

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

Fishing Regulations Guidelines

November 2022

About these Guidelines

The following guidelines provide guidance to staff who are responsible for communicating federal fishing regulations in the Gulf of Mexico. These guidelines also provide Council members and the public with information about the Councils' process and rationale for hosting regulations.

The Council chooses to host regulations on a variety of different platforms because it is an effective way to foster understanding, educate, enhance compliance, and build goodwill among stakeholders. Additionally, the Council process itself relies upon a clear understanding of the current regulations. This allows the Council to monitor the efficacy of current fishery management measures and ensure that proposed changes build upon current regulations.

Regulations summaries drive a majority of stakeholder engagement. The regulations pages of the Council website have continuously been the most visited pages on the site. Additionally, the Fish Rules applications account for more constituent contacts than any other Council communication vehicle, by an order of magnitude.

The official, legal regulations are housed in the Codified Federal Register, but they are hard to navigate and are not displayed in a user-friendly, plain language format. While Council communications have no legal force or effect, it is imperative that Council-hosted regulations are both timely and accurate. As the most popular means of bringing constituents to Council communications related material, hosting regulations represents many people's first and/or only impression of the Council. So, regulations products must be precise and professional because they reflect upon the organization itself.

Maintaining Regulations

Council hosted regulations summaries should be easily accessible and understandable. In the absence of any other comprehensive summary of federal regulations in the Gulf of Mexico, this is essential to educating and promoting compliance across the fisheries. Since, hosting accurate regulations is vital, the Council staff works in conjunction with state and federal partners to ensure that federal regulations summary products are accurately representative of the law. As such, the Council's Public Information Officer (PIO) serves as the primary person responsible for cooperating with partner agencies and maintaining regulations across platforms. The Outreach Specialist and Communications Assistant serve as back up when the PIO is unavailable.

Annual Updates

Some regulations need to be reset or updated in the new year. For example, many catch limits change annually or seasons must be reset for a fishery subject to in-season

quota closure in a given year. The PIO will set aside time in the last week of each calendar year to ensure that regulations are reset for the new year across platforms.

Al-la-Carte Updates

Regulations change throughout the year as fishery management measures are implemented or quota closures go into effect. Regulation change notices almost exclusively publish in the Federal Register and via the NOAA Fishery Bulletin. The PIO is responsible for tracking Federal Register Notices (FRNs) and Fishery Bulletins and making regulation updates across Council platforms as soon as practicable. The Communications Assistant and Outreach Specialist serve as backups to make regulations updates in absence of the PIO.

Hosting Platforms

The Council currently hosts regulations on its website and on third-party mobile applications. Apart from creating print materials, considerations for hosting regulations on new platforms must first be approved by the Council.

Council Website

The Council website regulations pages are consistently the most visited pages on the site. The PIO is responsible for maintaining regulations on the website with the Communications Assistant serving as backup. Regulations are hosted in three different ways on the website:

- Regulations Tables
- Species Specific Pages
- Recreational Season Calendar

Fish Rules

The Council is in a contractual relationship with Fish Rules to host regulations on the Fish Rules recreational and commercial applications. The PIO is responsible for maintaining regulations on Fish Rules apps with the Outreach Specialist serving as a backup.

Print Materials

While the Council does not produce regular regulation brochures, it has printed regulations in different forms (i.e. water-proof pocket guides) for targeted outreach purposes. Any such efforts should be approved by the Council Executive Director and guided by the PIO.

Regulations Interpretations

While fishing regulations and products developed to explain them aim to be precise, it is not uncommon for regulations to be ambiguous and leave room for interpretation. In such cases, when stakeholders contact the Council staff for clarification on federal regulations, staff should contact NOAA General Counsel for guidance before responding. When stakeholders contact Council staff for clarification on state regulations, staff should contact the state's Council

representative for guidance before responding. Staff should always avoid sharing their personal understanding and should instead rely on official interpretations.