

# Saltwater Recreational Fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico

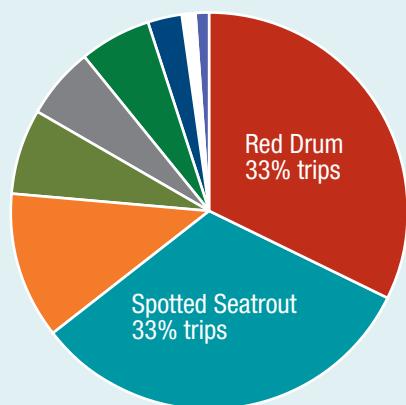


**100+**  
**SPECIES OF FISH**  
are available to  
saltwater anglers in the  
Gulf of Mexico at any  
point in the year

In the Gulf of Mexico, thriving recreational fisheries support vibrant coastal economies. With more than 100 species of fish available to saltwater recreational fishermen at any time of year, many unexplored recreational opportunities await anglers in the Gulf. While some species like gag grouper, greater amberjack, and red snapper have specific seasons, many others like jacks, mackerels, cobia, and other snappers and groupers can be caught year-round. In partnership with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council and the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission and its member states, NOAA Fisheries is working to ensure sustainable and enduring saltwater fishing opportunities along the Gulf Coast.

## Primary Target Species

Nearly one third (29%) of all recreational fishing trips in the Gulf targeted these popular recreational species. Of those trips, the primary target species breakdown is as follows:



- Spanish Mackerel 12% trips
- Sheepshead 7% trips
- Gray Snapper 6% trips
- Red Snapper 6% trips
- Sand Seatrouts 3% trips
- White Grunt <1% trips
- Atlantic Croaker <1% trips

Source: Marine Recreational Information Program

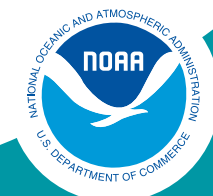
## Popular Recreational Species in the Gulf of Mexico\*

2015 Species	Total Catch NUMBERS OF FISH	Harvested / Released		CAUGHT IN STATE WATERS	CAUGHT IN FEDERAL WATERS
		Harvested	Released		
Spotted seatrout	16,873,000			98%	2%
Gray snapper	7,512,000			94%	6%
Red drum	6,160,000			97%	3%
White grunt	3,311,000			60%	40%
Sand seatrout	3,759,000			99%	1%
Atlantic croaker	3,514,000			99%	1%
Spanish mackerel	2,980,000			95%	5%
Sheepshead	2,889,000			98%	2%
Red snapper	2,350,000			34%	66%

Source: Marine Recreational Information Program

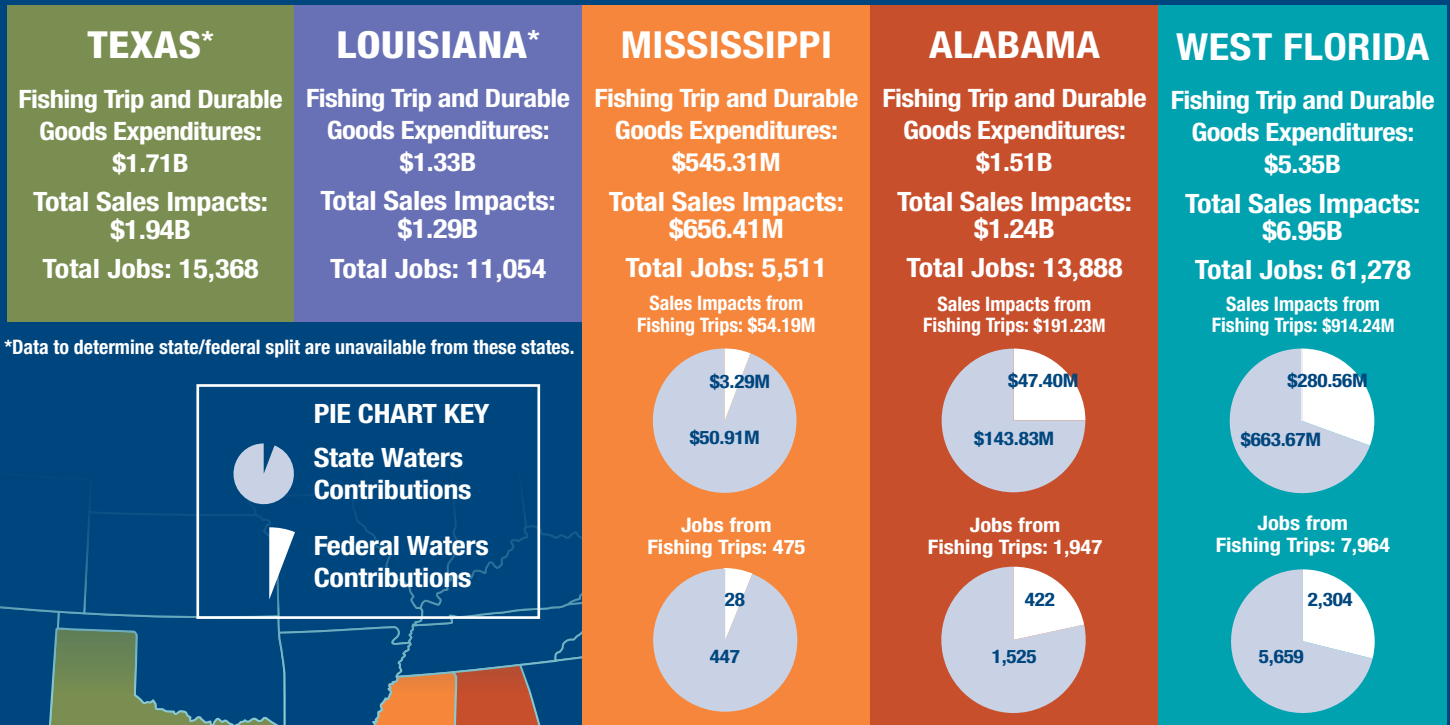
\*Release data and select species data are unavailable from Texas and Louisiana.

The table above depicts 2015 catch data. Catch totals and catch-by-area vary annually based on regulatory, ecological, meteorological, and other factors.

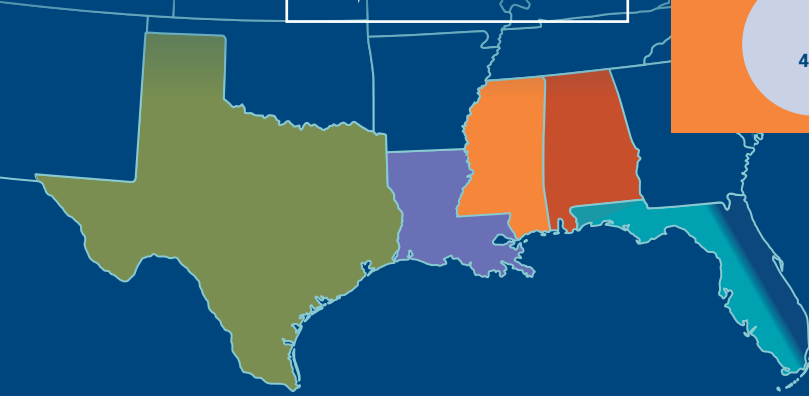
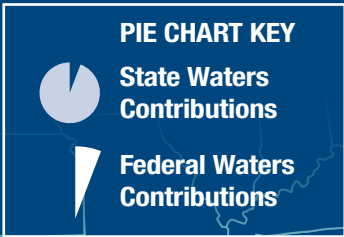


**NOAA**  
**FISHERIES**

# 2015 Economic Impacts in the Gulf of Mexico



\*Data to determine state/federal split are unavailable from these states.



In 2015  
**2.5 million**  
 Gulf anglers took  
**19.7 million**  
 fishing trips in the Gulf spending  
**\$10.4 billion**  
 on trips and durable goods

## Red Snapper

The Gulf's most iconic species, red snapper, is among its greatest management challenges requiring creative and collaborative solutions. Summer 2017 saw a novel federal-state agreement to provide significant additional recreational fishing opportunities for Gulf of Mexico red snapper. This solution came in response to years of management challenges. Overfishing of Gulf red snapper ended in 2009 and the population grew rapidly. As the population rebounded, the total red snapper quota rose from a low of 5 million pounds in 2007 — when the rebuilding plan was established — to a high of 14.3 million pounds in 2015 — the highest quota ever allowed. While anglers and managers alike expected the federal red snapper recreational fishing season would get longer as the stock recovered, just the opposite has

proven true. This is the result of a combination of factors: longer state seasons, greater numbers of fishermen able to more easily find and fish for red snapper around the Gulf, red snapper being caught more quickly by fishermen, and the larger size of fish being caught. The average size of a red snapper doubled in the last 10 years. As a result, the quota for red snapper is harvested more quickly, which requires the season to be shortened over time despite large and historic increases in allowable catches. The new federal-state agreement changes this dynamic and is expected to deliver additional recreational fishing opportunities and associated economic benefits to the Gulf region.



### LEARN MORE

In the Southeast region, NOAA Fisheries works closely with the Gulf Fishery Management Council, as well as with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council and its member states, to cooperatively manage recreational fisheries. For more information visit [NOAA Fisheries Southeast Region website](http://NOAA Fisheries Southeast Region website).

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