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

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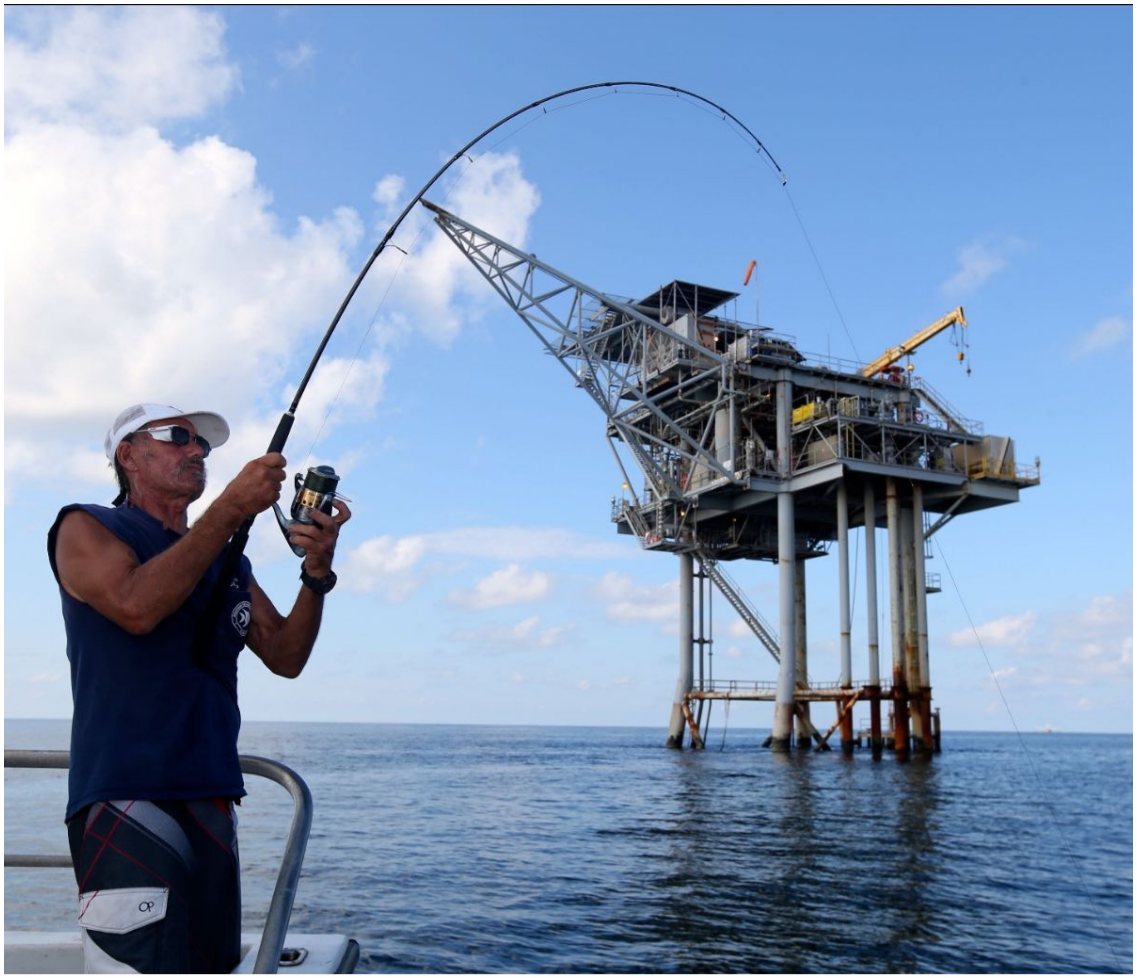


FISH ON! A gulf coast fisherman angler prepares to land a nice fish. Photo by David Hay Jones.

Along the Gulf Coast, fishing opportunities sustain thousands of fishermen and their families and support a way of life for coastal communities. Gulf of Mexico

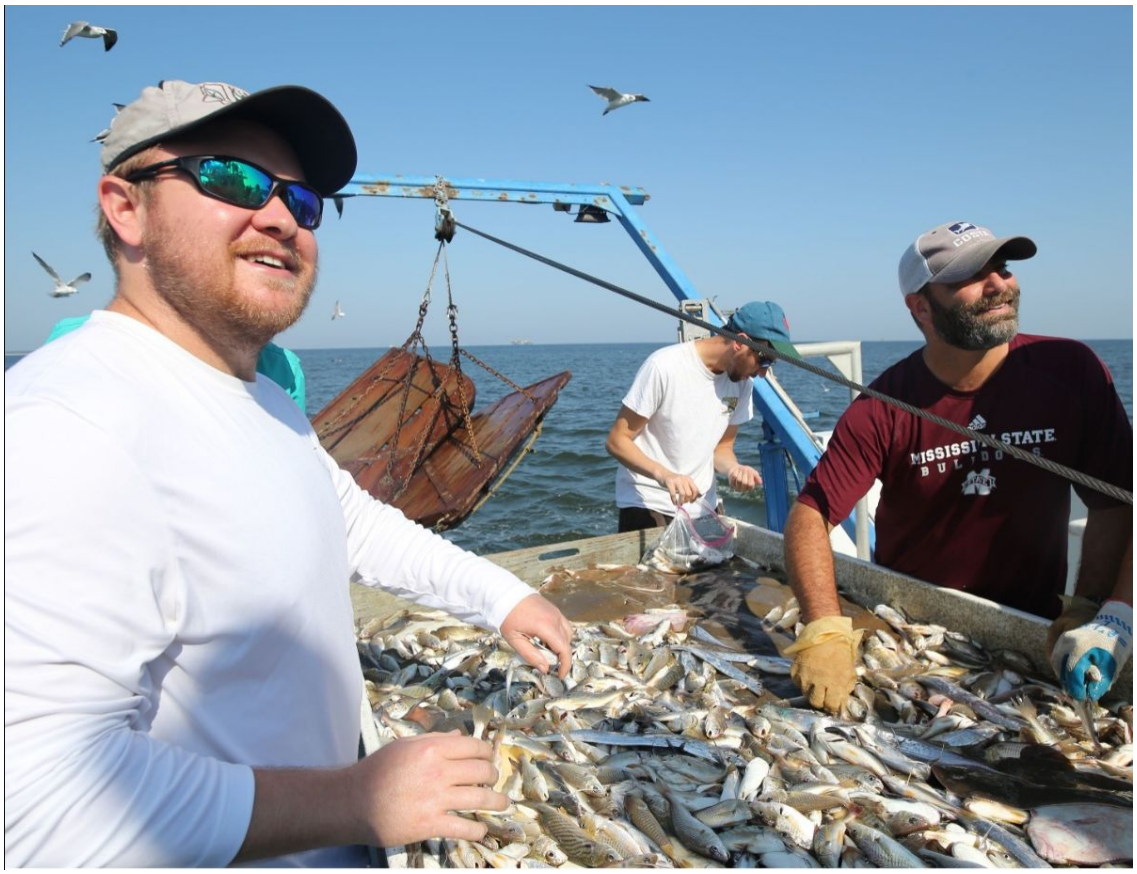
fishing is particularly economically valuable. In Mississippi and Alabama alone, saltwater fishing contributes more than $1.7 billion in added value to the economy per year! With so much invested into fishing in the northern Gulf of Mexico, the successful management of its marine fisheries is vitally important. Fishing regulations that are too strict can needlessly cost the fishing industry millions of dollars, whereas regulations that are too lenient can compromise the sustainability of a fishery, a mistake that can take decades to fully rectify. However, despite its importance, most people view fisheries management – and the science that goes into it – as something of a black box.

Confusion and uncertainty surrounding fisheries management can be attributed to several factors. For example, although numerous resources are available to anyone interested in learning about fisheries management and science, these resources are often dense, filled with technically-worded text, and are frequently not presented in a user-friendly format. Additionally, the content may also be complex, making it difficult to understand why some types of data are used to make management decisions while other types of data are not. The existence of several fisheries management bodies adds to the confusion about what organization oversees each fishery. Finally, though most people understand that fisheries managers work to ensure that fisheries remain sustainable, it can be difficult to understand exactly what this term means.

This confusion is why we at the Marine Fisheries Ecology Program spent a large portion of 2020 developing a certification program, and writing an accompanying textbook, titled *FISHES*, or *Fishermen Invested in Science, Healthy Ecosystems, and Sustainability.* We extracted complex information from various resources and then distilled this information into brief, easy-to-digest text and simple, straightforward graphics. As a result, the *FISHES* course and textbook communicate a great deal of information without overwhelming readers by presenting them with excessively complicated concepts.

The goal of *FISHES* is to extend practical, science-based information about fisheries management, fisheries science, and sustainability to fish enthusiasts in a user-friendly format. In both the book and the certification program, we review what makes Gulf of Mexico fisheries unique and how historical fisheries management helped shape fisheries management in the Gulf today. We then describe the various types of data used by fisheries managers, how these data are obtained by scientists, and how

they are implemented into fisheries management. Lastly, we discuss current threats facing Gulf of Mexico fisheries and how fishermen can aid fishery managers and scientists in improving the Gulf's fisheries.

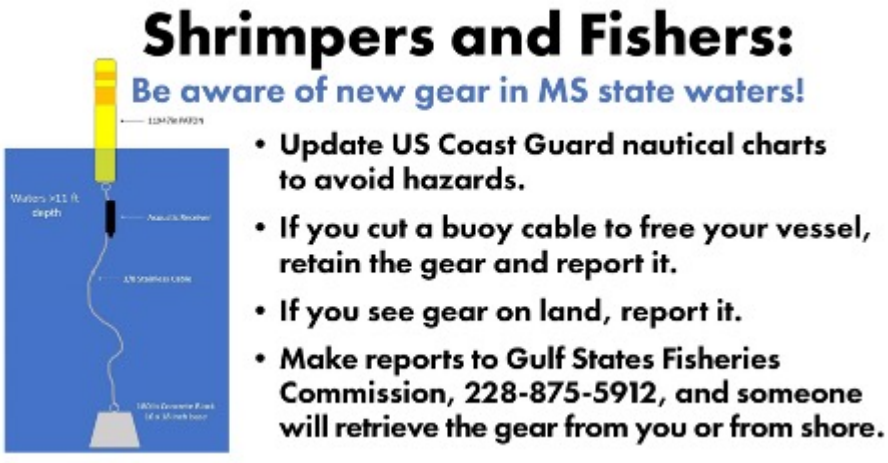


Eric Sparks (left) and Marcus Drymon (right), two Extension Professors at Mississippi State University, in the field with the Mississippi Master Naturalists', a course similar to FISHES.

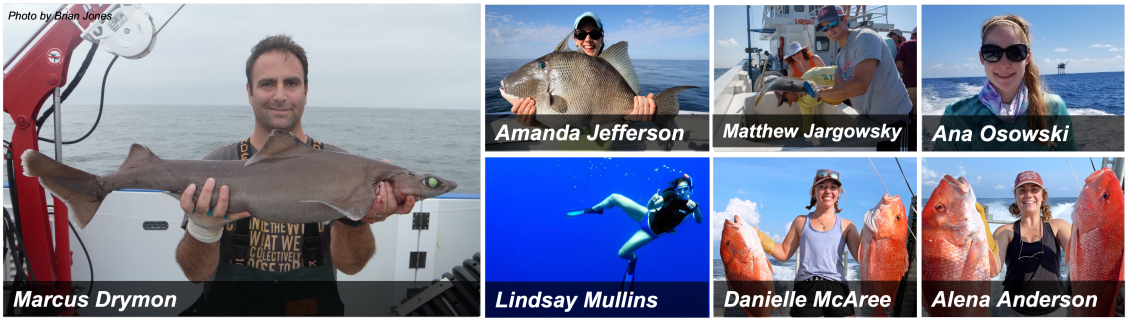
The inaugural offering of the *FISHES* course will be held Thursday evenings from October 14th - November 13th, 2021 at the Coastal Research and Extension Center in Biloxi. This in-person course consists of five 2-hour classroom sessions (light refreshments provided), as well as one 5-hour field excursion. In addition to lectures given by members of MSU's Marine Fisheries Ecology Program, several lectures will be given by guest lecturers, including Jim Franks of the Gulf Coast Research Lab. The field excursion will take place at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab, where we will bring participants out on a research vessel and demonstrate different fishing gears used by fisheries scientists.

If you would like more information about the course, you can find it on the

FISHES webpage or by emailing us at marinefisheriesecology@gmail.com. If you are interested in registering, you can do so here! The *FISHES* course will be offered annually, so if you miss your chance to take part in it this year you can always sign-up next year. Also, if you are interested in taking the course, but are unable to do so, the textbook we wrote for the course can be found for free on our website. While the textbook was written to complement the course, it also stands alone so that any reader can learn about Gulf of Mexico fisheries management, fisheries science, and sustainability, whether or not they take the corresponding course.



NOTICE: The Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission and the University of Southern Mississippi's Gulf Coast Research Lab have placed several yellow buoys in the eastern Mississippi Sound for the purpose of tracking Cobia, Redfish, Tripletail, Flounder, and other species. If you find one that has washed up, disconnected from its concrete block, or become entangled in your gear, please contact the number below and someone will come retrieve the gear.



I'm Marcus Drymon, an Assistant Extension Professor at Mississippi State University and a Marine Fisheries Specialist at Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant. Amanda Jefferson, Lindsay Mullins, Matthew Jargowsky, Danielle McAree, Ana Osowski, Alena Anderson and I are the Marine Fisheries Ecology Lab. We'd love to hear from you! Please reach out to us at marinefisheriesecology@gmail.com

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