

Exempted Fishing Permit Application

Date: August 7, 2026

Applicant: Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries

Contact: Ryan Montegut, Assistant Secretary

Office of Fisheries

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Introduction:

Opportunities for recreational anglers to harvest Greater Amberjack, *Seriola dumerili*, in federal waters have been greatly reduced in recent years. While Greater Amberjack populations in the northern Gulf of America (Gulf) are considered overfished, the private recreational Total Allowable Catch (TAC) is based upon an outdated stock assessment informed by recreational data that has a high error rate. While awaiting the results of the Greater Amberjack Count, the private recreational season for Greater Amberjack in waters of the federal Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) has experienced numerous closures and season structure changes over the past two decades. These season structure changes and frequent closures have further compounded recreational landings estimate errors by creating a management dynamic which has led to Greater Amberjack becoming a rare event species within dockside surveys completed along most of the northern Gulf.

While Louisiana has the LA Creel program, which provides near real-time estimates of recreational landings, gulf wide estimates of Greater Amberjack recreational harvest, and therefore quota closures, are still influenced by estimates from the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). MRIP has improved in recent years, but it does not provide the real-time data needed to actively manage recreational seasons in both state and federal waters. Recently, both Mississippi and Alabama piloted LA Creel style recreational landings programs, which are now certified, in order to provide more timely and accurate estimates of recreational harvest. With three states in the northern Gulf using a similar program, landings can now be estimated more timely and accurately.

Many recreational anglers and for-hire captains who pursue Greater Amberjack are dissatisfied with the recent management dynamic of Greater Amberjack seasons and the reduced fishing opportunities for this species in federal waters. In addition, Louisiana's coastal communities, the recreational fishing industry, and associated businesses (bait and tackle shops, marinas, restaurants, gas stations, etc.) have expressed concern over fewer anglers traveling to coastal areas to go fishing.

Statement of Purposes and Goals:

LDWF is requesting an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) to conduct a pilot for a state managed season for the recreational harvest of Greater Amberjack that will not only attempt to address the aforementioned issues but also provide a stable season for the collection of dockside biological data. The purpose of this EFP is to evaluate a state-based management approach which allows harvest in federal waters off Louisiana.

LDWF proposes a unique management strategy tailored to the needs of the Louisiana recreational fishing community. 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. The goal is to use LA Creel and the associated Recreational Offshore Landing Permit (ROLP) to monitor private recreational and for-hire landings of Greater Amberjack in near real-time and use the authority of the LDWF Secretary or the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission (LWFC) to manage the season, based on landings estimates from LA Creel. LDWF proposes a 61 day season beginning June 1, 2027 and continuing through July 31 with the opportunity to continue for the subsequent years (2028, and 2029). This management approach would maximize fishing opportunities for Greater Amberjack for private anglers and for-hire captains in Gulf waters off Louisiana while providing a defined annual season. As part of this goal, we will evaluate the feasibility and adequacy of state management to not only effectively monitor landings but also provide other data needed by fishery managers and stock assessment biologists.

This project will:

- Evaluate effort and catch rates of Greater Amberjack landed in Louisiana. Results could inform future management options or fishery dependent sampling.
- Provide private anglers and for-hire captains a defined season in which to recreationally harvest Greater Amberjack.
- Provide managers with near real-time landings data and fishing year harvest estimates.

- Allow a comparison of individual LA Creel to MS Creel and AL Creel programs and comparisons of a region wide estimate to provide data towards symmetry among all three state landings programs.

Fishing Activities under the Proposed EFP:

LDWF proposes a three-year pilot under this EFP; the fishing periods would be calendar years 2027, 2028, and 2029 and will include a Greater Amberjack recreational season from June 1 through July 31 within those calendar years. Under this EFP, recreational anglers would be permitted to harvest Greater Amberjack from Louisiana's state territorial sea and the adjoining federal EEZ out from shore to 200 nautical miles, during the established 61 day seasons. Program guidelines for all participants are in Appendix A.

LDWF will manage the areas under this EFP as one unit and recommends that the season opening date be June 1 and the season closing date be July 31 for both state and federal waters and both the private angling and for-hire components.

Greater Amberjack harvested under this EFP would not increase the total recreational Greater Amberjack landings allowed for Gulf-wide recreational harvest. Louisiana is however requesting an exemption under this EFP of 50 CFR 622.41 (a)(2)(ii) and 50 CFR 622.34 (c) for 2027, 2028, and 2029.

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.

Participants must land their fish in Louisiana. Participants must abide by all licenses and permits required by Louisiana in order to land their catch. Eligible anglers and for-hire captains would include those that hold both a valid Louisiana Saltwater Fishing License and a Recreational Offshore Landing Permit (ROLP), including those domiciled in states other than Louisiana. The ROLP is free but required to land many offshore species,

including Greater Amberjack. LDWF implemented this requirement to better quantify and characterize the private anglers and for-hire captains that fish offshore. Anglers fishing aboard a for-hire vessel are not required to obtain a ROLP as they are covered by the ROLP issued to the for-hire vessel captain.

State for-hire captains (those without a federal for-hire reef fish permit) will be included in this EFP; however, they are not permitted to fish outside of Louisiana's state waters for reef fish management purposes, which extend 9 nautical miles seaward from the baseline from which the territorial sea of the United States is measured, pursuant to section 110 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016 (Pub. L. 114-113).

Participating anglers must abide by the federal minimum size limit (currently 34 inches fork length) and one fish bag limit during all fishing activities as well as stipulations and guidelines set forth by LDWF and the EFP.

All participants (private anglers and for-hire captains) would be subject to periodic, random LA Creel dockside surveys at public and private facilities and associated online and phone effort surveys. LA Creel data will provide official landings estimates for both the private angling and for-hire components and will be used to monitor total open season and fishing year harvest. LDWF will report landings under the EFP to NOAA Fisheries as they are available. Currently, LA Creel information is available about two weeks after a survey week ends. We expect to maintain this reporting rate; if we experience data management issues, the available data will be updated soon as possible.

Justification for Issuance of the 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. The NOAA Fisheries Regional Administrator can thus authorize "out-of-season" recreational harvest by anglers that would otherwise be prohibited by NOAA Fisheries regulations.

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, during months when offshore effort is higher, 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 Greater Amberjack 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.

Species Expected to Be Harvested under the EFP, Amount of Harvest, Disposition of Regulated Species, and Anticipated Environmental Impacts (including impacts on fisheries, marine mammals, threatened or endangered species, and essential fish habitat):

This EFP would authorize recreational anglers to harvest Greater Amberjack from Louisiana's state territorial sea and the adjoining federal EEZ, out to 200 nautical miles from shore, during the seasons indicated (June 1 through July 31) during each of the years 2027, 2028, and 2029. Since fishing for other reef fish, in particular red snapper, already occurs during the timeframe established under this EFP, overall fishing effort is not likely to change significantly under this EFP. Existing analyses of recreational fishing impacts under the current FMP should not change as a result of this EFP. There should be no additional environmental impacts on other managed or non-managed species, protected resources, or habitat during the timeframe of this study. The study could marginally 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. The number of angler days under this EFP would be very similar to the numbers of angler days already occurring during the time period of the EFP; therefore, any changes to sea turtle interactions are likely negligible because overall effort is not expected to substantially change. This EFP is also not expected to adversely affect marine mammal populations.

Approximate Times and Places Fishing Will Take Place Under the EFP:

Fishing under this EFP would occur in Louisiana's territorial sea and in adjoining federal waters of the Gulf out to 200 nautical miles during 2027, 2028 and 2029. If the EFP is approved, both the private angling and for-hire seasons would be recommended to open on June 1 and close on July 31 of each year.

Signature of the Applicant:



Tyler M. Bosworth

Date



Secretary

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries

Appendix A

PROGRAM GUIDELINES

ELIGIBILITY

Possession of a Louisiana Recreational Offshore Landing Permit (ROLP) and a Louisiana Saltwater Fishing License. Frame will include all private anglers and for-hire captains who hold a valid ROLP during the 2027, 2028, and 2029 calendar years. Participating Anglers and captains are not required to be residents of Louisiana, but must have all appropriate Louisiana licenses.

PARTICIPATION GUIDELINES

Participating anglers and for-hire captains must agree to abide by the following program guidelines:

1. Hold a valid Louisiana Saltwater Fishing License and ROLP.
2. The EFP season will commence on the date specified (June 1) but must occur during the same time that state waters are also open for Greater Amberjack harvest.
3. Anglers must abide by existing federal size limit regulations in place for the year the fish are harvested (currently 34 inches fork length).
4. Anglers must abide by the federal one fish per person daily bag limit.
5. At no time shall the number of Greater Amberjack onboard a vessel exceed the total sum of all bag limits.
6. On a vessel operating as a charter vessel or headboat, no Greater Amberjack may be retained by the captain or crew; the bag limit for such captain and crew is zero, consistent with 50 CFR 622.38(b)(1).
7. State for-hire captains that do not hold a federal charter vessel/headboat permit for Gulf reef fish may not fish under this EFP seaward of Louisiana's state waters for reef fish management purposes (9 nautical miles).

Appendix B

LA CREEL DATA INPUTS

When anglers and for-hire captains are intercepted at the dock during LA Creel sampling, the following information will be collected:

- Date
- Launch or marina
- Number of anglers
- Number of Greater Amberjack harvested
- Number of Greater Amberjack discarded
- Area fished

LDWF biologists will also collect hard parts for aging, determine sex of the fish, and record fork length for Greater Amberjack landed. All aging will be conducted by LDWF at the LDWF Age and Growth Laboratory in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.