



Resource Stewardship Tips for 2012
Recreational Red Snapper Season

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The 40-day 2012 Gulf of Mexico recreational Red Snapper season began June 1, and ends on July 1. Fishermen are preparing to optimize their catch potential given a bag limit of two snapper per angler per day.

Several recent studies indicate the mortality of Red Snapper increased dramatically when they were returned to the Gulf during high summer water temperatures. Complying with size limits or simply trying to catch a bigger fish may have unintended consequences when water temperatures approach the mid 80s.

Warmer water usually holds less oxygen. Also warm water often layers above heavier cooler waters creating a thermocline. The result is temperature shock and possibly death for the fish which remains in warmer water too long.

Red Snapper populations are considered to be recovering as stocks successfully rebuild and are reflected by the numerous large fish landed. Red Snapper dominate many Gulf of Mexico artificial reefs, making an unintended catch quite likely and difficult to avoid after the bag-limit is reached.

Red Snapper populations are considered to be recovering as stocks successfully rebuild. It is encouraging to see numerous large fish at the dock. Though, it is difficult to avoid catching a red snapper after the bag-limit is reached.

Some tips and advice from seasoned charter guides and fish researchers can help bring home more fish while minimizing fish mortality during the dog days of summer.

First, know the species of fish sought. This will help with correct bait and hook selection. Captain **Sonny Schindler** of Shore Thing Charters in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, recommends increasing the bait and hook size to catch larger fish.

This strategy has been confirmed by research conducted by **Will Patterson** at the Dauphin Island (Alabama) Sea Lab. Use 12/0 or 15/0 hooks when fishing for red snapper during open season, let your tackle help bring home a big one the first time.

Captain **Robbie Fuller** of Hatitude in Panama City, Florida, offers the strategy of changing from live bait to strips of Bonita or squid and fishing in shallower water to avoid catching additional red snapper and exceeding the catch limit.

Target other fish such as Beeliners or Vermillion Snapper which are plentiful and consistently mild flavored. Other prized fish include King Mackerel frequently caught while trolling. Black Sea Bass may be caught on different artificial reef habitat, hook depth, or bait.

Beeliners or Vermillion Snapper are a plentiful fish with a consistently mild flavored fish. One recent headboat trip limited out on beeliners and brought home nearly 50 pounds of fish per person. Other prized fish include King Mackerel frequently caught while trolling. Black Sea Bass may be caught on different artificial reef habitat, hook depth, or bait.

A slight adjustment to fishing techniques will reduce unintended Red Snapper landings and mortality during hot weather, and still get the fisherman a full catch.

Captain Fuller also recommends using vacuum freezer bags to extend the fish storage well into the fall and possibly beyond. “You can still have Red Snapper this October even if the season closes in July,” he said

All reef fish released showing signs of a barotraumas, such as floating on the surface, should be properly vented with decompression tool. New fishing equipment to aid in recompression and return of fish to cooler, deeper water are coming to market. Current regulations do not require return-to-depth tools, but they do not prohibit them either.

These new recompression devices can be utilized to aid in fish recovery only after use with a venting tool. For more information visit <http://catandrelease.org> or <http://fishsmart.org>

For more information on Red Snapper regulations, including minimum size and gear rules, visit the [FWC snapper regulations page](#).