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EXEMPTED FISHING PERMIT**Experimental June-July Data Collection and Controlled Recreational Harvest of Greater Amberjack off Louisiana***Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries | Draft for SERO review | August 25, 2026 (Rev. 4)*

Item	Detail
Applicant	Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, 2000 Quail Drive, Baton Rouge, LA 70808
Contact	Ryan S. Montegut, Assistant Secretary, Office of Fisheries; (225) 765-2800
Species	Greater amberjack (<i>Seriola dumerili</i>), recreational sector
Area	Louisiana territorial sea and the adjoining exclusive economic zone off Louisiana
Exemptions requested	Exemption from 50 C.F.R. § 622.34(c) to allow retention June 1 through July 31 (61 days), and exemption from § 622.41(a)(2)(i) so a Gulf-wide ACT closure does not terminate the EFP before Louisiana reaches the EFP maximum; access by existing Louisiana recreational license and Recreational Offshore Landing Permit; retention closes when landings reach or are projected to reach the EFP maximum; renewal years use the substitution described in Section 3.2
Amount requested	68,060 lb whole weight, from the LA Creel estimate of 2024 Louisiana landings (Section 5)
Term	One year, June 1 through July 31, 2027; renewal requested for 2028 and 2029 under Section 8

1. Introduction

Gulf greater amberjack is overfished but is not currently subject to overfishing. Recreational seasons have varied substantially, and the resulting Louisiana dockside record does not provide a consistent basis for estimating June-July landings, effort, catch rates, or releases. The fixed federal season is September and October, but accountability measures have produced realized seasons of 24, 61, 26, and 43 days in the four most recent fishing years.

Louisiana operates LA Creel, a NOAA-certified survey that produces near-real-time recreational landings and effort estimates and has managed Louisiana's recreational red snapper season since 2018. LA Creel reports a relative standard error with every estimate. NOAA has also certified the Mississippi and Alabama surveys modeled on LA Creel. The state surveys can support direct comparisons, but greater amberjack estimates must be reconciled to the common currency used for federal stock assessment and annual catch monitoring.

This permit establishes a fixed 61-day observation window, an EFP maximum, and weekly in-season monitoring through LA Creel. Access to the EFP fishery is governed by the licenses and permits Louisiana already issues, and harvest is controlled by the opening and closing of the retention period. The EFP will measure actual June-July effort, catch rate, landings, releases, and biological composition while testing Louisiana's ability to manage landings to the EFP maximum.

2. Statement of purposes and goals

The primary purpose is to measure Louisiana recreational greater amberjack effort, catch rate, landings, releases, and size and age composition during a fixed June 1 through July 31 window. The permit also tests whether LA Creel can manage a stated catch level in near real time, using the same survey and closure mechanism Louisiana already uses for recreational red snapper.

Louisiana intends the resulting information to be available to the Gulf Council in its consideration of regional management or allocation of the recreational greater amberjack sector, and states that intent rather than disclaiming it.. This permit does not itself establish, alter, or reserve any allocation, and no allocation follows from its issuance. Because Louisiana seeks the permit to collect information it does not now have, economic allocation is not the sole purpose of the permit within the meaning of 50 C.F.R. § 600.745(b)(3)(iii)(C).

The project will:

- Estimate June-July harvest potential from LA Creel offshore effort, the observed greater amberjack landed catch rate, and mean landed whole weight, with the precision of each term reported separately.
- Manage actual EFP landings against the maximum stated in the permit through weekly LA Creel estimates and closure of retention on projection.
- Collect fork length, whole weight, sex, and aging structures from sampled recreational and cooperating commercial landings, from offshore dockside intercepts.
- Produce a comparable three-year series of June-July offshore effort, greater amberjack catch rate, landings, and length and age composition on a fixed survey frame, and coordinate the analysis with NOAA and the Gulf Council.
- Evaluate whether the observed Louisiana catch rates support additional fishery-independent, allocation, or regional-management analysis.

3. Fishing activities authorized

Recreational anglers and eligible for-hire operators may retain greater amberjack under this permit while the EFP retention period is open. Access to the fishery under this permit is governed by the recreational licenses and the Recreational Offshore Landing Permit that Louisiana already issues to all qualifying anglers. This permit creates no separate participant pool, individual authorization, harvest tag, lottery, or entry limit. Retention may occur in the Louisiana territorial sea and adjoining exclusive economic zone from June 1 through July 31, 2027, subject to a one-fish daily bag limit, a 34-inch fork length minimum size, zero retention by the captain and crew of a for-hire vessel, and the catch controls in Section 5.

The observation window runs for all 61 days. Retention remains open until landings reach or are projected to reach the EFP maximum, at which point the Secretary closes retention for all participants.

3.1 Basis for the access and reporting design

Louisiana's access and reporting design is constrained by state law, and Louisiana states the constraint here so that NOAA can evaluate the permit against what Louisiana may lawfully administer. La. R.S. 56:10(B)(16)(b) prohibits the use of the dedicated fund that supports LA Creel and the Recreational Offshore Landing Permit program to create an exempted fishing permit or pilot program that establishes a limited access or entry program for licensed fishermen, whether voluntary or required, to issue fish harvest tags, to limit access other than by the beginning and end dates of established seasons, or to

establish mandatory catch reporting by licensed fishermen outside a dockside intercept conducted by Department personnel.

Louisiana therefore proposes the season-control design it already operates. Access is by existing licenses and permits, harvest is monitored weekly by LA Creel, and retention closes by order of the Secretary when landings approach the EFP maximum. This is the mechanism that has governed Louisiana's recreational red snapper season since 2018, and it is the mechanism NOAA identified as the accountability strength of this application. Louisiana does not propose a design it cannot lawfully run.

3.2 Year-one transition and later substitution

Louisiana will participate in the regular September 1 through October 13, 2026 federal season. Louisiana announced that season before NOAA decided whether to issue this permit, and the state will not surrender that opportunity without an effective permit for the replacement window. The June-July 2027 season is therefore an additional controlled research fishery within the 2026-2027 fishing year, bounded by the remaining annual catch limit headroom described in Section 5.

If NOAA renews the permit for June-July 2028 and 2029, Louisiana proposes fall-for-summer substitution in those fishing years. Louisiana would forgo the September-October 2027 season before the June-July 2028 permit season, and would forgo the September-October 2028 season before the June-July 2029 permit season, provided NOAA issues each renewal early enough for Louisiana to implement the corresponding state closure. Louisiana notes that the state closure withdraws Louisiana effort but does not by itself reduce sector landings, because the fall season closes on a Gulf-wide projection. The EFP maximum therefore rests on Louisiana's landings history, as stated in Section 5, and not on the fall harvest Louisiana forgoes.

4. Regulations from which exemption is requested

Under 50 C.F.R. § 600.745(b)(1), this permit exempts participants only from the regulations named below. All other federal regulations remain in effect.

4.1 50 C.F.R. § 622.34(c), fixed seasonal closure

Required so that retention may occur in June and July. In year one, the exemption supports a controlled research fishery bounded by the EFP maximum stated in Section 5. For renewal years, Louisiana proposes the fall-for-summer substitution stated in Section 3.2.

4.2 50 C.F.R. § 622.41(a)(2)(i), in-season closure accountability measure

Requested to the extent the Gulf-wide ACT-trigger closure would otherwise terminate the EFP season. The closure published at 91 FR 32360 is effective through July 31, 2027 and would bar the entire first permit season. Louisiana requests that § 622.41(a)(2)(i) be replaced, for participants fishing under this EFP, by the EFP maximum, the weekly LA Creel monitoring, and the closure authority in Section 5. The exemption does not authorize harvest above the adjusted recreational ACL.

4.3 No exemption sought from the payback measure

Louisiana does not seek exemption from 50 C.F.R. § 622.41(a)(2)(ii). Any EFP landings above the final Louisiana EFP maximum, or any fishing-year landings above the adjusted recreational ACL attributable to the EFP under the accounting method agreed with NOAA, will be deducted from the following permit-year maximum. The July 2026 request for a payback exemption is withdrawn.

5. Catch source, maximum harvest, and accountability

Louisiana requests an EFP maximum of 68,060 pounds whole weight for the June 1 through July 31, 2027 permit season. That figure is the LA Creel estimate of Louisiana recreational greater amberjack landings for the 2024 season, the most recent season fished under the prior season structure and the most recent season of comparable length.

Louisiana requests less than its landings record would support. Average Louisiana landings across 2014 through 2024 would support a request approaching 180,000 pounds, roughly 44.6 percent of the recreational annual catch limit. Louisiana asks instead for the single recent-season figure. At 68,060 pounds the request is 16.8 percent of the 404,000-pound recreational annual catch limit and 20.3 percent of the 335,320-pound recreational annual catch target. Year one is additive within the fishing year. The recreational fishing year runs August 1 through July 31 under 50 C.F.R. § 622.7(h), so Louisiana's announced September 1 through October 13, 2026 season and the requested June-July 2027 season fall inside fishing year 2026-2027. Louisiana asks NOAA to identify the fishing-year accounting for the permit amount, and will accept a reduced year-one amount if NOAA determines that less is available.

- Renewal years are substitutions. Louisiana would forgo the September-October season preceding each renewal season, so the EFP maximum replaces rather than supplements Louisiana's fall opportunity in fishing years 2027-2028 and 2028-2029.
 - Retention may close before July 31. Louisiana's own June-July projection (June-July effort in recent years against current catch rates) exceeds the requested amount in four of the seven years reported in Appendix C and averages 80,522 pounds against a request of 68,060 pounds. Louisiana states that expectation rather than presenting the requested amount as the expected harvest. The 61-day observation window does not shorten when retention closes, because LA Creel continues to estimate effort, catch rate, landings, and releases through July 31.
1. In-season monitoring. LA Creel will deliver weekly landings and effort estimates to NOAA during the season, approximately two weeks after each survey week closes, with the relative standard error reported for each estimate. Louisiana will also provide NOAA the method used to translate LA Creel estimates into the currency used for federal catch monitoring.
 2. Closure on projection. LDWF will close retention when cumulative landings reach or are projected to reach the EFP maximum, using the weekly projection method Louisiana already uses to close its recreational red snapper season. Because LA Creel estimates lag the fishery by approximately two weeks, Louisiana will run the projection against an operating target of 85 percent of the EFP maximum and hold the remaining 15 percent as a lag-and-variance reserve. The reserve is a closure-timing control, not a reserved share of the catch, and no portion of the maximum is assigned to any participant.
 3. Closure mechanism. Retention closes by declaration of emergency signed by the Secretary, the same instrument Louisiana uses to open and close its recreational red snapper season. Closure applies to every participant simultaneously. The permit requires no individual accounting, and Louisiana can implement a closure within the notice period its red snapper practice already demonstrates.
 4. Fishing-year backstop. The permit will prohibit retention under this permit if total 2026-2027 recreational landings reach or are projected to reach the adjusted recreational ACL, independent of whether the EFP maximum has been reached.
 5. Post-season payback. Any amount by which EFP landings exceed the final EFP maximum will be deducted from the following permit-year maximum. Louisiana will also comply with any fishing-year ACL payback that NOAA determines is required by § 622.41(a)(2)(ii).

6. No permanent allocation. The EFP maximum is a term of the federal permit under 50 C.F.R. § 600.745(b)(3)(v)(A) and a temporary research control. Deriving it from Louisiana landings does not make it an allocation. It establishes no Louisiana percentage, reduces no other state's legal allocation, and predetermines no Gulf Council decision, and Louisiana does not ask NOAA to treat it as a precedent for any share.

6. Species expected to be harvested, amount, and disposition

The target species is greater amberjack. No incidental harvest is authorized by this permit. Participants remain subject to all regulations governing other species, and other retained species are counted under their own accountability measures. Louisiana will report the other reef fish species recorded on sampled greater amberjack trips. LA Creel does not collect protected species interaction data and Louisiana does not propose to add that question to the survey; NOAA should rely on its existing observer and logbook programs for protected species information supporting its Endangered Species Act and Marine Mammal Protection Act review.

Appendix C states two separate quantities and does not conflate them. Expected June-July landings are projected from Louisiana offshore effort, the observed landed catch rate, and mean landed whole weight, and exceed the requested EFP maximum in most years reported. The permit amount is the ceiling Louisiana asks NOAA to set and manage to. All greater amberjack landed under this permit are retained for personal consumption; sale is prohibited.

7. Anticipated impacts

The June-July window overlaps substantial red snapper and other reef-fish effort, so some greater amberjack would be caught without this permit. Retention authority may change trip behavior, target selection, and the composition of landed catch. Louisiana will measure offshore effort, angler-declared target where the intercept records one, landings, and estimated releases by week and fishing mode, and will not assume that effort remains unchanged.

Retention converts a released fish, which survives or dies at the applicable release-mortality rate, into a landed fish. Louisiana will report the estimated number of greater amberjack released on sampled trips during the window. LA Creel does not record release condition or release depth, and Louisiana does not propose to calculate dead discards under this permit. Release mortality is applied to discard estimates at the Gulf level in the stock assessment, and Louisiana will supply its release estimates to that process rather than substitute a state mortality calculation. Louisiana does not assert that retention reduces total mortality.

The permit maximum and closure on projection limit additional removals, but the environmental effect depends on actual effort, catch rates, release mortality, and incidental interactions. Louisiana will provide the data it collects that NOAA requires for its NEPA, Endangered Species Act, Marine Mammal Protection Act, and essential fish habitat analyses, will identify where LA Creel does not produce a field NOAA needs, and will revise operating controls if those reviews identify a material effect.

8. Term, reporting, and renewal

Louisiana requests a one-year permit for June 1 through July 31, 2027, consistent with 50 C.F.R. § 600.745(b)(5), as the first year of a planned three-year design. Louisiana requests renewal for 2028 and 2029 under the following criteria, recognizing that each renewal requires NOAA review and written authorization.

- Weekly in-season LA Creel landings and effort estimates, with reported precision, delivered to NOAA during the season.
- A final report within 120 days covering actual landings, June-July harvest potential, offshore effort, catch rate, estimated releases, length and age composition, the precision of each estimate, and performance against the EFP maximum.
- A year-end meeting with SERO to evaluate the results, determine the next permit-year maximum, and decide whether the operating design or sampling effort requires adjustment.
- Louisiana having complied with the EFP maximum, or NOAA and Louisiana having accounted for any overage through the agreed payback mechanism.
- A stated amount for the renewal year, derived on the same landings basis stated in Section 5 and updated for any newer complete season, submitted with each renewal request. Louisiana will not submit a renewal request without a number.

The dates, core survey methods, principal fields, and analytical definitions will remain fixed across the three years. A single season cannot distinguish year effects from the effect of the observation window, and NOAA's Gulf survey transition work uses a multi-year process for incorporating state survey data. The renewal-year amount may change if a newer complete season enters the base period or if the annual catch limit changes. Louisiana will aim for a comparable amount across the three years so the seasons remain comparable, will document every adjustment, and will not alter the fixed observation frame.

9. Commercial sector participation

The commercial sector is not exempted and no quota is transferred. Louisiana will collect fork length, whole weight, sex, and aging structures from cooperating commercial vessels and dealers because commercial fish provide an additional biological sample and because the assessment need extends across sectors. Louisiana has no commercial discard sampling program for greater amberjack and does not propose to create one under this permit. Commercial trip tickets record the landing basin and do not record habitat, so Louisiana will report basin only. This work remains subject to all commercial limits, closures, permits, and reporting requirements.

EFP harvest is charged to the recreational sector. The permit does not draw from the commercial ACL or ACT, alter the 20 percent commercial and 80 percent recreational allocation established through Amendment 54, or modify a commercial accountability measure.

Signature of the applicant:

Ryan S. Montegut, Assistant Secretary

Office of Fisheries

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries

Appendix A. Program guidelines

Eligibility

Participants must hold a valid Louisiana basic and saltwater recreational fishing license and a Recreational Offshore Landing Permit, which Louisiana already requires to possess greater amberjack and issues free of charge to every qualifying applicant. This permit adds no application, individual authorization, harvest tag, lottery, participant cap, or selection process. Any licensed and permitted angler may participate while the retention period is open.

Participation requirements

- The observation window runs June 1 through July 31. Retention is permitted while the EFP retention period is open, and it closes for all participants at once by order of the Secretary.
- One greater amberjack per angler per day.
- Minimum size 34 inches fork length, matching 50 C.F.R. § 622.37(c)(4).
- On a for-hire vessel, the captain and crew may not retain greater amberjack, consistent with 50 C.F.R. § 622.38(b)(1).
- Participants are asked to complete LA Creel dockside intercepts and the weekly effort survey. Louisiana cannot make that reporting mandatory: La. R.S. 56:10(B)(16)(b) bars Louisiana from establishing mandatory catch reporting by licensed fishermen outside a dockside intercept conducted by Department personnel. If NOAA requires participant-level reporting, it must be imposed as a federal term and condition of this permit under 50 C.F.R. § 600.745(b)(3)(v)(G) and administered by NOAA. Louisiana will support such a requirement through outreach, dockside contact, and enforcement of the bag and size limits, but cannot operate it as a state reporting program.
- All EFP trips must originate and terminate at a Louisiana landing location, and all fish retained under the permit must be landed in Louisiana.
- Private vessels may operate in the permitted federal area. State-licensed for-hire vessels without a federal Gulf reef fish charter/headboat permit may operate under the EFP only within the waters where they are otherwise authorized to conduct for-hire fishing. Federally permitted charter/headboat vessels are excluded from year one unless SERO determines that their inclusion is necessary and adds the required exemptions and catch accounting before permit issuance.
- Sale, barter, or trade of greater amberjack harvested under this permit is prohibited.

Appendix B. LA Creel data inputs

LA Creel will produce the following through its existing weekly access-point dockside survey and its weekly telephone and email effort survey:

- Estimated individual angler trips and estimated greater amberjack landings, by week and by fishing mode, each reported with its relative standard error.
- From dockside intercepts: date; access site; fishing mode; number of anglers; species and numbers landed; the angler-reported number of greater amberjack released on the trip; and the angler-declared target species where the intercept records one.
- From dockside intercepts: the basic habitat category, recorded as natural bottom, artificial reef, or other structure, and the lease block. LDWF already records these fields on offshore intercepts for red snapper and will instruct samplers to record them on greater amberjack intercepts for the permit period.

- From sampled landings: fork length, whole weight, sex, and aging structures collected by LDWF biologists.

LA Creel produces survey estimates, not a census of trips or fish. It does not produce encounter rates, release condition, release depth, dead-discard estimates, protected species interaction records, or fine-scale spatial distribution, and Louisiana does not represent that it will report those quantities under this permit. LDWF will state the precision of every estimate and will provide NOAA the method used to translate LA Creel estimates into the currency used for federal catch monitoring.

Appendix C. Harvest estimates and catch controls

Two estimators are used, each where it applies. For an open season Louisiana has fished, LA Creel estimates landings directly in numbers of fish and estimates pounds from the mean landed whole weight for that season. The 68,060-pound 2024 estimate used the approximately 52-pound mean weight available from a small 2024 biological sample because LDWF needed to report that season's landings promptly. For the June-July projection, LDWF uses $T \times C \times W$, where T is estimated Louisiana offshore angler trips, C is the estimated greater amberjack landed catch rate per trip, and W is the 35.73-pound mean landed whole weight from the larger 2025 biological sample. LDWF considers the 2025 estimate more appropriate for forecasting the EFP season. During the EFP season, LA Creel will estimate landings using weights collected in real time and LDWF will close retention based on those current landings against the EFP maximum. LDWF reports the precision of each estimate and reports the projection separately from the requested EFP maximum.

Input	Source	Value
T, weekly Louisiana offshore angler trips	LA Creel offshore effort estimates, open greater amberjack weeks 2020-2024	2,155
C, landed catch rate per angler trip	LA Creel dockside estimates, open greater amberjack weeks 2020-2024	0.053
W, mean landed whole weight	LDWF biological sampling	35.73 lb
Expected landings, weekly	Calculated as $T \times C \times W$	115 fish, 4,109 lb
Requested EFP maximum, 2027 season	LA Creel estimate of 2024 Louisiana landings	68,060 lb
Closure-projection operating target	85 percent of the EFP maximum, remainder held as a lag-and-variance reserve	57,851 lb

Louisiana annual landings estimates, open greater amberjack seasons

Year	Landings (# fish)	Landings estimate (lb)	95% CI (# fish)
2020	2,434	72,970	1,032
2021	2,307	90,021	889
2022	834	25,169	324
2023	1,287	45,189	693
2024	1,312	68,060	752
2025	534	18,527	392

Projected June-July landings from observed June-July offshore effort

Year	June-July offshore angler trips	Projected landings (fish)	Projected landings (lb)
2020	44,810	2,375	84,856
2021	68,639	3,638	129,981
2022	33,475	1,774	63,391
2023	40,273	2,134	76,265
2024	32,666	1,731	61,859
2025	27,408	1,453	51,902
2026	50,377	2,670	95,398
Mean	42,521	2,254	80,522

The projection above applies a catch rate observed largely in fall open weeks to June and July effort. LDWF treats it as provisional for that reason and expects the June-July catch rate to exceed 0.053, which would raise projected landings above the figures shown. The projection exceeds the requested EFP maximum in four of the seven years and averages 80,522 pounds against a request of 68,060 pounds.

The annual estimates retain substantial uncertainty. For 2024, LA Creel estimated 1,312 landed fish with a reported 95% CI of 752 fish, and the 68,060-pound estimate used the mean weight available from the limited 2024 biological sample. The June-July forecast uses the larger 2025 biological sample for W, but its weekly effort and catch-rate terms are averages across open weeks from 2020 through 2024, which were predominantly fall weeks with a May opening under the season structure then in effect. Louisiana will report the June-July catch rate and mean weight observed under the EFP against the provisional 0.053 and 35.73-pound values used here.

Appendix D. Commercial data component

No exemption is sought for the commercial sector and no quota is transferred. Louisiana will conduct the following work subject to federal commercial limits and closures:

- Extend dockside biological sampling to cooperating Louisiana commercial greater amberjack landings, collecting fork length, whole weight, sex, and aging structures under a protocol compatible with the recreational sample.
- Record the landing basin reported on the commercial trip ticket for sampled landings. Commercial trip tickets do not record habitat, and Louisiana will not report commercial habitat data.
- Report commercial sampling results separately from recreational EFP results and make the biological data and methods available to the Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review process.

Louisiana will consult the Louisiana commercial reef fish industry on the design and feasibility of this component before the Federal Register notice of receipt publishes. Louisiana has no existing commercial discard sampling program for greater amberjack and does not represent that commercial vessels will supply discard data under this permit. If dealer and vessel cooperation proves insufficient during the consultation, Louisiana will narrow this component to the biological sampling it can deliver rather than carry a commitment it cannot meet.