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SECRETARY

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August 7, 2026

Mr. Andrew J. Strelcheck

Regional Administrator

NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Regional Office

263 13th Avenue South

St. Petersburg, FL 33701

Re: Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) Exempted Fishing Permit for Greater Amberjack

Dear Mr. Strelcheck,

On April 17, 2025, President Trump signed Executive Order 14276, Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness. Executive Order 14276 directs the United States Department of Commerce and NOAA to expand the use of Exempted Fishing Permits (EFPs) to expand access to fishing and modernize data collection.

The state of Louisiana is submitting the attached EFP, which the state believes meets the goals of President Trump's Executive Order 14276. Under the EFP, LDWF will pilot a state management system of the recreational Greater Amberjack harvest in state and federal waters off of Louisiana utilizing a more modern and statistically sound recreational data collection program (LA Creel) that has proven effective in Louisiana's management of the recreational Red Snapper season since 2018. Current Gulf of America recreational data harvest estimates for Greater Amberjack still rely on outdated and imprecise federal surveys like the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) to manage the annual harvest of Greater Amberjack.

We ask that this EFP be approved so LDWF can begin our preparation and outreach efforts for the 2027 fishing season.

Thank you and we look forward to working with you and answering any questions you may have.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tyler Bosworth", is written over a horizontal line.

Tyler M. Bosworth, Secretary

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries

To:

NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office (SERO)

Andrew J. Strelcheck, Regional Administrator

Sustainable Fisheries Division

263 13th Ave. South

St. Petersburg, FL 33701

andy.strelcheck@noaa.gov

Attn: Frank Helies, Gulf of America Branch Leader

frank.helies@noaa.gov

Date:

August 7, 2026

Applicant:

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF)

2000 Quail Drive

Baton Rouge, LA 70808

Primary Contact:

Chris Schieble, Deputy Assistant Secretary; Fisheries

cschieble@wlf.la.gov

Office: (225) 765-2917

Principal Investigator:

Jason Adriance, Finfish Program Manager; Marine Fisheries

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Purpose:

Request that an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) be issued to the LDWF to develop and pilot a state managed season for the recreational harvest of Greater Amberjack (*Seriola dumerili*). This EFP, to be requested annually for up to three years, and through this EFP, LDWF will test the use of near real-time landings data to flexibly manage and provide full accountability for both the private angling and for-hire components of the recreational Greater Amberjack fishery in Louisiana as an alternative to the current Gulf-wide season approach. Louisiana's proposed EFP was developed in cooperation with the other four Gulf states—Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, and the west coast of Florida—serving as a platform to test state recreational data systems to improve recreational data collection by permitting states to have both involvement and flexibility in the management of Greater Amberjack off their coasts.

Specific regulations from which an exemption is requested and why each exemption is required for the experiment to succeed:

The requested EFP is under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16 U.S.C. 1801 et seq.), and regulations 50 CFR 600.745 (b) concerning exempted fishing. The NOAA Fisheries SERO Administrator has the authority to approve the EFP sought by this application with the following regulatory exemptions:

50 CFR 622.41 (a)(2)(ii) Annual catch limits (ACLs), annual catch targets (ACTs), and accountability measures (AMs): In addition to the measures specified in paragraph (a) (2)(i) of this section, if recreational landings, as estimated by the SRD, exceed the recreational ACL, as specified in paragraph (a)(2)(iii) of this section, the AA will file a notification with the Office of the Federal Register, at or near the beginning of the following fishing year to reduce the recreational ACT (recreational quota) and the recreational ACL for that following year by the amount of any recreational overage in the prior fishing year.

50 CFR 622.34 (c) Seasonal closure of the recreational sector for greater amberjack: Seasonal closure of the recreational sector for greater amberjack. The recreational sector for greater amberjack in or from the Gulf EEZ is closed from January 1 through August 31 and from November 1 through December 31 each year. During the closure, the bag and possession limit for greater amberjack in or from the Gulf EEZ is zero.

Background and Justification for Issuance of an EFP:

Regulations at 50 C.F.R. § 600.745 (b) (1) allow the NOAA Fisheries Regional Administrator to “authorize data collection” of the “target or incidental harvest of species

managed under an FMP or fishery regulations that would otherwise be prohibited.” The NOAA Fisheries Regional Administrator has the authority to approve the EFP sought by this application. LDWF seeks this EFP to collect biological data for Greater Amberjack. Recent management dynamics have led to Greater Amberjack becoming more of an incidental and rare-event species with very little dockside biological data being collected. An established pre-determined season will allow LDWF to collect important biological data necessary for future stock assessments. The NOAA Fisheries Regional Administrator can thus authorize “out-of-season” recreational harvest by anglers that would otherwise be prohibited by NOAA Fisheries regulations.

Recreational initiative bullets:

- Overlap and consistency of seasons
- Interest in finer scale management (e.g. state or regional)
- Provide regional/state flexibility
- Different management measures for GAJ in the Western and Eastern Gulf
- Addressing the uncertainty and variability of Gulfwide recreational harvest estimates
- Equity of access in different regions of the Gulf

In addition, National Standard 10 provides that conservation and management measures shall, to the extent practicable, “promote the safety of human life at sea”. 16 U.S.C. § 1851(a)(10). By allowing anglers and for-hire captains to fish during an extended season when they want to go fishing, instead of during short fishing seasons that may span times of rough weather, this study could help promote safety of life at sea.

Goals and Objectives:

LDWF has three overall goals:

1. Improve accuracy and timeliness of private recreational and for-hire catch data of Greater Amberjack in Louisiana's adjacent federal waters.

This will be accomplished through the use of Louisiana's LA Creel recreational data collection program for private recreational and for-hire anglers. This project is intended to test a state management program, under an extended fishing season, as opposed to the current format which results in quota over-runs due to the amount of time needed to get landings estimates from the current MRIP program which is not designed for in-season management and frequently results in shortened future season from lack of timely production of harvest estimates.

2. Gain beneficial baseline information to inform future state management.

This project will collect valuable information about catch and effort data, number of fishery participants, and their general fishing practices and behaviors during a pre-determined established season. It will allow the agency to gain meaningful information upon which to design or implement a specialized state managed recreational season for Greater Amberjack.

Methods:

Through our existing LA Creel Recreational Landings program combined with our Recreational Offshore Landing Permit (ROLP), Louisiana licensed private recreational (or otherwise exempt) and for-hire anglers will be allowed to harvest one Greater Amberjack per person per day with a minimum size limit of 34 inches fork length (matching current federal bag and size regulations) from federal waters out to 200 nautical miles; however, on for-hire trips, the captain and crew will not be permitted to retain a Greater Amberjack (i.e., the recreational bag limit will apply only to paying passengers). Consistent with the terms of the EFP, state for-hire captains that do not hold a federal charter vessel/headboat permit for Gulf reef fish will be included in this EFP but will not be authorized to fish seaward of Louisiana's state waters for reef fish management purposes. All EFP trips must originate and terminate from a Louisiana landing location. LDWF is proposing that the EFP consist of a 61 day season (June through July). By comparison, the 2026-2027 federal recreational season in the Gulf of America will be open only 43 days, from September 1 through October 13, 2026, after NMFS projected that recreational landings would reach the annual catch target. A June through July season will provide anglers with greater flexibility and the opportunity to fish an overlapping season with Red Snapper without the current constraints related to derby-style fishing. Furthermore, this will allow for the more efficient collection of baseline catch and effort data as the season will be known and LDWF sampling of biological Greater Amberjack data can be more easily obtained during a known season with a known opening and closing date. This season structure could also reduce discards by allowing a pre-determined fishing season during months of high interaction with Greater Amberjack, thus reducing the number of fish caught out of season that would otherwise be discarded during months of the year with higher water temperatures. LA Creel will provide near real-time weekly recreational landings estimates of Greater Amberjack during the EFP season.

Current seasons for the harvest of recreational Greater Amberjack are based upon outdated stock assessment and MRIP data, which have constrained management and

resulted in Greater Amberjack becoming a rare event species dockside, further compounding landings estimation errors.

3. Allow a comparison of individual LA Creel to MS Creel and AL Creel programs.

The EFP will allow LDWF to evaluate data collection programs comparatively for Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama as Mississippi and Alabama are now utilizing LA Creel style recreational landings data programs for recreational harvest estimation and develop comparisons of a region wide estimate to provide data towards symmetry among all three state landings programs.

Data Objectives:

Utility of the Data:

The results of our proposed EFP will determine harvest rates for private recreational and for-hire anglers in Louisiana when encountering Greater Amberjack, offer a comparison to determine if this provides a more timely and reliable method for monitoring Greater Amberjack catch, and generate additional biological data to support stock assessments.

The results will also inform fisheries managers in future decisions regarding revisions to subsequent EFPs and ultimately state-based Greater Amberjack management. LDWF intends to coordinate with NOAA Fisheries to determine changes to subsequent EFPs.

Potential Impacts:

Are there any anticipated environmental impacts on fisheries, marine mammals, endangered species, or essential fish habitat?

Recreational fishing occurs during the requested time intervals regardless of Greater Amberjack harvest, thus impacts to marine mammals, endangered species, and essential fish habitat should remain the same. Although the EFP may increase the number of trips specifically targeting Greater Amberjack, it is not expected to increase the overall recreational fishing effort.

Signature of Applicant:



Tyler M. Bosworth, Secretary

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries

Date