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LDWF Red Snapper Management Approach

Purpose: *To provide more quality access to the Red Snapper resource, in both state and federal waters, for recreational anglers fishing from Louisiana ports.*

Measures Achieved To Date:

- Full commitment to LA Creel (see #3 below)
- Developed plans and partnerships for increased fisheries independent sampling around platforms in the gulf (see #5 below)
- Lifting of the SARS moratorium to capture more snapper habitat in our Artificial Reef Program (see #6 below)

Measures Underway:

- Efforts continue to explore alternative state-waters season structure for 2018 (see #1 below)
- Efforts continue through the Gulf Council to secure state management of the recreational harvest season in both state and federal waters (see #3 below)
- Education of the angling public concerning red snapper management has largely failed. LDWF will continue to provide science-based information to the public so that anglers better-understand why and how management decisions are made (see #7 below)

Future Measures:

- Testing solutions through the use of an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) are planned. Private anglers, if the test is approved by NOAA, will be instrumental in helping LDWF test an improved data collection system (see #2 below).

Descriptions of Management Measures:

1. *Restructure the State-Waters Red Snapper Season*¹
 - a. **Modify Seasonal Framework:** Rather than a January opening, consider an April or May opening when recreational fishing is most popular to allow for increased daily harvest without exceeding the self-imposed TAC. However, during the January 2017 meeting, the LWF Commission approved a 1 February 2017 opening of Red Snapper season. Other future considerations include opening on Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and certain holidays only during a designated time period. These options continue to be researched by LDWF Fisheries staff.
 - b. **Increase Daily Bag Limit:** Reducing the length of the Red Snapper season may allow a concomitant increase in the personal daily bag limit above the current two fish per day. This would result in each angling opportunity providing increased access.

¹ This measure will only have meaningful impact if Congress continues to recognize state waters out to nine nautical miles for reef fish management purposes.

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2. *Secure an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) from NOAA*

This permit would allow LDWF to operate a pilot program to research novel methods of providing more flexible access by the recreational sector to Red Snapper while also obtaining near real-time catch data through a smart phone app. Such methods include providing a snapper allocation to each angler or vessel participating in the program. The allocation could be harvested in federal waters at any time during the program period rather than forcing anglers to only fish the established federal season. Other methods (tags, days-at-sea, multi-species) to test in an EFP have been discussed and have been strongly rejected by the leaders of some stakeholder groups. With any management method, strict accountability measures must be in place to ensure proper reporting, no quota overruns, and other controls. These concepts should be tested and envisioned within a state management concept. Refer to the EFP fact sheet on the LDWF website for more information.

3. *Continue to Advocate for Recreational Angler Management in Louisiana*

A motion was made by LDWF at the April 2017 Gulf Council meeting in Birmingham, Alabama, to develop an amendment that would allow Louisiana to manage the harvest of its historical percentage (approx. 14%) of the Gulf-wide recreational Red Snapper landings during the calendar years of 2019, 2020, and 2021 out to 200 nm. This motion was passed by the Council 11-4. LDWF will continue to push for development of this LA-Only Amendment to help provide increased access to the Red Snapper resource to Louisiana's fishing community. Similar management programs have already been developed at the federal level both for the commercial and for charter-for-hire sectors, and this new amendment could help provide at the state level a robust and successful management program for the private recreational sector. It is expected that preliminary discussions on this amendment will occur at the June 2017 meeting of the Gulf Council in Naples, Florida.

4. *Commitment to Continuing LA Creel Program (Fisheries Dependent Data Collection)*

The LA Creel program was developed to more accurately account for recreational harvest of saltwater finfish species. This program was designed to replace the federally-run Marine Recreational Intercept Program (MRIP). The high success of the LA Creel program is well-known, and it has received partial accreditation by NOAA as an adequate replacement for MRIP. The program must be continued, and LDWF commits to such even if the recent saltwater license fee increase (\$7.50 per license) sunsets in 2018. LDWF expended just over \$1.9M on LA Creel in FY16 (July 2015 – June 2016), although it is felt that streamlining processes could reduce that expenditure to approximately \$1.2M in this current FY, which would keep expenditures in line with collections.

5. *Increased Reef Fish Sampling (Fisheries Independent Data Collection)*

NOAA's current level of sampling off of Louisiana is insufficient to provide enough data to perform a Louisiana-specific stock assessment. Additionally, this sampling does not adequately include fisheries independent data from critical reef fish habitats such as oil and gas platforms. LDWF proposes to augment the current NOAA sampling by performing three years of additional

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sampling, coordinated with NOAAs Southeast Science Center, around oil platforms and artificial reefs. The data collected will be provided to NOAA to bolster reef fish (including Red Snapper) stock assessments for the Gulf of Mexico. Recent conversations with the NOAA Office of Sustainable Fisheries, the office that produces the Red Snapper stock assessments, have been very helpful in our advancing the planning process for this effort.

6. *Increase Efforts to Secure Artificial Reefs in Red Snapper Habitat*

The Louisiana Artificial Reef Program has experienced a decrease in oil and gas structures being donated to the program in recent years. A moratorium on accepting structures as Special Artificial Reef Sites (SARS) may have been a contributor to this situation. However, on 10 April, 2017, at a meeting of the Artificial Reef Council (ARC) the Department requested and received revocation of the SARS moratorium. This action will allow the Department greater flexibility to take advantage of unique opportunities to reef decommissioned oil and gas structures in-place, rather than moving them sometimes tens of miles into a planning area. While the focus will be on oil and gas structures in known Red Snapper habitat, the lifting of the SARS moratorium will allow for preservation of important offshore habitat for other important fisheries species as well. The Department will also urge oil and gas companies to use less lethal methods (cutting rather than explosives), where and when appropriate, to sever the legs of their structures at the mudline to reduce mortality of fishes in the area.

7. *Initiate a Red Snapper educational outreach program*

It is likely that many of Louisiana's Red Snapper fishermen, and indeed our elected officials at all levels, are under-informed about the basic biology of species and what is involved in the fishery management process. The department wants to commit to a program under which educational materials of several sorts would be made available to Red Snapper fishermen to help them better understand Red Snapper biology and management. Specially trained departmental outreach personnel would travel to fishing club meetings, fishing rodeos, and coastal fairs/festivals both to hand out informational species profiles and fact sheets (see Attachment B) specific to Red Snapper issues and to discuss the concerns of fishermen at the individual level. We also envision a Web site of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) on Red Snapper biology and management to address issues in somewhat greater depth, but without an overabundance of jargon.

Anticipated Results/Outcomes: This multi-prong approach is designed to provide meaningful solutions and will address a number of the concerns expressed by members of the recreational angling community with respect to Red Snapper. Restructuring the state season (method #1 above) should provide more quality access to Red Snapper resources for the recreational sector in state waters. Methods #2 and #3 above will serve to assist in the development of an overall approach to provide increased flexibility and access to Red Snapper in federal waters. Continued concerns about inadequate data and "poor science" expressed by the recreational sector will be addressed by methods #4 and #5

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whereby LDWF commits to a significant increased role in quality data collection. This data will be instrumental in providing more scientifically-sound stock assessments, both at the gulf level and at the state level. Lastly, vital man-made habitats utilized by Red Snapper and other reef fish will be preserved under #6 by focusing efforts to reef oil and gas platforms in-place before they are removed from the water in the decommissioning process. Measure #7 will inform the Red Snapper fishing community and lead to a greater understanding of the management of the species. All measures are part of a holistic and prudent approach to responsible fisheries management for Red Snapper.