

June 29, 2026



Florida Fish
and Wildlife
Conservation
Commission

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Director

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Managing fish and wildlife
resources for their long-term
well-being and the benefit
of people.

Mr. Jonathan Dugas
Gulf of America Fishery Management Council
2203 N. Lois Avenue, Suite 1100
Tampa, FL 33604

Re: Extension of state cownose ray regulations into federal waters

Dear Chairman Dugas:

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) is considering establishing regulations for cownose rays, including the American cownose ray (*Rhinoptera bonasus*) and the Brazilian cownose ray (*Rhinoptera brasiliensis*) under Florida Administrative Code Rule Chapter 68B-44. The FWC is currently considering establishing a recreational bag limit of two rays per person or vessel, whichever is less; a commercial bag limit of 20 per commercial harvester or vessel, whichever is less; possession limits; and allowable gear and methods of harvest. These regulations under consideration would extend state regulations into adjacent federal waters because there are currently no regulations pertaining to cownose rays in federal waters adjacent to Florida.

Staff will be presenting these draft final rules for cownose rays at the August 5, 2026, FWC meeting in Panama City Beach, FL.

According to the Magnuson Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act Title 16 U.S.C. Section 1856, a state has the ability to extend its regulations for a species into adjacent federal waters if there is no fishery management plan or if there are no regulations for federal waters.

It is our understanding that the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council has no imminent plans to consider managing cownose rays in federal waters. The FWC is committed to conserving these resources for the future and is thus considering extending its regulatory authority into federal waters. Please contact me if you have questions or concerns about this proposal.

Sincerely,

Jessica McCawley, Director
Division of Marine Fisheries Management

jm/mo

cc: Erika Burgess
Dr. Christopher Sweetman

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