



The State-Based Solution to Gulf of Mexico Red Snapper

In March 2015, the directors of the state fish and wildlife agencies from Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas announced an agreement for state-based management of Gulf of Mexico red snapper, which in recent years has experienced increasing privatization of this public resource and decreasing recreational fishing opportunities.

Gulf of Mexico red snapper is presently managed by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, under the National Marine Fisheries Service. The states' agreement, which is predicated on transferring management authority away from the Council, describes the key elements of a plan in which the five Gulf states would coordinate management of red snapper throughout the Gulf of Mexico through the proposed Gulf States Red Snapper Management Authority.

Numerous regional and national fisheries organizations have come out in support of the states' plan. The recreational fishing community has long had a strong relationship with state fish and wildlife agencies because of their ability to manage fisheries resources in a way that allows for healthy populations and public access. Most all of the nation's most popular saltwater recreational fisheries are managed by the states. Rarely, if ever, does overfishing occur in state-managed recreational fisheries.

While the states are also tremendously successful at managing commercial fisheries, nothing in the Gulf states' plan proposes to change how the commercial red snapper fishery is managed. In fact, the Gulf States Red Snapper Management Authority Act goes a step further: statutorily reaffirming existing commercial individual quota shares.

It has become abundantly clear that the current Gulf red snapper management system is designed to penalize, rather than reward, recreational fishermen. Somewhere along the way of rebuilding the fishery, to where it's now at an abundance level beyond anyone's expectations, management went off the tracks. A new path forward is desperately needed, and the states are to be commended for their willingness to take on this task.



Representatives Garret Graves of Louisiana and Jeff Miller of Florida are championing this plan. They are working to ensure congressional action on this issue aligns with the five Gulf states.