

SPOTTED SEATROUT COMMERCIAL FISHING IN THE GULF OF MEXICO STATES

Spotted seatrout (often called “speckled trout” or “specks”) have a streamlined body with a gray/green back and white belly¹. The tail and dorsal fin are always spotted, and the body usually has spots as well¹. Spotted seatrout inhabit Atlantic waters from Cape Cod south to the east coast of Florida and the entire Gulf of Mexico¹. They are widely sought by recreational anglers along the Gulf Coast¹. In Mississippi waters, recreational regulations include a minimum size of 15 inches total length and a bag limit of 15 fish^{1,2}. The total allowable catch for the Mississippi commercial sector is 50,000 pounds².

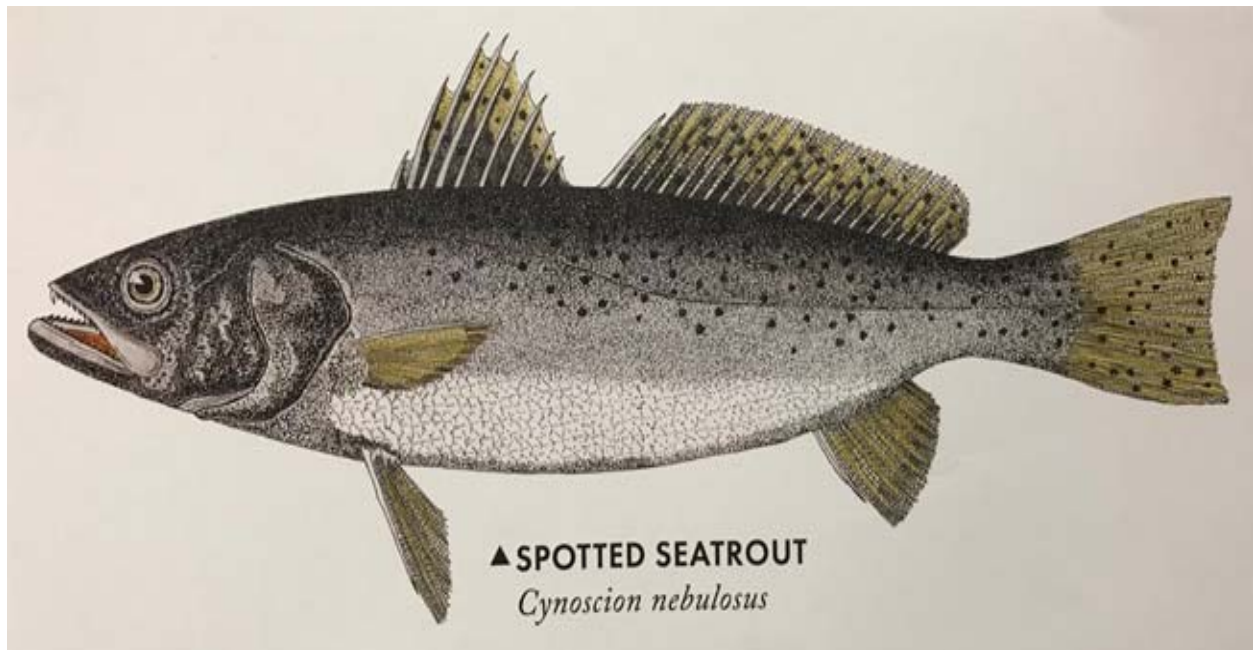


Figure 1. Spotted seatrout (*Cynoscion nebulosus*). Source: Mississippi Saltwater Fish. Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, Biloxi, Mississippi. Illustration by Joe Jewell.

The biology and ecology of the species are well-known, particularly here in the northern Gulf of Mexico¹. In Mississippi, spotted seatrout spawn from mid-April to mid-September, depending on temperature, in nearshore and estuarine waters¹. Juveniles move to seagrass beds,

sandy and muddy bottoms, and oyster reefs, and continue to reside in these habitats as adults¹. Spotted seatrout live 10 to 12 years, but most fish caught by anglers are less than 5 years old¹. Females can fully mature as early as 7.5 inches total length (100% are fully mature by 14 inches); males reach maturity at a smaller size¹. Males grow slower and have a shorter lifespan than females, which means that one can expect large spotted seatrout (> 5 pounds in weight) to be female¹.

Spotted seatrout are a schooling species and are opportunistic carnivores, consuming both invertebrates and fish by ambushing prey and swallowing it whole¹. On rare occasions, spotted seatrout may travel long distances, but tagging studies indicate that the species is non-migratory¹. For example, during a Mississippi tagging study, 90% of spotted seatrout were recaptured within 5 miles of their release¹.

Spot a speck? Although the Gulf Coast Research Lab is no longer tagging spotted seatrout, you might still encounter a fish that was previously tagged³. 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 drum⁴. If you catch a tagged fish, please report your catch!

References:

1. <http://gcrl.usm.edu/public/fish/spotted.seatrout.php>
2. <http://www.dmr.state.ms.us/index.php/recreational-fishing/recreational-catch-limits>
3. http://gcrl.usm.edu/fisheries_center/tag.and.release.program.php
4. <https://www.outdooralabama.com/node/2381>

Recipe for Speckled Trout in Capers and White Wine



Figure 2. This recipe is courtesy of <https://www.allrecipes.com/>. For ingredients and cooking instructions, please visit <https://www.allrecipes.com/recipe/247285/speckled-trout-in-capers-and-white-wine/>. Last visited: February 8, 2019.

Commercial Landings

The long-term annual commercial spotted seatrout landings in the Gulf of Mexico states are shown in Fig. 3. The yearly Gulf landings have fallen consistently since its peak in the mid-1970s. Since 2011, the Gulf supplied 16.78% of the total spotted seatrout domestic landings (Fig. 4) averaging 59,000 pounds and valued at \$157,000 annually.

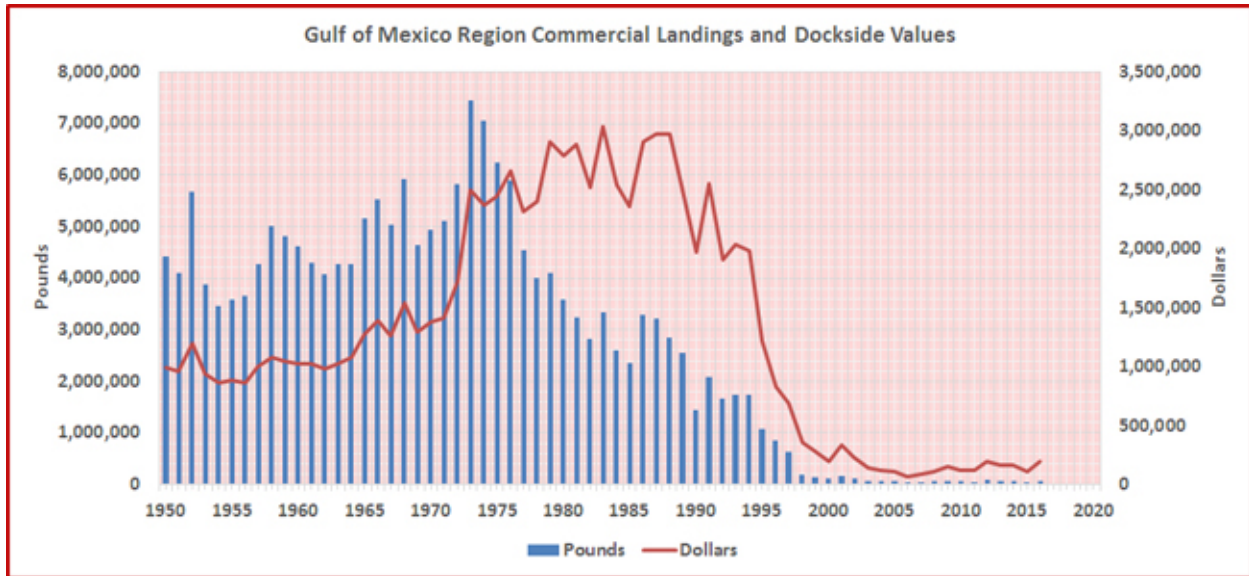


Figure 3. Commercial landings and dockside values of potted seatrout in the Gulf of Mexico region. The primary vertical axis shows the yearly commercial landings in pounds while the secondary vertical axis indicates the annual commercial dockside values in dollars. Source of raw data: NOAA Fisheries. <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/>. Last visited: February 5, 2019.

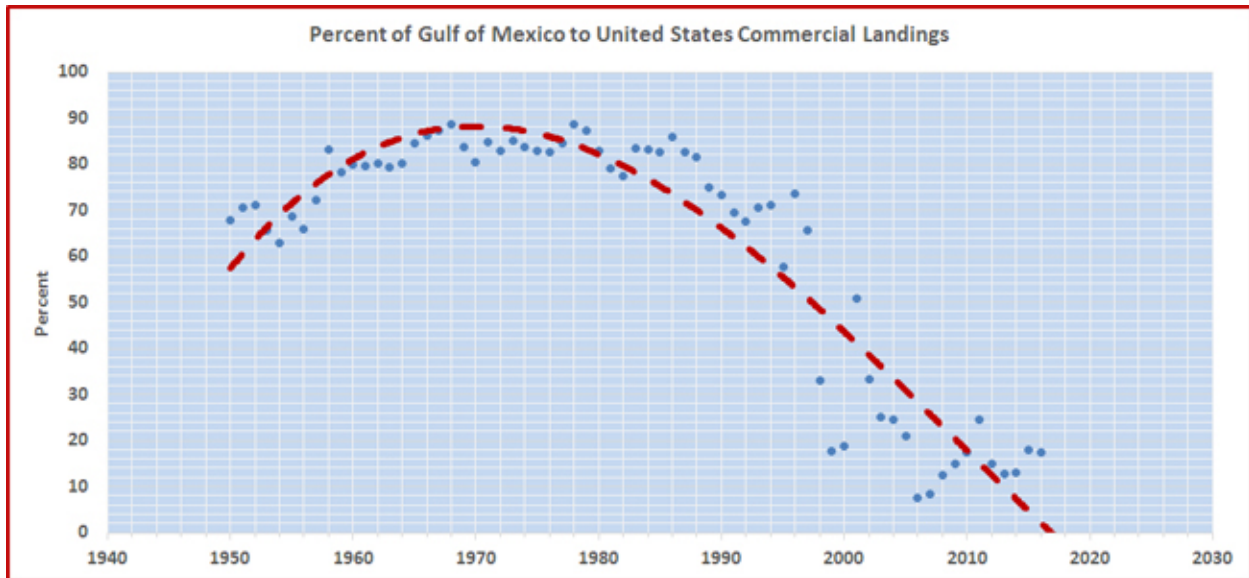


Figure 4. The vertical axis shows the percent of the Gulf of Mexico region to United States commercial landings of spotted seatrout. Source of raw data: NOAA Fisheries. <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/>. Last visited: February 5, 2019.

In 2016, Mississippi (14%) and Florida West Coast (3%) were the leading suppliers from the Gulf region with some landings from Louisiana (1%, Fig. 5). The bulk of the spotted seatrout was landed in North Carolina (71%), Florida East Coast (6%), and Virginia (5%).

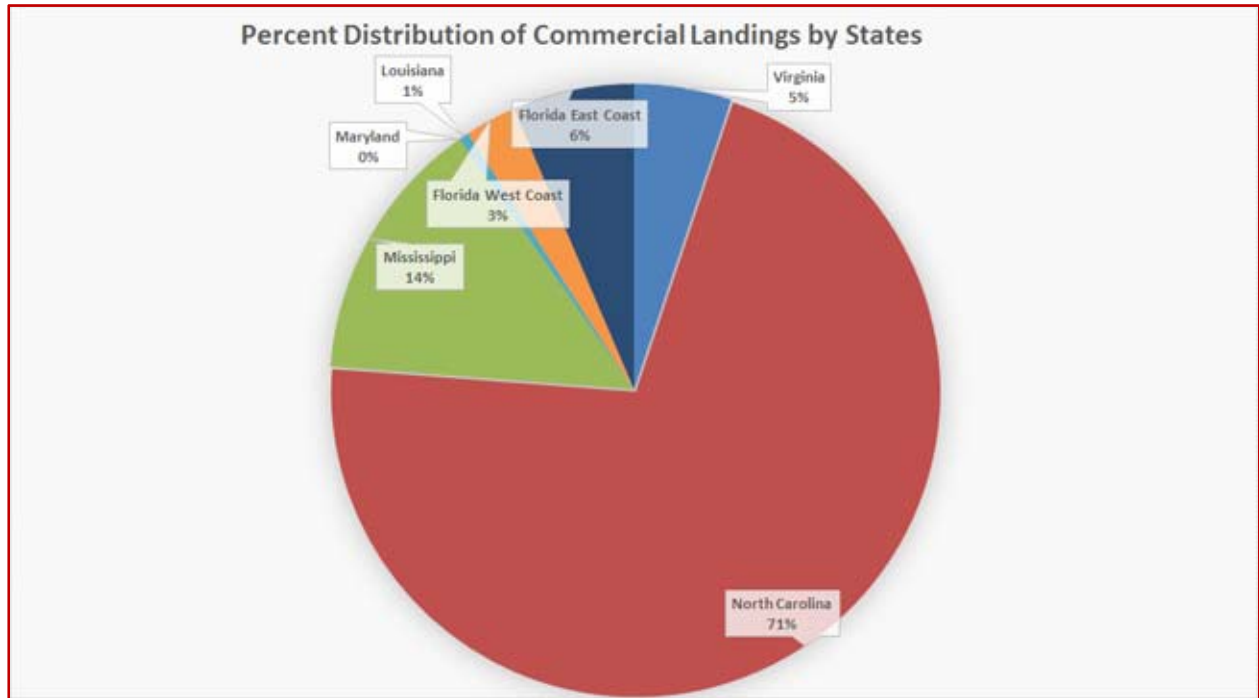


Figure 5. The pie chart shows the 2016 percent distribution of commercial landings of spotted seatrout by producing states. Source of raw data: NOAA Fisheries. <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/>. Last visited: February 5, 2019.

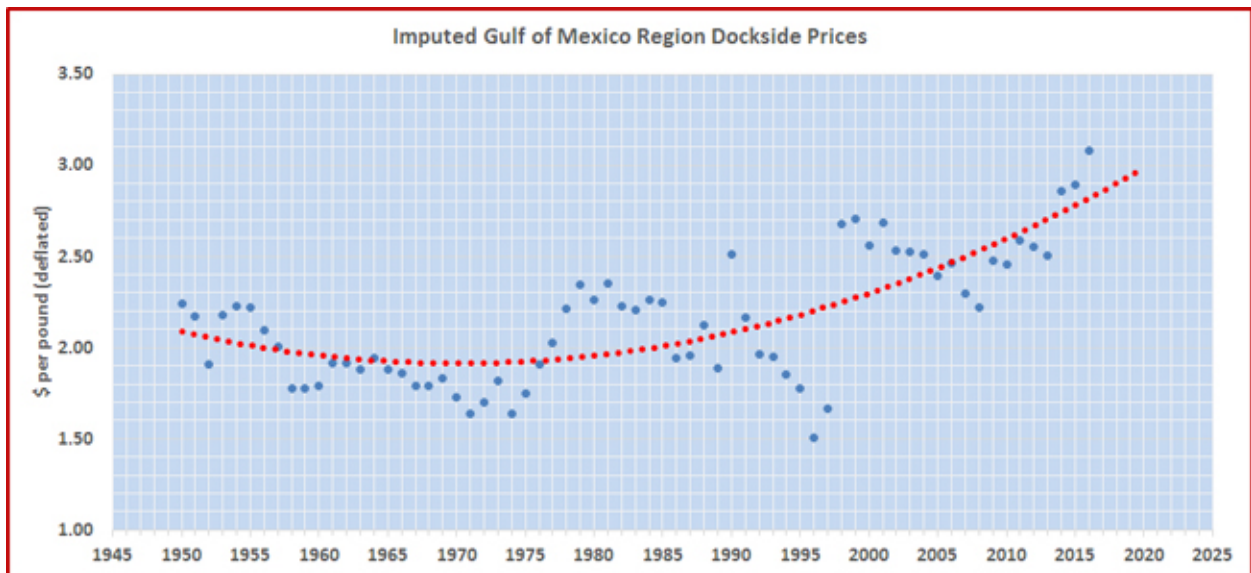


Figure 6. The vertical axis shows the average yearly dockside prices of spotted seatrout since 1990 in dollars per pound. Source of raw data: NOAA Fisheries. <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/>. Last visited: February 5, 2019.

The dockside prices of spotted seatrout in the Gulf of Mexico states have been rising during the past six years, averaging about \$2.74 per pound (Fig. 6). The ex-vessel prices were deflated by the consumer price index (2016=100).

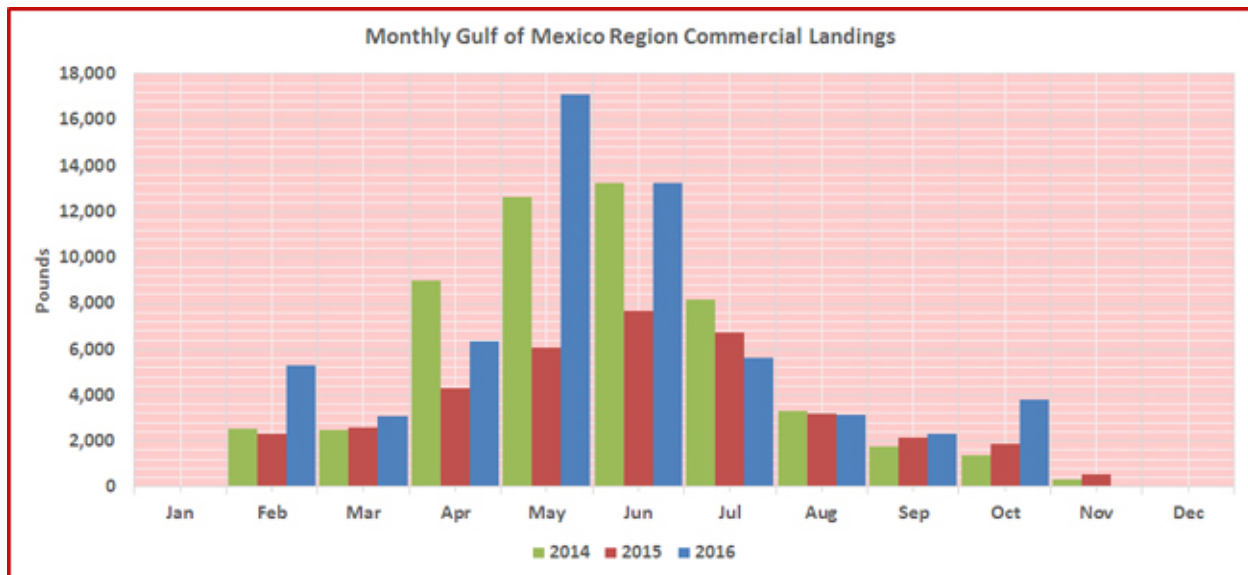


Figure 7. The vertical axis shows the monthly commercial landings of spotted seatrout in pounds in 2014-2016. Source of raw data: NOAA Fisheries. <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/>. Last visited: February 5, 2019.

MarketMaker Seafood Businesses

In 2016, the Gulf-wide commercial landings of spotted seatrout reached more than 62,000 pounds with dockside values about \$191,000. Spotted seatrout are harvested from February to October with peaks between May to July (Fig. 7). More than 12,000 businesses which catch, process, and sell seafood products are registered in MarketMaker nationwide. There are more than 200 businesses which promote their seafood products and services in Mississippi MarketMaker.

To search for seafood businesses in MarketMaker, perform the following procedures:

1. Go to <https://ms.foodmarketmaker.com/main/mmsearch/>
2. Click “search” and type “**Seafood**” in the product box.
3. You can sort the search results by relevance and name.
4. You can also limit online searches by state, and type of business.

Suggested citation:

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<http://extension.msstate.edu/newsletters/mississippi-marketmaker>.