

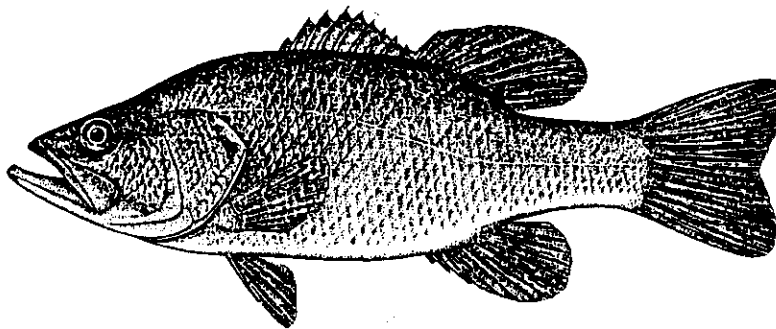


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SEA GRANT PROGRAM



LAGNIAPPE

Dear Friend:

The LSU Agricultural Center is experiencing a budget crunch. In an attempt to cut costs we will have to reduce our mailing of this newsletter to every other month (unless we find other funding). This will continue at least through the current fiscal year.

In order to better decide on our priorities please take the time to complete the short questionnaire at the end of this newsletter. I look forward to hearing from you.

FLORIDA BASS IN LOUISIANA

With the growing interest in largemouth bass fishing has come almost an obsession with Florida bass. The Florida bass is subspecies of our own local bass, but will grow larger than our fish under the right conditions. There has been a great deal of demand for the stocking of these fish in our natural waters.

According to Department of Wildlife and Fisheries District Biologist Mike Wood, Louisiana made its first public stocking effort in 1981 when the department stocked 50,000 Florida largemouths from the Alabama State Fish Hatchery in the Tchefuncte River and the Pearl River Lock Canal. Through June 1995, 13,356,536 Florida bass have been stocked in Louisiana public waters. The peak year was July 1992 through June 1993 with 2,222,352 fish stocked. Stocking this year is expected to be slightly lower than last year's

1,182,000. This is because production at the Natchitoches Federal Hatchery has been shifted to threatened fish like paddlefish and sturgeon.

As of June 1995, the department has stocked Florida strain largemouths in 81 waterbodies. The ten waterbodies receiving the most Florida bass are listed below.

LOCATION	PARISH	NO. STOCKED
Caney Lake	Jackson	2,531,402
False River	Point Coupee	1,612,330
Lake Vernon	Vernon	1,311,730
Chicot Lake	Evangeline	1,144,778
Toledo Bend	Sabine & Desoto	1,051,167
Lake Rodemacher	Rapides	901,689
Lake Concordia	Corcordia	556,676
Atchafalaya Basin		463,137
Lake Bartholomew	Morehouse & Ouachita	371,905
Spring Bayou	Avoyelles	293,657

Stocking will continue with as many as 250,000 Florida bass fingerlings stocked this spring in south Louisiana. In conjunction with Dow Chemical and Louisiana Bass Hatcheries, department biologists will stock Lac Des Allemands, Ruddock Canal and the Tangipahoa and Tickfaw River systems.

Stocking will dramatically pick up with the completion of the new Booker Fowler hatchery in October. Partial production will begin in 1997 and it should be up to full production by 1998.

According to Robert Gough the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Hatchery Supervisor the hatchery should have the annual production capacity of 4 million Florida largemouth bass, 2 million channel catfish, 2 million blue catfish, 1/2 million flathead (yellow) catfish, 1/2 million paddlefish and 150,000 sturgeon.

FLOUNDERING

After a series of changes, it looks like southern flounder regulations have finally become set for the next year. The regulations were brought on by the fact that Act 1316 of the 1995 legislature provides that a fishery be shut down if the spawning potential ratio (SPR) of certain fish is found to be below 30%. This year's report by Department of

Wildlife and Fisheries biologists showed a possible range of SPR for southern flounders of 16% to 44%.

As it presently stands, licensed commercial who are not on a boat with strike nets on board may possess 10 southern flounders per commercially licensed person. These may legally be sold. This includes commercial fishermen using legally licensed gigs. Fishermen on boats with strike nets on board cannot possess flounder.

It is important for all wholesale/retail seafood dealers to note that they must now keep a record showing the number of souther flounder that they have bought, sold or possessed.

Recreational fishermen will also have a 10 fish limit on southern flounder. This limit is not expected to have serious a affect on them. According to department biologists, of the recreational fishermen in their surveys that possessed flounder, 76% had only one flounder; 14% had 2; 4% had 3; 3% had 4 and less than 1% caught 5 per trip. The survey did not include gig fishermen. In another survey, 5% of Louisiana anglers reported that they did some gig fishing. The recreational regulations are expected to reduce recreational harvest by 3%.

No minimum size was put into place. A 14-inch minimum was discussed but not acted on when biologists pointed out that very few male flounder ever reach 14 inches. A minimum size would force fishermen to target females.

FEDERAL FISHERIES Q & A MEETINGS

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) will be holding a series of public question-and-answer meetings for commercial and recreational fishermen in Louisiana. They will be prepared to answer questions on current and proposed TED laws wherever TEDs are required.

Fisheries laws as they apply in the EEZ (federal waters) are also open for discussion. Sportsmen may have questions on the proposed reduction in daily limit on amberjack from 3 to 1 and the aggregate reef fish limit that will apply to triggerfish , sea bass, tilefish, porgies and some snappers.

Recently changes have been discussed for the commercial tuna, shark, swordfish and reef fish fisheries. Many gill net fishermen also may have questions on what the gill net rules in federal waters are.

People there to answer questions will include NMFS enforcement, NOAA general council, gear experts and the Coast Guard. The meetings for eastern Louisiana are listed below.

Belle Chasse
May 21, 7:00 p.m.
Belle Chasse Auditorium

Galliano
May 22, 7:00 p.m.
Port Commission Bldg.

GHOST CRAB TRAPS

The blue crab fishery is one of Louisiana's most important fisheries. In 1995, the state sold 3520 commercial crab trap and crab trap on a trotline licenses and 2978 recreational crab trapping licenses. No licenses are required for recreational crab lines and crap nets. Commercial landings for 1994, the last year available, were 36,764,750 pounds worth \$22,526,037 dockside, for soft and hard blue crabs. Recreational landings have not been calculated.

There has been some concern about the loss of crabs to ghost crab traps. A ghost trap is one that has been lost or abandoned and continues to catch crabs. To answer questions about the effects of ghost traps, Vince Guillory, a biologist with the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries conducted a study in the Timbalier Bay estuary.

Guillory baited crab traps one time and then left them out for an entire year, checking the traps, each two weeks. He measured and tagged each crab in the traps. After tagging, the crabs were returned to their trap. A small mesh hardware cloth was fitted across the bottom of the trap to prevent tag loss in case a crab was taken apart and eaten by other crabs in the trap. The traps were tied off underwater to prevent people from tampering with them or removing crabs.

Guillory found that the traps averaging catching almost 48 crabs per trap during the year. About 13 were caught with the first (and only) baiting. The rest entered the trap without bait. These crabs may have entered to eat another dead crab, for shelter or in the case of female (maiden) crabs to find a male to mate with.

Of the 48 crabs that entered each trap, an average of 26 (55%) died in the trap and 22 (45%) escaped. Smaller crabs, under the legal size, had a higher escape rate (57%) than did the larger legal-sized crabs (40%). Also, for some reason, the more crabs that were in a trap the higher the percentage of them that escaped.

The escape rate may have been underestimated because some crabs may have entered and left the trap between runs. This was shown by the high turnover rate in the traps. Two-thirds of the total number of crabs in the traps either died or escaped within 2 weeks. Three crabs lived in the traps for 22 weeks before dying and two lasted for 19 weeks. The longest that any crabs were in traps before escaping was 16 and 14 weeks.

On average, the unbaited traps caught one new crab per run. Not surprisingly, the traps caught more crabs in the warmer months than the cooler months.

Several things can be done to decrease the amount of ghost traps.

- 1) An outboard motor running at high speed can easily cut a float line with its propeller. Playing "dodge the float" with a boat or carelessly passing to close to a float will result in a ghost trap.
- 2) Only solid floats should be used on crab traps. Plastic bottles will become brittle with time and easily crack and sink.
- 3) Non-floating line or weight on float lines should be used to prevent boat propellers from catching them.

Unfortunately, shrimp trawls, one of the best ways of removing ghost traps can't be used. Current law prohibits anyone from having an untagged crab trap or one tagged with someone else's tag in possession while on the water.

Research Source: Ghost Fishing by Blue Crab Traps by Vincent Guillory. North American Journal of Fisheries Management 13:459-466, 1993.

LOUISIANA'S LEAST KNOWN FISHERY

Several years ago the state legislature formed a task force to study the feasibility of developing a freshwater mussel (clam) fishery. These mussels are fished not for their meat but rather for the shells. Plugs are taken from the shell, rounded into perfect beads and planted into pearl oysters in the Orient. After one to two years the oyster has placed a layer of pearl nacre over the bead producing a cultured pearl.

Mussels have been fished for decades in more northerly states in the Mississippi drainage. Before the shells were used as seed for pearls, they were widely used for making pearl buttons for dress shirts.

Louisiana's fishery began in 1995 after the adoption of rules by the Wildlife and Fisheries Commission in December, 1994. By September 1995, when the first season closed, 474,000 lbs (worth \$1,049,000) of washboard mussels, 144,000 lbs (\$184,000) of threeridge mussels and 8,000 lbs (\$8,052) of maple leaf mussels were landed.

The fishery is expected to reopen in early summer under newly amended rules. Permits are required and may be obtained by calling the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries in Baton Rouge at (504) 765-2641.

Source: An Update on the Commercial Harvest of Unionid Mussels in Louisiana. David Arnoldi. LA Chapter American Fisheries Society.

SEA LEVEL RISE REPORT

The U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has released a new report, "The Probability of Sea Level Rise". That sea level has risen in the last century is now accepted as fact. Tidal gauge measurements show that U. S. ocean coastlines have risen by 12 inches in that time period.

The report states that an 11 inch rise in sea level is likely in the Gulf of Mexico by the year 2050 and a 22 inch rise by the year 2100. According to the report there is an outside possibility that sea level will rise as much as 12 inches in the next 30 years, 4 feet in 100 years and 12 feet in 200 years.

This report agrees closely with that of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a United Nations Organization, IPCC projects that global sea level will rise from 8 to 34 inches by 2100 with 20 inches the best guess for the year 2100.

This is very important to south Louisiana where anyone living 4 feet above sea level is considered to be living on a mountain. These sea level rises are caused by water released from the melting ice packs at the North and South Pole regions, which in turn is due to higher global temperatures because of the greenhouse effect.

A free copy of the report can be obtained by writing the National Center for Environmental Publications and Information, P O Box 42419, Cincinnati, Ohio 45201.

HEARING ON PROPOSED TED REGULATION CHANGES

The National Marine Fisheries Service has proposed several changes in TED regulations that they hope will reduce deaths of sea turtles. The proposed changes are as follows:

- 1) Outlaw the use of soft TEDs in all areas on December 31, 1996.
- 2) Require the use of hard teds in all try nets with a headrope length more than 12 feet or a footrope length of more than 15 feet on December 31, 1996.
- 3) Establish Shrimp Fishery Sea Turtle Conservation Areas (SFSTCAs) from the beach out to 10 miles offshore from Mississippi River South Pass westward to the US-Mexico border.
- 4) Outlaw in these SFSTCAs, the use of soft TEDs and bottom shooting opening TEDs and requiring TEDs in over 12 foot try nets 30 days immediately after the rule goes into effect.

The public hearing for eastern Louisiana will be at 6:00 pm on May 15 at the Thibodaux Civic Center, Plantation Room, 310 N. Canal Blvd., in Thibodaux, LA.

OUCH!

Anyone who thinks that fisheries violations do not result in serious penalties, especially for commercial fishermen should pay attention to the following case. A southwest Louisiana red snapper fisherman found guilty of two violations of being over the trip limit of pounds of fish and fishing out of season.

The penalty was the loss of \$17,825 worth of fish and a civil penalty of \$60,000 which will be suspended if he agrees to:

- 1) Give up all state and federal fisheries licenses and permits.
- 2) Never apply for any future state or federal commercial fishing licenses.
- 3) Never get involved in commercial fishing aboard any vessel in U. S. navigable waters.
- 4) Sell both his fishing vessels by December 21, 1997 and give any money he gets over the mortgages to the government. If he doesn't get the vessels sold by the deadline he agrees to give them up to the government.

ALABAMA BLUE CRAB MORATORIUM

Last year, Louisiana put a two year moratorium in place on the sale of crab trap licenses to new people. This year, Alabama has passed a similar five year moratorium. Word has it that the long-term goal is to reduce the number of crab traps to half of what it is now. Closure of areas to crabbing in Alabama was originally considered but was not done when it was considered that area closures would just force all the crab traps now used into a smaller area causing crowding and safety problems.

COBIA FOOD HABITS

Cobia, also known as ling or lemonfish are a very popular recreational and commercial fish in Louisiana. In a recent study researchers from Mississippi studied the food habits of the fish. They looked at the stomach contents of 403 fish.

Of these, 287 or 71% had identifiable food items in them. The number one thing in their diet was crabs. The lesser blue crab (a smaller relative of one we love to eat) was the most common food, being found in almost 49% of the stomachs. Also very common were the iridescent swimming crab (27%) and the lady crab (23%). A total of 12 different kinds of crabs were eaten.

Very few shrimp were found in the stomachs, but mantis shrimp (sea lice) were quite common, being found in over 20% of the fish. Squid were found in over 11% of the fish.

Finfish were also eaten. By far, the most common finfish were hardhead catfish (24%) and eels (18%). With the exception of the round scad at 6% all other species of finfish were found in 3% or fewer of the stomachs. A total of 31 different species of finfish were identified.

Female cobia ate slightly more crabs and shrimp than males, while males ate more finfish, especially eels. Both sexes ate substantially more finfish as they became larger. For example, only 7% of the cobia under 37 inches long had eaten hardhead catfish. In cobia over 45 inches long, 44% had eaten hardheads.

The researchers concluded that cobia were primarily bottom or near bottom feeders, but would grab a bite to eat anywhere, even near the surface. They were also not specialized in their diet, but willing to eat whatever was available.

Source: Food of Cobia, Rachycentron canadum from the North Central Gulf of Mexico, by .Gabriele H. Meyer and James S. Franks, in Gulf Research Reports. Vol.9, No. 3. 1996.

HIGH SEAS PERMIT

Commercial fishermen fishing beyond the 200 mile EEZ are now required to purchase a High Seas Fisheries Compliance Act Permit. In Louisiana, this would mainly apply to longline fishermen. The permit can be obtained from the Southeast Regional Office of the National Marine Fisheries Service in St. Petersburg, FL (813) 570-5326. The permit costs \$50 and is good for five years.

1996 SHARK REGULATIONS

The 1996 commercial quotas and recreational limits for Atlantic and Gulf sharks will remain the same as last year's for the time being. However, the National Marine Fisheries Service is planning a meeting of scientists in early June to review the health of shark stocks. The results of this Shark Evaluation Workshop will be used to set future regulations and may even result in a mid-year change in 1996 regulations.

Currently, commercial fishermen fish under at 2570 metric ton quota for large coastal shark species and a 580 metric ton quota on pelagic (open sea) sharks. The recreational bag limit is 4 large coastal and pelagic sharks combined, per vessel per trip and a daily bag limit of 5 per person on small coastal shark species.

MARINE ADVISORY BOARD NEWS

The Jefferson Parish Marine Fisheries Advisory Board has announced that with the installation of gated buoys in Barataria Pass it has completed the Lower Barataria Bay Navigational Improvement Project. Gated buoys are buoys placed on each side of a waterway rather than one side. Barataria Pass is narrow, heavily traveled and has shallow shoals on each side.

Also included in the project, were relocation of some buoys and increasing the size of other buoys near the pass. Two new lights were established and some day beacons in Barataria Waterway were changed to lights to better mark eroding land cuts. The project was done through the Coast Guard with the support of Congressman Billy Tauzin. To further handle the navigational needs of the parish, the Marine Advisory Board has formed the Jefferson Parish Ports and Waterways Task Force. This Task Force will report navigation needs to the Jefferson Economic Development and Port District.

Sincerely,

Jerald Horst
Area Agent (Fisheries)
Jefferson, St. Charles, St. John

NEWSLETTER QUESTIONNAIRE

It is very important to the continued service of this newsletter that you take the time to complete this short questionnaire and return it to us. We need input from commercial and recreational fishermen, seafood dealers, marine businesses and government/university people. Please mail to LA Cooperative Extension Service, 1855 Ames Blvd., Marrero, LA 70072.

How well does this newsletter function to keep you informed about new fisheries research and new fisheries regulations?

Very Good Good Moderate Poor Very poor

Do you have another source to get fisheries research results and regulations changes if this newsletter is reduced to every other month rather monthly?

If this newsletter were placed in businesses such as net shops, marine suppliers and boat dealers would you be able to pick it up on a monthly basis rather than get home delivery in the mail?

What would you like to see this newsletter to emphasize in the future?

What type articles would you like to see us discontinue, remembering that we inform both commercial and recreational interests?

What is your primary affiliation? (Check one)

Commercial fisherman _____

Recreational fisherman _____

Seafood dealer _____

Marine business _____

Government/university _____

Other comments:

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