

BRINGING BACK THE FISH: Spotlight on the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic Regions

Interest in recreational fishing has skyrocketed in South Atlantic and Gulf waters over the last several decades. So the failure to maintain healthy fish stocks under this increased demand has come at a cost. For example, it has been estimated that the regions lost a combined \$154 million in recreational angling dollars annually from 2005 to 2009 from declines in red snapper and black sea bass.¹

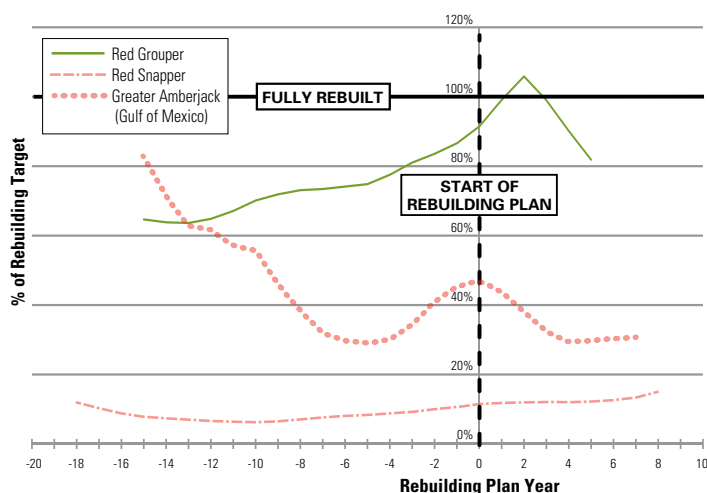
The rebuilding requirements added to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act as part of the Sustainable Fisheries Act (SFA) of 1996 are intended to recapture the direct and indirect benefits that sustainable fisheries provide—and to grow the economic opportunities. Although there are signs of hope, the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico lag behind others in rebuilding the overfished stocks that are so important to these regions' economy and culture.

FISHERIES RECOVERY PROGRESS IN THE GULF OF MEXICO AND ATLANTIC REGIONS: **POOR**

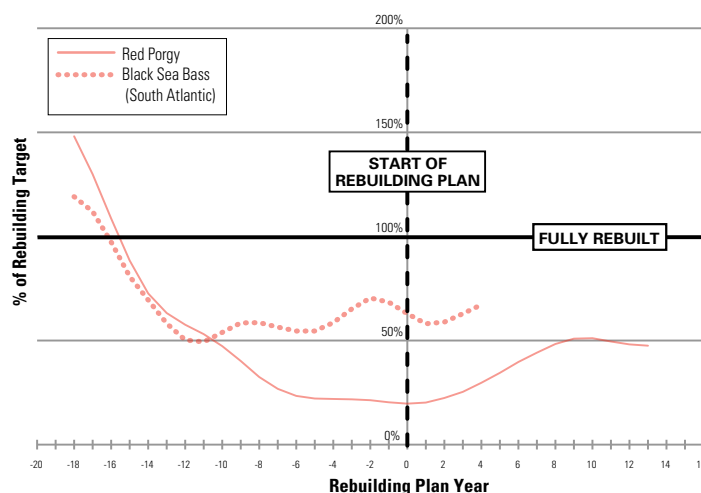
Only one overfished species across the two regions—Gulf red grouper—has been successfully rebuilt under a post-SFA rebuilding plan. South Atlantic black sea bass and red porgy have made some progress, although the latter remains overfished and its recovery has recently stalled. Gulf of Mexico amberjack has made little progress, remains overfished, and is subject to an unsustainable rate of fishing

pressure (i.e., overfishing). Red snapper in both regions are overfished, although there are positive signs for the population in the Gulf. Many stocks in the regions are classified with “unknown” or “undefined” population status and thus cannot trigger rebuilding plans—even stocks widely recognized to be depleted, such as speckled hind and warsaw grouper.

GULF OF MEXICO



SOUTH ATLANTIC



Population trends (3-year moving average). For rebuilt stocks, time series is extended to date of last assessment.
Source: NRDC, *Bringing Back the Fish: An Evaluation of U.S. Fisheries Rebuilding Under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act* (February 2013). www.nrdc.org/oceans/rebuilding-fisheries.asp.



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In *Bringing Back the Fish: An Evaluation of U.S. Fisheries Rebuilding Under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act*, NRDC evaluated all U.S. ocean fish stocks put in rebuilding plans under Section 304(e) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act with sufficient information to evaluate progress (44 stocks). For results from all regions and a national perspective on the rebuilding of all 44 evaluated stocks, please see the full report at www.nrdc.org/oceans/rebuilding-fisheries.asp.



Sarasota Bay, FL

© Tyrone Turner/National Geographic Stock



A FISHERMAN'S PERSPECTIVE:

When Mike Newman started fishing southeast Florida's waters, there were no rules.

He caught as many fish as he wanted. He joined a thousand other boats hovering over spawning grounds for king mackerel on busy weekends.

The commercial fisherman liked it that way, until he was making so little money he couldn't sleep.

"We thought whatever we caught would come back—that's what I was taught in school," the now 48-year-old charter boat owner recalls. "But there were too many people fishing. I fished on it until in my opinion it completely collapsed."

Today, his boat is more often filled with scientists working to restore depleted stocks than anglers paying to catch them. He's begun to see some signs of recovery, like the occasional juvenile sea bass that follows along as he dives a reef.

And he hopes people won't use that progress to loosen limits set by the Magnuson-Stevens Act that he now sees as entirely necessary.

"A whole new group of young fishermen has never seen a fishery the way it should be," Newman said. "They start to see a few little fish, and think everything's good, but they have a stunted perspective. They just don't understand yet."



FISHERIES REBUILDING IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC AND GULF REGIONS

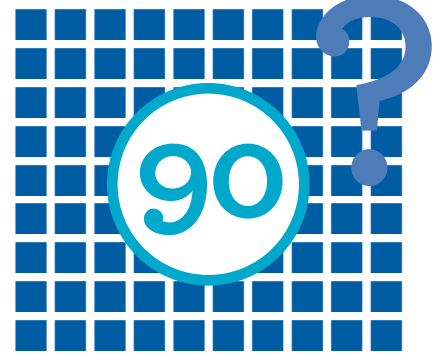
NUMBER OF
REBUILT STOCKS^a



NUMBER OF STOCKS
WITH PRE-2010
REBUILDING PLANS
THAT REMAIN OVER-
FISHED OR DEPLETED^b



NUMBER OF STOCKS
WITH UNKNOWN
OR UNDEFINED
POPULATION STATUS



^a Rebuilt with rebuilding plan implemented under section 304(e) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act; does not include S. Atlantic/Gulf of Mexico yellowtail snapper and Gulf of Mexico king mackerel, which were subject to pre-SFA rebuilding plans (only in the S. Atlantic for yellowtail snapper) and are no longer designated as overfished, or S. Atlantic pink shrimp, which was designated in early 2013 as rebuilt without apparently being subject to a formal rebuilding plan.

^b Includes S. Atlantic black sea bass, which is above the overfished threshold but still rebuilding to a healthy level; does not include Gulf of Mexico gag grouper, Gulf of Mexico grey triggerfish, S. Atlantic red snapper, S. Atlantic red grouper, and S. Atlantic snowy grouper, which have post-2010 rebuilding plans under the SFA and/or no recent assessment.

Sources: NRDC, *Bringing Back the Fish: An Evaluation of U.S. Fisheries Rebuilding Under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act* (February 2013); National Marine Fisheries Service, 4th Quarter Update Table A Summary of Stock Status for FSSI Stocks, available at http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/statusoffisheries/2012/fourth/Q4_2012FSSI_nonFSSIstockstatus.pdf.

¹ Ecotrust, *Economic Costs of Historic Overfishing on Recreational Fisheries: South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Regions*, Report to the Pew Charitable Trusts (July 26, 2012).