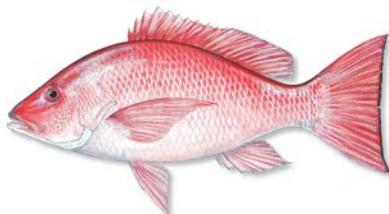


GULF ANGLER FOCUS GROUP INITIATIVE PROCESS OVERVIEW AND PHASES SUMMARY



GULF ANGLER FOCUS GROUP INITIATIVE PROCESS OVERVIEW

In order to provide substantive and consistent input and better influence decision-making by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, angler organizations including the American Sportfishing Association, Coastal Conservation Association, Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, and Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership organized and convened a Gulf Angler Focus Group Initiative. The Focus Group Initiative was a participation-based consensus building process organized around four Phases designed to increasingly involve all of the fishery stakeholder interests, and was operated without a formal membership structure. The Focus Group Initiative was convened and coordinated by a Planning Committee consisting of representatives of the aforementioned angler organizations.

In light of the contentious and complicated nature of Gulf red snapper management and the potential diversity of perspectives among participants, the recreational angler organizations hired professional facilitators from the FCRC Consensus Center at Florida State University with experience in fisheries issues to ensure that a fair, open and transparent consensus-based representative stakeholder approach was used to develop possible management options.

The Initiative focused on the evaluation of strategies for more effective engagement of the recreational sector with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council and to identify management options for the red snapper fishery specifically, and other reef fish fisheries generally, that ensure fisheries sustainability while providing equitable public access and enjoyment of the fishery. The goal of the process was to determine whether there are potential management options that may yield better outcomes in terms of fishing opportunities than the existing Status Quo for the management of the Gulf of Mexico red snapper fishery, while considering the existing Magnuson-Stevens Conservation and Management Act (MSA) regulatory framework and ensuring conservation of the fishery.

During an organizational meeting in September of 2015 it was decided to convene a process, the Gulf Angler Focus Group Initiative, over a 12-month period beginning in December of 2015 with an initial on-line questionnaire designed to compile recreational stakeholders' perspectives regarding key issues and possible options for the private recreational component of the Gulf red snapper fishery. The Initiative included five additional meetings conducted approximately bi-monthly in locations central to the five Gulf states. The Initiative culminated in the development of a document titled *Private Recreational Management Options for Gulf of Mexico Red Snapper* that was revised throughout the process to reflect input from unaffiliated private anglers, angler groups, recreational fishing industry members, for-hire operators, environmental NGOs, and commercial fishing industry representatives. In addition, the five state fisheries managers from the Gulf region provided consultation and input throughout the entire process.

Although the Initiative primarily focused on the evaluation of management options, a full range of relevant issues and options were discussed during the process including: recreational harvest data collection, biological data collection, stock assessment, regional management, season length/access to the fishery, allocation, and sector separation.

The Gulf Angler Focus Group Initiative developed a suite of potential management options to evaluate whether they might be potentially viable for management of the red snapper fishery for the private recreational sector. The management options and variations of options identified by the Initiative are evaluated in the *Private Recreational Management Options for Gulf of Mexico Red Snapper* document and are broadly described as:

- A. Status Quo
- B. Maximizing Fishing Days Within Current Framework
- C. Harvest Tags
- D. Depth/Distance-Based Management
- E. Reef Fish Season
- F. Harvest Rate/Recruitment-Based Management
- G. Hybrid of Various Options

The Planning Committee originally planned to conduct an evaluation of each option. However, as options were further evaluated it became clear that significant analyses well beyond the scope of the Initiative would be required to better understand the potential impacts and outcomes of each option in order to objectively evaluate them. However, the Planning Committee working with stakeholders developed the following criteria to determine whether the option merits further development once sufficient decision making analyses are completed:

I. Feasible/Doable: How likely is it that this option can be implemented?

II. Provide Increased Access: How likely is it that implementing this option would provide greater access to the fishery for the recreational sector than the Status Quo (Option A)?

III. Resources Are Available: What is the likelihood that there are resources (i.e., human, capital, funding, etc.) available, or likely to become available for implementing this option?

IV. Data/Research/Analyses Are Available: What is the likelihood that there is data and/or research and/or analyses available, or likely to become available, to implement this option.

V. Garner Private Recreational Sector Support: How likely is it that this option will garner broad support, or at least not active resistance, within the private recreational sector?

VI. Garner Support among other Stakeholders & Decision Makers: How likely is it that this option will garner broad support, or at least not active resistance, among the other sectors/stakeholders/decision makers?

The Gulf Angler Focus Group Initiative process concluded in December of 2016 with a revised draft of the *Private Recreational Management Options for Gulf of Mexico Red Snapper* document being circulated to all participants of the Initiative for final comments. The final comments were reflected where appropriate, and the document was subsequently finalized and will be presented to the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council at their January 2017 meeting.

GULF ANGLER FOCUS GROUP INITIATIVE PHASES SUMMARY

On September 8 – 9, 2015 recreational fishery interests met in Biloxi, MS for a focus group meeting to discuss solutions for better management of recreational fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico. At the conclusion of the meeting participants decided that they should convene a process to evaluate a strategy for the more effective engagement of the recreational sector with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, and to identify management options for the red snapper fishery specifically, and other reef fish fisheries generally, that ensure fisheries sustainability while providing equitable public access and enjoyment of the fishery. The participants agreed the process should be professionally designed and facilitated by neutral experts. As a result of this meeting the Gulf Angler Focus Group Initiative was initiated, convened and coordinated by a Planning Committee consisting of representatives of angler organizations, specifically; the American Sportfishing Association, Coastal Conservation Association, Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation, and Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership.

(Attachment I—Initiative Organizational Structure)

In addition, the FCRC Consensus Center at Florida State University was hired to facilitate the process. The process was organized around four key phases.

(Attachment II—Initiative Phases, Meeting Schedule, and Participation By Meeting)

Phase I of the Initiative involved consensus building with unaffiliated private anglers and angler groups, recreational fishing industry members, and for-hire operators. The five state fisheries managers from the Gulf region were asked to provide consultation and input throughout the entire process. In addition, NOAA’s NMFS was asked to provide guidance regarding the Gulf reef fish fisheries regulatory framework as needed. During this Phase of the project, a draft document titled *Private Recreational Management Options for Gulf of Mexico Red Snapper* was developed and revised based on participant feedback. The Phase I meetings were conducted on January 13 – 14, 2016 in New Orleans, Louisiana; April 18 – 19, 2016 in Biloxi, Mississippi; and, July 11 – 12, 2016 in Orlando, Florida.

The initial phase of the process included a series of focus group meetings convened to help develop the recreational perspective on management options for the Gulf red snapper fishery and other Gulf reef fish fisheries. During this Phase Gulf Angler Focus Group Initiative participants agreed to the Purpose, Vision and Project Scope for the process. Also, during this phase of the project management options and associated pros and cons for the *Private Recreational Management Options for Gulf of Mexico Red Snapper* document were developed.

(Attachment III—Initiative Purpose, Vision and Project Scope)

Phase II of the Initiative involved meeting with and receiving feedback from indirect stakeholders in recreational fishing including environmental NGOs and commercial fishing industry representatives, who may have differing opinions on the best management solutions for the recreational angler and associated industries. The Phase II meeting was conducted on October 17, 2016 in Biloxi, MS and feedback from participants was incorporated into the *Private Recreational Management Options for Gulf of Mexico Red Snapper* document.

Phase III of the Initiative involved meeting with and receiving feedback from for-hire operator perspectives. The Phase III meeting was conducted on October 17, 2016 in Biloxi, MS and feedback from participants was incorporated into the *Private Recreational Management Options for Gulf of Mexico Red Snapper* draft document.

Subsequent to Phase III stakeholder input from Phase II and Phase III were incorporated into the draft of management options and distributed to Phase I participants for further comments.

The final phase of the Initiative, **Phase IV**, involved the Planning Committee meeting with private angler stakeholders and state managers for additional feedback regarding the revised draft that incorporated Phase II and Phase III stakeholder feedback. The Phase IV meeting was conducted on November 30, 2016 in Biloxi, MS, and consistent with the previous phases of the process, feedback from participants was incorporated into the *Private Recreational Management Options for Gulf of Mexico Red Snapper* draft document.

Subsequent to the November 30, 2016 meeting the Planning Committee revised the draft of *Private Recreational Management Options for Gulf of Mexico Red Snapper* based on feedback from participants and sent the draft out for comments from all individuals that participated in the Initiative.

The process concluded with the Planning Committee finalizing the package of recreational fisheries management options resulting from the Initiative and submitting them to the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council for review in the form of the final *Private Recreational Management Options for Gulf of Mexico Red Snapper* document.

ATTACHMENT I

INITIATIVE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

PLANNING COMMITTEE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Gulf Angler Focus Group Initiative was initiated, and was convened and coordinated by a Planning Committee consisting of representatives of angler organizations. The role of the Planning Committee included coordinating the logistical, procedural and organizational aspects of the Gulf Angler Focus Group Initiative Consensus-Building Process. The Planning Committee's responsibilities included but are not limited to meeting logistics, agenda development, internal communication, stakeholder outreach, public relations, coordination with state and federal fishery managers, and communication with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council.

In addition, the Planning Committee compiled the Initiative's package of recreational fisheries management options focused on ensuring reasonable access and the sustainable harvest of Gulf reef fish fisheries generally, and the Red Snapper fishery specifically, for consideration in the management of the fishery. The Planning Committee will submit the options to the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council and the five state fisheries managers from the Gulf region.

PLANNING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dick Brame (Coastal Conservation Association), Ken Haddad (American Sportfishing Association), Chris Horton (Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation), Mike Leonard (American Sportfishing Association), Chris Macaluso (Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership), Kellie Ralston (American Sportfishing Association), and Ted Venker (Coastal Conservation Association).

FACILITATION TEAM

Jeff Blair and Robert Jones of the FCRC Consensus Center at Florida State University.

GULF ANGLER FOCUS GROUP INITIATIVE PARTICIPANTS

The Gulf Angler Focus Group Initiative, organized by recreational angler organizations, convened a series of meetings to work with stakeholders to identify and evaluate a full range of options including alternative strategies for key management topics including but not limited to: recreational harvest data collection, biological data collection, stock assessment, regional management, season length/access to the fishery, allocation, and sector separation.

The Focus Group Initiative was a participation-based consensus building process organized around the four key Phases described previously. The Focus Group Initiative operated without a formal membership structure, and was convened and coordinated by the Planning Committee.

All participants in the Focus Group Initiative were required to adhere to the Operating Procedures unanimously adopted by Focus Group Initiative participants at the January 13-14, 2016 meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana.

(Attachment II—Participation By Meeting)

ATTACHMENT II
INITIATIVE PHASES, MEETING SCHEDULE, AND MEETING PARTICIPATION

GULF ANGLER FOCUS GROUP INITIATIVE	
INITIATIVE PHASES (I – IV) AND KEY TASKS	
I.	Planning Committee engages in consensus building with unaffiliated private anglers, angler groups, recreational fishing industry members, and limited for-hire operators.
I.	Planning Committee consults with NOAA regarding Gulf reef fish fisheries regulatory framework.
I.	Planning Committee consults with Gulf States on Gulf reef fish fisheries management options throughout initiative.
II.	Planning Committee meets with and receives feedback from recreational fishery stakeholders including environmental NGOs, commercial fishing industry representatives, and others as appropriate.
III.	Planning Committee meets with and receives feedback from unaffiliated private anglers, angler groups, recreational fishing industry members, and all for-hire operator perspectives.
IV.	Planning Committee provides analysis of recreational fisheries management options resulting from the Initiative and submits them to the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council and the five state fisheries managers from the Gulf region as appropriate.

GULF ANGLER FOCUS GROUP INITIATIVE MEETING SCHEDULE		
MEETING SCHEDULE		
I.	September 8 - 9, 2015	Biloxi, Mississippi [Organizational Meeting]
II.	January 13 – 14, 2016	New Orleans, Louisiana [Phase I]
III.	April 18 – 19, 2016	Biloxi, Mississippi [Phase I]
IV.	July 11 – 12, 2016	Orlando, Florida [Phase I]
V.	October 17, 2016	Biloxi, Mississippi [Phase II and Phase III]
VI.	November 30, 2016	Biloxi, Mississippi [Phase IV]

GULF ANGLER FOCUS GROUP INITIATIVE PARTICIPATION BY MEETING							
Date	Total	Private Anglers	For-Hire	Env. NGO	Rec. Ind.	Commercial	Regulators
Sept. 8-9, 2015	22	11	4	0	3	0	4
Jan. 13-14, 2016	24	8	4	0	4	0	8
April 18-19, 2016	21	10	3	0	4	0	4*
July 11-12, 2016	18	11	0	0	5	0	2
October 17, 2016	19	4	7	5	1	2	0
Nov. 30, 2016	10	3	1	0	3	0	3

* Regulators were Gulf state regulators, except there were 2 from NOAA who attended the April 18, 2016 meeting.

GULF ANGLER FOCUS GROUP INITIATIVE PARTICIPATION BY AFFILIATION							
	Private Anglers	For-Hire	Env. NGO	Rec. Ind.	Commercial	State Reg.	Fed. Reg.
TOTALS	17	9	5	7	2	10	2

ATTACHMENT III

INITIATIVE PURPOSE, VISION, AND PROJECT SCOPE

GULF ANGLER FOCUS GROUP INITIATIVE ADOPTED PURPOSE STATEMENT

The Gulf Angler Focus Group Initiative is organized by angler organizations and consists of representatives of angler groups including unaffiliated private anglers, for-hire operators, bait and tackle shop owners, fishing tackle manufacturers and distributors, and marina owners in consultation with all five state fisheries managers from the Gulf region.

The Focus Group Initiative's purpose is for the recreational sector to identify and evaluate a suite of alternative management options that could provide for reasonable access and the sustainable harvest of Gulf reef fish fisheries generally, and the Red Snapper fishery specifically, for consideration in the management of the fishery.

GULF ANGLER FOCUS GROUP INITIATIVE ADOPTED VISION STATEMENT

By 2020 recreational fishermen have reasonable and consistent access with stable regulations and seasons set in advance for multiple years. All of this will have been accomplished within a flexible framework that is used differently by regions and results in maximum economic benefit while maintaining healthy Gulf reef fish fisheries stocks.

GULF ANGLER FOCUS GROUP INITIATIVE ADOPTED PROJECT SCOPE

The Gulf Angler Focus Group Initiative was convened by angler organizations to evaluate the Red Snapper fishery and reef fish fisheries practices and management options consistent with the NOAA's National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy Guiding Principles* and the findings of the Commission on Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Management on a range of management options and issues, and offer consensus recommendations aimed at sustaining an economically viable and healthy Gulf of Mexico reef fish fisheries, while providing equitable and reasonable access to the fisheries. The key management options and issues that were evaluated during the Focus Group Initiative include but are not limited to the following:

- Recreational Harvest Data Collection
- Biological Data Collection
- Stock Assessment
- Recreational Management Options
- Regional Management
- Season Length/Access to the Fishery
- Allocation
- Sector Separation

The Initiative's ultimate goal was to evaluate reef fish fisheries practices and management options to ensure that the regulation and management of the Gulf of Mexico reef fish fisheries generally, and the red snapper fishery specifically, are informed by the best available science and shared stakeholder stewardship values, resulting in economically viable, healthy and sustainable Gulf of Mexico reef fish fisheries and ecosystems, and equitable access to fisheries resources.

** Following are the results of Focus Group Initiative participants' rankings regarding the importance of NOAA's six Recreational Fishery Guiding Principles listed in rank order:*

RATING	NOAA GUIDING PRINCIPLES RATED ON A 5-POINT IMPORTANCE SCALE	AVERAGE
1	Provide scientifically sound and trusted social, cultural, economic, and ecological information.	4.85
2	Communicate and engage with the recreational fishing public.	4.80
3	Promote public access to quality recreational fishing opportunities.	4.80
4	Advance innovative solutions to evolving science, management, and environmental challenges.	4.50
5	Coordinate with state and federal management entities.	4.45
6	Support ecosystem conservation and enhancement.	4.20