

Tab E, No. 5

Consideration of Wahoo for Federal Conservation and Management



Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

Life History

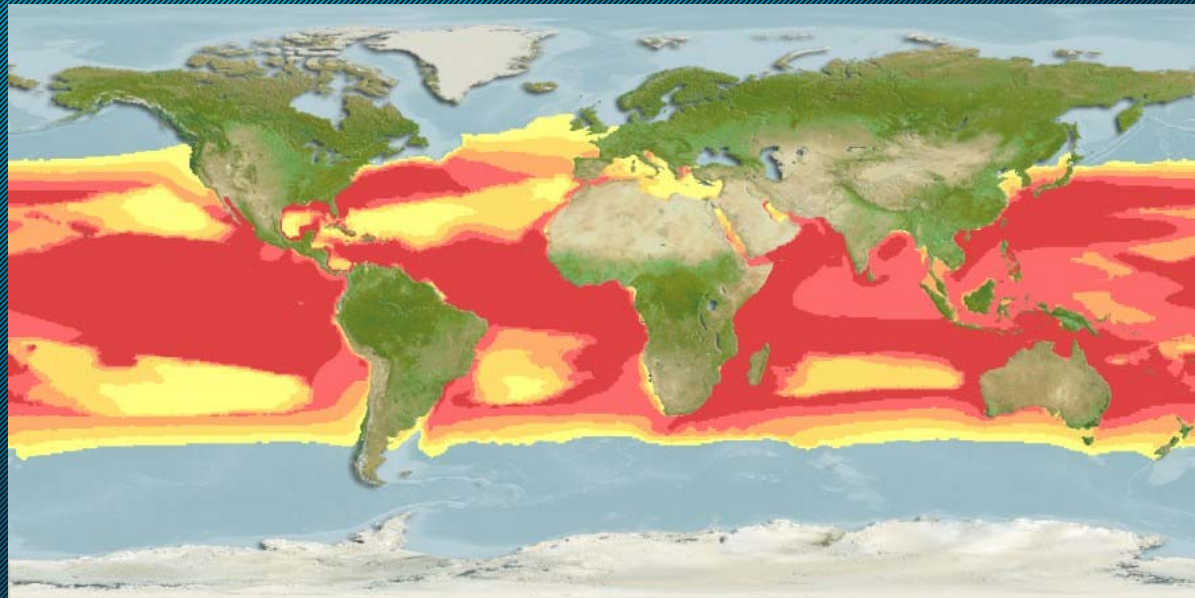


Range

- Global distribution in tropical and subtropical waters
- Migratory groups are genetically similar throughout the western North Atlantic

Habitat Use

- Pelagic
- Juveniles associated with *Sargassum* spp.
- Can aggregate around vertical relief, reef structures, floating debris, or anything else likely to attract and hold baitfish



Life History



Biology

- Females are larger than males
- Sex ratio presumed 1:1
- Max age 9 years; uncommon older than 6 years old
- 50% of females mature at 925 mm (36.4 inches) fork length and just under 1 year old

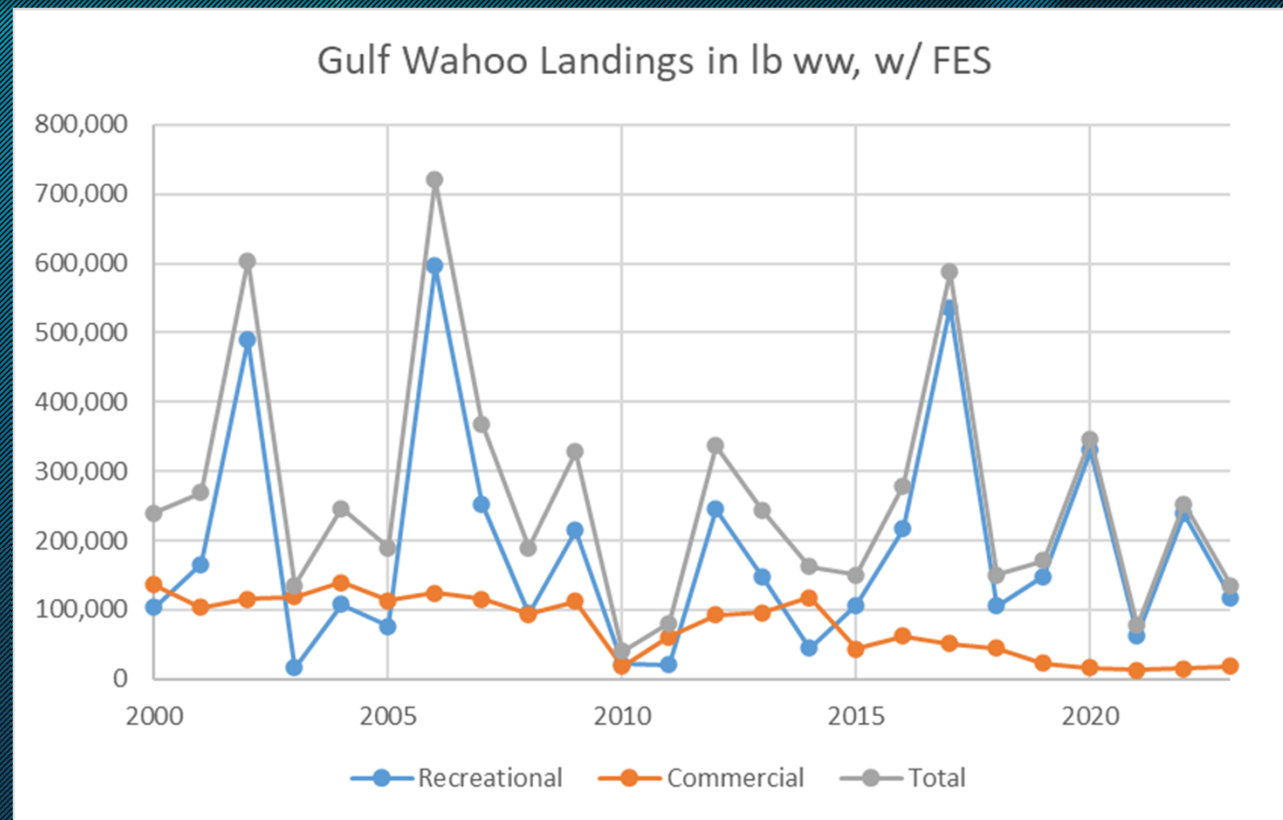
Spawning

- Form spawning aggregations
- Batch spawners, spawning every 5 days during June–August, with some skipped spawning
- Batch fecundity is positively correlated with fish size, meaning larger females are most important to spawning success

Gulf Landings



- Recreational landings in FES units
- PSEs exceed 50% in all years for rec landings
- Landings highly variable and uncertain



Why are we Here?



June 2024 Council Meeting

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary shared concern that the harvest of wahoo may not be sustainable within its boundaries.

Council Motion: To consider whether wahoo is in need of federal conservation and management



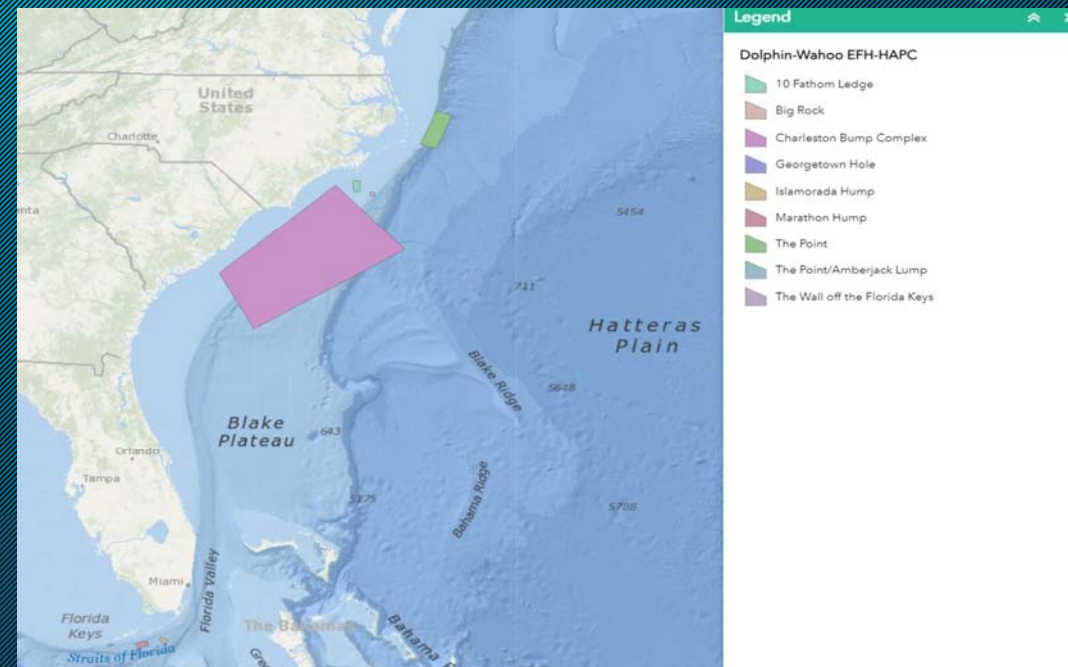
Existing Federal Wahoo Management



Florida is the only State with wahoo-specific regulations in the Gulf. (2 /person /day)

Dolphin/Wahoo jointly managed by all three Council's on the East Coast

- Recreational Regulations
 - 2,815,000 lb ww ACL
 - 2-fish bag limit
- Commercial Regulations
 - 70,690 lb ww ACL
 - 500-lb trip limit
- The Councils have identified several HAPCs for Wahoo
- Landings are consistently below ACLs



<https://myfwc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=961f8908250a404ba99fac3aa37ac723>

Considerations for Federal Management



The MSA provides guidance for determining whether a species needs federal conservation and management.

Considerations for Federal Management



(i) The stock is an important component of the marine environment.

- Wahoo is a pelagic predatory species
- Predator-prey or ecological interactions poorly known

(ii) The stock is caught by the fishery.

- Wahoo is harvested in the Gulf; landings are uncertain
- Species is a rare-event species and that increases uncertainty
- Private recreational angler survey protocols may under sample given that larger vessels with extended range are typically required to harvest wahoo and may not land at public boat ramps/marinas where sampling occurs

Considerations for Federal Management



(iii) Whether an FMP can improve or maintain the condition of the stock.

- Wahoo's stock status is undefined in the Gulf, but it is a component of the western Atlantic stock managed by the three East Coast Councils
 - Not overfished or experiencing overfishing

(iv) The stock is a target of a fishery.

- Wahoo is likely harvested opportunistically with other pelagic species but can be targeted
 - Targeted seasonally from some ports
 - Prized species among pelagic spear fishers

Considerations for Federal Management



(v) The stock is important to commercial, recreational, or subsistence users.

- Wahoo sold commercially, served in restaurants
 - Served in Gulf restaurants but not necessarily locally caught
- Wahoo caught primarily with handline gear
- Recreational landings of wahoo are highly variable and uncertain
- There is no known subsistence fishing for wahoo

Considerations for Federal Management



- (vi) The fishery is important to the Nation or to the regional economy.
- Average landings vary widely (~100,000 – +1,000,000 lb ww annual harvest)
 - For comparison in the Gulf:
 - Cubera snapper stock ACL = 5,065 lb ww
 - West FL Hogfish stock ACL = 150,000 lb ww
 - Red snapper stock ACL = 16,310,000 lb ww
 - Wahoo is an economically valuable species
 - Commercial vessels unlikely to discard
 - Recreational vessels may specifically target wahoo during opportunistic times of year

Considerations for Federal Management



(vii) The need to resolve competing interests and conflicts among user groups and whether an FMP can further that resolution.

- Wahoo is caught primarily along with other pelagic species
- There is currently no catch limit nor sector allocation for wahoo in the Gulf

Considerations for Federal Management



(viii) The economic condition of a fishery and whether an FMP can produce more efficient utilization.

- The efficiency of the Gulf wahoo fishery is unknown

(ix) The needs of a developing fishery, and whether an FMP can foster orderly growth.

- The Gulf wahoo fishery is less developed than other Gulf pelagic fisheries like king mackerel
- It is unknown/undecided whether the Gulf wahoo fishery would benefit from further development

Considerations for Federal Management



(x) The extent to which the fishery is already adequately managed by states, by state/Federal programs, or by Federal regulations pursuant to other FMPs or international commissions, or by industry self-regulation, consistent with the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and other applicable law.

- The stock that includes the Gulf is jointly managed by the three East Coast Councils
- 4 of 5 Gulf states do not have specific regulations for management of wahoo (only FL)
- The US has no international cooperative management agreement for wahoo

Considerations for Federal Management



- Since wahoo is one stock, is the stock adequately managed in the rest of its range by the states/other Councils?
- Should the Council consider federal management?
- **If so, should the Council manage wahoo on its own or consider co-management with the other Councils?**