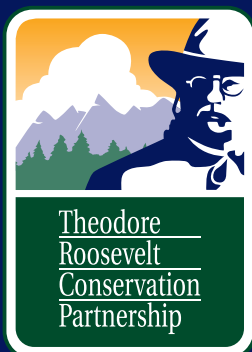


# Gulf Spill Recreational Fishing Response Group: *Recommendations for Resource Recovery*





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# I. Introduction

The Gulf Spill Recreational Fishing Response Group (GSRFRG) was formed in January 2011 to compile ideas and recommendations directly from the sportfishing community in the Gulf of Mexico region regarding responses to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

This report from the Response Group reflects input gathered directly from saltwater recreational angling interests in the region as well as from experts including academics and state and federal officials associated with recreational fisheries management in the region. (A list of participants is in the Appendix.) The GSRFRG's report outlines the consensus priorities for investments participants believe should be made to restore the quantity and quality of recreational fishing opportunities in the Gulf of Mexico that existed before the spill. Mindful of goals that have been set by Gulf State governors, members of Congress and the president to go even further with ecosystem restoration (to baselines that existed long before the spill) the Response Group offers ways to manage and improve Gulf marine resources that transcend near-term restoration to offer longer-term systemic improvements.

Through the support of The Walton Family Foundation, the GSRFRG was facilitated by the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership (TRCP). This report was drafted based primarily on stakeholder meetings in the Gulf region but also from input gathered outside of these meetings. Between the regional meetings and the additional input (e.g., contributions from individual anglers, recreational fishing organizations, sportfishing business representatives, academic experts, and state and federal resource managers) multiple perspectives were captured. The three regional meetings that served as the primary basis of this report were held in February 2011 in the following locations:

- Pensacola, Florida
- Gulfport, Mississippi
- New Orleans, Louisiana

TRCP's George Cooper and Michael Misurek organized and facilitated the GSRFRG and developed this report. The three co-chairs of the Response Group are:

- Jeff Angers (Chairman), President, Center for Coastal Conservation
- David Cresson, Executive Director, Coastal Conservation Association Louisiana
- Ken Haddad, American Sportfishing Association

This report provides interested policymakers, legislators and entities associated with the processes determining post-spill expenditure decisions a clear picture of the Gulf region's recreational angling community interests.



Photo courtesy—Charlie Caplinger

Saltwater recreational fishing contributes more than \$8 billion in economic output in the Gulf Coast region annually and supports approximately 82,000 jobs. The Gulf of Mexico is one of the most popular areas for recreational fishing in the United States with 3.6 million saltwater anglers spending more than 42.5 million days on the water each year – fishing for species such as red drum, spotted seatrout, sheepshead and red snapper.

Of paramount importance to the entire GSRFRG, arching over all of the recommendations below, is a commitment to long-term funding. Several years will pass before we have an adequate picture of the spill's effects on fish and their habitat as well as the businesses that rely on recreational fishing in the Gulf. Ultimately the full effects might never be known. Therefore, the GSRFRG takes the long view and strongly supports the establishment of funding that will be available several years from now to ensure investments are made in the most targeted and effective manner possible once we have more complete scientific and socio-economic information.

The GSRFRG-reached consensus on the need to ensure an adequate amount of funding to the Gulf region is explicitly dedicated to the region's fish, wildlife and habitat needs as well as legitimate economic sectors. Specifically, with respect to penalties to be assessed to British Petroleum and other responsible parties under the Clean Water Act (CWA), the Response Group believes Congress should act on the Oil Commission's recommendation to require that 80 percent of fines are used for natural resource and economic restoration in the Gulf region rather than allowing this money to go to general use in the Federal Treasury.

The Response Group hopes that Congress will consider these recommendations as it looks to direct CWA penalty money

and that these recommendations will be considered in the Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) process directed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). While the GSRFRG does not list specific projects, the group intends to provide signposts for prioritizing project funding requests. Projects proposed for NRDA funds that fall into the recommendation areas below can and should be considered to meet the priorities of the Gulf recreational fishing community.

Further, the GSRFRG looks forward to engaging with the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force established by President Obama. The GSRFRG drafted these recommendations in large part toward addressing the goals and needs articulated in the 2010 report by Secretary of the Navy Ray

Mabus, which the administration is using as a roadmap for the task force and for ecosystem recovery in the Gulf.

The GSRFRG is confident these recommendations will be useful to other entities and processes not listed above with an interest in the perspective of the Gulf recreational fishing community on restoration of the region's bountiful natural resources and coastal economies.

The Response Group has divided its recommendations into three areas. Representatives of the group can provide contact information for group participants best able to answer follow-up questions with more detail than is provided in the overview below.

## II. Habitat Restoration and Improvement

Discussions in this area focused around habitat critical to healthy recreational fisheries both offshore and inshore. The GSRFRG supports an ecosystem-based approach to restoration and finding in this tragedy an opportunity to address longstanding needs for conserving and maintaining healthy habitats and strong, sustainable fish and wildlife populations.

### A. Offshore

- Dedicate funding to immediately gather much more complete and thorough information regarding critical offshore habitat such as sargassum beds that have potentially been impacted by the spill. Far too little is known about offshore habitat needs and spill impacts from released oil and chemical dispersants.
- Invest funds in the creation of offshore reefs in deep water. Superb opportunities exist through existing Rigs to Reefs programs and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement's so-called "Idle Iron" guidelines to use existing well pads and other drilling infrastructure to create valuable habitat – and to retain already existing habitat. A great deal of streamlining and red-tape reduction is necessary in this area, as well as actions to address liability concerns, but the potential for partnering with industry to create and maintain beneficial habitat is tremendous.

### B. Inshore

- Oyster bed restoration and creation should be a high priority in any efforts to restore and improve Gulf fisheries habitat.

- Funding should be made available for projects planting marsh and wetlands grasses.
- Funding should be made available for projects creating or enhancing sea grass beds.
- Funding should be made available for near-shore reef projects that have been proven to benefit not only fish populations with important habitat but also recreational anglers who can gain accessible, high-quality fishing opportunities with thoughtful reef placements.
- Special attention and funding should be dedicated to effectively addressing saltwater intrusion and coastal wetlands issues in Louisiana that are unique to the region. Chronic degradation of marshlands and estuarine habitat tied to manmade diversions was exacerbated by the spill and actions forced by the spill. Major investments must be made in shoreline protection such as barrier islands, and a completely new approach must be taken to diversions and how water is released and regulated in coastal Louisiana. The GSRFRG supports major investments targeted at reconnecting the Mississippi River with Louisiana's coastal wetlands.

### C. Both

- Set aside funds for the removal of oil deposits inshore or offshore once they have been identified and determined to represent potential harm to fisheries and the ecosystem that merits disturbance and removal.

# III. Improved Fishery Monitoring, Data Collection, Research and Management

Recommendations in this section are focused on addressing near-term needs for immediate pre-spill restoration and long-term shortfalls in core needs for effective fishery management in the Gulf. In the days after the spill, it became abundantly clear that an unacceptable lack of key baseline data existed on fisheries of greatest importance to recreational anglers and the Gulf sportfishing economy. Rebuilding and restoration efforts now are hampered by an inability to measure against a complete and reliable baseline of fishery data. We must ensure we never again find ourselves in this position should we be confronted with responding to large natural resource disasters in the Gulf.

## A. Recreational Fishing Data

- A streamlined, user-friendly logbook and reporting system should be established and maintained for for-hire vessels and charter boats.
- Targeted investments should be made in the National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) with the goal of gathering better data from intercepts with recreational anglers in the region. In building and maintaining a more effective fisheries management program throughout the Gulf, the federal government must have much more complete data regarding what recreational anglers in the region are doing and where they are doing it.
- New requirements should be enacted for the collection of data regarding the economics of recreational fishing in the Gulf region. Current economic assessments by the NMFS do not provide the necessary information to expeditiously and fairly compensate anglers and sportfishing businesses impacted by the spill.

## B. Fishery Monitoring

- Funding must be dedicated to carrying out expanded and more frequent stock assessments in the Gulf. Specifically, more frequent *full* new assessments should be made as opposed to continuation of long-running stock assessment updates. Spatial distribution needs to be much more complete and targeted.
- More funding must be directed specifically to fishery independent data gathering.
- Funding should be explicitly marked for better information on forage species such as menhaden.



## C. Restoration Monitoring

- Funding should be specifically dedicated to a long-term program for monitoring restoration efforts. Restoration projects have traditionally not included monitoring, but long-term monitoring must take place to measure what is working and what is not. Objective evaluations must be made along the way on the success of restoration with real consequences for projects that are not achieving their intended effects.

## D. Marine Stock Enhancement

- Funds should be designated specifically to hatcheries and science centers that can accelerate fishery and habitat recovery in key areas. The Response Group advocates the use of hatcheries, following a responsible and quantitative approach, with strong scientific standards and emphasis on stock assessment, modeling enhancement impact, pilot releases to identify optimal release strategies, and density-dependent stocking thresholds. The focus would be on replenishing depleted stocks, rather than simply releasing fish on a regular basis to create artificial and undocumented recreational opportunities. Strategic and responsible use of hatchery-raised fish can guide restoration and management decisions with information about critical uncertainties about life history and ecological parameters gathered before, during and after their releases of tagged fish. We urge recipients of this report to reference the 2010 article, "Responsible Approach to Marine Stock Enhancement: An Update," by Kai Lorenzen, Kenneth M. Leber and H. Lee Blankenship



(Reviews in Fisheries Science 18[2]:189-210). We strongly believe that recent breakthroughs in marine fisheries enhancement science makes this a must-use tool for the fishery management efforts to come in the Gulf.

- Funds should be directed to research on expanding the number of species that can be raised in hatcheries.

### E. Research

- Funds for continued research on fisheries restoration and improvement should be tied to requirements for better coordination between universities and institutions.
- Research funding should be specifically dedicated to creating and maintaining a map of key habitat in the Gulf. The creation and continued use of such a map would be an extraordinarily helpful tool in future fisheries management.

## IV. Recreational Fishing Business Impacts and Restoration of Angler Interest and Confidence

The consensus priorities in this section are coupled with a definitive recommendation to take a region-wide approach when targeting investments for recovery and future resilience of the recreational fishing-dependent businesses in the Gulf of Mexico region.

### A. Full Assessment of Recreational Fishing Economic Impacts

- A high-quality, thorough specific assessment must be carried out quantifying the exact impacts of the spill on recreational fishing-dependent businesses. Information in this assessment could be broken down by species, region and other categories to help drive better decisions about where to invest in habitat and fisheries.

### B. Seafood

- The recreational fishing community in the Gulf is intensely interested in both the monitoring of seafood safety and how information in this area is conveyed to the public. The integrity of the Gulf of Mexico seafood brand extends beyond the commercial fishing industry. The recreational fishing-dependent industry is equally impacted by brand integrity. Clearer standards must be set for what is said publicly about Gulf seafood.

### C. Publicly Promoting Recreational Fishing

- Significant funds must be earmarked for attracting recreational anglers back to the Gulf region and getting more former anglers who live in the region back out on the water. Outreach and marketing in this regard must



Photo courtesy—Mike Eller

be targeted and *cannot be lumped in with overall tourism building efforts*. A stand-alone program must be established with the explicit goal of getting more people fishing in the Gulf region, and this program must be directed in coordination with representatives from the recreational fishing community if it is to be effective. Efforts to date have not been crafted in a manner that takes the particular interests and make-up of the recreational fishing audience properly into account.

- Designate funds for the creation of “Sportfishing Work Groups” in specific areas of the region so that leaders in the recreational fishing community can get regular

reports from key officials on Gulf restoration to disseminate to individual anglers and sportfishing businesses.

- Direct funds to be spent specifically on engagement with the sportfishing industry to create a partnership that has not yet taken shape. Businesses in the recreational fishing industry in the Gulf region could be playing a much more effective role in getting more people out fishing if they were involved as partners in a structured marketing campaign.

#### D. Removal of Impediments to Fishing

- Funds should be directed to projects and efforts that will improve public access to recreational fishing. The creation and improvement of boat ramps and fishing piers are excellent examples of investments where maximum returns can be found on access improvement investments.
- The purchase of boats for fishing should be encouraged through a tax break or incentive system that would apply to individuals who buy new or used boats in the region.

#### E. Events

- Funding should be directed to re-establishing or strengthening longstanding recreational fishing

tournaments and derbies that have been impacted by the spill. Such funding would allow organizers to temporarily waive entry fees and provide prizes significant enough to attract large numbers of entrants. Tournaments have strong multiplier effects, sending out ripples through press stories, pictures and competition results that attract average anglers to the water to fish.

- The Response Group recommends creating a series of new events throughout the region that would focus on getting average anglers back out on the water. These events would focus less on serious competition and more on education, fun and connecting or reconnecting the public to the Gulf's wonderful saltwater fishing opportunities.

#### F. Compensation So Far

- BP to date has a mixed record regarding compensating recreational fishing-dependent businesses impacted by the spill. In too many cases, BP has failed to compensate recreational fishing business, and the GSRFRG recommends that an independent entity carry out a specific review of compensatory action and inaction in this area.

Recreational angling in the Gulf of Mexico has been very popular and has helped drive the region's coastal economy. Yet the millions of people who regularly fish in the Gulf region are disparate and less organized than individuals in other user groups that have been engaged in the Gulf restoration task force. Recreational anglers, however, have a uniquely direct connection to the Gulf and its fishery resources. Because of this connection, they have absorbed a tremendous collective blow since the Deepwater Horizon spill, but they also possess an extremely well-informed perspective on how to recover from this blow.

From the earliest days of the spill, government officials and private interests have stressed the importance of factoring in the impacts to recreational fishing in the Gulf. Leaders in the recreational fishing community have registered concerns and ideas in a multitude of hearings and meetings but to date have not come together with a central set of consensus recommendations and requests that would be applicable throughout the region.

With the completion of the GSRFRG's report, interested



Photo courtesy—Charlie Caplinger

parties now have in hand clear-cut actions that can be taken in response to this community's highest priorities. The Response Group considers the above recommendations to be basic guideposts, and its members stand ready to provide far more detailed information on any of these recommendations for interested parties.

## V. Conclusion

# Appendix

## GSRFRG Participants:

### Pensacola:

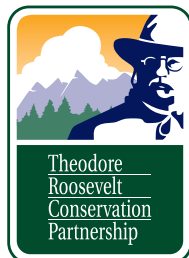
Emily Muehlstein – *GMFMC*  
Robert Turpin – *Escambia County*  
Mike Eller – *Destin Charter*  
Michelle Sempstrott – *Florida FWC Division*  
Jeff Marker – *Private recreational fisher*  
Wes Campbell – *TTI Blakemore Fishing Group*  
Kerry Campbell – *Future Fisherman Foundation*  
Mike Guidry – *Eglin Air Force Base Dive Club*  
Mel Boyett – *Private recreational fisher*  
Tom Boyett – *Private recreational fisher*

### Gulfport:

Ed Francis – *CCA Louisiana*  
Rome Emmons – *CCA Mississippi*  
F.J. “Doc” Eicke – *CCA Mississippi*  
Edwin Lambreth – *CCA Alabama*  
Mo Shaver – *Charter boat Captain*  
Bob Abruscato – *Charter boat Captain*  
Dr. Bob Shipp – *Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council*  
Dr. Joe Powers – *Louisiana State University*  
Bennett Long – *Orange Beach Marina*  
Larry Simpson – *Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission*  
Stephen Brown – *Mississippi Department of Wildlife,  
Fisheries and Parks*

### New Orleans:

Jimmy Fisackerly – *Boat Stuff*  
Mike Butler – *Venice Marina / Tournament Angler*  
Ryan Lambert – *Cajun Adventures Lodge / Fishing Guide*  
Andre Boudreaux – *Boudreaux Lodge / Fishing Guide*  
Darren Angelo – *Delta Marina*  
Dan McKinzey – *Spear-fisherman*  
PB Candies – *International Grand Isle Tarpon Rodeo*  
Ken Leber – *Mote Marine Labs*  
Tim Osborn – *NOAA*  
Camp Matens – *Gulf Fisheries Commission*  
Randy Pausina – *Assistant Secretary of Fisheries- LDWF*  
Charlie Caplinger – *CCA*



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