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## **FWC, NOAA TO INCREASE DATA COLLECTION ON GULF RED SNAPPER TO ADDRESS OIL SPILL IMPACTS**

**TALLAHASSEE** – The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and NOAA Fisheries Service are keeping a close eye on the BP oil spill. So far the only impacts off Florida's coast have been in the form of fishing closures well offshore in federal waters where oil has been spotted. Fishing continues to be open in the vast majority of Gulf of Mexico waters.

With the approach of the June 1 opening of red snapper season, the FWC and NOAA Fisheries Service are working closely together to allow as much fishing as possible while being prepared for the possibility of impacts. In fact, preparations are under way to collect and analyze information on the number of fish harvested by charter boats in the Gulf more frequently.

NOAA Fisheries Service, in cooperation with the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, will provide the FWC with additional funding to increase its monitoring efforts to give fisheries managers the information they need to possibly adjust or extend fishing seasons, such as the recreational Gulf red snapper season, if that is warranted.

Gov. Charlie Crist expressed appreciation for this effort. "I am pleased to hear of this action to help Florida's charter boat industry and recreational fishermen. They need all the support we can give them during this unprecedented crisis."

The FWC and NOAA Fisheries Service are exploring ways to ease harmful economic impacts that Florida's fishing industries are experiencing because of the BP oil spill in the Gulf. Thanks to a rapid response and commitment of federal support, the FWC will be able to hire and train more people in Florida to survey fishing activity in the Gulf, and to do the surveys a weekly basis.

"Gulf charter fishermen have raised concerns to us that they are likely to lose customers this spring and summer due to public perception that fishing will be affected by the oil spill," said Steve Murawski, Chief Scientist for NOAA Fisheries Service. "If that happens, there would likely be fewer red snapper and other reef fish caught in the Gulf, and collecting data more quickly might allow fisheries managers to extend some fishing seasons if angler fishing effort decreases because of the oil spill."

With the additional federal funds, the FWC will work to be ready by June 1 – when the Gulf recreational red snapper season is scheduled to reopen – to survey Gulf charter boat catches each week during the 53-day season to see if catch rates are lower than previously anticipated. If so, state and federal fisheries managers could use that information to determine if the season can be extended or if an additional period of harvest can be allowed later in the year.

The recreational red snapper season in the Gulf will remain closed until June 1. For more information on [red snapper management rules and research efforts](#), go to [MyFWC.com/Rules](http://MyFWC.com/Rules); click on “Fishing – Saltwater.”

The FWC reminds Floridians and visitors that the state’s recreational and commercial fisheries have not been impacted by the oil spill and remain open for public enjoyment and commerce. [Florida saltwater fishing regulations](#) remain in effect as usual and are available online at [MyFWC.com/Fishing](http://MyFWC.com/Fishing).

For the latest information on Florida’s response to the Deepwater Horizon incident, visit [www.dep.state.fl.us/deepwaterhorizon](http://www.dep.state.fl.us/deepwaterhorizon) or follow us on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/FLDEPAlert](http://www.twitter.com/FLDEPAlert) or call the Florida Oil Spill Information Line at 888-337-3569.

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