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

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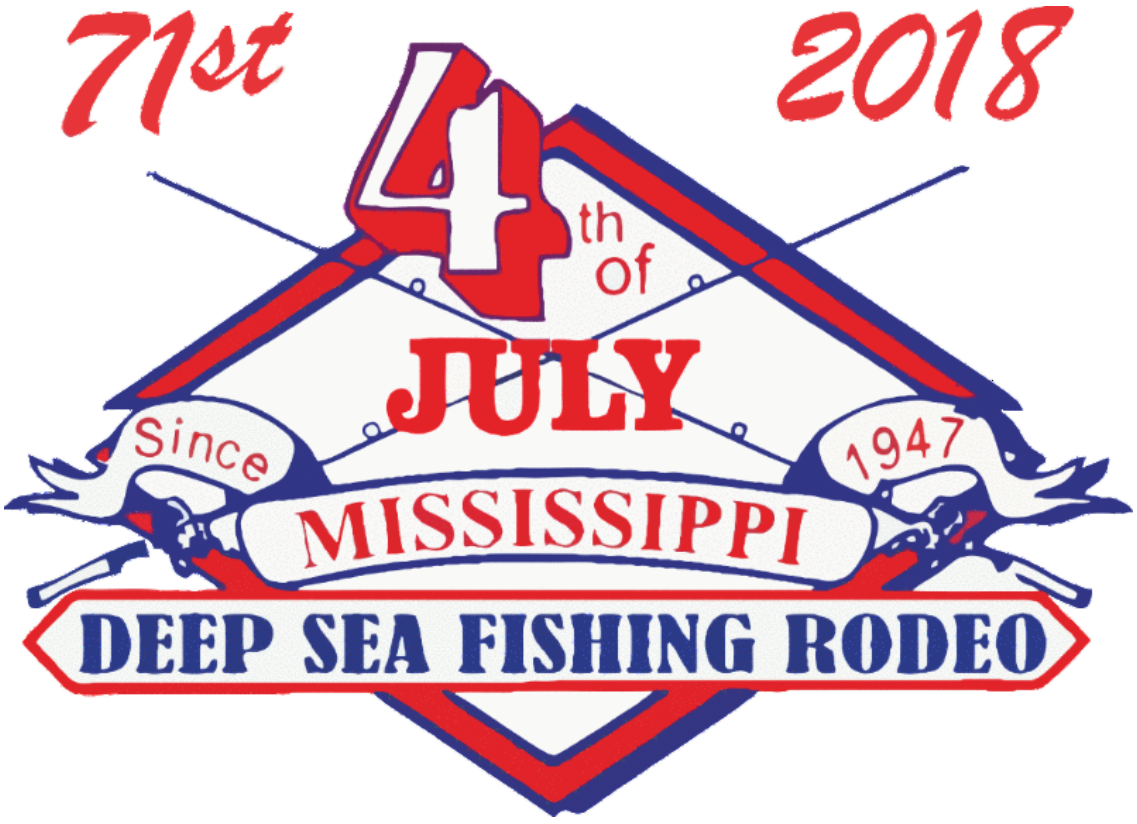
# This ain't our first Rodeo

On the Mississippi/Alabama Gulf Coast, summertime is synonymous with "rodeo season" – but we aren't talking about roping cattle. In this month's newsletter, we'll give you the scoop on the biggest saltwater fishing tournaments in Mississippi and Alabama.

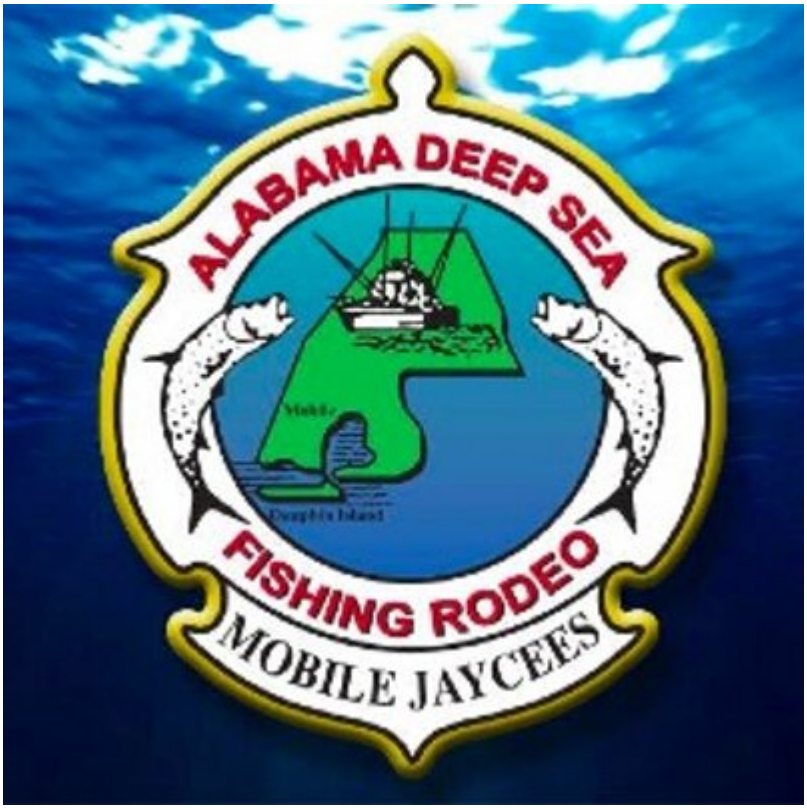



The Mississippi Deep Sea Fishing Rodeo (MDSFR) is located at

Jones Park in Gulfport, MS, and is hosted by its board of directors, led by President Richard Valdez. In 1948, captain Horace Towell dreamt the first MDSFR into existence, and it was hosted annually by the American Legion through 1957. In 1953, the MDSFR was designated as the State's Official Fishing Event, and since then, the first week of July has been named "Mississippi Deep Sea Fishing Rodeo Days" by all of the Mississippi governors. Since its inception, the rodeo was always held in Gulfport; however, the specific site has varied through the years, from the Jessup Brothers Tent, to the Ringling Brothers Circus Tent, to Rice Pavilion.

Today's MDSFR draws over 3,000 registrants annually. The University of Southern Mississippi's Gulf Coast Research Laboratory scientists take data and biological samples from the rodeo fish each year. The MDSFR consists of 24 categories including both inshore and offshore species, as well as a shark category (minimum length requirement is 54 inches) and a speckled trout shootout. Registration is free for all anglers. This year's rodeo features over $65,000 in cash and prizes, along with the biggest prizes ever: $25,000 apiece for anglers who break state records for tiger shark (390 lbs) and southern stingray (158 lbs, 1.6 oz).

The 71$^{st}$ MDSFR is happening NOW through July 4, 2018. The rodeo will end with a bang as crowds gather to watch the giant 4$^{th}$ of July fireworks display. For more information about the MDSFR and a complete schedule of events, click here.




The Alabama Deep Sea Fishing Rodeo (ADSFR) is located on Dauphin Island, AL, and is hosted annually by the Mobile Jaycees. In 1929, a group of Mobile businessmen organized the first rodeo, which attracted 260 anglers. The Fort Gaines Pier served as the initial rodeo site, and the first president was Chief Investigator Adams. During the early years of the rodeo, the island was only accessible by boat, and carrier pigeons were used to transmit news about the biggest catches to Mobile. As the years passed, the rodeo grew in size, and in 1948, the Mobile Junior Chamber of Commerce and the Mobile Jaycees began leading the event. In 2011, the ADSFR received the title “world’s largest fishing tournament” from the Guinness Book of World Records.

Today, the ADSFR is known for its conservation-based practices. The rodeo has donated over $275,000 to the University of South Alabama Department of Marine Sciences, and scientists from the Dauphin Island Sea Lab work at the rodeo each year to collect scientific samples and data from various fish species. The tournament draws over 3,200 participants and 75,000 spectators and features 30 categories including both inshore and offshore species, with catch-and-release categories for billfish, shark, and tarpon. The ADSFR features over $1 million in cash and prizes.

The 85th annual ADSFR is scheduled for July 20-22, 2018, and will be preceded by the Roy Martin Young Anglers Tournament (RMYAT) on July 14, 2018. For more information about the ADSFR and RMYAT and a complete schedule of events, click here.

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# Rodeo-based science

*Background*

One of the biggest challenges in understanding how fishing has affected marine ecosystems is accurately documenting how fish population size has changed over time. Scientific surveys represent the “gold-standard” for detecting changes in fish population size over time. These surveys use repeated, standardized (i.e. controlled) sampling to record the identity and size of fish, and because the sampling is always the same, changes in identity, quantity and/or size of fishes is used as an indication of the status of a particular stock. For example, researchers at Mississippi State University and the University of South Alabama have been conducting a bottom longline survey since 2006 to assess the relative abundance and distribution of sharks in the northern Gulf of Mexico. The distribution and relative abundance data collected during this survey have been used in stock assessments for several species of shark, including Atlantic sharpnose shark, blacknose shark, and blacktip shark. Unfortunately, most scientific surveys span a relatively short period of time, and in the best cases, have only been in existence since the 1970s or 80s. As such, datasets for examining historical trends in fish populations are all but absent.

*Our novel use of data*

While scientific surveys are a product of the modern era, anglers have recorded the size and/or weight of their fish since the dawn of time. Nowhere is this more evident than when anglers compete in fishing tournaments. Archived records from fishing tournaments provide a novel set of data for assessing historical trends in fish populations. Therefore, we used these rodeo records in a scientific study to assess changes in the size of large coastal sharks in the northern Gulf of Mexico. Click here for a link to the complete study; our approach and findings are summarized below.

*Our approach*

We used 80 years (1929-2009) of historical records from the Alabama Deep Sea Fishing Rodeo (ADSFR), the Mississippi Deep Sea Fishing Rodeo (MDSFR), and the Texas Deep Sea Roundup (TDSR), three of the oldest fishing rodeos in the United States. Trends in weight (ADSFR and MDSFR) and size (TDSR) were used as an indication of the relative abundance and size of large sharks in the Gulf of Mexico.

*Our findings*

Dramatic and consistent changes in the sizes and species of the winning sharks were seen across all three rodeos. The average size of the three largest sharks captured in all three rodeos increased from the rodeos' inception until the early 1980s, then decreased by greater than 60%. Not only did the average size change - a change in species composition was also seen. Large tiger and bull sharks dominated the early years of the rodeos, smaller blacktips and hammerheads were more common in recent years.

*Reasons behind the increase and subsequent decline*

The size of the winning shark at the three rodeos increased throughout the 40s, 50s, 60s, and 70s, which is attributed to improvements in technology (more powerful outboard engines, heavier fishing tackle, and more sophisticated marine electronics). The reduction in the size of large sharks starting in the mid-1980s is best explained by increases in commercial shark landings across the northern Gulf of Mexico. The archived fishing rodeo records helped us visualize trends that we were unable to see in our modern scientific surveys. The historical records highlight a troubling decline in shark size and change

in species composition in recent decades. In the future, scientists will continue to use rodeo and scientific survey data to obtain the most accurate picture of shark populations in the northern Gulf of Mexico.

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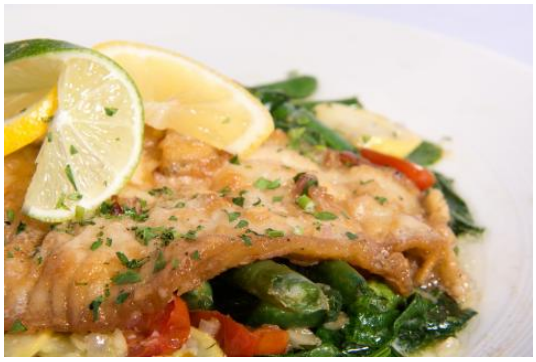
# In the Galley

***Pan-seared Gulf fish over vegetables***

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



*Recipe courtesy of Louisiana Kitchen & Culture.*
*For more recipes or to subscribe to their magazine or free e-newsletter, please visit* [http://louisiana.kitchenandculture.com/](http://louisiana.kitchenandculture.com/)

Serves 4.
**Ingredients:**

- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 tablespoon olive oil, plus more for pan
- 2 to 4 garlic cloves, finely minced
- 24 grape tomatoes, halved
- 24 young green beans, trimmed
- 2 small yellow squash or zucchini, thinly sliced
- 1 lemon, zest and juice reserved separately
- Creole seasoning, as needed
- 1 pound baby spinach, washed
- Salt and pepper
- 4 boneless, skinless flounder, redfish, drum, snapper, or other mild white fish fillets, 4 to 6 ounces each
- Minced parsley, lemon and lime slices, for garnish

**Method:**
Melt butter in olive oil in a heavy skillet over medium-high heat. When

foaming subsides, add garlic and cook until fragrant. Add tomatoes and sauté for 2 minutes; add green beans and squash or zucchini; sprinkle lightly with Creole seasoning and lemon zest and toss to coat. Sauté until vegetables are just crisp-tender and remove to a platter, leaving pan juices behind; keep warm. Add spinach to pan and cook, turning, until spinach is wilted and coated with pan drippings; season with salt and pepper and remove to a bowl, drizzling with any remaining pan juices.

Wipe pan clean and add just enough olive oil to coat the pan; place over high heat. Blot fish dry with paper towels and sprinkle lightly with Creole seasoning; when oil shimmers and is almost smoking, working in batches if necessary, add fish to pan. Allow to cook, undisturbed, for 1 minute; shake pan until fish releases. Continue to cook until golden brown; turn and repeat, reducing heat if necessary to prevent burning.

To serve, divide spinach among 4 plates. Top with sautéed vegetables, then with fillets of fish. Garnish with lemon, lime, and parsley. Pass lemon wedges at the table.

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## 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.

# FD

## Fishery-dependent

Data collected about fish or a fishery from commercial or sport fishermen and seafood dealers.

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## Upcoming events

Mississippi Deep Sea Fishing Rodeo
*June 29 - July 4*
Gulfport, MS

Alabama Deep Sea Fishing Rodeo
*July 20 - 22*
Dauphin Island, AL

Shark Week
*July 23 - 27*
Gulf State Park Pier, Gulf Shores, AL

Sharks!
*July 27*
St. Martin public Library, St. Martin, MS

Alabama Coastal Birdfest
*October 3-6*
Various locations, AL

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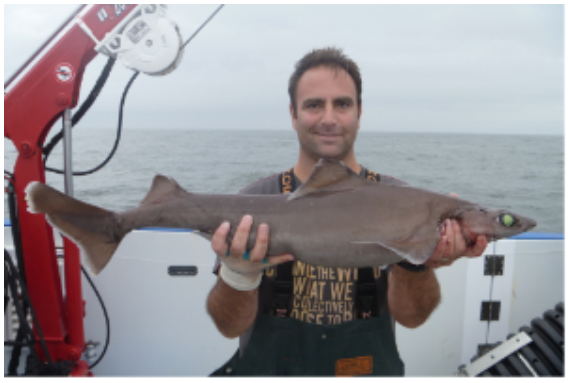
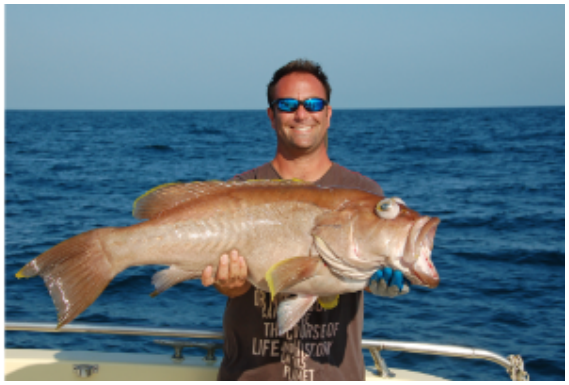
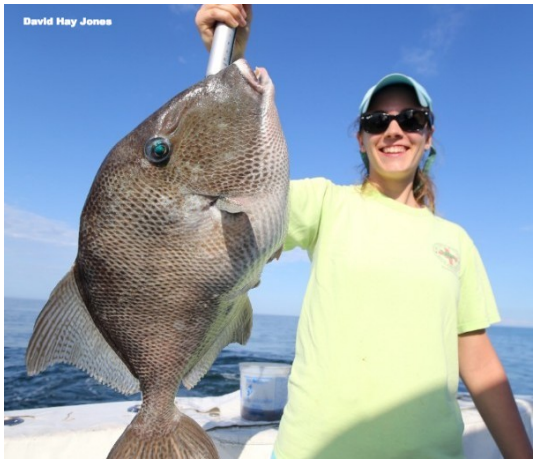
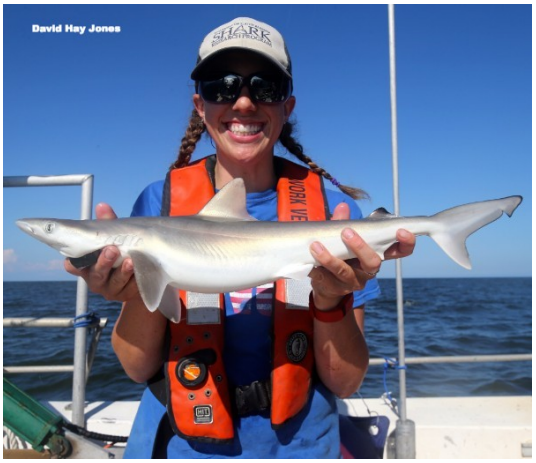




I'm Marcus Drymon, an Assistant Extension Professor at Mississippi State University and a Marine Fisheries Specialist at Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant. I'd like to hear from you - please send any comments or questions to marcus.drymon@msstate.edu, and click on the links below for more information on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




Contributing authors shown with their favorite fishes: Extension Associate **Amanda Jefferson** (triggerfish, left) and Extension Program Associate **Emily Seubert** (Atlantic sharpnose shark, right).

Facebook Website