

Red Snapper (*Lutjanus campechanus*)

Red Snapper are rosy-red in color with a white underside. Key characteristics include red eyes, sharp needle-like teeth, and a pointed anal fin that differs from the rounded anal fin found in other snappers.

Spawning

Females mature and start spawning sometime between the ages of 2 and 6 years; males generally mature at younger ages than females.

Spawning season begins in May and ends in September, but peak spawning is in May, June, and July.

Red Snappers do not migrate to specific sites to congregate for spawning as do some other snappers and many groupers. However, large numbers of individuals may participate in group spawning wherever and whenever it is time for them to spawn.

Females spawn a batch of eggs every 4-5 days throughout the spawning season. Individual batches of eggs may number from as few as 1,000 to as many as 2.5 million depending on the size of the female.

A small, young female may spawn 30,000 eggs in a season, but an older, larger female may produce as many as 75 million eggs in a season.



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Age and Size

Red Snappers are capable of living for up to 60 years, but few actually survive that long. Old individuals (greater than 20 years) are very scarce in the Gulf population these days.

Most Red Snappers harvested in both the recreational and the commercial fisheries are from 2 to 7 years of age.

Red Snappers grow very quickly to about 30 inches in length during their first 10 years of life after which they grow very slowly for the remainder of their lives.

Size and age are largely unrelated in Red Snappers: a 5 year old individual may be a little as 14 inches in length or as much as 30 inches in length, though the average is about 23 inches.

Habitats & Diet

Red Snappers live in 3 different habitats during the course of their lives. 1 and 2 year olds inhabit shoreward mud/sand bottom areas. At age 3 years they move to structure (natural and artificial reefs, oil and gas platforms, shipwrecks) and stay there for 7 to 8 years. At about age 10 or so, they move to remote, more isolated habitats in the deeper shelf waters of the Gulf.

Red Snappers do not make seasonal long distance migrations like some other Gulf fishes. In fact, they do not move around very much at all except for those movements noted in above.

As voracious opportunistic feeders, Red Snappers consume a wide variety of marine organisms including fishes, tunicates, squids, crabs, shrimps, mantis shrimps, and zooplankton.

Age and Growth

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries use “ear stones” called otoliths to calculate the age of fish. Biologists remove these hard structures from the skull of bony fish and cut them into small sections to reveal yearly growth rings. In a process similar to ageing trees, they count the number of rings to determine the age of a fish. Fishery managers use fish age, length, and weight data to estimate growth rates, mortality rates, and population size. The chart below shows that Red Snapper grow rapidly during the first few years of life, and then growth slows as they get older. Once Red Snapper mature, they invest more energy in reproduction rather than growth.

*AGE (YEARS)	APPROX. AVERAGE LENGTH	APPROX. LENGTH RANGE
1	11"	9" - 14"
2	17"	11" - 25"
3	19"	11" - 28"
4	21"	13" - 30"
5	23"	14" - 30"
6	25"	15" - 33"
7	26"	17" - 35"
8	26"	20" - 31"
9	27"	21" - 32"
10+	28"	24" - 38"

LDWF fishery-dependent data, 2012-2016.

*Due to large variability in age at a given total length, size is not a good estimator of age in individuals.

LDWF Contact Information

Recreational Fishing License
225-765-2887

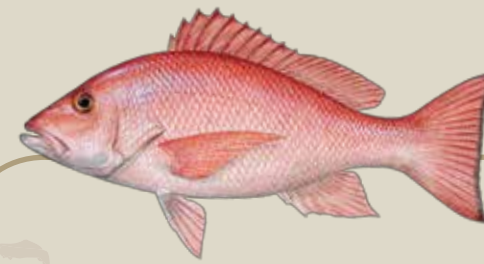
Recreational Offshore Landing Permit
<https://rolp.wlf.la.gov>

**Commercial License
Boating Registration
Enforcement**
225-765-2898



Your purchase of fishing equipment and motor boat fuels supports Sport Fish Restoration and boating access facilities.

Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
Office of Fisheries
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Baton Rouge, LA 70808
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Red Snapper Management

Are data from Red Snapper populations at oil and gas platforms and artificial reefs located off the Louisiana coast included in the stock assessments?

- Catch data is a critical part of stock assessments and the majority of Red Snapper caught off of Louisiana are from platforms and other artificial structures. Under LA Creel, the recreational catch of snappers is monitored closely and these data are subsequently provided to NMFS for inclusion in the stock assessments.
- The Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (SEAMAP) also performs annual vertical line (commercial bandit reel) surveys at oil and gas platforms, artificial reefs, and natural hard bottom areas in the Gulf, including in Louisiana waters. From 2013 to 2016, 622 vertical line drops have caught almost 3,200 Red Snappers. These data are also supplied to NMFS for use in future stock assessments.

As the Red Snapper populations in the Gulf of Mexico increase, why are the private recreational Red Snapper seasons in the EEZ getting shorter?

- Catch rates have more than doubled since 2007 due to an increase in numbers of both fishermen and fish.
- The average Red Snapper is more than twice the size it was in 2007, increasing from 3.3 pounds (2007) to 7.25 pounds (2016). Catching larger fish means that the annual quota (measured in pounds) will be met more quickly.
- To decrease the chance of overfishing, a 20% quota buffer was established by the Gulf Council. This means that the annual recreational catch quota has decreased by 20%.
- If the annual quota is exceeded, any excess is deducted from the quota for the following fishing season. This is called a “payback provision.”
- The lengths of state seasons for Red Snapper have increased drastically since 2012, so a large fraction of the recreational harvest comes from state waters. NMFS estimates that 81% of the annual recreational harvest in 2017 will occur during state waters seasons, leaving less than 600,000 pounds for the recreational federal waters season.