



A Declining Delicacy?

Soft-shell blue crabs are one of the popular delicacies in the seafood industry. In order for soft-shells to be available at restaurants, crabbers will put peelers, crabs that are close to shedding, into holding tanks. These peelers, or busters, are held until they swell with water and split their hard shell in the back. The crab backs out of the old shell and then must be removed from the water before the new exterior begins to harden. The new soft-shell crabs are usually frozen and sold to wholesalers.

Soft-shell blue crab production is a century-old industry that has established itself along the Gulf coast, specifically in Louisiana. In 1945, Louisiana had a record year producing 2,370,000 pounds of soft-shell blue crabs. In 2013, Louisiana produced only 8,133 pounds of soft-shell crabs. In fact, between the years 2000 and 2013, the highest number of soft-shell blue crabs produced was 57,665 – that was in 2001. On average, these soft-shell crabs receive seven times the price per pound. So why is Louisiana producing such small numbers?

The last look at the industry took place in 1991 through surveys conducted by Louisiana Sea Grant. During this time, it was estimated there were around 300 soft-shell producers with most being small family owned operations with little outside labor. While production in 1991 was estimated around 250,000 pounds, production has been declining ever since. The survey conducted in 1991 attributed this decline to high producer turn-over rate, over-regulation, pollution, lack of buster crabs, marketing issues (competing with Maryland) and mortality.

Today it is estimated that there may be fewer than 50 soft-shell producers in Louisiana. These producers are family owned businesses operating a small number of trays and participate in various commercial fishing practices. Lack of communication with the soft-shell industry and the scientific community leaves unanswered questions as to why there is a continued decline of such a high value product. One reason may be a lack of crabs; Louisiana has put in place regulations as of 2016 to alleviate fishing pressure of the blue crab stock. A decline in catch and amount of buster crabs may have led to an industry that is no longer worth the investment. Another source of decline may be the high mortality rate in the shedding systems. Louisiana Sea Grant is working on a project to understand why high mortality rates exist in the shedding systems, with the goal of helping shedders remain in business. Specifically, we are focusing on a disease, a virus, that can be passed through cannibalism, which is very common in blue crabs. However, this may not be the full story, if you or someone you know has produced soft-shell blue crabs in Louisiana and are interested in filling out a short survey please contact janderson@agcenter.lsu.edu or (225) 578-0771.

- Stephanie Grodeska



PHOTO: JULIE LIVELY, LOUISIANA SEA GRANT

Established Recreational Reef Sites

The Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission took action on a Notice of Intent to update the list of established recreational reef sites in Louisiana inshore waters.

In Calcasieu Lake, the commission proposes to remove the inshore planning area encompassing Oyster Reefs 1, 2 and 3 (also known as the Chenier Reefs) from the list of established recreational reef sites. This action would allow for the future harvest of market-size oysters known to exist in the area. A new area of water bottoms in the lake would be designated and set aside as a recreational reef (planned East Calcasieu Reef in Cameron Parish), and oyster harvest would be restricted in this area.

New reef sites in Lake Pontchartrain include the recently created 10-acre West End Reef site near the south shore of the lake in Orleans Parish, and the new 10-acre St. John Reef site in the southwestern part of the lake in St. John the Baptist Parish.

Other site changes include the removal of duplicate reef sites coordinates, consistency corrections and subsequent renumbering of reef sites. Interested persons may submit comments relative to the proposed modifications to Craig Gothreaux, Artificial Reef Program manager, Department of Wildlife and Fisheries – Fisheries Extension, P.O. Box 98000, Baton Rouge, LA 70898-9000, or via email to cgothreaux@wlf.la.gov prior to Nov. 28, 2016.

LOUISIANA REGULATIONS

2016-17 CALCASIEU LAKE OYSTER SEASON

The 2016-2017 season was set based on the annual oyster stock assessment provided by Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) biologists and comments received from members of the public, including the oyster industry.

Both the East Side and West Cove portions of the Calcasieu Lake Public Oyster Area opened one-half hour before sunrise on Tuesday, Nov. 1, 2016. However, this action does not supersede public health closures.

During the 2016-17 oyster season, the following provisions will be in effect:

1. Any vessel from which any person(s) takes or attempts to take oysters from the Calcasieu Lake Public Oyster Area described above are limited to a daily take and possession limit not to exceed seven sacks of oysters per vessel. A sack of oysters for the purposes of this declaration of emergency shall be defined as the size described in R.S. 56:440.
2. If any person on a vessel takes or attempts to take oysters from the Calcasieu Lake Public Oyster Area described above, all oysters contained on that vessel will be deemed to have been taken from said public oyster area from the time harvest begins until all oysters are off-loaded dockside.
3. Prior to leaving the Calcasieu Lake Public Oyster Area with oysters harvested from said oyster area, all oysters must be sacked. The number of sacks should be recorded in a log book, and each sack shall be properly tagged.
4. All vessels located in the Calcasieu Lake Public Oyster Area during those times between one-half hour after sunset and one-half hour before sunrise should have all oyster dredges unshackled.

The following areas shall remain closed for the 2016/2017 oyster season:

1. The 2015 Calcasieu Lake West Cove Cultch Plant;
2. The 2015 Calcasieu Lake Southeast Side Cultch Plant;
3. The Cheniere Reef Artificial Reef Planning Area; and
4. The Sabine Lake Public Oyster Area (as described in R.S. 56:435.1).

Closure dates will be determined by LDWF Secretary Charles Melancon on an “as needed” basis, based on biological and harvest data, or if enforcement issues are encountered. The secretary is also authorized by the commission to take emergency action to reopen areas previously closed if the threat to the resource has ended, and to open public areas if substantial oyster resources are located.

Public notice of any opening, delay or closure of a season will be provided at least 72 hours in advance, unless such closure is ordered by the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals for public health concerns.

Visit www.wlf.louisiana.gov/fishing/commerical-oyster-seasons for more information on Louisiana oyster seasons.

GULF OF MEXICO REGULATIONS

Modifications to Increase Red Grouper Allowable Harvest

New regulations became effective on Oct. 12, 2016 that modify the red grouper commercial and recreational allowable harvest in the Gulf of Mexico. The changes include:

1) Increases to the Gulf of Mexico red grouper annual catch limit and quota (annual catch target) for the commercial sector from 6.03 and 5.72 million pounds gutted weight, to 8.19 and 7.78 million pounds gutted weight, respectively.

2) Increases to the Gulf of Mexico red grouper annual catch limit and annual catch target for the recreational sector from 1.9 and 1.73 million pounds gutted weight, to 2.58 and 2.37 million pounds gutted weight, respectively.

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council has chosen to increase red grouper allowable harvest to allow the opportunity for the recreational fishing season to remain open yearlong instead of closing late in the season. In addition, the increase in quota will provide commercial fishermen an increase in their Individual fishing quota allocations.

The increase in quota was effective Oct. 12, 2016. The commercial increase will not include additional multi-use allocation for 2016 to prevent the red grouper or gag annual catch limit from being exceeded.

Gulf Council Update

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council met in Biloxi, Miss., Oct. 17-20, 2016, to discuss a number of fishery issues, including a gray triggerfish rebuilding plan, data reporting for federally permitted for-hire vessels, and appointments for the Ad-Hoc Private Recreational Advisory Panel.

Mackerel: (Mackerel Framework Amendment 5) The council took final action to remove restrictions on the retention of the recreational bag limit of king and Spanish mackerel on vessels with federal commercial king or Spanish mackerel permits when the commercial season is closed.

(Coastal Migratory Pelagic Amendment 29) The council selected preferred alternatives for this amendment which considers allocation-sharing strategies between the recreational and commercial sectors and recreational accountability measures for Gulf migratory group king mackerel. The council plans to host public hearings on the amendment before the end of the year.

Data Collection: The council reviewed a proposed generic amendment to modify the frequency and method of reporting for federally permitted charter vessels and headboats fishing for reef fish and coastal migratory pelagics in the Gulf of Mexico. The council also initiated the development of an amendment that considers implementing mandatory electronic logbook reporting for commercial vessels.

Shrimp: Shrimp Amendment 17B is slated for review of a public hearing draft at their January 2017 meeting.

Red Snapper Management for Charter Vessels and Reef Fish Management for Headboat Survey Vessels: The council reviewed drafts of Amendment 41, which considers creating a red snapper management plan for federally permitted charter vessels and Amendment 42, which considers creating a management plan for federally permitted headboats fishing for reef fish in the Gulf of Mexico. The council plans to convene the Ad-Hoc Red Snapper Charter For-Hire and Ad-Hoc Reef Fish Headboat Advisory Panels before the January meeting.

Gray Triggerfish: The council reviewed a draft of Amendment 46 - Gray Triggerfish Rebuilding Plan, which considers revising annual catch limits and targets along with commercial and recreational management measures. After reviewing recommendations from the Scientific and Statistical Committee and the Reef Fish Advisory Panel, the council selected preferred alternatives. The council selected alternatives that would establish a nine-year rebuilding period, retain the current gray triggerfish annual catch limits and targets, and to modify the recreational regulations by adding a January and February closed season in addition to the current June 1-July 31 closed season during the spawning season. The council also selected preferred alternatives that would reduce the bag limit to one-fish per angler within the 20-reef fish aggregate, and increase the recreational minimum size limit to 15 inches fork length. Additionally, the council has decided to express commercial trip limits in numbers of fish rather than in pounds and add an alternative that would consider a 16 fish trip limit. The council choose locations for public hearings which will be held after the January 2017 meeting.

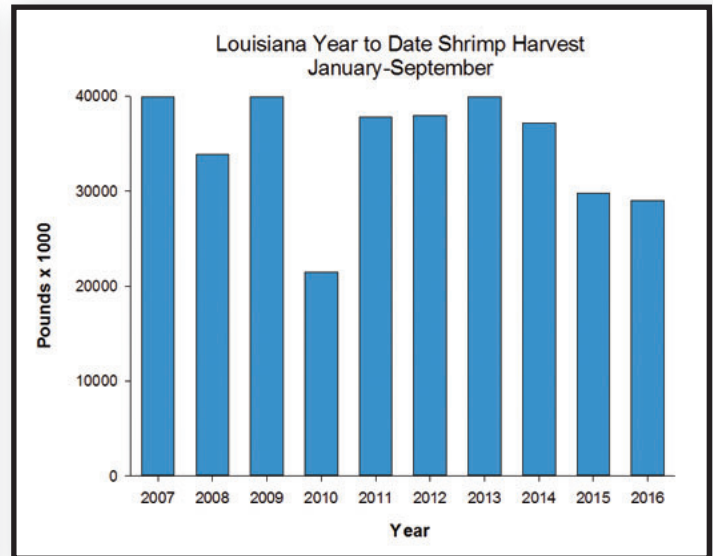
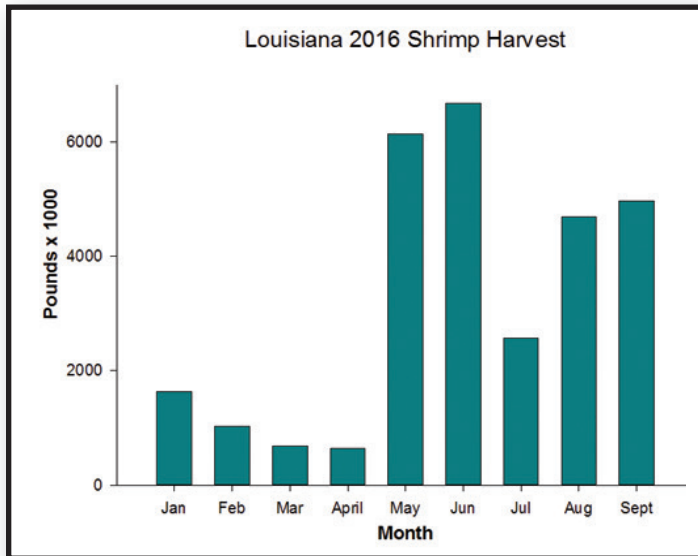
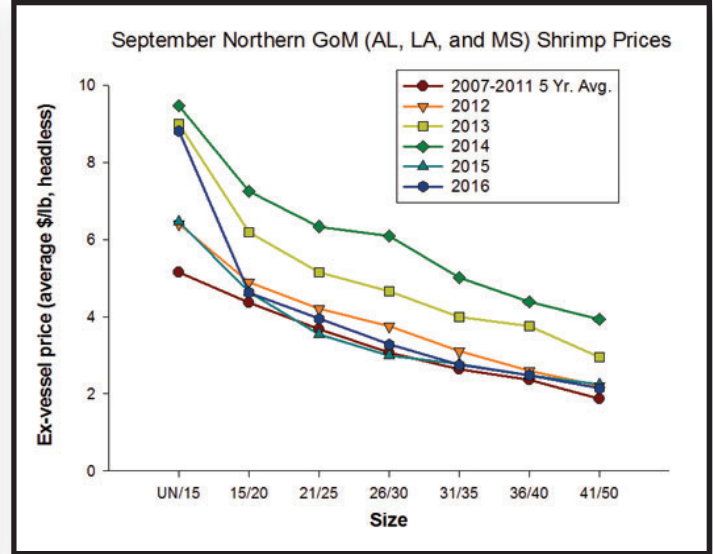
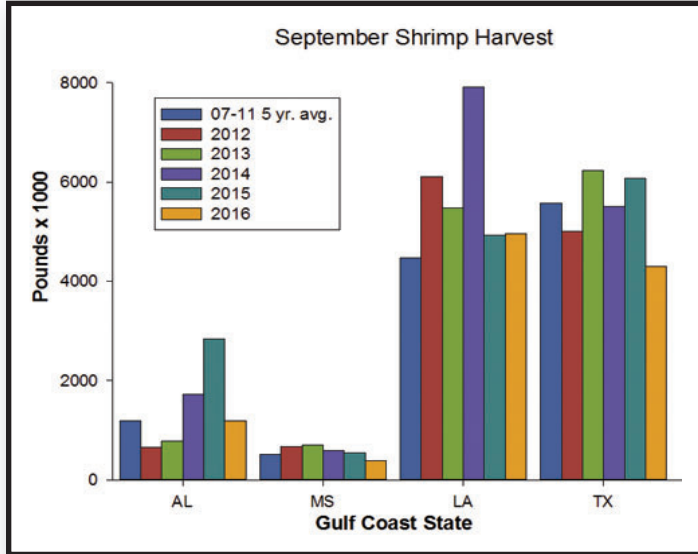
Ad-Hoc Private Recreational Advisory Panel: The council appointed 25 members to the newly formed Ad-Hoc Private Recreational Advisory Panel. The charge for the advisory panel will be: to provide recommendations to the council on private recreational red snapper management measures which would 1) provide more quality access to the resource in federal waters, 2) reduce discards, and 3) improve fisheries data collection. Advisory Panel appointees are listed on our website at:

http://gulfcouncil.org/panels_committees/advisory_panels.php

Louisiana Shrimp Watch

Louisiana specific data portrayed in the graphics are selected from preliminary data posted by NOAA on its 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



Important Dates

Oct. 7, 2016: Harvest of red snapper in state waters began during weekends only. Weekends are restricted to Friday, Saturday and Sunday only.

Oct. 14, 2016: Western Zone of the Gulf of Mexico closed to commercial fishing for king mackerel.

THE GUMBO POT

GALATOIRE'S SHRIMP AND EGGPLANT SOUP

Recipe courtesy of *Louisiana Kitchen & Culture*.

For more recipes or to subscribe to their magazine or free newsletter, please visit <http://louisiana.kitchenandculture.com/>



PHOTO: ROBERT RAY, LOUISIANA SEA GRANT

INGREDIENTS:

1 pound salted butter
 1 small yellow onion, diced (about 1 cup)
 1 medium eggplant, peeled and diced (about 5 cups)
 1 large tomato, diced and drained (about 1½ cups)
 1½ cups all-purpose flour
 1½ pounds small Louisiana shrimp (50 to 60 count), peeled
 Salt and white pepper

Method:

Melt the butter in a stockpot over medium high heat and add the onions, eggplant and tomatoes. Sauté the vegetables about 5 minutes, until the onions become caramelized. Whisk the flour into the mixture to make a roux. Reduce the heat to medium and cook for about 2 minutes, stirring. Slowly add one gallon of water, whisking constantly. Bring the soup to a low rolling boil and cook for 20 minutes. Add the shrimp and simmer for 10 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

**Be sure to visit the *Lagniappe* blog for additional news and timely events between issues.
<https://louisianalagniappe.wordpress.com/>**

Lagniappe Fisheries Newsletter

Editor: Julie Anderson Lively

Web coordinator: Melissa Castleberry

Copy editor: Roy Kron



For more information, contact your local extension agent:

Thu Bui

Assistant Extension Agent, Fisheries
St. Mary, Iberia, and Vermilion Parishes
Phone: (337) 828-4100, ext. 300
tbui@agcenter.lsu.edu

Kevin Savoie

Area Agent (Southwest Region)
Natural Resources-Fisheries
Phone: (337) 475-8812
ksavoie@agcenter.lsu.edu

Carol D. Franze

Associate Area Agent
Southeast Region
Phone: (985) 543-4129
cfranze@agcenter.lsu.edu

Mark Shirley

Area Agent (Aquaculture & Coastal Resources)
Jefferson Davis, Vermilion, Acadia, St. Landry,
Evangeline, Cameron, Calcasieu, Lafayette,
Beauregard, & Allen Parishes
Phone: (337) 898-4335
mshirley@agcenter.lsu.edu

Albert 'Rusty' Gaudé

Area Agent, Fisheries
Jefferson, Orleans, St. Charles and St. John Parishes
Phone: (504) 433-3664
agaude@agcenter.lsu.edu

Thomas Hymel

Watershed Educator
Iberia, St. Martin, Lafayette, Vermilion,
St. Landry, & Avoyelles Parishes
Phone: (337) 276-5527
thymel@agcenter.lsu.edu

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 Lively at janderson@agcenter.lsu.edu.

Julie A. Anderson Lively

Assistant Professor
LSU Agcenter & Louisiana Sea Grant
114 RNR Building
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
Phone: 225-578-0771
Fax: 225-578-4227
janderson@agcenter.lsu.edu