



May 25, 2017

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

The Honorable Wilbur L. Ross Jr.
Secretary of Commerce
Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20230

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Dear Secretary Ross,

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) works closely with the NOAA, National Marine Fisheries Service and participates fully in the Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council. We appreciate the combined efforts to successfully move forward with rebuilding Gulf red snapper stocks. Recreational anglers and coastal communities in Florida, however, are increasingly frustrated with a situation where red snapper stocks are clearly rebuilding more quickly than expected, more red snapper are available for harvest, yet our federal management system continues to reduce the season length, now down to an unacceptable 3 days for private recreational boats. Beyond direct impacts to anglers, this abbreviated federal season results in significant economic impacts along Florida's Gulf Coast where each day of red snapper fishing is a major economic benefit supporting numerous businesses and jobs.

The FWC has demonstrated a heightened appreciation and support for recreational red snapper fishing by establishing a 78-day season in our state jurisdictional waters. Over the past few years, where Florida's state waters season has been appreciably longer than the season in federal waters, we have demonstrated that additional days of recreational red snapper fishing can be sustained while continuing to rebuild red snapper stocks. We are convinced there is more sustainable capacity for red snapper fishing opportunities in federal waters than the current system allows. In recognition of this, FWC is supportive of efforts to increase the season for recreational red snapper fishing in federal waters, particularly during the summer months when such fishing opportunities would bring the greatest economic benefit to Florida's coastal communities. FWC support is based on an understanding that this extension of fishing opportunity for private recreational anglers would not negatively impact the current red snapper season for federally permitted for-hire vessels open from June 1 through July 20, 2017.

It is our understanding that there may be an opportunity to increase the number of days open in the Gulf for red snapper fishing in federal waters this season if FWC is willing to reduce the number of days open in state waters. Please accept this letter as indication of FWC's willingness and intent to reduce the number of days that Florida's season is open in state waters in September and October in exchange for substantial blocks of fishing days in federal waters during June, July, August, and Labor Day weekend. Please advise what actions or information will be necessary to finalize this process. Thank you for your willingness to work cooperatively toward solutions that will provide more appropriate access to red snapper fishing opportunities for recreational anglers in Florida and significant economic benefits to our coastal communities on the Gulf of Mexico.

Sincerely,

[Signature of Brian Yablonski]
Brian Yablonski
Chairman

[Signature of Nick Wiley]
Nick Wiley
Executive Director