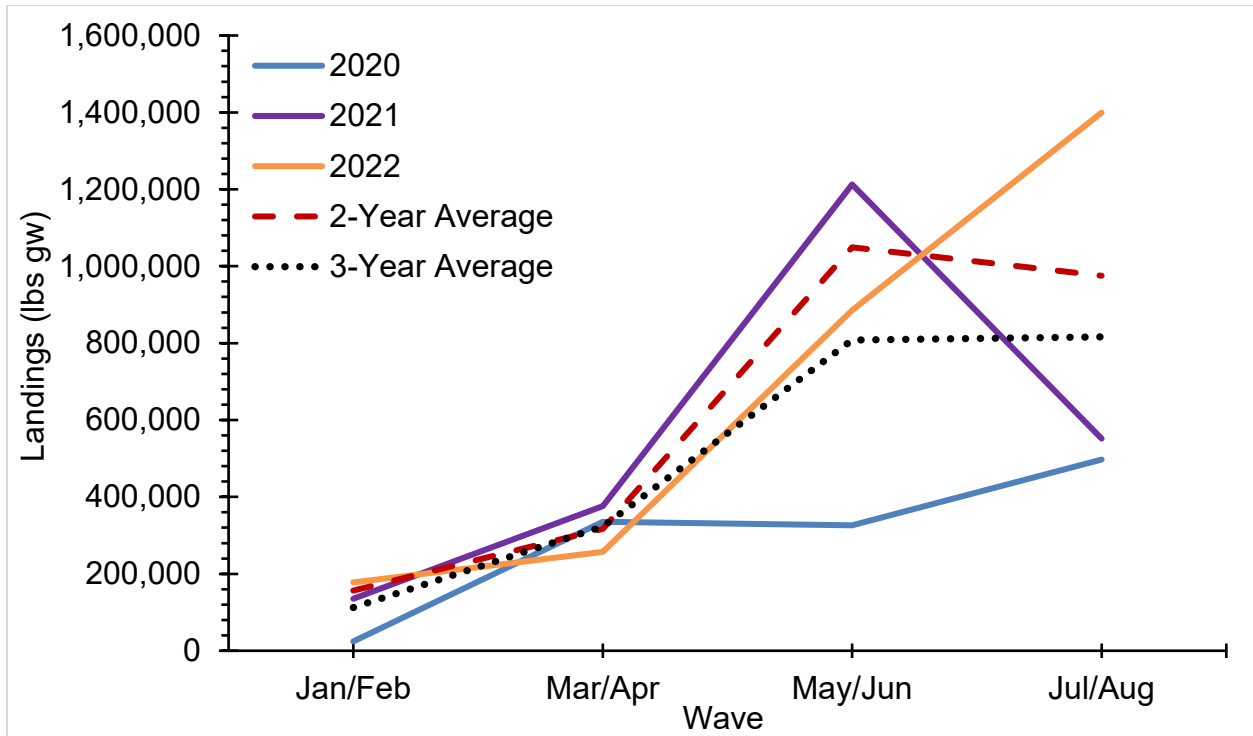


Figure 1. Gulf of Mexico red grouper recreational landings by two-month wave from 2020 through 2022, 2-year average (2021 and 2022), and 3-year average (2020, 2021, and 2022). These landings include MRIP-FES, Headboat, Louisiana, and Texas recreational landings.

Table 1. Recreational landings for Gulf of Mexico red grouper from January 1 through August 31 by wave for 2020 through 2022. The closure dates were generated from three different scenarios of: 1) landings from 2022, 2) a two-year average by wave of landings from 2021 and 2022, and 3) a three-year average by wave of landings from 2020, 2021, and 2022. These landings include MRIP-FES, Headboat, Louisiana, and Texas recreational landings. The landings are in pounds (lbs) gw.

Year	Jan/Feb	Mar/Apr	May/June	Jul/Aug
2020 Landings	24,244	335,354	326,241	497,195
2021 Landings	135,320	376,437	1,212,686	551,960
2022 Landings	177,712	257,038	885,644	1,399,436
2-Year Average	156,516	316,738	1,049,165	975,698
3-Year Average	112,425	322,943	808,190	816,197

Table 2. The projected closure dates for Gulf of Mexico red grouper recreational sector are based on when the ACT (1,840,000 lbs gw) is expected to be met. The closure dates were generated from three different scenarios of: 1) landings from 2022, 2) a two-year average by wave of landings from 2021 and 2022, and 3) a three-year average by wave of landings from 2020, 2021, and 2022. The closure dates were determined by cumulatively summing the recreational landings and comparing them to the ACT (1,840,000 lbs gw).

Landings	Closure Date
2022 Landings	July-24
2-Year Average	July-21
3-Year Average	August-15

cc: F/SER29 - Stephen