Mississippi State University Extension
Gulf Coast Fisherman
Sea Grant Mississippi-Alabama

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Shortfin mako sharks declared overfished

Sleek, strong, fast, beautiful, and…overfished; unfortunately, these are all words that describe the shortfin mako shark (*Isurus oxyrinchus*). Fortunately, NOAA Fisheries is taking steps to help rebuild the North Atlantic stock of this iconic species.

In general, sharks are highly migratory species (HMS) that travel vast expanses of the ocean, and this tendency to move back and forth across state and regional boundaries complicates their management. As a result, sharks and other HMS (tunas, swordfish, billfish) are managed by NOAA Fisheries rather than regional councils like the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council.

Furthermore, many HMS also cross international boundaries. For example, shortfin mako sharks tagged in the northern Gulf of Mexico move freely between the US, Mexico, and Cuba. To properly manage these species requires international collaboration. In the case of HMS in the Gulf of Mexico, this happens at the annual meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT).

Shortfin mako sharks are a valuable component of U.S. commercial and recreational shark fisheries. However, the 2017 ICCAT stock assessment concluded that shortfin mako sharks are overfished (i.e. their population level is too low), with overfishing occurring (i.e the rate of removal is too high). Preventing further population declines requires immediate management actions.

In accordance with the outcome of the ICCAT stock assessment, NOAA Fisheries implemented an emergency rule on March 2, 2018. This emergency rule outlines both commercial and recreational measures to address overfishing and help rebuild the North Atlantic shortfin mako shark stock. The emergency rule will take effect for 180 days while NOAA Fisheries develops Amendment 11 to the 2006 Consolidated HMS Fishery Management Plan. Given the dynamics of the shortfin mako shark fishery, Amendment 11 proposes a range of commercial and recreational management options.

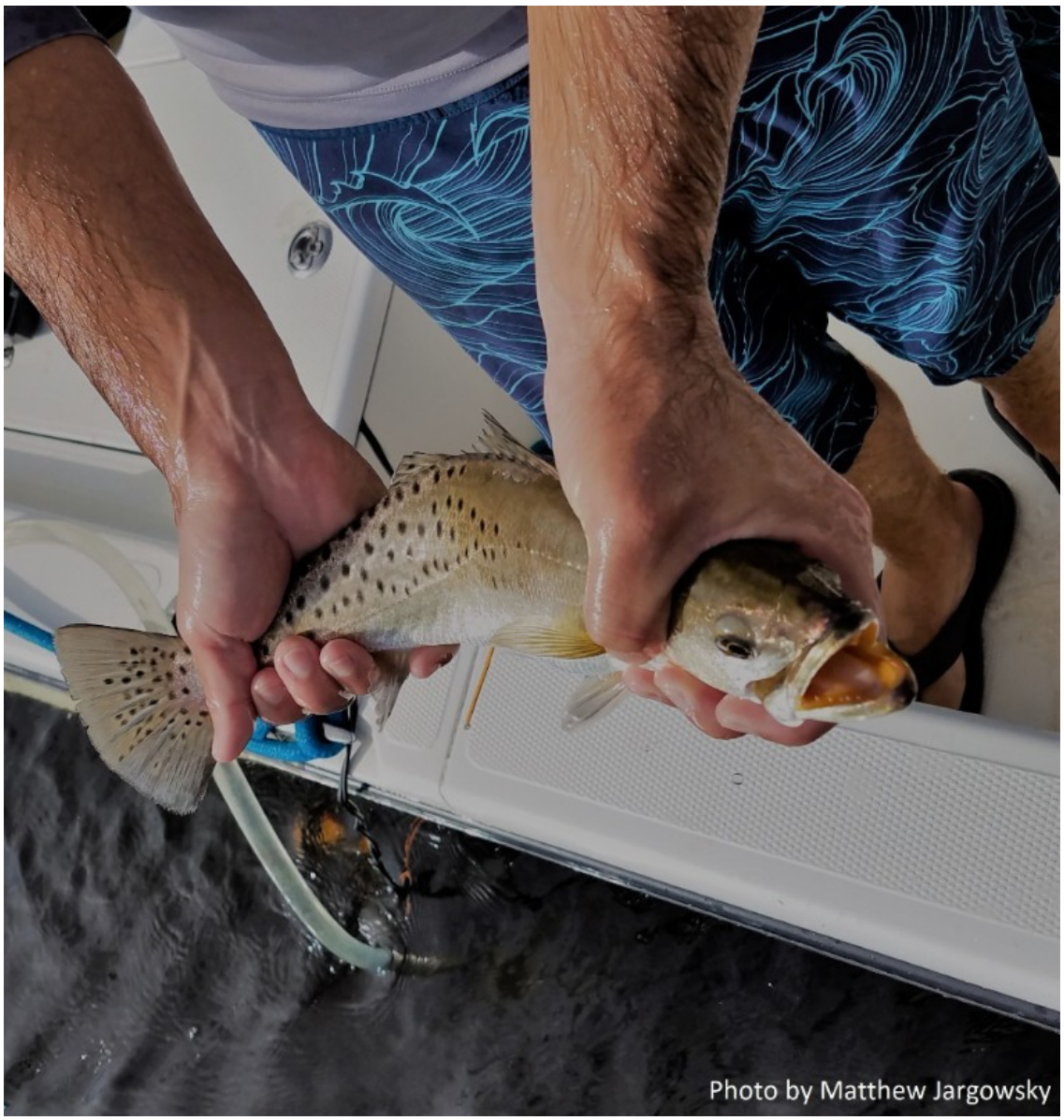
For commercial harvest of shortfin mako shark, several alternatives are proposed, including live release, gear restrictions, minimum sizes, creation of a specific shortfin mako shark quota, and limiting retention to trips where NOAA observers are on board.

Similar options are proposed for recreational harvest of shortfin mako

shark, including mandatory catch and release, increasing the minimum size, restricting retention to HMS tournaments, establishing a lottery to land shortfin mako shark, requiring the use of circle hooks, and establishing variable in-season minimum sizes.

Let your voices be heard! NOAA Fisheries is requesting public comment on the range of management strategies offered in Amendment 11. For more information, or to submit comments, click here before May 7, 2018. Following the public comment period, NOAA Fisheries will publish a proposed rule, which will be evaluated at the November 2018 ICCAT meeting.

Spectacular "Specks"



Spotted seatrout (often called “speckled trout” or “specks”) are widely sought by recreational anglers in coastal Gulf of Mexico waters. Peak fishing times are spring and fall, and in Mississippi waters, the minimum size is 15 inches total length and the bag limit is 15 fish.

The biology and ecology of the species is well-known, particularly here in the northern Gulf of Mexico. In Mississippi, spotted seatrout spawn from mid-April to mid-September, depending on temperature, in nearshore and estuarine waters. As juveniles, spotted seatrout move to seagrass beds, sandy and muddy bottoms, and oyster reefs, and continue to reside in these habitats as adults. Studies report that the maximum age of Mississippi spotted seatrout is 6 years; Alabama fish have reached a maximum age of 8 years. Females can fully mature as early as 7.5 inches total length (100% are fully mature by 14 inches) and grow faster than males; males reach maturity by approximately 8 inches. Typical spotted seatrout weigh 1 to 3 pounds.

Spotted seatrout are a schooling species and are opportunistic carnivores, consuming both invertebrates and fish. On rare occasions, spotted seatrout may travel long distances, but tagging studies indicate that the species is non-migratory. During a Mississippi tagging study, 90% of fish were recaptured within 5 miles of their release.

Spot a speck? Although the Gulf Coast Research Lab is no longer tagging spotted seatrout, you might still encounter a fish that was previously tagged. The University of South Alabama and the Dauphin Island Sea Lab are currently acoustically tagging spotted seatrout in Alabama waters and are launching a new program, “Tag Alabama”, with the Coastal Conservation Association to implement angler-based tagging of spotted seatrout as well as red drum. If you catch a tagged fish, please report your catch!

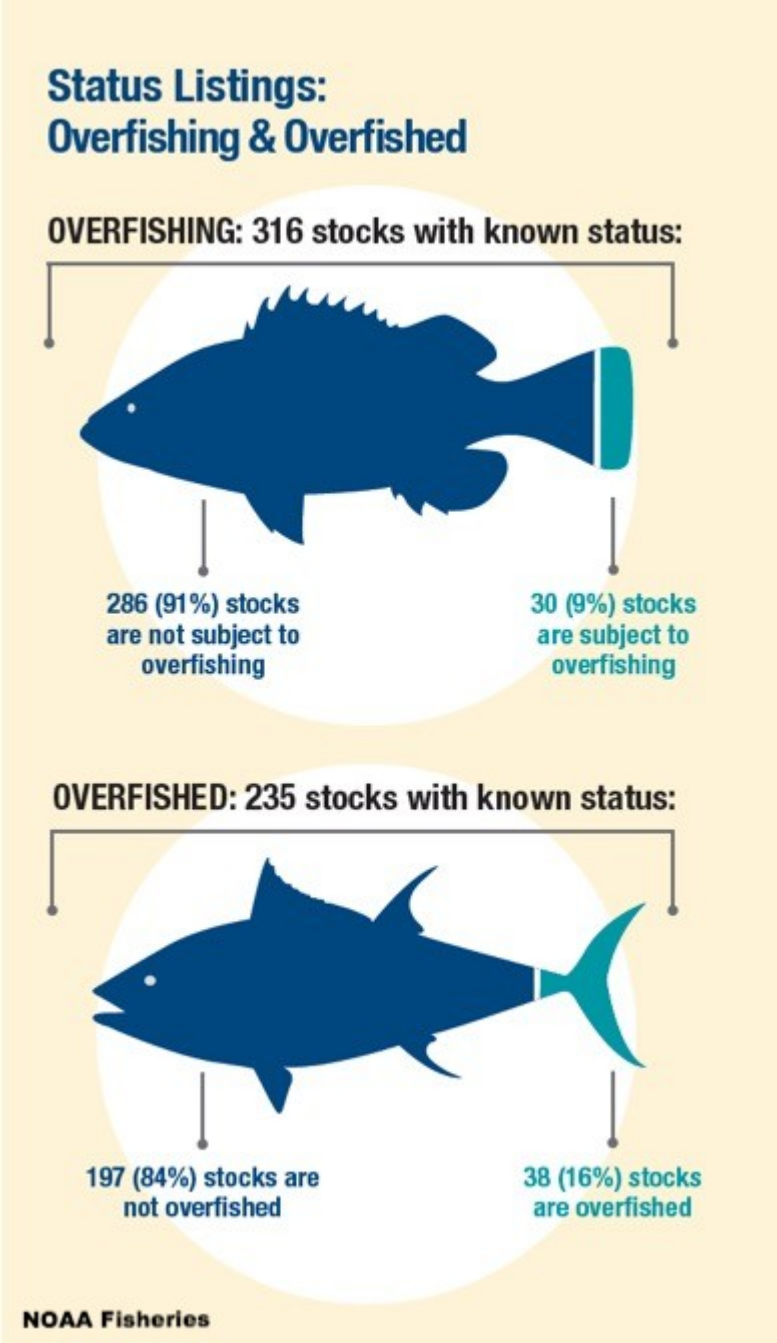
A Year in Review
Status of Stocks 2016

Each year, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries produces three reports covering different aspects of the

status of U.S. marine fisheries:

- Fisheries of the United States
- Status of Stocks
- Fisheries Economics of the United States

We will be reviewing each of these topics and their relevance to Gulf States commercial fisheries in our monthly newsletters. Last month we reviewed “Fisheries of the United States” This month, we have provided information from the “Status of Stocks 2016,” a report to Congress on the status of U.S. fisheries as managed under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA).



By The Numbers

NOAA Fisheries tracks **474** stocks or stock complexes in **46** fishery management plans. At the end of 2016:

4 stocks were removed from the overfishing list, and **6** were added.

9 stocks are no longer considered overfished, but continue to be managed under rebuilding plans.

2 previously overfished stocks were rebuilt (barndoor skate and North

Atlantic albacore).

2 species are considered undergoing overfishing in the Gulf of Mexico: greater amberjack and gray triggerfish.

A Call to Commercial Fishermen

Catch data contributed by you, the fisherman, provides scientists and managers with important information they need to make informed decisions concerning the effective stewardship of living marine resources. See our May newsletter next month to learn how your reported catch data contributes to economic benefits.

For more information, click here.

In the Galley

Each month in this series, we'll highlight a new way to prepare delicious seafood from the northern Gulf of Mexico. ***Enjoy!***

Trout Almandine

Recipe courtesy of Louisiana Kitchen and Culture.

For more recipes or to subscribe to their magazine or free e-newsletter, click here or visit their website at http://louisiana.kitchenandculture.com.

Ingredients:
6 large speckled trout fillets
Salt and pepper, to taste
Cajun seasoning, to taste
Plain flour, for dusting
1 stick (8 tablespoons) butter, in all

1 (4-ounce) package slivered, blanched almonds
1/4 cup lemon juice

Method:
Season the fish fillets with salt, pepper and Cajun seasoning.
Lightly dust the seasoned fillets with flour and set to the side.
In a heavy-bottomed skillet over medium heat, melt the stick of butter, reserving 1 tablespoon. Sauté the prepared fillets in the butter until brown, 2 to 3 minutes per side, flipping only once.
Remove fillets to a plate, then add the remaining tablespoon of melted butter to the pan. When the butter begins to foam, add the almonds, cooking until toasted. Add the lemon juice, stirring until fully incorporated; taste and adjust for seasonings.
Pour almandine sauce over fillets.
Serve.

Serves 6

Sea of Acronyms

Being an informed angler begins with understanding the terminology used in fisheries management. This series helps demystify the concepts hidden beneath a sea of acronyms.

BRP

Biological Reference Point

A biological reference point is a metric of stock status from a biological perspective. A BRP often reflects a combination of stock dynamics (e.g. growth, recruitment, mortality). BRPs allow managers to determine whether a stock is overfished or subject to overfishing.

Upcoming events

Celebrate the Gulf
April 7th
Pass Christian, MS

CCA Casting for Conservation
April 14th
Gulfport, MS

Biloxi Wooden Boat Show
May 19, 20
Biloxi, MS

I'm Marcus Drymon, an Assistant Extension Professor at Mississippi State University and a Marine Fisheries Specialist at Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant. I'd like to hear from you - please send any comments or questions to marcus.drymon@msstate.edu, and click on the links below for more information on my website and Facebook page.

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