UPDATED Marine Recreational Information Program Estimates

Southeast Highlights

AUGUST 2026

NOAA FISHERIES



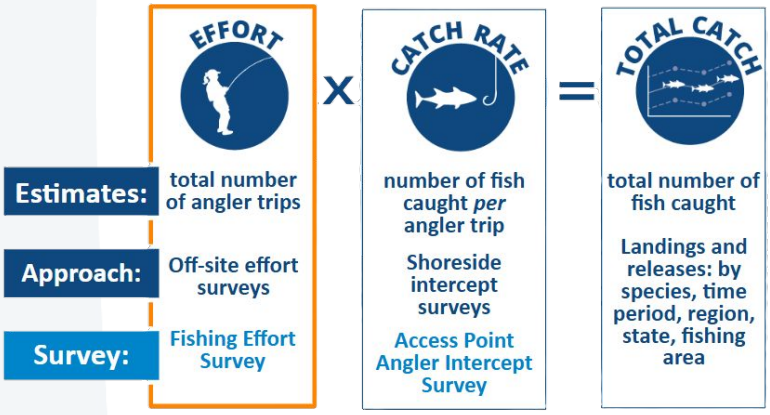
Photo: Black sea bass (*Centropristis striata*)
Credit: FWC photo by Tim Donovan

Updated Marine Recreational Information Program Estimates

NOAA Fisheries has updated recreational fishing effort and catch estimates dating back to 1981. These updated estimates reflect the improved 2026 Fishing Effort Survey (FES) design. The FES estimates the number of recreational saltwater fishing trips taken from private boats and shore. For-hire effort estimates are calculated using other methods and are not impacted by this update.

2026 Fishing Effort Survey Revisions

We revised the fishing activity question order and increased the frequency of the mail survey administration from every two months to monthly. The new design addresses overreporting of private boat and shore fishing trips and generally produces lower effort estimates.



Key Takeaways

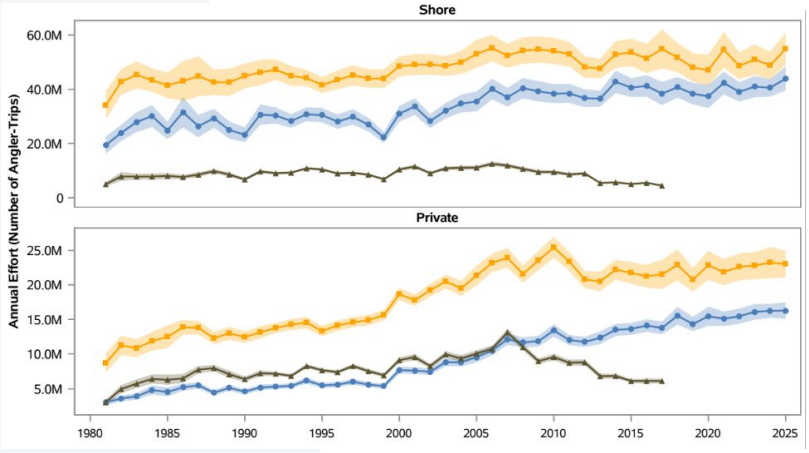
1. While the updated total catch estimates are systematically lower, historical trends in recreational fishing activity remain largely the same
2. The magnitude of the reduction in total catch estimates varies by species because the updated effort estimates differ by state, fishing mode (shore vs. private boat), and time of year
3. Reductions are larger for fisheries occurring in low-activity months via private boat
4. Data outliers across the time series are reduced

In the states where both the FES and the Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (APAIS) are conducted, the FES effort estimates are multiplied by the APAIS catch-per-trip estimates to calculate total catch, which is used alongside other sources of data to inform stock assessments and management. The APAIS design did not change in 2026.

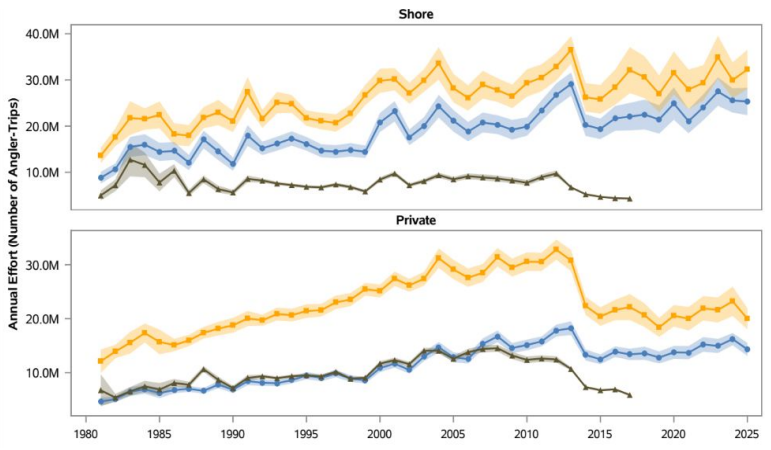
Why Did We Make These Changes?

We aim to continuously improve our survey methods and data through conducting thorough research and listening to partner and industry feedback. An independent peer review panel found the revised FES to be a substantial improvement that produces more accurate fishing trip data. The calibration model used to rescale the historical estimates was also favorably, independently peer reviewed.

Annual Effort Comparisons – South Atlantic



Annual Effort Comparisons – Gulf of America



Using Improved FES
Using Original FES
Using CHTS

In 2018, we transitioned to the original FES from the Coastal Household Telephone Survey as a result of declining landline phone usage. As landline phone use declined, the fishing effort estimates from the CHTS also lowered due to survey coverage issues. Additionally, in the Gulf of America, the termination of the FES in Louisiana likely explains the decrease in overall effort beginning in 2014.

How Will These Changes Impact Management?

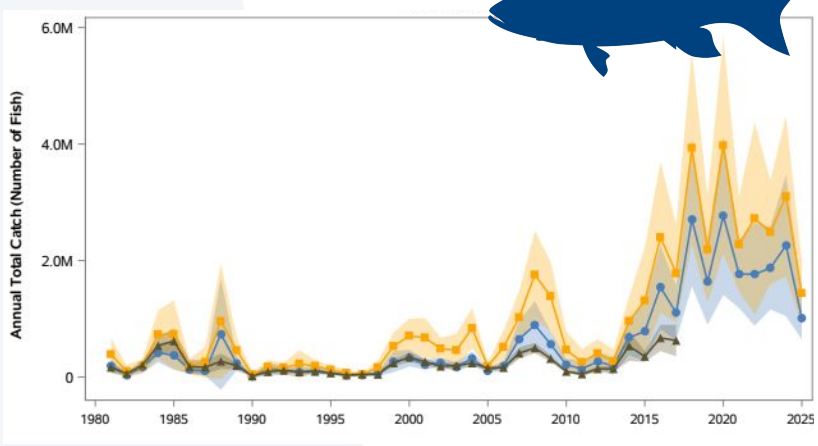
- This data revision does not trigger immediate fisheries management changes or adjustments to catch limits.
- Management advice is currently set using original FES estimates or CHTS estimates depending on the species. These species will continue to be monitored and managed in the prior units until the updated estimates can be integrated into stock assessments and management advice set in the same scale.
- NOAA Fisheries and regional partners will begin integrating the improved data into upcoming stock assessments to help determine the health of stocks and provide new management advice through standard regional Fishery Management Council, States, Interstate Marine Fisheries Commissions, and NOAA Fisheries public processes.
- Incorporation of the revised data into stock assessments may affect estimates of stock size, fishing mortality, biological reference points, and stock status, which could eventually lead to changes in stock status, acceptable biological catches (ABCs), annual catch limits (ACLs), other management measures, and sector allocations.
- We can't predict specific fishery stock assessment or management outcomes as a result of the catch estimate update, including the direction and magnitude of stock status change, as there are other sources of data, such as biological and commercial fishing information, which also influence outcomes and any needed decisions.
    - Effects will vary among species depending on how important recreational catch is to the fishery and its stock assessment.
- Sector allocations are handled separately and exist for several managed stocks. Regional fishery management councils and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (for the South Atlantic) are responsible for reviewing and recommending allocation decisions for individual stocks. Any allocation change would require a separate management action.

Impacts to Highly Migratory Species Data

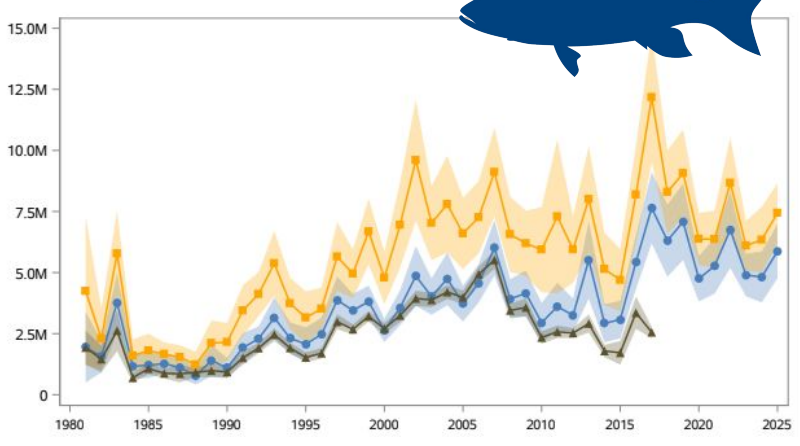
- These updated estimates are the agency's primary data source for monitoring landings of yellowfin, bigeye, and skipjack tuna in this region. The U.S. does not have assigned quotas for these fisheries, so management impacts should be minimal.
- The large-scale MRIP surveys provide the primary data necessary for the management of recreational coastal shark fisheries in the Atlantic and Gulf of America, including sandbar sharks. Sandbar sharks are historically one of the top species in the commercial shark fishery and one of the most commonly encountered sharks in depredation events.

Snapshots of Estimate Comparisons for Key Regional Fisheries

South Atlantic Total Catch
Red Snapper, All Modes



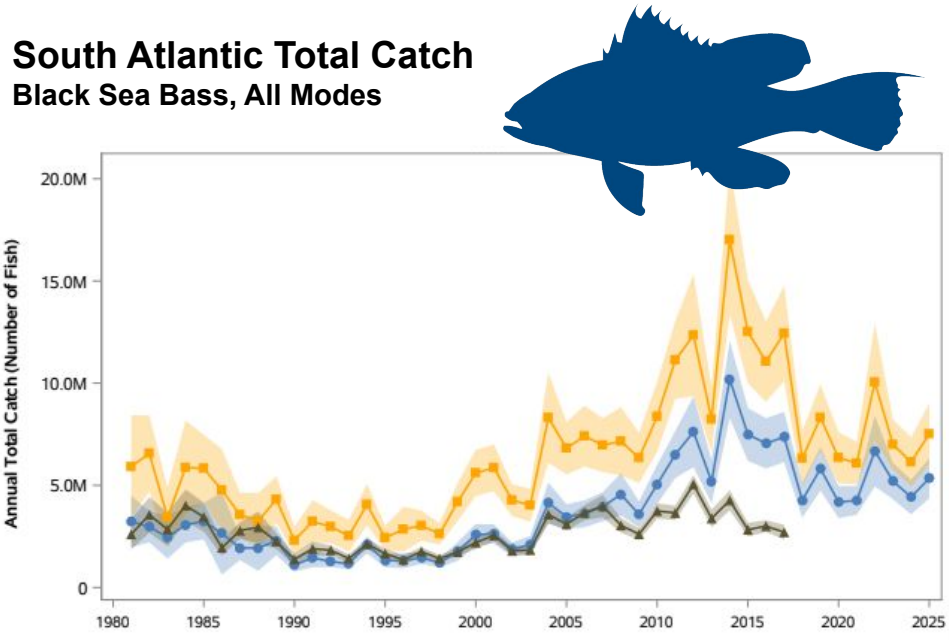
Gulf of America Total Catch
Red Snapper, All Modes



Using Improved FES Using Original FES Using CHTS

Southeast FES Update

Using Improved FES
Using Original FES
Using CHTS



Timing

- Management changes will occur over time, and not all fisheries will be affected or affected at the same time. Timing will vary depending on assessment schedules, management processes, and when updated scientific advice becomes available.
- **Anticipated Stock Assessments in 2026 and 2027:**
  - South Atlantic - red snapper, dolphinfish management strategy evaluation, HMS sandbar shark, Atlantic cobia (Rhode Island to Georgia, ASMFC assessment), black sea bass, Spanish mackerel, gag grouper, king mackerel, red grouper, and HMS bullsharks
  - Gulf of America - king mackerel, gray triggerfish, red snapper, tilefish, gag grouper, HMS sandbar shark, gray snapper, greater amberjack, scamp, and HMS bullsharks
- Management advice is generally made for the year following completion of a stock assessment. Therefore, the new data will not impact projected 2027 catch limits or established 2027 recreational management measures.
- **2028-2029:** First round of management measures will be set based on the new stock assessments.
- View the Southeast Data Assessment, and Review schedule for the full list and timelines.

Fisheries in the Gulf of America

- The improved FES provides a baseline of effort data across the region while several Gulf of America states transition to their own survey programs and work to enhance the comparability of regional estimates.
- Mississippi transitioned to its creel survey program in 2026, and Alabama plans to fully transition to its creel program by 2027. NOAA Fisheries certified both of these programs in 2026 through an independent peer review that found them to produce statistically valid sources of data to inform recreational fishery management. The APAIS and FES will only be administered in Florida in the Gulf of America starting in 2027.
- Data from the NOAA Fisheries' surveys are still necessary for interim management needs until new state survey data can be incorporated into stock assessments. Since the data to assess, manage, and monitor fisheries must be at the same scale, NOAA Fisheries Southeast Fisheries Science Center is coordinating with Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama state partners to develop a standardized, scientific calibration approach.

Note: The recreational fishing estimates used in stock assessments and management support analyses may differ from estimates published within the Marine Recreational Information Program Query Tool. Depending on the stock assessment, regional fishery scientists may make adjustments to MRIP survey data based on species-specific or regional needs. This might include partitioning data by stock areas or sub areas within states, separating and calibrating for-hire estimates, combining estimates with state surveys, applying multi-survey estimates of average fish weights, smoothing survey response outliers, using unweighted length data, and creating additional variables like open and closed-season estimates. Final estimates incorporated into regional stock assessment models are made publicly available in the stock assessment reports and on the Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review site.