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Tab I, No. 4

2026 Marine Recreational Information Program Updates

Gulf Council Meeting, Mobile, AL

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Outline

- Fishing Effort Survey (FES) status and next steps
- RAPID: Recreational data collection partnership improvement process - status and next steps*
- National Academies Committee on National Statistics Review of NOAA recreational survey and data standards*

* Time permitting

Fishing Effort Survey



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Background and Motivation for 2024 FES study

- Completed a **large-scale study throughout 2024** to test a revised survey design aimed at improving the accuracy and resolution/timeliness of recreational fishing effort estimates
 - **Responding to concerns from the recreational fishing community** and partners that shore and private boat fishing effort estimates may be too high
 - Aligning with our **commitment to continuous improvement** of recreational fishing data



What we tested in 2024

- Experimental design overlapped with FES from January-December 2024 (Maine to Mississippi and in Hawaii)
- **Key differences compared to previous FES design:**
 - **Increased frequency of administration:** The survey was mailed **monthly** instead of every two months.
 - **Revised question order:** The sequence of fishing activity questions was changed to improve reporting accuracy.
 - **Split Reference Period:** The 2-month fishing activity question was separated into two individual 1-month questions.
 - **Composite Estimation:** Combined two independent estimates for each reference month to improve precision and stability.



FES Questionnaire

15 How many days did this person go recreational saltwater fishing from the **SHORE** in <Merged State>?

The shore includes docks, bridges, causeways, beaches, banks, or any other shore-based place or area. Do not include freshwater fishing.

Did not recreational saltwater fish from shore in last 12 months → **Go to question 16**

Number of days saltwater shore fishing in Jan. and Feb. of 2024

Number of days saltwater shore fishing in last 12 months, including Jan. and Feb.

16 How many days did this person go recreational saltwater fishing from a private or rental **BOAT** that returned to shore in <Merged State>?

Do not include freshwater trips or trips where a paid captain or crew helped locate and catch fish.

Did not recreational saltwater fish from private boat in last 12 months

Number of days saltwater boat fishing in Jan. and Feb. of 2024

Number of days saltwater boat fishing in last 12 months, including Jan. and Feb.

EXP Questionnaire

15 How many days did this person go recreational saltwater fishing from the **SHORE** in <Merged State>?

The shore includes docks, bridges, causeways, beaches, banks, or any other shore-based place or area. Do not include freshwater fishing or fishing for shellfish.

Did not recreational saltwater fish from shore in last 12 months → **Go to question 16**

Number of days saltwater shore fishing in last 12 months, including Jan. and Feb.

Number of days saltwater shore fishing in Jan. of 2024

Number of days saltwater shore fishing in Feb. of 2024

16 How many days did this person go recreational saltwater fishing from a private or rental **BOAT** that returned to shore in <Merged State>?

Do not include freshwater trips, shellfishing trips, or trips where a paid captain or crew helped locate and catch fish.

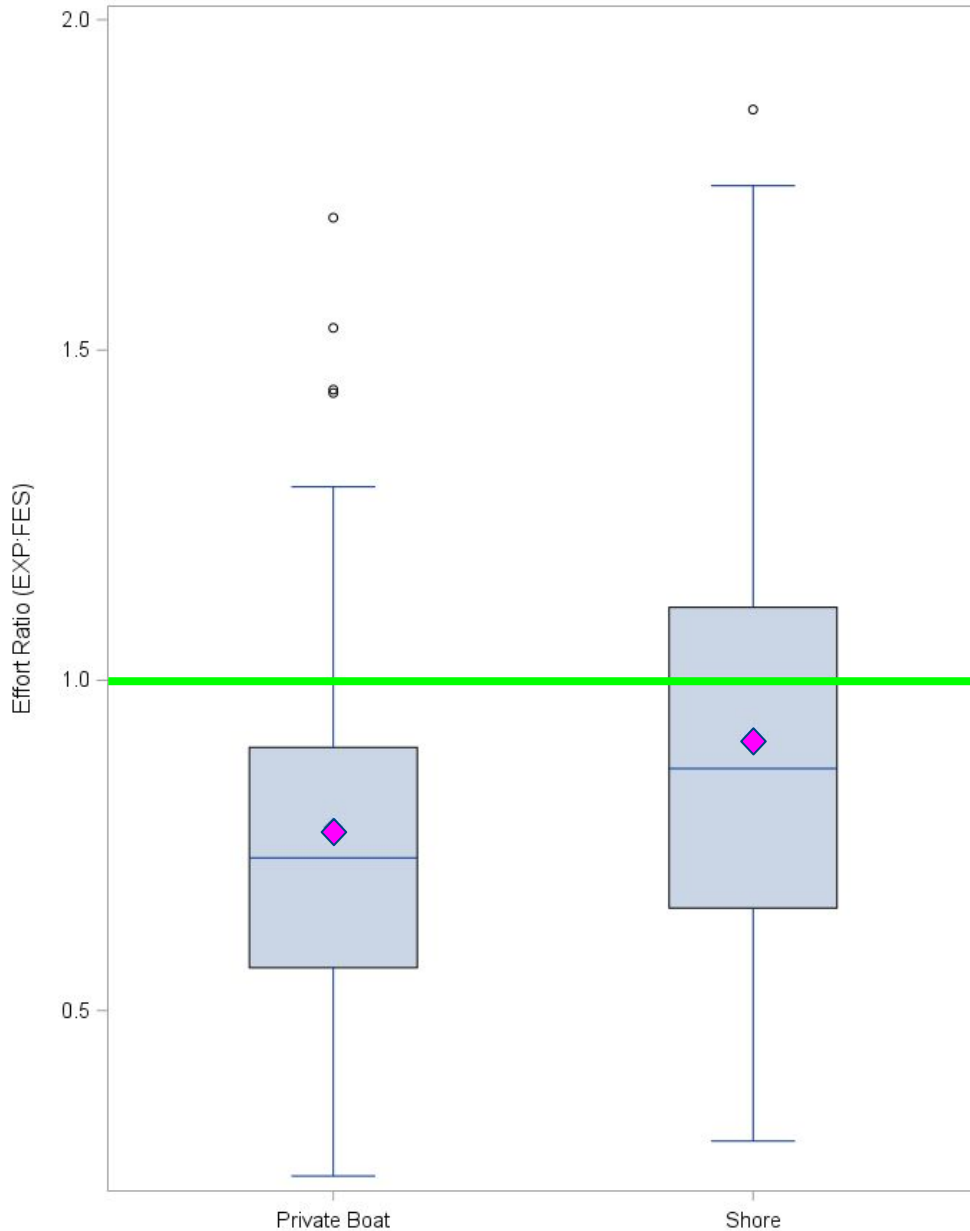
Did not recreational saltwater fish from private boat in last 12 months

Number of days saltwater boat fishing in last 12 months, including Jan. and Feb.

Number of days saltwater boat fishing in Jan. of 2024

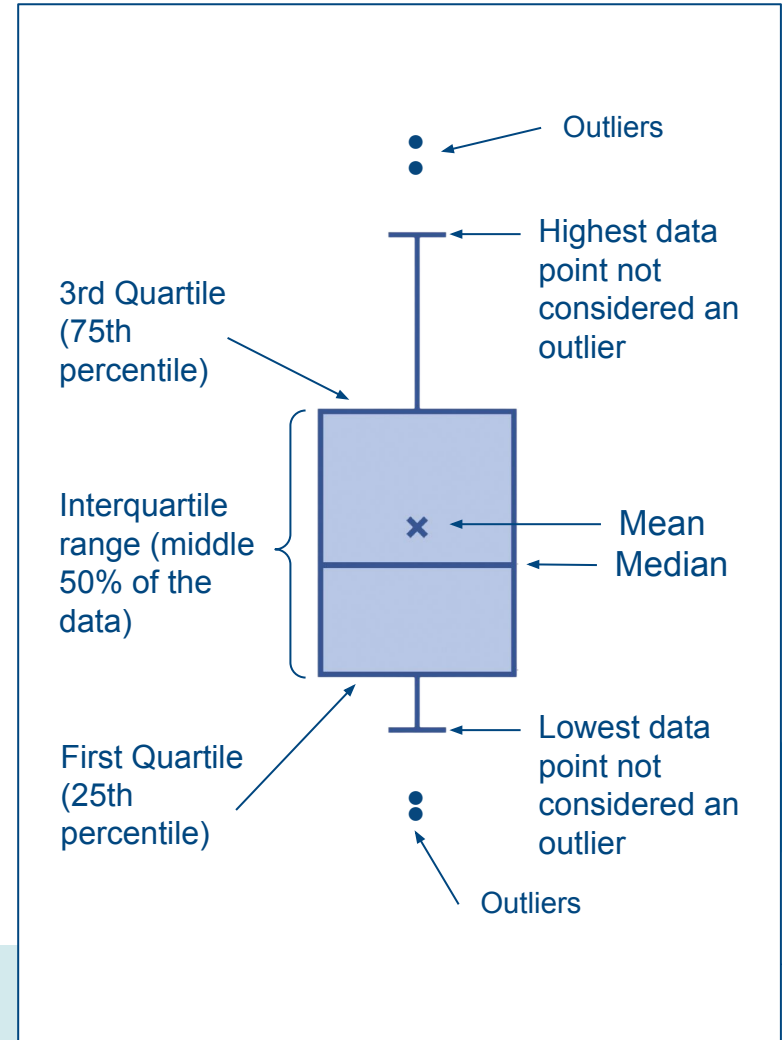
Number of days saltwater boat fishing in Feb. of 2024

Distribution of effort ratios (EXP:FES) across all estimation domains

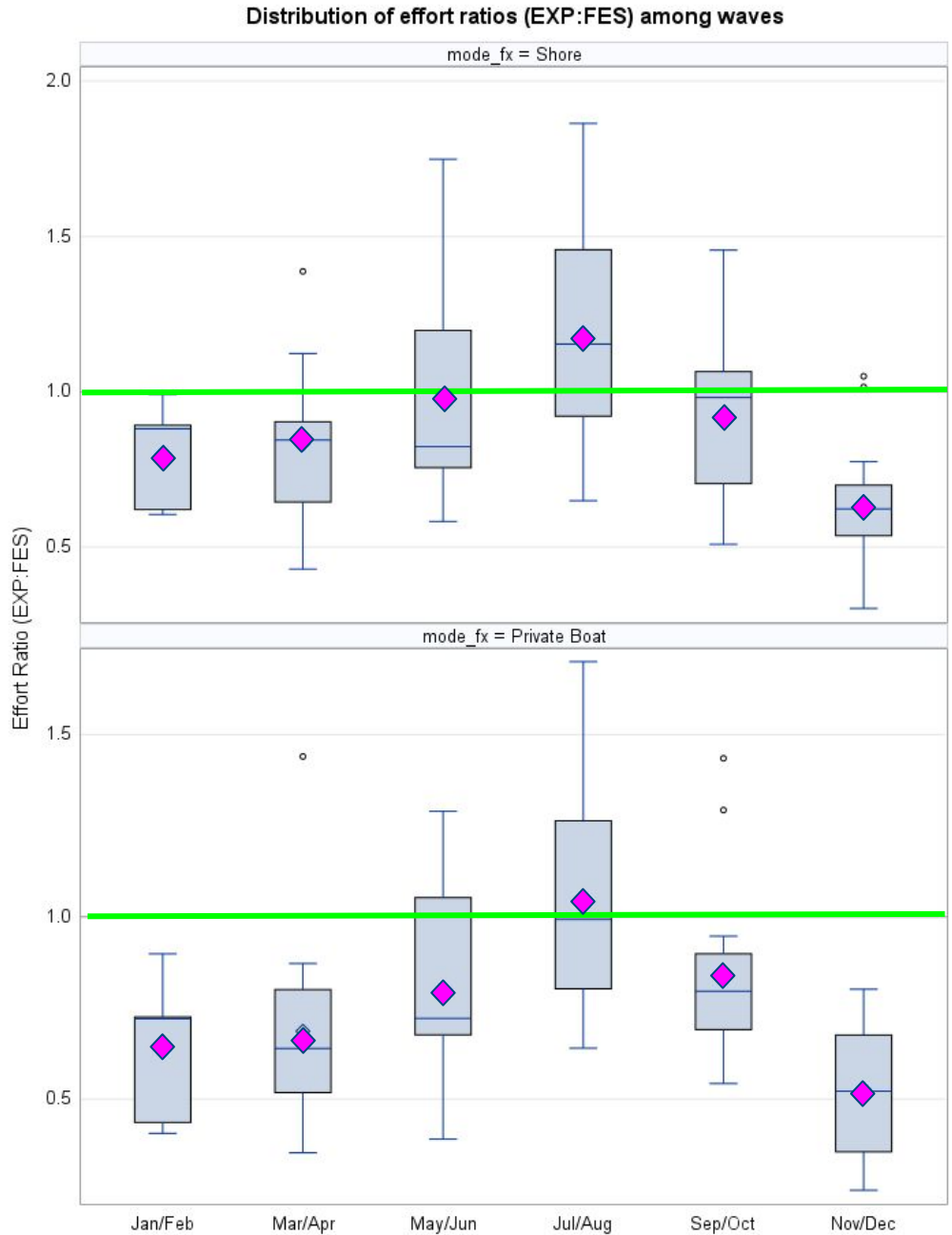


Results Overview

Ratio < 1 = experimental estimates lower than previous FES design



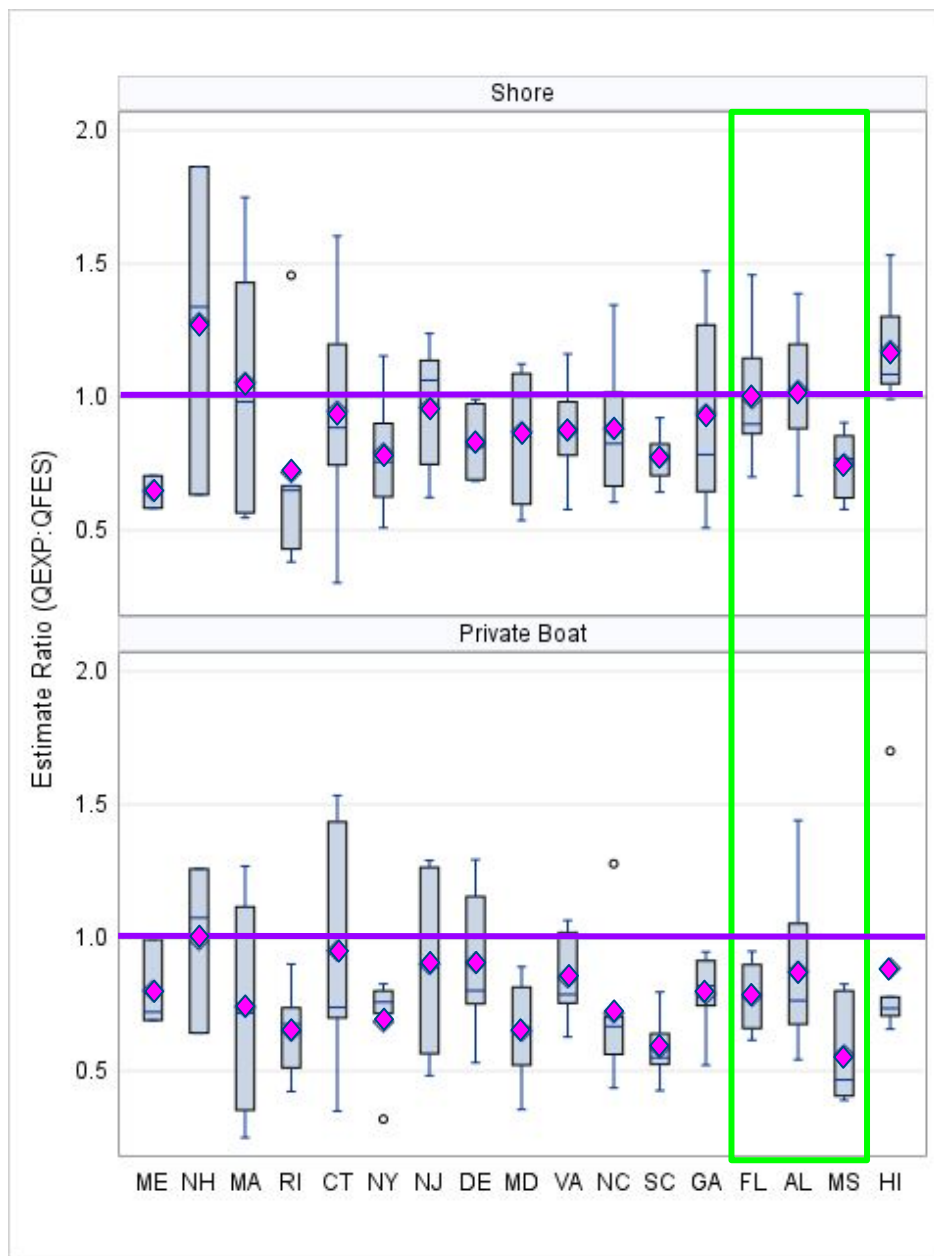
By Wave



Differences most pronounced during periods of lower fishing activity (e.g., Nov/Dec) and lowest during periods of high fishing activity (e.g., July/Aug).

Ratio <1 = experimental estimates lower than previous FES design

By State



Key Findings and Conclusions

- The new FES should **increase the accuracy of recreational effort estimates** by mitigating potential overreporting of fishing trips
- **Experimental estimates of angler trips were generally lower** than previous FES design
 - Differences more pronounced in **private boat mode** and in **low activity waves**
- **Primary driver** of differences was **revised question order**
 - Created a beneficial "**bounding effect**" to mitigate overreporting
 - Allowed respondents to **identify as anglers without biasing the primary trip-count questions**
- Study demonstrated the **feasibility of monthly sampling**, as well as the benefits of a composite estimation design, including **greater precision and stability of survey estimates**



2026 Implementation

- Calibration model, peer review, and implementation
 - Model builds on what was used for 2018 effort survey changes
 - Public peer review workshop, Sept. 23-24, 2025
 - Peer Review Panel agreed proposed method is a reasonable and scientifically defensible estimation approach; state of the art and fully addresses the complexity of the survey data to rescale the historical time series
 - Revision/fine-tuning of model as needed based on peer review recommendations
 - Note calibration results will not be a simple reflection of the 2024 study results
- Status of Monthly Estimate Production
 - Current bimonthly estimate publication schedule maintained in near-term based on current resources
 - Revised monthly design provides flexibility to produce monthly estimates in future
 - Analyzing resource requirements to support a shift to monthly estimate production



Impact on Fisheries Management

- In summer 2026, we will publish the calibrated historical estimates, (40+ years of data) rescaled to the improved design, for use in subsequent fisheries management decisions and stock assessments
- The updated information could lead to changes in fishing regulations, such as new catch limits, that more accurately reflect the status of the fish stocks
- FES only produces private boat and shore fishing trip, or effort, estimates. All species catch information is collected through dockside/public-access interviews (APAIS)
 - a. The effort information is generally multiplied by the catch information to estimate total catch for a species
 - b. Catch estimation functions as a batch process; the revised effort time series is applied to all species simultaneously; there is no technical mechanism to prioritize or parse out individual species ahead of the full data release



FES Milestones

Milestone	Timeline
FES 2024 study report completed	August 2025
Peer review of FES 2024 study report and proposed design change through Center for Independent Experts	Late August→November 2025
Calibration model peer review workshop (also through CIE); open virtual meeting with partner and public comment	Sept 23-24, 2025 (Workshop) Dec 2025/Jan 2026 (Final Peer Review Reports)
Transition plan development and partner review	July→December 2025
MRIP Transition Team meeting with Atlantic, Gulf, and Hawai'i subgroups (includes NMFS, state, commission, and council representation) to review partner input on transition plan for effectively implementing the revised FES	Sept. 29, 2025
Peer reviewed study report, final peer-reviewed calibration methodology, and transition plan released	Spring 2026 (awaiting leadership clearance)
Implement improved FES design	Jan 2026
Calibrated time series available for use in assessment/management	Original: Spring 2026 Revised target following gov. Shutdown impacts: Summer 2026



RAPID



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Initiative to Re-envision the Recreational Fishing Data Partnership (2024-2025)

Working Goal

A state-federal data collection system for marine and estuarine recreational fisheries that is regionally specific and nationally coherent and leverages partner expertise and resources to obtain the best quality data possible from available sources to inform sustainable, adaptive fisheries management

Progress To-Date (Spring 2024–Summer 2025):

- Engaged over 150 partners through initial briefings
- Conducted internal interviews with 40+ NMFS regional office and science center staff across all regions
- 15+ regional partner and public listening sessions nationwide
- Produced a framework report synthesizing all gathered input
- Sent draft report to partners for review - received 200+ follow-up comments that were incorporated into the final framework report



Recreational Angler Partnership Improvement Directive (RAPID)

- Supersedes the Partnership Re-envisioning initiative
- The "Directive" changes the trajectory in two key ways:
 - High-Level Buy-In: We have the full weight of the NOAA Policy team behind this effort
 - Partner-Led Design: The intent is to shift to a true co-leadership model for the effort
 - Will lean heavily on the Commissions and States for direction of regional workshops and devising regional partnership models and plans
 - ASMFC is managing the national facilitation contract
- The end goal remains unchanged - a state-federal data collection partnership that better meets regional needs while maintaining scientific integrity and improving stakeholder trust
- Funding - initial injection focused largely on states that implement APAIS





Recreational Angler Partnership Improvement Directive (RAPID)

RAPID serves as the transformation stage to increase data collection capabilities and strengthen our partnerships to modernize our recreational data collection enterprise.



Other Program Updates



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Peer review of agency's Recreational Fishing Survey and Data Standards

Our national survey and data [standards](#) are intended to:

- Serve as guidelines on core aspects of recreational fisheries data collection and estimation
- Promote **data quality, consistency, and comparability** across state, regional, and federal recreational fishing surveys, as well as **shared use of the resulting data**

The **National Academies** conducted an [independent review](#) assessing the standards' **effectiveness for key data uses**, alignment with **federal best practices**

Jan 2026: Published their report with **recommendations for improvement**, including e.g., potential guidance related to Artificial Intelligence/modeling approaches and integration of non-probability data

Peer review of agency's Recreational Fishing Survey and Data Standards

Key Findings and Next Steps:

- Overall, peer review panel found the MRIP standards to be well designed and consistent with OMB's standards, other federal agencies' practices, and the standards of other organizations
- Panel supported the continuation of publishing highly imprecise estimates with current disclaimers on appropriate use considerations
- Panel noted probability-based survey research should continue to be the primary source of data; however, they recommended we should consider how to effectively provide standards for supplementing data with other approaches and new developments such as: AI, model-based methods, spatial/temporal models, and data science technologies
- Other recommendations include:
 - making the standards more manageable to states and agencies that lack statistical experts
 - incorporating elements on timeliness of data to better meet the needs of those actively managing fisheries
 - promoting greater consistency in how the catches are enumerated
 - adopting tiered levels of survey certification
- The peer review report includes general timeframes to meet the recommendations, understanding some of these could take 1-3 years to implement while others could take up to 10 years, such as the adoption of new technologies
- We are drafting a plan this FY to outline how we will address the recommendations in the report



New Partner Review Procedures for Recreational Catch Estimates

Strengthened Review Process: NOAA Fisheries, in collaboration with all participating States, has launched a more [robust procedure](#) for reviewing recreational fishing catch and effort estimates

Collaborative Approach: The new process leverages the local expertise of state partners to identify inconsistencies and improve the quality of data used for fisheries management

Positive Feedback: State partners have responded positively, noting a greater sense of ownership in data review

Forthcoming Tool: A new online data review tracking tool is in development to increase transparency and efficiency (contingent on resourcing)



GulfFIN MRIP Regional Implementation Plan

- Updated [plan](#) published March 2026
- Living document, updated at least every 5 years
- Assists with allocation of NOAA resources and funding to meet partner-identified regional data collection needs
- Top priority highlighted by GulfFIN in their plan: Implementation of Alabama and Mississippi Creel Surveys
 - Of note, we are working closely with AL and MS state partners on the certification of these surveys



Gulf of America

Marine Recreational Information Program Regional Implementation Plan

February 2026

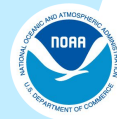
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Questions?



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