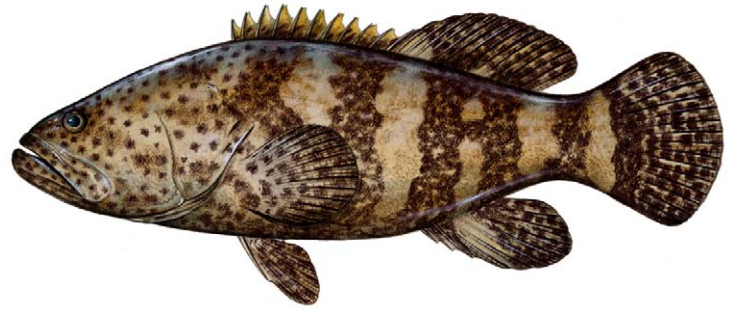


## Giants of the Gulf

The goliath grouper (*Epinephelus itajara*), also known as the Jewfish, is the second largest member of the grouper family and one of the largest reef fish on earth. An adult goliath grouper can weigh as much as 800 pounds and reach 8.2 feet in length. Adults have small spots on the fins, body and head and are typically olive, gray or brownish yellow in color. The goliath grouper inhabits tropical and subtropical waters and can be found in the eastern Pacific, western Atlantic, and eastern Atlantic Ocean from Florida to Brazil, the Caribbean Sea, and the Gulf of Mexico in shallow reefs at depths from 15 feet to 150 feet. The grouper prefers structure such as oyster bars, mangroves, rock or coral and is one of the few groupers found in brackish water.



Goliath grouper. Photo credit: Dianne Rome Peebles

Goliath groupers are opportunistic ambush predators that feed on a variety of food items. This grouper primarily feeds on crustaceans (crabs, shrimp and spiny lobster). Other prey items include octopus, juvenile sea turtles, gastropods, and a variety of fish such as hardhead catfish, stingray and parrotfish.

The large fish can live more than 35 years and is a slow grower. On average fish grow approximately four inches per year until age 6, then growth declines sharply to 1.2 inches per year until age 15 and down to 0.4 in. per year after age 25. The fish take several years to reach sexual maturity due to the slow growth rate. Males are considered sexually mature when they have reached a total length of 45.5 inches and are over 7 years of age. Females are considered sexually mature when they reach a total length of 48.2 inches and are over 6 years of age. The spawning season varies from June to October depending on location. In the Gulf of Mexico spawning occurs during a full moon in July through September. During spawning, goliath groupers form aggregations of tens to hundreds of individuals at specific spawning sites. Research has shown slow-growing, long-living, fish which aggregate in specific spawning sites are vulnerable to overfishing.

Historically, harvest of the goliath grouper was much greater in the Gulf of Mexico than in the Atlantic; take was primarily by speargun, hook and line and as bycatch from trawls and traps. The large

fish are not easily startled by approaching divers, making spearguns an effective tool. In the 1980s fishing pressure increased dramatically as the fish became more economically valuable, spawning aggregation locations and times were publicized and navigational equipment was used in the fishery. By the 1990s goliath grouper landings began to decline. Many factors were involved in the decline of the species. One factor is an increase in urban development in coastal areas. Development affects coastal mangroves, seagrass beds, live coral, and estuaries which provide important habitat for juveniles and adults. The species life history traits such as long life span, low reproductive rates, slow growth rate, large size at sexual maturation and spawning behavior make the fish more sensitive to overfishing.

Sharp declines in goliath grouper populations caused regulatory agencies to take swift action to protect the species. In 1990, the Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council, the South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the United States Virgin Islands territorial government closed the fishery to harvest and possession of the species. In 1991, the grouper was listed on the United States Endangered Species List. In 1996, the species was listed as critically endangered on the Red List of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The IUCN lists a species as critically endangered when the species has been “observed, estimated, inferred or suspected” of a reduction in abundance of at least 80 percent over the last 10 years or three generations. The IUCN considers critically endangered species to be at an “extremely high risk of extinction in the wild in the immediate future.” The combination of these actions ended the commercial and recreational harvest of the goliath grouper from all of its range.

More than 20 years of protection is beginning to show hope for the species. In 2004 the grouper was removed from the U.S. Endangered Species List to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Species of Concern List. Populations of goliath grouper in the southeastern U.S. waters continued to increase, and the fish was removed from the NOAA list in 2006. Due to life history characteristic of the goliath grouper recovery will be slow. However, the species is continuing to recover and being monitored by governmental regulatory agencies and shows promise for the future.

- **Nikki Anderson**

### **Marine Recreational Information Program**

Since the 1970s the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistical Survey, or MRFSS, has been the program which estimates recreational catches of marine fish. Now, a new plan is being implemented to replace MRFSS. It is called the Marine Recreational Information Program.

For the past four decades MRFSS has gathered information about catches and retention of fish by recreational fishermen along the coasts of the U.S. This was accomplished through many man hours of intercept surveys in which surveyors interviewed anglers at boat launches and marinas at random sites across coastal regions. Random phone interviews were also conducted asking a series of questions concerning coastal fishing activities such as numbers of trips, numbers of fish caught and numbers of fish kept. From this data, estimates were made of the amount of effort, number of fish caught and the number of fish kept for a region, state or the nation by recreational anglers.

The new system, Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) is designed to meet two critical needs:

1. Provide the detailed, timely, scientifically-sound estimates that fishery managers, stock assessors and marine scientists need to ensure the sustainability of ocean resources.
2. Address head-on stakeholder concerns about the reliability and credibility of recreational fishing catch and effort estimates.

MRIP is a system of coordinated data collection programs designed to address specific regional needs for recreational fishing information. This regional approach based on a nationally consistent standard will ensure that the appropriate, targeted, place-based information is being collected to best meet the needs of managers and stakeholders, and that it is being done in a scientifically rigorous way.

Although NOAA Fisheries is ultimately responsible for making MRIP work, the program's design has relied extensively on input and commitment from independent scientists, partner agencies, fishing groups, conservation organizations and individuals who served on MRIP working groups.

The ultimate goal of the MRIP is to reduce bias and increase the accuracy, timeliness and spatial resolution of recreational catch and effort estimates. MRIP is also intended to increase stakeholder confidence in those estimates.

For more information on the MRIP visit website: [www.countmyfish.noaa.gov/aboutus/index.html](http://www.countmyfish.noaa.gov/aboutus/index.html).

- Kevin Savoie

## Second Group of Whooping Cranes Released at White Lake WCA

Sixteen juvenile whooping cranes were released into the wild at White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area (WCA) in Gueydan. The juvenile cranes join three adults that were released in March as part of an experimental population being monitored by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF).

The cranes were delivered to southwest Louisiana on Dec. 1 from the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, MD. LDWF is working cooperatively with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), USGS, and the Louisiana Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit to establish a non-migratory population in the state.

### Lagniappe Fisheries Newsletter

Editor: Julie Anderson

Web coordinator: Melissa Castleberry

Copy editor: Roy Kron

Layout/design: Jessica Schexnayder

The whooping crane is protected under the federal Endangered Species and Migratory Bird Treaty Acts and by state law. Anyone encountering a whooping crane is advised to observe the bird from a distance.

For more information on the re-introduction of whooping cranes to Louisiana, please visit [www.wlf.la.gov](http://www.wlf.la.gov), or contact Sara Zimorski at [szimorski@wlf.la.gov](mailto:szimorski@wlf.la.gov) or Bo Boehringer at [bboehringer@wlf.la.gov](mailto:bboehringer@wlf.la.gov) or 225-765-5115. For photos, video footage and research documentation please visit: [www.wlf.louisiana.gov/wildlife/whooping-cranes](http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/wildlife/whooping-cranes).

## **LOUISIANA REGULATIONS**

### **Closure of Oyster Season on All Public Oyster Areas East of the Mississippi River**

The oyster season on all public oyster areas east of the Mississippi River will close one-half hour after sunset on Thursday, Feb. 2, 2012. The areas are being closed to protect the resource, based on current harvest pressure and estimated low oyster stock size. All other details, rules and regulations of the 2011/2012 oyster season as established by previous actions of the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission and the LDWF Secretary remain in effect until further notice.

### **Fall Shrimp Season to Close in Zone 1**

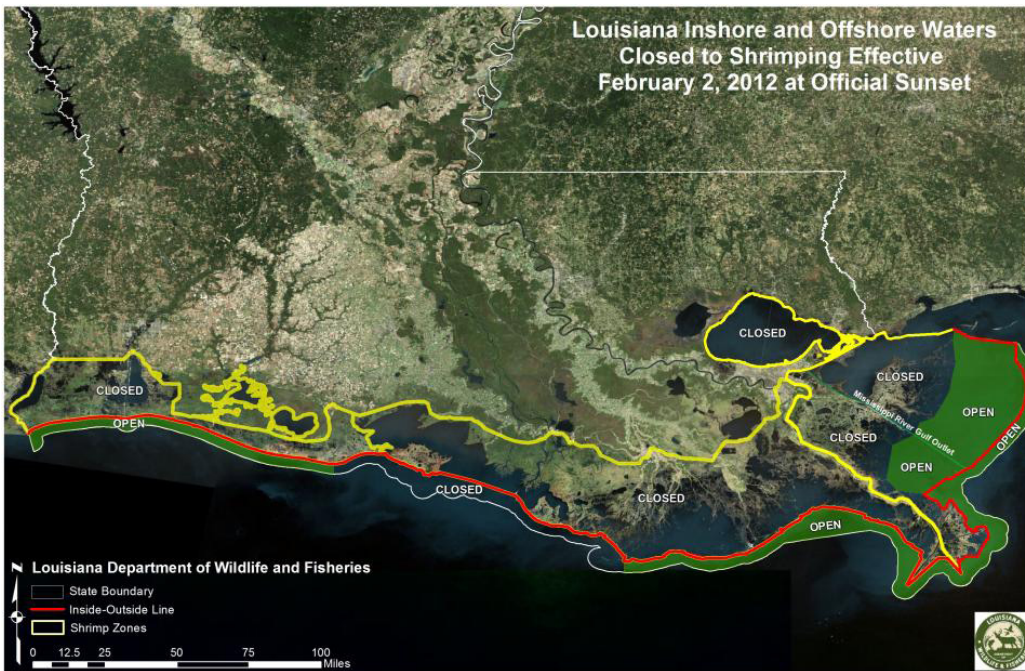
The fall shrimp season will close in the remaining portion of Shrimp Management Zone 1, excluding the open waters of Breton and Chandeleur sounds, at official sunset on February 2, 2012.

The Department took action in December to extend the fall shrimp season in these waters, but current sampling conducted by LDWF fisheries biologists indicates that average white shrimp size in these waters is smaller than 100 count per pound. This action protects these small, white shrimp and provides increased opportunity for growth to larger, more valuable sizes. It also protects juvenile brown shrimp which begin to recruit into these waters in early spring.

Effective with this closure, shrimping will only be allowed in:

- The open waters of Breton and Chandeleur Sounds as described by the double-rig line in R.S.56:495.1.(A)2, and
- State outside waters seaward of the inside/outside shrimp line east of the U.S. Coast Guard navigational light off the northwest shore of Caillou Boca at 29 degrees 03 minutes 10 seconds north latitude and 90 degrees 50 minutes 27 seconds west longitude, and
- State outside waters seaward of the inside/outside shrimp line west of Freshwater Bayou Canal at 92 degrees 18 minutes 33 seconds west longitude

The shrimping industry is the most valuable commercial fishery in Louisiana, averaging over 8,700 licensed recreational and commercial shrimpers annually over the past five years.



**Shrimp closure**  
Photo credit: LDWF

## Commercial King Mackerel Season

The Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission set the 2012 commercial king mackerel season to begin July 1, 2012. Once the season opens, it will remain open until the quota set for the Gulf of Mexico of approximately one million pounds is met.

King mackerel is a significant commercial fishery in Louisiana. From 2000 through 2011 Louisiana has landed approximately 87 percent of the allotted western Gulf of Mexico quota. In 2011, approximately 690,000 pounds were landed in Louisiana. A considerable portion of the king mackerel landed in Louisiana is shipped to markets in the northeastern United States.

Currently, the 2010-2011 commercial king mackerel season is closed as the established quota has been harvested.

For more information, contact Jason Adriance at 504-284-2032 or [jadriance@wlf.louisiana.gov](mailto:jadriance@wlf.louisiana.gov).

## State Waters Close to Recreational Harvest of Gag Grouper

The closure for the recreational harvest of gag grouper in state waters is extended until June 2, 2012. Today's action ensures that regulations in Louisiana waters are consistent with those of federally managed waters.

This closure also prohibits anyone on board a vessel for which a federal commercial or charter/headboat permit for the Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish fishery has been issued from harvesting or possessing gag grouper in state waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

## **Establishing Vessel Monitoring for the Harvesting of Oysters on Public Seed Grounds**

Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission took action designed to improve harvesting and monitoring efforts on the state's public oyster seed grounds. The proposed action would require Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) onboard all oyster seed ground vessels.

The use of VMS technology will allow LDWF to have real-time access to resource management data and allow LDWF biologists to more effectively serve the oyster industry by monitoring and replacing cultch material where fishing pressures are greatest.

Annually, there are over 700 vessel permits issued, giving access to the state's public oyster beds, totaling 1.6 million acres. The VMS technology will help the department more accurately determine the actual number of vessels that fish the public seeds grounds as well as the amount of material these vessels take from the public.

The VMS technology will also provide an added safety factor by allowing vessel operators to dispatch help with exact GPS coordinates, as well as for vessel owners to better manage their fleet. The systems will also be available for oyster harvesters to use while fishing private leases. The Louisiana oyster industry provides more than one-third of the oysters consumed in the United States. LDWF proposed to institute the VMS program on a year-to-year basis. The VMS units, service and installation will be provided at no cost to the vessel operator, participants will only be required to provide minimal maintenance for the units. All information collected by LDWF will be considered privileged and confidential and will not be made public.

Public comments on the Notice of Intent will be accepted no later than April 4, 2012. Comments should be submitted to Jason Froeba at [jfroeba@wlf.la.gov](mailto:jfroeba@wlf.la.gov) or 225-765-0121.

## **2012 Commercial Season for Non-Sandbar Large Coastal Sharks**

The 2012 commercial season for non-sandbar large coastal sharks will open in Louisiana waters on Feb. 15. In the spring, the commercial and recreational seasons for the harvest of all sharks in Louisiana waters will close from 12:01 a.m. April 1, 2012, until 12:01 p.m. July 1, 2012, due to an existing fixed closure to protect shark pupping.

During the open season, commercial harvest of non-sandbar large coastal sharks and pelagic sharks are regulated by the existing federal and state rules regarding trip limits, allowable species and requirements for permits and landings.

The non-sandbar large coastal shark group is composed of the great hammerhead, scalloped hammerhead, smooth hammerhead, nurse shark, blacktip shark, bull shark, lemon shark, silky shark, spinner shark and tiger shark. While sandbar shark are a member of the large coastal shark group, only specifically designated federally permitted vessels may take sandbar shark while operating under conditions of that permit.

Commercial fishing for non-blacknose small coastal sharks remains open in Louisiana waters currently and will remain open until the federal quota is met. The non-blacknose small coastal shark

group is composed of bonnethead shark, Atlantic sharpnose shark, blacknose shark and finetooth. Last year the commercial fishing season for non-blacknose small coastal sharks remained open for all of 2011, as the quota was not met.

There is no allowable harvest at any time for all prohibited species. Shark species falling in the category include basking shark, white shark, bigeye sand tiger, sand tiger, whale shark, smalltooth sawfish, largetooth sawfish, Atlantic angel shark, Caribbean sharpnose shark, smalltail shark, bignose shark, Caribbean reef shark, dusky shark, Galapagos shark, narrowtooth shark, night shark, bigeye sixgill shark, bigeye thresher shark, longfin mako, sevengill shark and sixgill shark.

## **GULF OF MEXICO REGULATIONS**

### **Recreational Grouper Season**

The recreational shallow-water grouper fishery will close from Feb. 1 through March 31. The annual closure, which includes gag, black, red, yellowfin, scamp, yellowmouth, rock hind and red hind, is designed to protect gag, which are often found and caught with the other grouper species. The two-month spawning season closure helps reduce overfishing of gag and rebuild its populations so that larger annual harvests may be possible in the future.

Gag grouper, which is also part of the shallow-water grouper complex, has been closed since Nov. 16, 2011. The proposed 2012 recreational gag season is July 1 through Oct. 31.

### **Proposed Changes to Regulations for Bycatch Reduction Devices and Shrimp Effort Restrictions in the Southeastern Shrimp Fisheries**

On Jan. 9, 2012, NOAA Fisheries Service began accepting public comment on proposed changes to shrimp regulations. One action would certify two new bycatch reduction devices (BRDs) for use in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic region. Another action would relax a restriction regarding the level of allowable shrimp effort in the Gulf of Mexico.

Both of the new BRDs represent modifications to the Composite Panel BRD, which is provisionally certified through May 24, 2012. The proposed rule would add these BRDs to the list of allowable BRDs, and provide technical specifications for the construction and subsequent legal enforcement of the BRDs. One version incorporates the addition of a square mesh panel (SMP Composite Panel BRD); the other version incorporates the addition of a “spooker” cone in the cod-end of the trawl behind the BRD (Cone Deflector Composite Panel BRD).

The proposed rule would also relax a shrimp effort reduction threshold for the Gulf of Mexico shrimp fishery. Regulations implemented in 2008 require that shrimp effort in the 10-30 fathom depth zone west of Mobile Bay, Ala., be at least 74 percent less than effort levels documented during 2001 through 2003. In accordance with the framework procedures set forth in Amendment 14 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Shrimp Fishery of the Gulf of Mexico, this rule would adjust the threshold to require a 67 percent reduction in effort in the 10 to 30 fathom depth contours compared to the designated baseline years.

The intended effect of this proposed rule is to improve bycatch reduction in the shrimp fishery, provide greater flexibility to the industry, reduce social and economic impacts to fishing communities, and better meet the requirements of National Standard 9 of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act).

*Background:* BRDs have been required in shrimp trawls in the South Atlantic since 1997, in the western Gulf of Mexico since 1998, and since 2004 for the eastern Gulf of Mexico. In 2008, NOAA Fisheries Service provisionally certified the Composite Panel BRD for use in federal waters throughout the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic, and changed the classification for the Expanded Mesh BRD in the Gulf of Mexico from “fully certified” to “provisionally certified.” Provisional certifications only allow the use of the BRD for a two-year period. In 2010, NOAA Fisheries Service extended these provisional certifications to allow industry greater time to make modifications that would fully certify the BRDs. Such testing occurred on the Composite Panel BRD, resulting in the two modified versions being proposed for certification. No additional information is available for the Expanded Mesh BRD in the Gulf of Mexico.

Therefore, as of May 25, 2012, the original Composite Panel BRD will be decertified for use in both the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic federal waters, and the Expanded Funnel BRD will be decertified for use in Gulf of Mexico federal waters. Shrimp fishers who use the original Composite Panel BRD would have until May 25, 2012, to make the modifications to their BRDs to meet the new construction specifications.

### **New Regulations for King Mackerel, Spanish Mackerel, and Cobia**

*Small Entity Compliance Guide:* NOAA Fisheries Service approved Amendment 18 to the Fishery Management Plan for Coastal Migratory Pelagic Resources in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic. A final rule implementing these regulations published in the Federal Register on Dec. 29, 2011 (76 FR 82058). The fishery management plan is jointly managed by the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils.

NOAA Fisheries Service and the councils developed Amendment 18 to address new requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, which requires establishing the following for most federally managed stocks: Annual catch limits, the highest level of landings that is acceptable to maintain the stock, are required for most federally managed species. Annual catch targets, acceptable levels of landings that provide a buffer for management uncertainty, are optional. Accountability measures, which help keep landings within the catch limits or catch targets, or make adjustments if those levels are exceeded, are also required. The final rule makes the following changes to the fishery management plan: Removes four species (cero, little tunny, dolphin, and Gulf of Mexico bluefish) from the fishery management plan. Establishes annual catch limits, annual catch targets, and accountability measures for king mackerel, Spanish mackerel, and cobia. Establishes separate migratory groups for cobia. Revises the framework procedure, which allows for more timely implementation of routine regulatory changes.

In addition, the amendment contains non-regulatory actions to revise thresholds used to determine the status of the stock, such as overfishing (rate of removal is too high) and overfished (population abundance is too low). The councils also established an acceptable biological catch control rule and set allocations for Atlantic group cobia.



Changes from the proposed rule: When finalizing the Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel commercial quota, NOAA Fisheries Service realized the adjusted commercial quota also needed to be revised. The adjusted commercial quota is relevant to trip limit reductions for the commercial sector. In this final rule, the adjusted quota is revised from 3.63 million pounds to 2.88 million pounds as a result of the change in the commercial quota from 3.87 million pounds to 3.13 million pounds.

Although the intent of the adjusted quota is to allow continued harvest after the 2.88 million pound adjusted quota is reached, total harvest for the fishing year still must be restricted to the annual catch limit. This means that if the entire commercial quota of 3.13 million pounds is reached or projected to be reached, the commercial sector will close for the remainder of the fishing year.

For Information Contact: Susan Gerhart or [susan.gerhart@noaa.gov](mailto:susan.gerhart@noaa.gov) 727-824-5305, FAX 727-824-5308

### **Fish Gear Coordinates- December 2011**

In accordance with the provisions of R.S. 56:700.1 et. seq., notice is given that five claims in the amount of \$21,367.44 were received for payment during the period Dec. 1-31, 2011.

There were five claims paid and zero claims denied.

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates of reported underwater obstructions are:

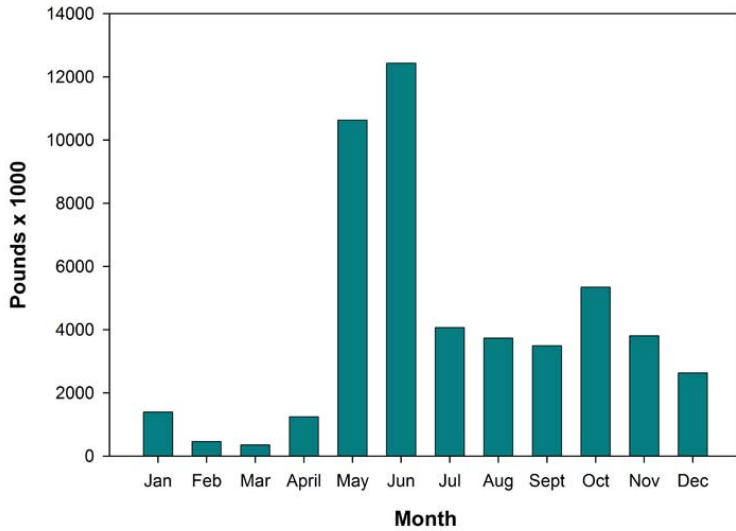
2909.606 9025.016	TERREBONNE
2910.095 9004.883	JEFFERSON
2917.948 8944.189	PLAQUEMINES
2919.437 8931.092	PLAQUEMINES
2956.353 8922.710	SAINT BERNARD

A list of claimants and amounts paid can be obtained from Gwendolyn Thomas, Administrator, Fishermen's Gear Compensation Fund, P.O. Box 44277, Baton Rouge, LA 70804 or you can call 225-342-9388.

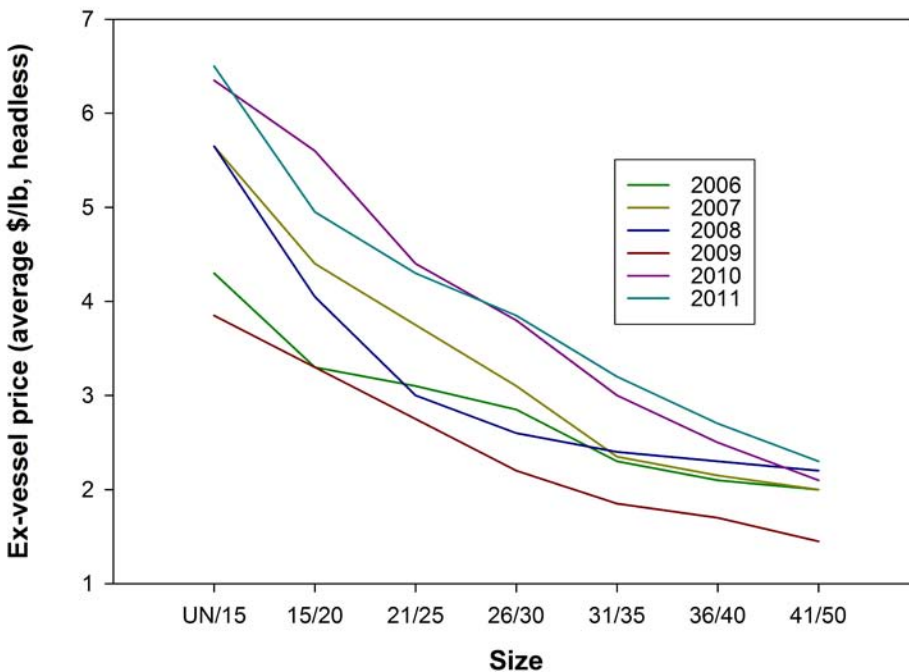
## Louisiana Shrimp Watch

Louisiana specific data portrayed in the graphics are selected from preliminary data posted by NOAA on their website. All data portrayed are subject to final revision and approval by NOAA. Shrimp landings are ex-vessel prices, inclusive of all species harvested. Missing, inadequate or withheld reports are portrayed as “zero” in these graphics. Price graphics reflect central Gulf states only (Texas and Florida are reported independently). For more information, please refer to: [www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/st1/market\\_news/index.html](http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/st1/market_news/index.html).

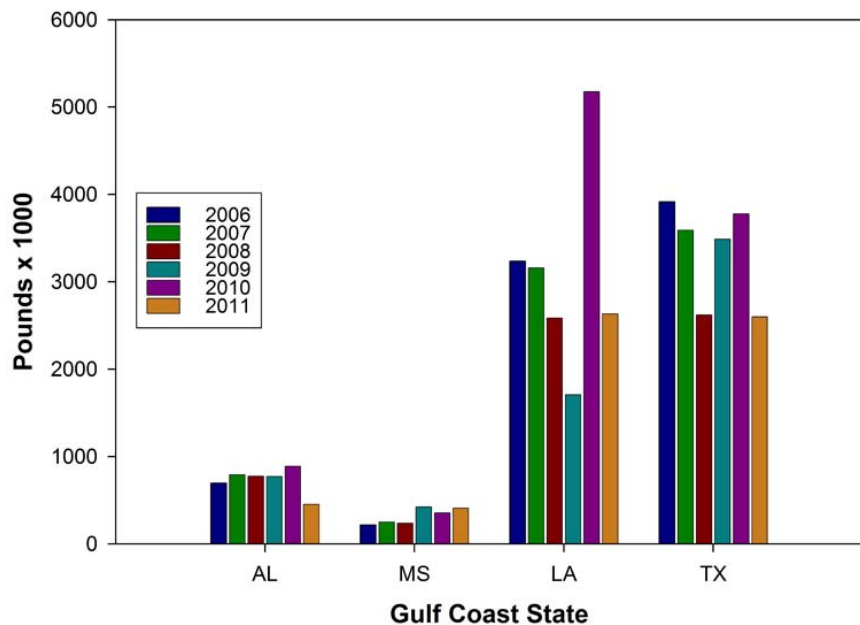
Louisiana 2011 Shrimp Harvest



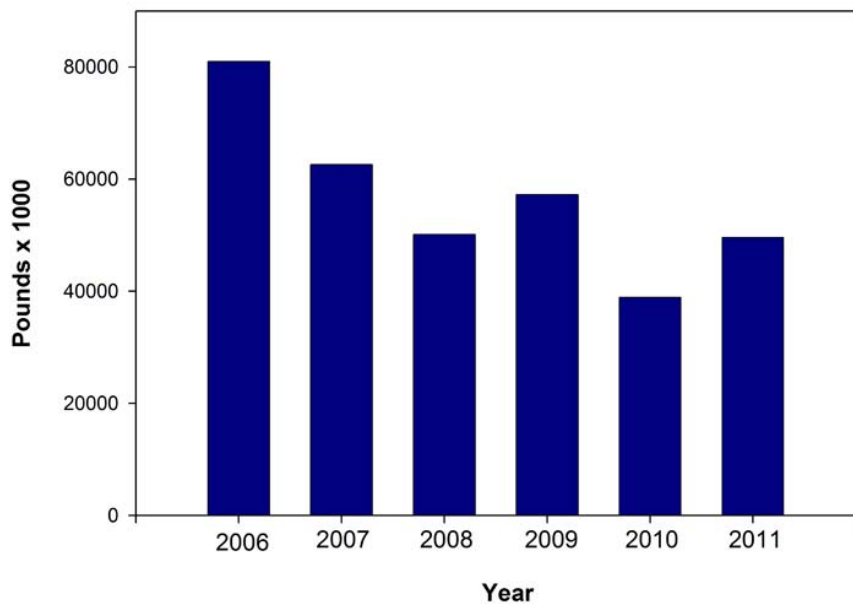
December Northern GoM Shrimp Prices



December Shrimp Harvest



Louisiana Year to Date Shrimp Harvest



## **The Gumbo Pot- Stuffed Trout**

*Compliments of Los Islenos Heritage and Cultural Society - St. Bernard, Louisiana*

4 lb. Louisiana trout fillets  
1 ½ lb. Louisiana shrimp, chopped  
1 lb. Louisiana crab meat  
1 ½ c onion chopped  
1 c. celery, chopped  
1 c. green pepper, chopped  
2 tbsp. parsley, chopped  
½ c. garlic, chopped  
Creole seasoning to taste  
Salt and pepper to taste  
Bread crumbs  
½ loaf day old bread, soaked and drained  
Lemon juice  
Pats of margarine  
A little oil for sauté

Sauté onion, celery, green bell pepper, parley, and garlic in oil on low heat. Add shrimp and fry for about 8 minutes. Add crab meat, salt, pepper, Creole seasoning and soaked bread, well drained. Fry on low approximately 10 minutes. Season fish fillets to taste and place in a well-greased pan. Place stuffing on top of fillets, packing well, and sprinkle bread crumbs and lemon juice on top. Add small pats of margarine on top of each fillet. Add ¼ cup of water to pan and bake at 350 degrees for 20 minutes or until brown.

If you have a favorite seafood recipe that you would like to share, please send it to Julie Anderson [janderson@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:janderson@agcenter.lsu.edu) for inclusion in future issues.



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We would like to hear from you! Please contact us regarding fishery questions, comments or concerns you would like to see covered in the Lagniappe. Anyone interested in submitting information, such as articles, editorials or photographs pertaining to fishing or fisheries management is encouraged to do so.

**Please contact Lagniappe editor Julie Anderson at [janderson@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:janderson@agcenter.lsu.edu).**

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