

# Catch Limit Modifications for Gulf of America Lane Snapper



## Abbreviated Framework Action under the Fishery Management Plan for the Reef Fish Resources of the Gulf

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## ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS DOCUMENT

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Definition</b>
ABC	acceptable biological catch
ACL	annual catch limit
AM	accountability measures
Council	Gulf Council
E.O.	Executive Order
EFH	Essential Fish Habitat
FES	Fishing Effort Survey
GFMC	Gulf Fishery Management Council
GMFMC	Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
Gulf	Gulf of America (Formerly Gulf of Mexico)
IA	interim analysis
IFQ	individual fishing quota
mp	million pounds
MRFSS	Marine Recreational Fishery Statistics Survey
MRIP	Marine Recreational Information Program
NMFS	National Marine Fisheries Service
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
OFL	overfishing limit
SEDAR	Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review
SEFSC	Southeast Fisheries Science Center
SERO	Southeast Regional Office
SSC	Scientific and Statistical Committee
ww	whole weight

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# CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

Gulf of America<sup>1</sup>(Gulf) lane snapper is managed under the Gulf Council’s (Council) Fishery Management Plan for the Reef Fish Resources of the Gulf and an annual catch limit (ACL) is set for the stock, with no allocation between the commercial and recreational sectors.

This framework action modifies the lane snapper overfishing limit (OFL), acceptable biological catch (ABC), and stock ACL, in response to the 2026 Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) 49 Interim Analysis (IA) for Gulf lane snapper. Previous lane snapper IAs relied on the recreational headboat catch per unit effort (CPUE) index; however, that index is prone to effects from management bias, and as of 2026, the data for that index are no longer sampled as they were historically. The Gulf Fishery Independent Survey of Habitat and Ecosystem Resources (G-FISHER) composite video index of relative abundance was used as the representative index in place of the headboat CPUE index. The G-FISHER index indicated that the Gulf lane snapper stock has increased in abundance since the 2010s through the early 2020s and has remained stable since. The data from G-FISHER are corroborated by public comment from fishermen at Council meetings which have indicated that lane snapper is both more abundant and that the average size of lane snapper caught has increased. During its review of the 2026 SEDAR 49 IA, the Council’s Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) updated the reference period from 2006 – 2015, as was used in previous lane snapper IAs, to 2009 – 2018 using the G-FISHER index to better capture fishery dynamics for the stock. The results of this IA indicated that the OFL and ABC for Gulf lane snapper could be increased. The SSC recommended that the Gulf lane snapper OFL be 1,336,443 pounds (lb) whole weight (ww), and the ABC be 1,304,917 lb ww, for 2026 – 2028 and subsequent years. Because the stock is considered healthy, the Council currently sets the stock ACL equal to the ABC.

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) monitors commercial and recreational landings and prevents further harvest when the stock ACL is met or projected to be met. In 2021, NMFS implemented a framework action that modified the lane snapper OFL, ABC, and stock ACL, and modified the accountability measure (AM) provision to require a prohibition on harvest for the remainder of the fishing year if lane snapper landings meet or are projected to meet the stock ACL (GMFMC 2021). These new catch limits were directly comparable to those collected by the Marine Recreational Information Program’s (MRIP) Fishing Effort Survey (FES) as opposed to legacy Marine Recreational Fishery Statistics Survey (MRFSS). When recreational landings were monitored in MRFSS, the ACL was exceeded yearly starting in 2016. The ACL was also exceeded in every year but one (2022, 2023, and 2024) since recreational landings have been monitored in MRIP-FES. When evaluating historic recreational landings converted to MRIP-FES compared to the current ACL in the same units, the ACL has only been exceeded four times in the past decade. In this same time period, landings have only exceeded the proposed ACL twice. In October 2024, NMFS implemented another framework action to increase the lane snapper OFL, ABC, and stock ACL (GMFMC 2024) in response to the Council’s SSC review of

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<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.

the 2023 SEDAR 49 IA for lane snapper<sup>2</sup>. Although the lane snapper stock ACL was increased in 2024, the stock ACL was still projected to be harvested early and fishing was closed on November 26, 2024. The lane snapper fishing season in 2025 remained open for the entire fishing year (January 1 – December 31), however, once Wave 6 recreational landings were received, the stock ACL was estimated to have been exceeded.

Landings for the commercial and recreational sectors from 2006 through 2025 in lb ww are shown in Table 1.1.1. Recreational landings were monitored in MRFSS units prior to 2021 and MRIP-FES units from 2021 to present<sup>3</sup>. Commercial sector landings have shown a slight decreasing trend since 2006; whereas recreational sector landings have increased beginning in 2016, with some fluctuations (see Appendix A Figure 1). NMFS implemented closures in 2019 (December 13), 2021 (closed October 18 and reopened December 23<sup>4</sup>), 2022 (November 15), and 2024 (November 26).

Of note, in August 2025, the Council completed and transmitted a framework action to increase the minimum size limit of Gulf lane snapper for both sectors from 8 inches total length (TL) to 10 inches TL. The Council expected this management modification to increase the fishing season duration under the current catch limits by requiring the discarding of fish under 10 inches TL. If this increase in the Gulf lane snapper minimum size limit is combined with the proposed increase in catch limits in this document, the fishing season duration for the species would be expected to be extended further compared to increasing the minimum size limit alone.

**Table 1.1.1.** Landings of lane snapper (lb ww) by sector from 2006-2025, by weight (lb ww), and ACL values. Recreational landings are inclusive of MRIP-FES data.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://sedarweb.org/documents/report-of-the-gulf-of-mexico-ssc-review-of-the-2023-update-to-the-sedar-49-lane-snapper-assessment/>

<sup>3</sup> MRFSS and MRIP-FES generate estimates that are not directly comparable. References to “MRFSS units” and “MRIP-FES units” signify that the estimates use different scales.

<sup>4</sup> In 2021, the fishery reopened on December 23 upon implementation of a higher stock ACL.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Recreational Landings (lb ww)</b>	<b>Commercial Landings (lb ww)</b>	<b>Total Landings</b>	<b>ACL FES (lb ww)</b>
2006	513,265	49,340	562,605	
2007	531,385	29,222	560,607	
2008	354,496	25,475	379,971	
2009	535,266	35,848	571,114	
2010	178,642	17,262	195,904	
2011	151,116	14,365	165,481	
2012	423,252	28,928	452,180	
2013	456,712	23,189	479,901	
2014	467,957	30,237	498,194	
2015	401,702	46,027	447,729	
2016	612,615	34,723	647,338	
2017	1,272,029	42,618	1,314,647	
2018	791,568	26,435	818,004	
2019	1,036,281	24,299	1,060,580	
2020	852,730	24,246	876,976	
2021	554,911	22,885	577,797	1,028,973
2022	1,113,580	16,447	1,130,027	1,028,973
2023	1,125,173	28,217	1,153,390	1,028,973
2024	1,366,313	30,297	1,396,610	1,088,873
2025	1,066,620	26,844	1,093,464	1,088,873

**Source:** Commercial data sources – SEDAR 49 (2006-2013) and Southeast Fishery Science Center’s (SEFSC) ACL Monitoring Data (2014-2025), accessed February 2026; recreational data source – SEFSC FES ACL Monitoring Data, accessed February 2026.

## 1.2 Purpose and Need

The purpose of this framework action is to modify the OFL, ABC, and stock ACL for Gulf lane snapper based on the 2026 SEDAR 49 IA.

The need for this framework action is to update existing lane snapper catch limits based on the best scientific information available and to achieve optimum yield while preventing overfishing, consistent with the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

## 1.3 Modification of the OFL, ABC, and Stock ACL for Gulf Lane Snapper

**Option 1:** Retain the current OFL, ABC, and ACL for the Gulf lane snapper stock. The OFL is 1,116,331 lb ww and the ABC is 1,088,873 lb ww. The ACL is set equal to the ABC.

**Option 2:** Modify the OFL for the Gulf lane snapper stock to be 1,336,443 lb ww, and the ABC to be 1,304,917 lb ww, for 2026 – 2028 and subsequent years. The stock ACL is set equal to the ABC.

**Option 1** would retain the current catch limits for Gulf lane snapper, as established in 2024. **Option 2** would increase the lane snapper catch limits based on the 2026 Gulf lane snapper IA, using data through 2024. The stock ACL would increase by 216,044 lb ww, which would be expected to result in a longer fishing season duration compared to **Option 1**. The SSC determined that the results of the 2026 SEDAR 49 IA were consistent with the best scientific information available and used the results of that analysis to inform the OFL and ABC recommendations. **Option 2** is consistent with the updated catch advice recommended to the Council by its SSC. Given the recent history of the stock ACL being exceeded, both the commercial and recreational sectors support the increase in the catch limits specified in **Option 2**.

### **Council Conclusion:**

## **CHAPTER 2. REGULATORY IMPACT REVIEW**

This section will be completed once a preferred option is selected by the Council.

# CHAPTER 3. REGULATORY FLEXIBILITY ACT ANALYSIS

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GFMC = Gulf 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

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