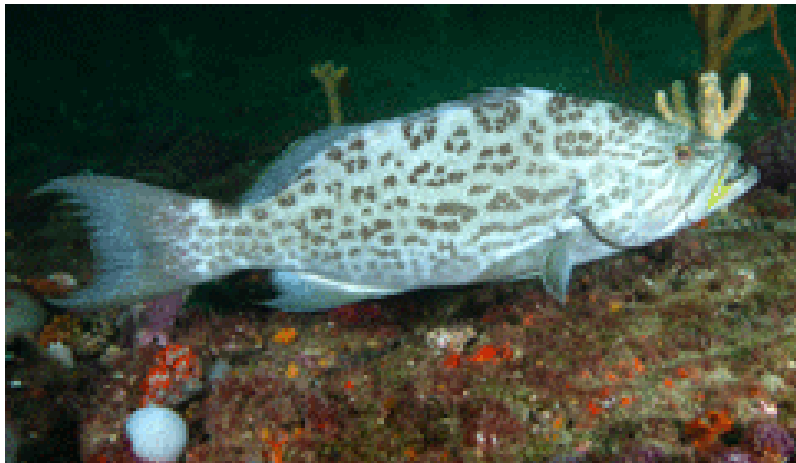


# **Modifications to Other Shallow Water Grouper Complex Management Measures**



## **Draft Framework Action under the Fishery Management Plan for Reef Resources in the Gulf of Mexico**

**April 2025**



*This is a publication of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council Pursuant to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Award No. NA20NMF4410007.*

This page intentionally blank

## Responsible Agencies and Contact Persons

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council)  
4107 W. Spruce Street, Suite 200  
Tampa, Florida 33607  
John Froeschke ([John.Froeschke@gulfcouncil.org](mailto:John.Froeschke@gulfcouncil.org))

813-348-1630  
813-348-1711 (fax)  
[gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org](mailto:gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org)  
[Gulf Council Website](#)

National Marine Fisheries Service (Lead Agency)  
Southeast Regional Office  
263 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue South  
St. Petersburg, Florida 33701  
Daniel Luers ([Daniel.Luers@noaa.gov](mailto:Daniel.Luers@noaa.gov))

727-824-5305  
727-824-5308 (fax)  
[SERO Office Website](#)

## Type of Action

Administrative  
 Draft

Legislative  
 Final

## ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS DOCUMENT

ABC	acceptable biological catch
ACL	annual catch limit
AM	accountability measure
APAIS	Access Point Angler Intercept Survey
CFR	code of federal regulations
CHTS	Coastal Household Telephone Survey
Council	Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
EA	environmental assessment
EEZ	exclusive economic zone
EIS	economic impact statement
EFH	essential fish habitat
FES	fishing effort survey
FMP	Fishery Management Plan
Gulf	Gulf of America (Mexico)
gw	gutted weight
IFQ	individual fishing quota
Magnuson-Stevens Act	Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act
mp	million pounds
MRFSS	Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey
MRIP	Marine Recreational Information Program
MSST	minimum stock size threshold
NMFS	National Marine Fisheries Service
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
OFL	overfishing limit
OST	Office of Science and Technology
Reef Fish FMP	Fishery Management Plan for Reef Fish Resources in the Gulf
RFA	Regulatory Flexibility Act
RFFA	reasonably foreseeable future actions
RIR	regulatory impact review
RQ	regional quotient
SDC	status determination criteria
SEDAR	Southeast Data and Review
SEFSC	Southeast Fisheries Science Center
SEIS	Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement
SERO	Southeast Regional Office
SMZ	special management zone
SPR	spawning potential ratio
SRHS	Southeast Region Headboat Survey
SSC	Scientific and Statistical Committee
SWG	shallow water grouper
TL	total length
ww	whole weight
YMG	yellowmouth grouper

YFG

yellowfin grouper

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abbreviations Used in this Document .....	ii
Table of Contents .....	iv
List of Tables .....	v
List of Figures .....	vi
Chapter 1. Introduction .....	1
1.1 Background .....	1
1.2 Purpose and Need .....	5
1.3 History of Management .....	6
Chapter 2. Management Alternatives .....	9
2.1 Action 1: Modification of Gulf Other Shallow Water Grouper (Other SWG) Complex Catch Limits .....	9
2.2 Action 2: Gulf Other SWG Complex Recreational Season .....	13
Chapter 3. List of Preparers .....	18
Chapter 4. References .....	19

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table 1.1.1.</b> Catch limits and buffers by sector for Other SWG, as established in the Generic ACL/AM Amendment. ....	2
<b>Table 1.1.2.</b> Landings for Other SWG by sector from 2013 – 2023. ....	2
<b>Table 1.1.3.</b> SSC recommended OFL and ABC values for scamp and yellowmouth grouper, based on the results of SEDAR 68 (2022) and using an MSY proxy of the yield when fishing at $F_{40\%SPR}$ . ....	5
<b>Table 2.1.1.</b> SSC recommended OFL and ABC values for scamp and yellowmouth grouper, based on the results of SEDAR 68 (2022) and using an MSY proxy of the yield when fishing at $F_{40\%SPR}$ . ....	10
<b>Table 2.1.2.</b> Landings for scamp and yellowmouth grouper from 2019 – 2023. ....	11
<b>Table 2.2.1.</b> Proposed recreational harvest levels based on an apportionment of the ABC. ....	17

## LIST OF FIGURES

<b>Figure 2.1.1.</b> Landings for scamp and yellowmouth grouper from 2019 – 2023 in comparison to the ABC recommendation from the SSC based on the review of SEDAR 68. The ABC recommendation is a 54.7% reduction from recent landings for these two species. ....	11
<b>Figure 2.2.1.</b> A comparison of the recreational seasons among the alternatives in Action 2. ....	16

# CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

Several species of grouper in the Gulf of America<sup>1</sup> (Gulf) are currently managed within the Other Shallow-water Grouper (SWG) complex. These species include scamp (*Mycteroperca phenax*), yellowmouth grouper (*Mycteroperca interstitialis*), black grouper (*Mycteroperca bonaci*), and yellowfin grouper (*Mycteroperca venenosa*). These species were assigned to this complex under the Generic Annual Catch Limits (ACL) and Accountability Measures (AM) Amendment to the Fishery Management Plans (FMP) of the Gulf (Generic ACL/AM Amendment; GMFMC 2011). Assignment of these species to the complex was based on where these species occurred, and whether it was common for these species to be caught on the same fishing trips. Until recently, no approved peer-reviewed stock assessment was available to inform stock status of any of these species<sup>2</sup>. In 2022, a stock assessment of scamp and yellowmouth grouper was completed (SEDAR 68 2022), which assessed both species together, and passed a peer-review by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's (Council)<sup>3</sup> Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC). The SSC recommended updated status determination criteria (SDC) and catch advice for these two species. To act on these recommendations, the Council initiated work on Reef Fish Amendment 58A to the FMP for the Reef Fish Resources in the Gulf (Reef Fish FMP) that considers changes to the Other SWG complex including species within the complex, changes to catch limits, modification of the commercial Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) program, and other management measures. In recognition of the complexity of Reef Fish Amendment 58A, the Council is developing this framework action to consider changes in catch limits for the Other SWG complex that are consistent with the recommendations from the SSC based on its review of SEDAR 68. The modifications from this framework action are expected to reduce the likelihood of overfishing for scamp and yellowmouth grouper while a more holistic management response is developed in Reef Fish Amendment 58A.

The Other SWG complex is managed under a complex ACL that is set equal to the complex Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC). However, in the Generic ACL/AM Amendment the commercial sector was apportioned a specified amount of the complex ACL based on historical harvest to allow the commercial sector to operate under the Grouper-Tilefish IFQ program (Amendment 29 to the Reef Fish FMP; GMFMC 2008). The associated catch limits are shown in

---

<sup>1</sup> The Gulf of Mexico was renamed the Gulf of America pursuant to Executive Order 14172, and Secretary of the Interior Order No. 3423. All geographical references to the Gulf of America or "the Gulf" in this Framework Action refer to the same body of water known as the Gulf of Mexico in the regulations at 50 CFR part 622.

<sup>2</sup> Black grouper was initially assessed in 2010 (SEDAR 19), but an assessment attempted in 2017 (SEDAR 48) had to be terminated due to irreconcilable data issues. In addition, yellowmouth grouper was included in the SEDAR 49 assessment, but was not further evaluated due to limited data and misidentification issues. Thus, no assessment for informing the stock status of black or yellowmouth grouper relative to its SDC exists.

<sup>3</sup> This framework action retains the name of the Council as established by the Magnuson-Stevens Act. See 16 U.S.C. § 1852(a)(1)(E).

Table 1.1.1. Landings (2013 – 2023) by species for the Other SWG complex are shown in Table 1.1.2. The recreational landings data in Table 1.1.2 are based on estimates derived from the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS). However, recreational landings are now estimated using the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP), which includes an Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (APAIS, estimates catch) and Fishing Effort Survey (FES, estimates effort), collectively referred to as MRIP-FES. MRFSS and MRIP-FES both generate estimates in pounds of fish, but those estimates are not directly comparable because they use different scales (See Federal Data Collection Programs section in this Chapter).

**Table 1.1.1.** Catch limits and buffers by sector for Other SWG, as established in the Generic ACL/AM Amendment. Values are in millions of pounds (mp) gutted weight (gw). OFL = overfishing limit. An OFL and a recreational ACL for Other SWG are presently undefined.

Complex	OFL	ABC (Total ACL)	Comm ACL	Comm Quota	Comm Buffer	Rec ACL
Other SWG	undefined	0.710	0.547	0.526	4%	undefined

**Table 1.1.2.** Landings for Other SWG by sector from 2013 – 2023. Landings are in pounds (lb) gw. Data for 2023 are preliminary. Black grouper and yellowfin grouper (YFG) are aggregated due to data confidentiality requirements. Scamp and yellowmouth grouper (YMG) are aggregated for both sectors because of data confidentiality requirements.

Year	Commercial			Recreational (MRFSS)			Total Landings
	Black + YFG	Scamp + YMG	Total Comm Landings	Black Grouper + YFG	Scamp + YMG	Total Rec Landings	
2013	57,606	243,129	300,735	3,198	153,090	156,288	457,023
2014	61,123	169,125	230,248	826	129,569	130,395	360,643
2015	55,273	183,154	238,427	1,563	178,960	180,523	418,950
2016	49,497	285,741	335,238	8,249	159,438	167,687	502,925
2017	37,184	162,825	200,009	1,706	112,388	114,094	314,103
2018	35,246	143,047	178,293	358	111,654	112,012	290,305
2019	26,011	114,072	140,083	356	201,089	201,445	341,528
2020	25,411	119,043	144,454	516	108,691	109,207	253,661
2021	25,946	129,982	155,928	199	148,441	148,640	304,568
2022	23,946	122,752	146,698	1,215	139,225	140,440	287,138
2023	39,875	109,137	149,012	2,398	133,752	136,150	285,162

## **Commercial Sector**

Commercial harvest of Other SWG complex species has been managed under the Grouper-Tilefish IFQ program since 2010 (GMFMC 2008). Anyone commercially fishing for Other SWG complex species must possess a federal commercial reef fish permit and Other SWG complex allocation under the IFQ program. IFQ allocation is determined and distributed at the on January 1<sup>st</sup> of each calendar year by multiplying a shareholder's IFQ Other SWG shares, represented as a percentage of the total commercial quota, times the commercial quota for that complex. As IFQ allocation is often transferred between participants on or shortly after January 1, the allocation cannot be reclaimed by the agency after distribution. The current commercial ACT (quota) is 4% below the commercial ACL for the Other SWG complex (GMFMC 2011; Table 1.1.1). The difference between the commercial quota and the commercial ACL was put in place to account for uncertainty with discards from the implementation of the IFQ program, and it was noted that this buffer could be re-evaluated with time. The IFQ program acts as the AM for the commercial portion of the reef fish fishery for Other SWG complex, and the commercial quota has never been exceeded for this complex under the IFQ program.

## **Recreational Sector**

Recreational fishing for the Other SWG complex species occurs primarily via hook-and-line. All species are caught throughout the Gulf except for black grouper, which is more common to the southeastern Gulf off of Florida. Recreational landings comprise an increasing proportion of landings for this complex in the last several years (see Table 1.1.2).

Presently, there is no defined ACL for the recreational sector for the Other SWG complex. When the catch limits were specified in Generic ACL/AM Amendment, the intent was to allow the recreational sector to harvest the difference between the sector apportionment for the commercial ACL and the total complex ACL. The AM for the recreational sector is linked to the total complex ACL. This AM states that in the year following an overage of the complex ACL, recreational fishing will close when the complex ACL is projected to be reached. There is no payback of an overage of a complex ACL. Because total landings have not reached the complex ACL (Table 1.1.2) the recreational AM has never been implemented. However, because the IFQ system allows commercial landings year-round, it is unlikely that this AM would effectively constrain recreational landings unless NMFS assumes at the beginning of the fishing year that all of the commercial quota will be landed.

### *Recreational Data*

#### Federal Data Collection Programs

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) created the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS) in 1979. In the Gulf, MRFSS collected recreational catch and effort data, including for Other SWG species, since 1981. MRFSS included both the Coastal Household Telephone Survey (CHTS) and onsite interviews at marinas and other points where recreational anglers fish. In 2008, the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) replaced MRFSS to meet increasing demand for more precise, accurate, and timely recreational

catch estimates. MRIP is a state-regional-federal partnership that utilizes large-scale surveys of the saltwater recreational fishing community to estimate recreational fishing catch and effort information used in stock assessments and fisheries management. MRIP utilizes separate surveys to measure catch rate and effort by mode (e.g., private angler vs for-hire) to estimate total recreational catch. For each mode the catch rate is multiplied by the effort to obtain an estimate of total catch.

The MRIP Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (APAIS) captures catch rate for both the private angler and for-hire modes. This new survey was designed in 2013 to address concerns of potential bias and better account for all types of completed trips by extending the time period dockside samplers stayed at an assigned location (Foster et al. 2018). The more complete temporal coverage with the new survey design provides for consistent increases or decreases in APAIS angler catch rate statistics, which are used in stock assessments and management, for at least some species (NOAA Fisheries 2019).

MRIP transitioned from the legacy CHTS to a new mail survey (FES) in 2015. The surveys were run side by side for three years, and in 2018, MRIP-FES replaced MRIP-CHTS. Both survey methods collect data needed to estimate marine recreational fishing effort (number of fishing trips) by shore and private/rental boat anglers on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. MRIP-CHTS used random-digit dialing of homes in coastal counties to contact anglers. The new mail-based FES uses angler license and registration information as one way to identify and contact anglers (supplemented with data from the U.S. Postal Service, which includes virtually all U.S. households). Comparisons of the CHTS and FES surveys from the side-by-side years indicated that, in general, total recreational fishing effort estimates generated from the FES are higher — and in some cases substantially higher — than the CHTS estimates (NOAA Fisheries 2019). This is because the FES is designed to measure fishing activity more accurately than the CHTS, albeit while recognizing a greater degree of uncertainty in those landings estimates. This increase in estimated effort is not because there was a sudden rise in fishing effort, but rather because FES better targets actual fishery participants through the directed mail survey. Likewise, the increase in uncertainty about the effort estimates reflects uncertainty that was likely also present in CHTS but went unaccounted for due to biases that were identified as FES was developed. NMFS developed a calibration model to allow historic effort estimates using MRIP-CHTS to be compared to new estimates from MRIP-FES.

### 2023 MRIP-FES Pilot Study and 2024 Comprehensive Study

At the August 2023 Council meeting, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Office of Science and Technology (OST) discussed the release of a pilot study (NOAA 2023<sup>4</sup>), which evaluated potential respondents' bias as recall error in the mail portion of the recreational FES survey used to estimate effort. The 2023 pilot study evaluated this bias for a portion of the year across several states, and preliminary results suggest the order of the

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/recreational-fishing-data/fishing-effort-survey-research-and-improvements>

questions in the survey has led to overestimation of fishing effort by MRIP-FES. A more comprehensive pilot study began in 2024 and is expected to end data collection in March, 2025. NOAA’s Office of Science and Technology (OST) plans to produce a public report with key findings and estimate comparisons in summer 2025 and determine if a new design will be implemented in 2026, pending study results and peer review. In mid-2026, OST is expecting to produce calibrated historical effort estimates to reflect the findings of the updated survey design for use in future stock assessments and fisheries management. Prior to when data calibration is finalized in 2026, any conclusions about the impact of observed bias would be speculative. After the updated survey data is finalized, it will then be available for evaluation by data users (e.g., the Southeast Fisheries Science Center [SEFSC], Southeast Regional Office [SERO], and the Council).

***Recent Stock Assessments and Catch Projections***

SEDAR 68 (2022)

SEDAR 68 was completed in 2022 using data through 2020 and assessed both scamp and yellowmouth grouper together as a complex. SEDAR 68 (2022) used updated recreational landings information informed by MRIP-FES, and thus the results are not directly comparable to current catch limits and would require extensive changes to integrate the updated catch advice into management. The SSC recommended catch limits (Table 1.1.3) that are a reduction from current landings, and the Council is developing this action to reduce the likelihood of overfishing scamp and yellowmouth grouper while Reef Fish Amendment 58A is developed and implemented.

**Table 1.1.3.** SSC recommended OFL and ABC values for scamp and yellowmouth grouper, based on the results of SEDAR 68 (2022) and using an MSY proxy of the yield when fishing at F<sub>40%SPR</sub>. Catch limits are in lb gw and the recreational data were informed by MRIP-FES. These catch recommendations are not directly comparable to current catch limits.

Year	OFL	ABC
2024	271,000	203,000
2025	263,000	203,000
2026+	257,000	203,000

**1.2 Purpose and Need**

The purpose of this amendment is to reduce SWG harvest consistent with findings of the SEDAR 68 stock assessment and recommendations from the SSC.

The need for these actions is to use the best scientific information available to implement measures to avoid future overfishing, and to achieve optimum yield for the Other SWG Complex, consistent with the authority under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

## 1.3 History of Management

**Amendment 1 to the Reef Fish FMP**, including an environmental assessment (EA), regulatory impact review (RIR), and regulatory flexibility analysis (RFA), implemented in 1990, set objectives to stabilize long-term population levels of all reef fish species by establishing a survival rate of biomass into the stock of spawning age fish to achieve at least 20% spawning stock biomass per recruit by January 1, 2000. It set a five-grouper recreational daily bag limit; allowed a 2-day possession limit for charter vessels and head boats on trips that extend beyond 24 hours, provided the vessel has two licensed operators aboard as required by the U.S. Coast Guard, and each passenger can provide a receipt to verify the length of the trip; set an 11.0 mp commercial quota for grouper, with the commercial quota divided into a 9.2 mp SWG (black grouper, gag, red grouper, Nassau grouper, yellowfin grouper, yellowmouth grouper, rock hind, red hind, speckled hind, and scamp) quota and a 1.8 mp DWG (misty grouper, snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, and warsaw grouper, and scamp once the SWG quota was filled) quota; established a longline and buoy gear boundary at the 50-fathom depth contour west of Cape San Blas, Florida, and the 20-fathom depth contour east of Cape San Blas, inshore of which the directed harvest of reef fish with longline gear and buoy gear was prohibited, and the retention of reef fish captured incidentally in other longline operations (e.g., sharks) was limited to the recreational daily bag limit; limited trawl vessels to the recreational size and daily bag limits of reef fish; established fish trap permits (up to 100 fish traps per permit holder); and established a commercial reef fish vessel permit.

A **July 1991 Regulatory Amendment**, including EA and effective November 1991, provided a one-time increase in the 1991 quota for SWG from 9.2 mp to 9.92 mp.

**Amendment 3 to the Reef Fish FMP**, including an EA, RIR, and RFA and implemented in July 1991, transferred speckled hind from the SWG quota category to the DWG quota category.

A **November 1991 Regulatory Amendment**, including EA, RIR and initial regulatory flexibility analysis (IRFA) and effective June 1992, raised the 1992 commercial quota for shallow-water groupers to 9.8 mp whole weight (ww).

**Amendment 5 to the Reef Fish FMP**, including an EA, RIR, and RFA and implemented in February 1994, established restrictions on the use of fish traps in the Gulf exclusive economic zone (EEZ); implemented a three-year moratorium on the use of fish traps by creating a fish trap endorsement for fishermen with historical landings; created a special management zone (SMZ) with gear restrictions off the Alabama coast; created a framework procedure for establishing future SMZ's; required that all finfish except for oceanic migratory species be landed with head and fins attached; and closed the region of Riley's Hump (near Dry Tortugas, Florida) to all fishing during May and June to protect mutton snapper spawning aggregations.

A **Framework Action**, including an EA, RIR, and RFA implemented in June 2000, increased the commercial size limit for black grouper from 20 to 24 inch total length (TL); prohibited commercial sale of gag, black, and red grouper each year from February 15 to March 15 (during

the peak of gag spawning season); and established two marine reserves (Steamboat Lumps and Madison-Swanson) that are closed year-round to fishing for all species under the Council's jurisdiction.

**Secretarial Amendment 1 to the Reef Fish FMP**, including EIS, RIR, and IRFA (effective July 2004), revised the commercial trip limit to 5,200 lb gw to achieve a red grouper harvest reduction, a reduction in the SWG quota from 9.35 mp gw (9.8 mp ww) to 8.8 mp gw, and repealed the Feb. 15 – Mar. 15 closed season on commercial harvest of red grouper, black grouper and gag in the Gulf exclusive economic zone (EEZ). The DWG quota was reduced from 1.6 mp ww (equal to 1.35 mp landed weight) to 1.02 mp gw. NMFS rejected the proposed 5,200-pound SWG trip limit and the repeal of the February 15 – March 15 commercial closed season. The remaining proposed measures were approved, and NOAA added a commercial red grouper quota of 5.31 million pounds gutted weight with the stipulation that the commercial SWG fishery close when either the SWG quota or red grouper quota is reached, whichever occurs first.

An **October 2005 Regulatory Amendment**, including EA, RIR, IRFA and implemented in January 2006, established an aggregate DWG and SWG commercial trip limit of 6,000 lb gw.

**Amendment 29 to the Reef Fish FMP**, including an EA, RIR, and RFA, implemented January 2010, established an IFQ system for the commercial harvest of grouper and tilefish.

**Amendment 30B to the Reef Fish FMP**, including a final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS), RIR and IRFA, implemented May 2009, established ACLs and AMs for the commercial aggregate SWG fishery. For the commercial sector, the amendment for 2009 reduced the aggregate SWG quota from 8.80 mp gw to 7.8 mp gw. The gag and SWG quotas were scheduled to increase in subsequent years as the gag stock rebuilt. When 80 percent of a grouper species quota is reached, the allowable catch per trip for that species will be reduced to an incidental catch limit of 200 pounds until the species quota is filled, in order to reduce discard mortality of that species while fishermen target other species. The amendment repealed the commercial closed season of February 15 to March 15 on gag, black and red grouper, and replaced it with a January through April seasonal area closure to all fishing at the Edges 40-fathom contour, a 390-nautical square mile gag spawning region northwest of Steamboat Lumps. In addition, the Steamboat Lumps and Madison-Swanson fishing area restrictions were continued indefinitely. For the recreational sector, the amendment reduced the aggregate grouper bag limit from five fish to four. A recreational closed season on SWG was established from February 1 through March 31 shoreward of 20-fathoms. Finally, the amendment required that all vessels with federal commercial or charter reef fish permits comply with the more restrictive of state or federal reef fish regulations when fishing in state waters.

**Amendment 31 to the Reef Fish FMP**, including a final SEIS, RIR and IRFA, implemented May 2010, prohibited the use of bottom longline gear shoreward of a line approximating the 35-fathom contour from June through August; established a longline endorsement; and restricted the total number of hooks onboard each reef fish bottom longline vessel to 1,000, of which only 750 may be rigged for fishing.

**Amendment 32 to the Reef Fish FMP**, including EIS, RIR and IRFA and implemented in March 2012, contained a commercial SWG quota adjustment to account for dead discards, and simplified the commercial SWG AMs by using the IFQ program to reduce redundancy.

**Amendment 38 to the Reef Fish FMP**, including EA, RIR, and RFA and implemented in March 2013, revised the postseason recreational AM that reduces the length of the recreational season for all SWG in the year following a year in which the ACL for gag or red grouper is exceeded. The modified AM reduces the recreational season of only the species (gag or red grouper) for which the ACL was exceeded.

A **2013 Framework Action**, including EA, RIR, and RFA and implemented in March 2013, eliminated the February 1 through March 31 SWG closure shoreward of 20 fathoms.

**Amendment 44 to the Reef Fish FMP** standardized the MSST for certain reef fish species. The MSST is used to determine whether a stock is overfished; if the biomass of the stock falls below the threshold, then the stock is overfished. The MSST for several reef fish species was set equal to 50% of the biomass at MSY. This amendment was approved on December 21, 2017.

**Amendment 36A to the Reef Fish FMP**, including EIS, RIR and IRFA and implemented in January 2019, requires all reef fish permitted vessels landing federally managed reef-fish to land at approved locations and hail-in at least 3 hours, but no more than 24 hours before landing. The Amendment returns red snapper and grouper-tilefish shares from non-activated individual fishing quota (IFQ) accounts to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for redistribution and allows NMFS to withhold a portion of IFQ allocation at the start of the year equal to an anticipated quota reduction.

## CHAPTER 2. MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVES

### 2.1 Action 1: Modification of Gulf Other Shallow Water Grouper (Other SWG) Complex Catch Limits

**Alternative 1:** No Action – Maintain the current catch limits for the Other SWG complex: scamp, yellowmouth grouper, black grouper, and yellowfin grouper. The complex acceptable biological catch (ABC) is 710,000 pounds gutted weight (lb gw). The complex annual catch limit (ACL) is set equal to the complex ABC. The commercial ACL is 547,000 lb gw, and the commercial annual catch target (ACT) or quota, is set 4% below the commercial ACL at 525,000 lb gw. The recreational ACL is undefined.

**Preferred Alternative 2:** Reduce the Other SWG complex ABC by 54.7%. Set the stock ACL equal to 322,000 lb gw, the commercial ACL equal to 255,636 lb gw, and the commercial ACT (quota) equal to 245,410 lb gw.

**Alternative 3:** Reduce the Other SWG Complex ABC by 54.7% based on the average Other SWG complex landings from 2019-2023. The stock ACL is set equal to the ABC at 133,000 lb gw. The commercial ACL is 105,589 lb gw, and the commercial ACT (quota) is 101,365 lb gw.

**Alternative 4:** Reduce the total ACL of the scamp and yellowmouth grouper component of the Other SWG Complex by 54.7% based on the average scamp and yellowmouth grouper landings from 2019-2023. Use the average of the 2019-2023 landings for black grouper and yellowfin grouper to calculate the catch limits. The complex ABC/ACL is set at 151,000 lb gw, the commercial ACL is 119,879 lb gw, and the commercial ACT is 115,084 lb gw.

#### **Discussion:**

The Other SWG complex is currently managed using a complex ACL (710,000 lb gw) and recreational landings are monitored consistent with the Marine Recreational Fishery Statistics Survey (MRFSS). The stock complex ACL is set equal to the complex ABC. The commercial ACL was established based on an apportionment of the stock ACL, and the commercial ACT was reduced by 4% from the commercial ACL to accommodate flexibility measures between the Deep-Water Grouper and Other SWG complexes in the IFQ program. Recreational harvest is restricted only in the year following an overage of the stock ACL, and only then when the stock ACL is projected to be fully harvested. To date, there has been no overage of the stock ACL, and thus, no restrictions on recreational harvest.

This action would modify the ABC, commercial ACL, and commercial ACT for the Other SWG complex. Consistent with current practice, the overfishing limit (OFL) will remain undefined. SEDAR 68 (2022) was completed and reviewed by the Gulf Council's (Council) Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), which provided revised catch limits for scamp and yellowmouth grouper. Scamp and yellowmouth grouper are managed along with black and yellowfin grouper in the Other SWG complex. The SSC recommended reduced catch limits for scamp and

yellowmouth grouper and the Council is developing an action (Reef Fish Amendment 58A) that considers modifying the composition of the Other SWG complex, specifying sector allocations, and modifying the structure of the commercial individual fishing quota program (IFQ) and recreational management measures. This framework action aims to reduce harvest of the Other SWG complex consistent with the results of SEDAR 68 to allow time for completion and implementation of Reef Fish Amendment 58A.

SEDAR 68 used updated recreational landings information informed by MRIP-FES. The SSC reviewed SEDAR 68 and recommended catch limits for scamp and yellowmouth grouper (Table 2.1.1) that are substantially reduced from recent landings for these species (Table 2.1.2<sup>5</sup>). From 2019 – 2023, average combined annual landings for scamp and yellowmouth grouper were 448,490 lb gw (Figure 2.1.1). To reduce harvest to the ABC recommended by the SSC based on SEDAR 68 (203,000 lb gw), landings would have to be reduced by 54.7% from the 2019-2023 average. This reduction target (as a percentage) was used as the basis for the action alternatives in this document. The percentage basis was used because the current Other SWG complex catch limits are based in part on landings data derived from MRFSS, and thus the ABC recommendation that is based on SEDAR 68 is not directly comparable to the current complex ABC of 710,000 lb gw. The objective of this action is to reduce landings (and fishing mortality) from the Other SWG complex consistent with the SSC’s recommendations for scamp and yellowmouth grouper while modifications to the Other SWG complex are developed in Reef Fish Amendment 58A.

**Table 2.1.1.** SSC recommended OFL and ABC values for scamp and yellowmouth grouper, based on the results of SEDAR 68 (2022) and using an MSY proxy of the yield when fishing at F<sub>40%SPR</sub>. Catch limits are in lb gw.

Year	OFL	ABC
2024	271,000	203,000
2025	263,000	203,000
2026+	257,000	203,000

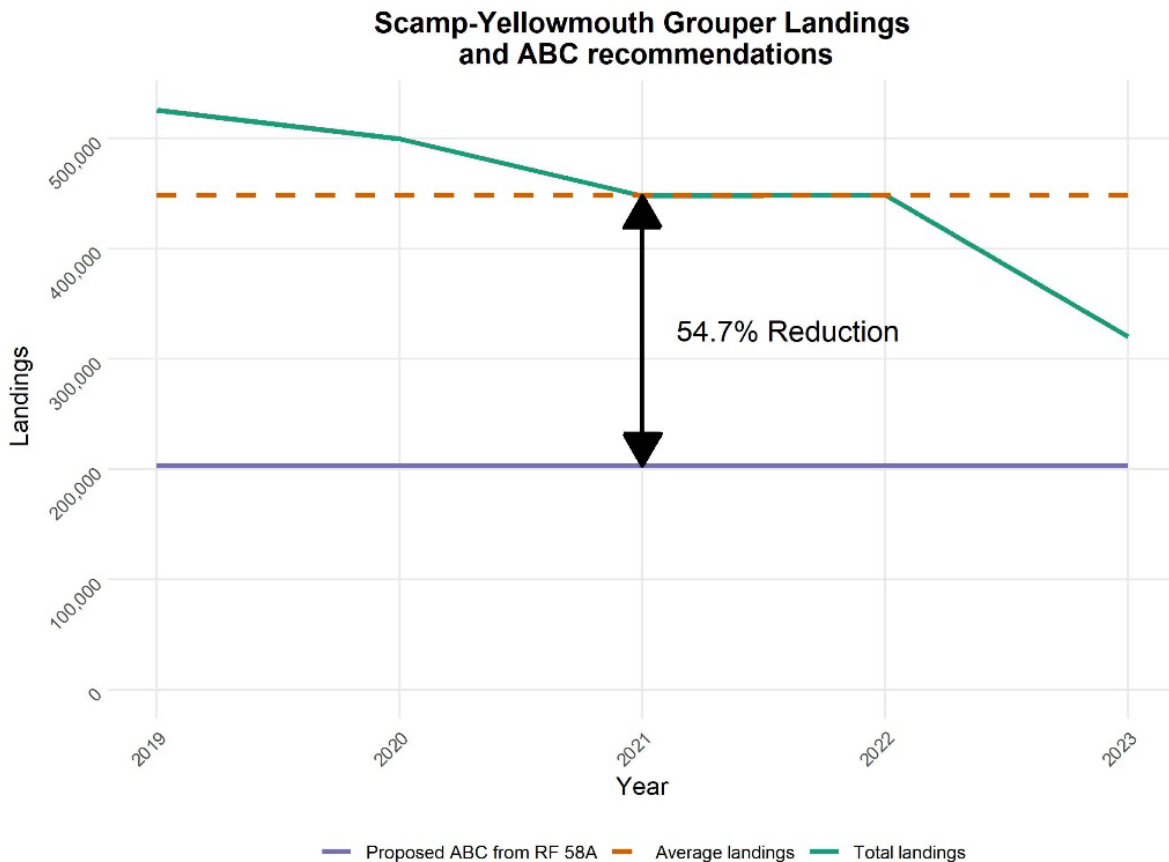
---

<sup>5</sup> The catch limits are consistent with the recreational data used in SEDAR 68, which was derived in part from MRIP-FES. The landings data used for the action are consistent with MRFSS as presented in Table 1.1.2.

**Table 2.1.2.** Landings for scamp and yellowmouth grouper from 2019 – 2023. Landings are in lb gw and recreational data are consistent with MRIP-FES. Data for 2023 are preliminary. Scamp and yellowmouth grouper are aggregated for both sectors because of data confidentiality requirements. The recreational landings data are not directly comparable to the current management measures established and monitored using MRFSS data.

	Commercial	Recreational	
Year	Scamp + YMG	Scamp + YMG	Total Landings
2019	114,072	411,764	525,836
2020	119,043	380,593	499,636
2021	129,982	317,851	447,833
2022	122,752	326,023	448,775
2023	109,137	211,234	320,371

**Figure 2.1.1.** Landings for scamp and yellowmouth grouper from 2019 – 2023 in comparison to the ABC recommendation from the SSC based on the review of SEDAR 68. The ABC recommendation is a 54.7% reduction from recent landings for these two species.



**Alternative 1** (No Action) would maintain the current catch limits as established in the Generic ACL/AM Amendment (GMFMC 2011). These catch limits were set using recreational data from MRFSS. **Alternative 1** does not consider the harvest recommendations for scamp and yellowmouth grouper resulting from SEDAR 68 (2022) and increases the likelihood of overfishing of scamp and yellowmouth grouper relative to **Preferred Alternative 2** and **Alternatives 3 – 4**.

**Preferred Alternative 2** would reduce the complex ABC by 54.7% consistent with the SSC recommended percent reduction in the ABC for scamp and yellowmouth grouper based on its review of SEDAR 68. **Preferred Alternative 2** would set the commercial ACL equal to 255,636 lb gw, and the commercial ACT equal to 245,410 lb gw. Since 2019, commercial landings for the Other SWG complex have averaged just under 150,000 lb gw and thus, the proposed commercial harvest limits may not adequately reduce the catch from this sector. However, this would result in a substantial reduction in the distributed annual IFQ allocation for the Other SWG complex and may lead to a reduction in commercial harvest. **Preferred Alternative 2** would reduce the recreational harvest consistent with the overall 54.7% reduction target. This would result in an allowable recreational Other SWG harvest equal to 66,364 lb gw (consistent with MRFSS); which is substantially below the recreational sectors recent annual landings and **Preferred Alternative 2** is consistent with the objective to reduce harvest as recommended by the SSC.

**Alternative 3** would reduce the total allowable SWG Complex harvest by 54.7% relative to recent annual landings<sup>6</sup> (2019-2023; see Table 1.1.2). This would set the complex ABC equal to 133,000 lb gw. The commercial ACL, commercial ACT, and the recreational component apportionment were calculated using the same approach as **Preferred Alternative 2**. The allowable harvest for both the recreational and commercial sectors would be reduced substantially relative to **Alternative 1** and **Preferred Alternative 2**.

**Alternative 4** is similar to **Preferred Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3** in that it would reduce harvest of scamp and yellowmouth grouper by 54.7% relative to recent annual landings<sup>7</sup> (2019-2023; see Table 1.1.2). In contrast to **Preferred Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3**, **Alternative 4**, would not reduce the harvest of black and yellowfin grouper as part of the calculation of the complex ABC. The complex ABC for **Alternative 4** would include the average landings from 2019-2023 for black and yellowfin grouper and the reduced landings (54.7%) for scamp and yellowmouth grouper. The commercial ACL, commercial ACT, and recreational apportionment would be set in the same manner as **Preferred Alternative 2** and **Alternative 3**.

In terms of total allowable harvest from greatest to least, the alternatives are: **Alternative 1** > **Preferred Alternative 2** > **Alternative 4** > and then **Alternative 3**. In December 2024, the Council's Reef Fish Advisory Panel reviewed the management alternatives and recommended **Preferred Alternative 2** as preferred noting the potential for reduced harvest while providing greater access to this complex while Reef Fish Amendment 58A is developed and implemented.

---

<sup>6</sup> The recreational harvest was calculated using the MRFSS data consistent with current management.

<sup>7</sup> The recreational harvest was calculated using the MRFSS data consistent with current management.

## 2.2 Action 2: Gulf Other SWG Complex Recreational Season

**Alternative 1:** No Action – Do not establish a recreational fixed closed season for the Other Shallow Water Grouper Complex.

**Alternative 2:** Establish a recreational fixed closed season for the Other SWG complex. The recreational season would open June 1 and close when the recreational portion of the total ACL is expected to be met under the Preferred Alternative in Action 1.

**Action 1, Alternative 2:** Closed January 1 – May 31; September 15 – Dec 31 (Open June 1 – September 14)

**Action 1, Alternative 3:** Closed January 1 – May 31; Closed July 5 – Dec 31 (Open June 1 – July 4)

**Action 1, Alternative 4:** Closed January 1 – May 31; July 12 – Dec 31 (Open June 1 – July 11)

**Alternative 3:** Establish a recreational fixed closed season for the Other SWG complex. The recreational season would open July 1 and close when the recreational portion of the total ACL is expected to be met under the Preferred Alternative in Action 1.

**Action 1, Alternative 2:** Closed January 1 – June 30; (Open July 1 – December 31)

**Action 1, Alternative 3:** Closed January 1 – June 30; Closed August 18 – Dec 31 (Open July 1 – August 17)

**Action 1, Alternative 4:** Closed January 1 – June 30; August 25 – Dec 31 (Open June 1 – August 24)

**Alternative 4:** Establish a recreational fixed closed season for the Other SWG complex. The recreational season would open September 1 and close when the recreational portion of the total ACL is expected to be met under the Preferred Alternative in Action 1.

**Action 1, Alternative 2:** Closed January 1 – August 31 (Open September 1 – December 31)

**Action 1, Alternative 3:** Closed January 1 – August 31; Closed October 28 – Dec 31 (Open September 1 – October 27)

**Action 1, Alternative 4:** Closed January 1 – August 31; Closed December 21 – Dec 31 (Open September 1 – December 20)

**Alternative 5:** Establish a recreational fixed closed season for the Other SWG complex. The recreational season would open April 1 and close May 31, and reopen on September 1 and close when the total ACL is expected to be met under the Preferred Alternative in Action 1.

**Action 1, Alternative 2:** Closed January 1 – March 31; June 1 – August 31 (Open April 1 – May 31; September 1 – December 31)

**Action 1, Alternative 3:** Closed January 1 – March 31; May 30 – December 31 (Open April 1 – May 29\*)

**Action 1, Alternative 4:** Closed January 1 – March 31; September 7 – December 31 (Open April 1 – May 31; September 1 – September 6)

**Action 1, Alternative**

\* The recreational season would close when the recreational portion of the total ACL is met (see Appendix A)

## **Discussion:**

This action considers alternatives to establish a recreational closed season for the Other SWG complex. The commercial harvest of the Other SWG complex is managed by apportioning a percentage of the complex ABC/stock ACL to shareholders participating in the commercial IFQ program. The remaining portion of the complex ABC/stock ACL can be harvested by the recreational sector. This approach was developed in the Generic ACL/AM Amendment (GMFMC 2011) and the complex ABC/stock ACL has never been exceeded. Historically, most of the harvest of this complex was from the commercial sector. However, the recreational sector has incrementally increased its harvest (both in pounds landed and as a percentage of the harvest). The trend of increasing recreational harvest along with the reduction in total harvest based on the SSC's recommended catch levels from SEDAR 68 (2022) increases the likelihood of overfishing. The harvest of the commercial sector is limited by the commercial IFQ program where any reduction in allowable harvest is achieved through changes in the distribution of annual allocation. In contrast, the recreational season is managed with a year-round season, minimum size limits (16 inch for scamp, 24 inch for black grouper, 20 inch for yellowfin grouper, no minimum size limit for yellowmouth grouper), and a four fish bag limit within the aggregate grouper bag limit. If Alternative 1 (no action) in Action 1 is selected as preferred (i.e., no reduction in allowable harvest), the total landings (commercial and recreational) are not expected to approach the current 710,000 lb gw complex ABC/stock ACL. However, the action alternatives in Action 1 consider reduced complex ABC/stock ACL values ranging from 322,000 – 133,000 lb gw, of which only a proportion would be available for recreational harvest consistent with the approach developed in the Generic ACL/AM amendment (GMFMC 2011).

**Alternative 1** would maintain the current regulatory structure including a year-round recreational fishing season along with minimum size (scamp only) and daily bag limits.

**Alternatives 2 - 5** retain the minimum size (scamp only) and bag limits but also consider a recreational closed season across different portions of the year. For **Alternatives 2 - 5**, the opening date for each alternative is specified while the close date (if applicable), depends on the catch limits selected in Action 1. For each action alternative, the season duration is conditional upon the preferred alternative in Action 1 and the estimated catch rates for each month (Appendix A). No consideration of a recreational closed season is proposed in relation to Alternative 1 in Action 1 as the total harvest is not projected to exceed the complex ABC/stock ACL.

**Alternative 2** would open the recreational fishing season on June 1 and prohibit harvest from January through May. This alternative would allow harvest during the summer when fishing effort is greatest and other target species are open to harvest. However, the increased catch rate during summer compared to **Alternatives 3 - 5** would allow for fewer fishing days than **Alternatives 3 - 5**. Under **Alternative 2** the season closure dates would occur as early as July 5 and no later than September 15 based on the alternatives presented in Action 1 (Figure 2.2.1. and Table 2.2.1).

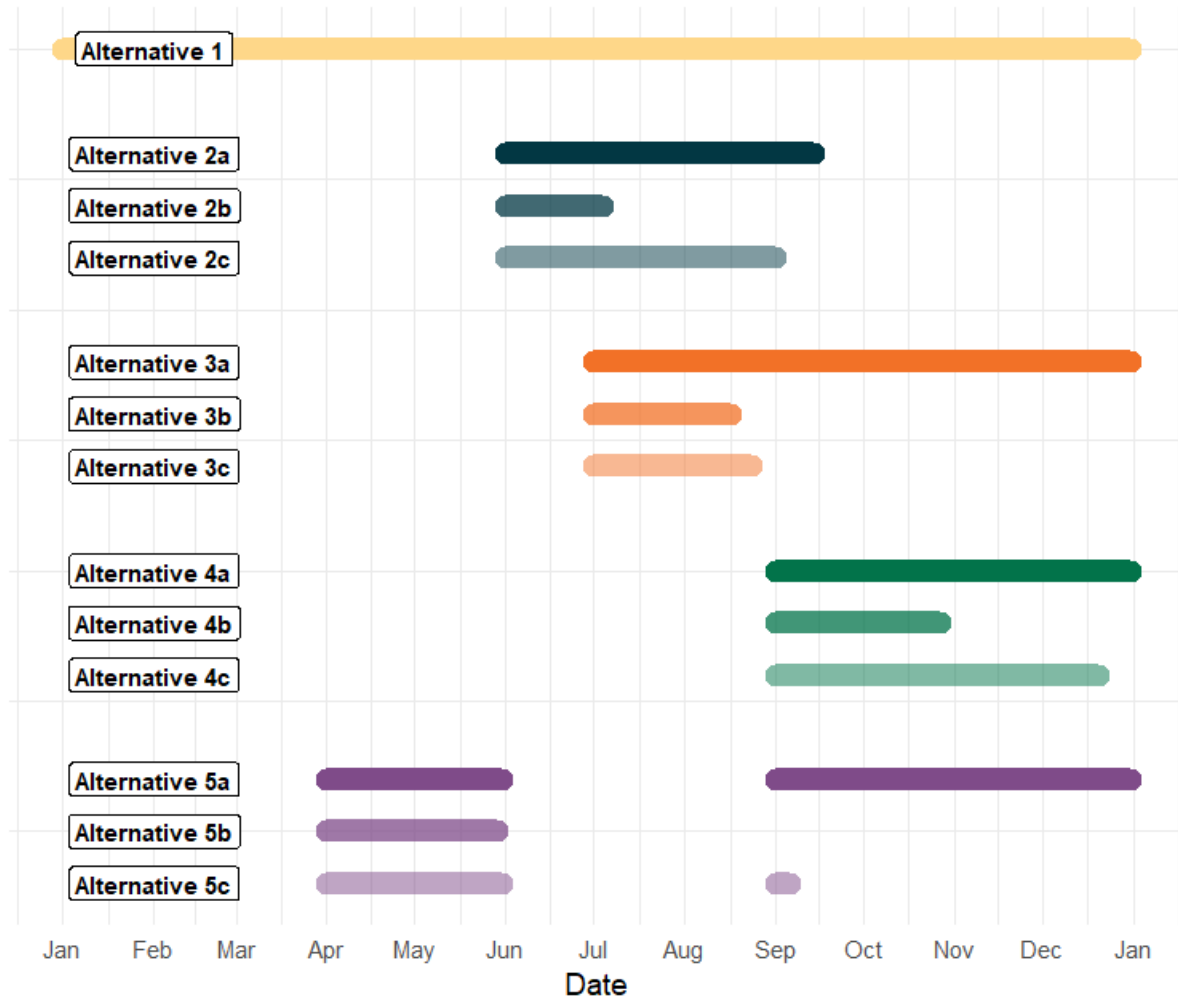
**Alternative 3** would open the recreational fishing season on July 1 and prohibit harvest from January through June. This alternative would prevent harvest in June when historical landings are highest and would prevent overlap with the beginning of the red snapper season when angler effort is very high. Thus, it would provide for a longer season than **Alternative 2** while providing some access during the summer period that is often preferable to recreational anglers (Table 2.2.1).

**Alternative 4** would open the season on September 1. This opening day corresponds to the start date of the gag recreational season. Gag and Other SWG complex species often occupy similar habitat and can be caught in the same areas with similar fishing tactics. This alternative would aim to align this fishing effort and create an opportunity for harvest of multiple prized species on a trip. From September 1 through the end of the year, fishing effort is generally less than the peak months. If Alternative 2 in Action 1 is selected as preferred (i.e., Stock ACL is equal to 322,000 lb gw), the entire stock ACL may not be harvested under **Alternative 4**.

**Alternative 5** considers a split-season approach where a portion of the recreational harvest would occur during the spring months (i.e., April – May) and a subsequent fall season opening September 1. Similar to **Alternative 4**, this alternative may not fully harvest the recreational portion of the stock ACL if Alternative 2 in Action 1 is selected as preferred. **Alternative 5** could provide a balance of access across the Gulf to the extent that regional difference in harvest rates differ.

**Figure 2.2.1.** A comparison of the recreational seasons among the alternatives in Action 2.

### Other SWG Recreational Season Alternatives



**Table 2.2.1.** Proposed recreational harvest levels based on an apportionment of the ABC.

Alternative 2 Fishing Season Start Date: June 1			
Action 1	Proposed Recreational harvest (lb gw)	Open Dates	Season Duration
Alternative 2	66,364	June 1 – September 14	<b>106</b>
Alternative 3	27,411	June 1 – July 4	<b>34</b>
Alternative 4	31,121	June 1 – July 11	<b>41</b>
Alternative 3 Fishing Season Start Date: July 1			
Alternatives	Proposed Recreational harvest (lb gw)	Open Dates	Season Duration
Alternative 2	66,364	July 1 – December 31	<b>184</b>
Alternative 3	27,411	July 1 – August 17	<b>48</b>
Alternative 4	31,121	July 1 – August 24	<b>55</b>
Alternative 4 Fishing Season Start Date: September 1			
Alternatives	Proposed Recreational harvest (lb gw)	Open Dates	Season Duration
Alternative 2	66,364	September 1 – December 31	<b>122</b>
Alternative 3	27,411	September 1 – October 27	<b>57</b>
Alternative 4	31,121	September 1 – December 20	<b>111</b>
Alternative 5 Fishing Season Start Dates: April 1; September 1			
Alternatives	Proposed Recreational harvest (lb gw)	Open Dates	Season Duration
Alternative 2	66,364	April 1 – May 31; September 1 – December 31	<b>183</b>
Alternative 3	27,411	April 1 – May 29*	<b>59</b>
Alternative 4	31,121	April 1 – May 31; September 1 – September 6	<b>67</b>

\* The recreational portion of the ACL is projected to be met prior to the re-opening of the split season, thus this would be a single season in April 1 – May 29.

## CHAPTER 3. LIST OF PREPARERS

### PREPARERS

Name	Expertise	Responsibility	Agency
John Froeschke	Fishery Biologist	Co-Team Lead – Amendment development, biological analyses	GMFMC
Daniel Luers	Fishery Biologist	Co-Team Lead – Amendment development, biological analyses	SERO
Matt Freeman	Economist	Economic analyses	GMFMC
Adam Stemle	Economist	Economic analyses	SERO
Max Birdsong	Social Scientist	Social analyses	GMFMC
Christina Package-Ward	Anthropologist	Social analyses	SERO
Alisha Gray	Fishery Biologist	Data analyses	SERO

### REVIEWERS

Name	Expertise	Responsibility	Agency
Mara Levy	Attorney	Legal review	NOAA GC
Scott Sandorf	Technical writer and editor	Regulatory writer	SERO
Jessica Stephen	Fishery Biologist	Review	SERO
Jennifer Lee	Protected Resources	Review	SERO
Frank Helies	Branch Chief	Review	SERO
Ryan Rindone	Fishery Biologist	Review	GMFMC
Carrie Simmons	Fishery Biologist	Review	GMFMC

GMFMC = Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council; NOAA GC = National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration General Counsel; SEFSC = Southeast Fisheries Science Center; SERO = Southeast Regional Office of the National Marine Fisheries Service

## CHAPTER 4. REFERENCES

GMFMC. 2008. Amendment 29 to the reef fish fishery management plan – effort management in the commercial grouper and tilefish fisheries, including final environmental impact statement and regulatory impact review. Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council. Tampa, Florida. 302 pp. [https://gulfcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/Reef-Fish-Amdt-29-Dec-08\\_508Compliant.pdf](https://gulfcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/Reef-Fish-Amdt-29-Dec-08_508Compliant.pdf)

GMFMC. 2011. Final generic annual catch limits/accountability measures amendment for the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council’s red drum, reef fish, shrimp, coral and coral reefs fishery management plans, including environmental impact statement, regulatory impact review, regulatory flexibility analysis, and fishery impact statement. Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, Tampa, Florida. 378 pp. [http://www.gulfcouncil.org/docs/amendments/Final%20Generic%20ACL\\_AM\\_Amendment-September%209%202011%20v.pdf](http://www.gulfcouncil.org/docs/amendments/Final%20Generic%20ACL_AM_Amendment-September%209%202011%20v.pdf)

NOAA Fisheries. 2019. Recommended Use of Current Gulf of Mexico Surveys of the Marine Recreational Fishing in Stock Assessments. 37 pp. <https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/dam-migration/94100569.pdf>

SEDAR 68. 2022. SEDAR 68 Operational Assessment of Gulf of Mexico Scamp and Yellowmouth Grouper. Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review. North Charleston, South Carolina. 231 pp. <https://sedarweb.org/documents/sedar-68oa-gulf-of-mexico-scamp-operational-assessment-final-stock-assessment-report/>

## APPENDIX A. SEASON PROJECTIONS

### Recreational and Commercial Season Analyses for the Gulf of Mexico Shallow-water Grouper Complex

Southeast Regional Office  
LAPP/DM Branch  
February 2025

The Gulf of Mexico (Gulf) shallow water grouper (SWG) complex consists of black grouper, scamp, yellowedge grouper and yellowmouth grouper. These species are currently managed as a stock complex in federal waters under the Fishery Management Plan for the Reef Fish Resources of the Gulf of Mexico (Reef Fish FMP). In 2025, an amendment to the Reef Fish FMP will establish allowable catch limits (ACLs) and sector allocations in pounds (lb) gutted weight (gw) for the commercial and recreational sectors. This analysis provides the average commercial landings and how much that represents of each proposed commercial IFQ quota option, and separately projects recreational season closures based on all management options being considered.

#### *Commercial and recreational landings data*

Monthly commercial landings were obtained for the SWG species from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Catch Share Database (January 2025; **Table 1**). Gulf recreational landings for the SWG complex were obtained from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) recreational ACL files (accessed December 2024; **Table 2**). The SEFSC recreational landings dataset includes landings from the Texas Parks and Wildlife recreational creel survey (TPWD), Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries creel survey (LA Creel), Southeast Region Headboat Survey (SRHS), and Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS; Florida, Alabama and Mississippi). The MRFSS file contain estimates from MRIP's Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (APAIS), MRFSS (private angler effort estimates), and For-Hire Telephone Survey (FHS; for-hire effort estimates). For 2020 and 2021, imputed MRFSS catch estimates are used to account for disruptions in the dockside sampling due to COVID. Monthly landings were estimated for MRFSS, TPWD and LA Creel by assuming equal daily catch rates for months within a wave and then combined with SRHS, which are provided monthly.

Predicted future landings for both the commercial and recreational sector were estimated by averaging monthly landings in 2022-2024 when available, and 2021-2023 otherwise. The average monthly landings were then divided by the number of days in each month to provide a daily catch rate for each sector.

Commercial Gulf SWG species are currently managed as a catch share program, and therefore, any reductions in the commercial quota will result in fewer pounds being distributed to each participant who holds shares in the program rather than the fishery experiencing closures.

Average commercial landings of SWG species are calculated to project future landing rates and are provided to compare against each of the proposed IFQ quotas (**Table 3**). Separately, the recreational sector will be closed if the ACL is met or is projected to be met. Predicted recreational closure dates are provided in **Table 4** based on cumulatively summed projected recreational landings of SWG species.

**Table 1.** Monthly commercial landings (lb gw) of the Gulf shallow-water grouper from 2021-2023 and projected future landings using averaged landings from 2022-2024. 2024 landings are preliminary.

Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total Landings
2021	10,064	8,417	14,116	15,315	14,526	16,317	21,123	11,296	9,176	10,463	8,950	16,165	155,928
2022	5,648	9,919	10,298	11,283	18,152	23,840	13,965	12,308	11,093	9,262	7,405	13,525	146,698
2023	6,453	14,170	18,340	14,483	17,305	16,021	16,072	11,826	6,760	6,586	9,758	11,238	149,012
Prelim 2024	5,099	10,894	8,017	10,454	10,413	10,625	13,981	11,371	6,560	3,481	4,666	7,765	103,326
3yr Avg Projected Landings	5,733	11,661	12,218	12,073	15,290	16,829	14,673	11,835	8,138	6,443	7,276	10,843	133,012

Source: SEFSC Commercial ACL dataset [January, 2025].

\*2024 Commercial landings are preliminary.

**Table 2.** Monthly recreational landings (lb gw) of the Gulf shallow-water grouper from 2021-2024 along with projected future landings estimated using averaged landings from 2022-2024 through October and 2021-2023 for November and December.

Preliminary 2024 landings were available for January through October.

Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total Landings
2021	1,173	895	10,746	10,960	22,287	22,841	31,169	30,247	6,191	7,214	2,559	2,358	148,639
2022	524	239	6,999	7,420	44,219	43,624	14,162	14,301	3,755	3,732	582	883	140,440
2023	64	61	715	1,173	18,841	18,933	13,977	13,802	33,198	34,319	583	479	136,146
Prelim 2024	593	558	2,302	2,520	10,580	11,400	24,107	23,596	6,063	6,102	-	-	86,953
3yr Avg Projected Landings	394	286	3,339	3,705	24,546	24,652	17,416	17,233	14,339	14,718	1,241	1,240	123,108

Source: SEFSC MRFSS recreational ACL database [December, 2024].

Notes: MRFSS landings include all Gulf shallow-water grouper landings (black grouper, scamp, yellowfin grouper, yellowmouth grouper; TPWD, SRHS, LA Creel, MRFSS).

\*Recreational January-October 2024 landings are preliminary.

**Table 3.** Average commercial landings of the Gulf of Mexico SWG commercial sector compared against each proposed 2026 IFQ Quota alternative. Source: NMFS Catch Share Database (January 2025).

Alternatives	Proposed IFQ Quota (lb gw)	Average Commercial Landings	% Average Landings compared against Proposed IFQ Quota
<b>Alternative 1: No Action</b>	710,000	150,546	19%
<b>Alternative 2</b>	245,410	150,546	54%
<b>Alternative 3</b>	101,365	150,546	131%
<b>Alternative 4</b>	115,084	150,546	116%

**Table 4.** Projected Gulf of Mexico SWG closure dates expected for the recreational sector with each proposed 2026 Annual Catch Limit (ACL) alternative. Source: SEFSC MRFSS Recreational ACL Dataset (December 2024).

<b>Fishing Season Start Date: June 1</b>			
Alternatives	Proposed Recreational ACL (lb gw)	3-year Average (W1-5:2022-2024   W6: 2021-2023)	Upper 95% 3-year Average (W1-5: 2022-2024)   W6: 2021-2023)
<b>Alternative 1: No Action</b>	710,000	No Closure	No Closure
<b>Alternative 2</b>	66,364	<b>Sep 15</b>	<b>Jul 30</b>
<b>Alternative 3</b>	27,411	<b>Jul 5</b>	<b>Jun 19</b>
<b>Alternative 4</b>	31,121	<b>Jul 12</b>	<b>Jun 22</b>
<b>Fishing Season Start Date: July 1</b>			
Alternatives	Proposed Recreational ACL (lb gw)	3-year Average (W1-5:2022-2024   W6: 2021-2023)	Upper 95% 3-year Average (W1-5: 2022-2024)   W6: 2021-2023)
<b>Alternative 1: No Action</b>	710,000	No Closure	No Closure
<b>Alternative 2</b>	66,364	No Closure	<b>Sep 18</b>
<b>Alternative 3</b>	27,411	<b>Aug 18</b>	<b>Aug 5</b>
<b>Alternative 4</b>	31,121	<b>Aug 25</b>	<b>Aug 10</b>
<b>Fishing Season Start Date: September 1</b>			
Alternatives	Proposed Recreational ACL (lb gw)	3-year Average (W1-5:2022-2024   W6: 2021-2023)	Upper 95% 3-year Average (W1-5: 2022-2024)   W6: 2021-2023)
<b>Alternative 1: No Action</b>	710,000	No Closure	No Closure
<b>Alternative 2</b>	66,364	No Closure	<b>Oct 31</b>
<b>Alternative 3</b>	27,411	<b>Oct 28</b>	<b>Sep 26</b>
<b>Alternative 4</b>	31,121	<b>Dec 21</b>	<b>Sep 29</b>

<b>Fishing Season Start Date: April 1-May 31; September 1 – Dec 31</b>			
<b>Alternatives</b>	Proposed Recreational ACL (lb gw)	3-year Average (W1-5:2022-2024   W6: 2021-2023)	Upper 95% 3-year Average (W1-5: 2022-2024)   W6: 2021-2023)
<b>Alternative 1: No Action</b>	710,000	No Closure	No Closure
<b>Alternative 2</b>	66,364	No Closure	Apr 1 – May 31 Open <b>Sep 18 Closed</b>
<b>Alternative 3</b>	27,411	<b>May 30</b>	<b>May 14</b>
<b>Alternative 4</b>	31,121	Apr 1 – May 31 Open <b>Sep 7 Closed</b>	<b>May 17</b>

The reliability of these results is dependent upon the accuracy of the underlying data and input assumptions. The analysis intends to create a realistic baseline as a foundation for comparisons, under the assumption that projected future landings will accurately reflect actual future landings. These closure dates are our best estimate, but uncertainty still exists as economic conditions, weather events, changes in catch-per-unit effort, fisher response to management regulations, and a variety of other factors may cause departures from any assumption.