

Well, we have witnessed some movement from the Trump administration in regards to actually listening to American fishermen this summer - a vast departure away from the actions by the Obama administration to take us off the water. Roy Crabtree and the EDF-controlled Gulf Council legislated for the private recs to have only 3 days access to OUR federal fisheries this year, while giving the for-hire sector 49 days.

The 3 days came and went without much fanfare. Then, there came news that the Commerce Department was stepping in and picking up the reins of our fisheries management due to the failure of NMFS/EDF/Gulf Council to manage our fisheries in a fair and equitable manner as mandated by our fisheries laws. State fisheries managers and top dogs at Commerce worked out a deal to open up red snapper for American anglers for 39 additional days! The season would consist of 3 day weekends (Fri/Sat/Sun) for the rest of the summer in addition to July 3rd, 4th, and Labor Day.

This action brings a lot of optimism to American recreational fishermen who have seen their access to red snapper swimming in OUR federal waters slashed immensely in the 8 disastrous years of the Obama administration. During that time frame, our seasons went from 194 days / 4 red snapper to 11 days / 2 red snapper last year - a 97% DECREASE in access. However, the commercial IFQ shareholders' access went from 120 days to 365 days - a 300% INCREASE in access. It's painfully obvious to any reasonable, unbiased person who views the results of this federal fisheries "management" that there has been a movement to reward commercial interests at the DIRECT EXPENSE of American recreational fishermen and their families. This needs to change.

The significance of the Commerce Department over-riding the NMFS/EDF/Gulf Council's actions and dealing DIRECTLY with the 5 Gulf states' fisheries managers cannot be overstated. First, it acknowledges that the current federal fisheries management system is not working for the American recreational fishermen and their families and that this administration is not casting a blind eye to that fact. Secondly, it shows that the 5 Gulf states CAN work together to hammer out a deal that is beneficial to all states - this has been extremely hard to achieve in recent years.

To enforce this optimism, the Secretary of Commerce announced this week the appointments of 3 members to the Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council which was a slam dunk for Gulf of Mexico recreational anglers! This is a cataclysmic shift of power at the Gulf Council level, away from the enviro/commercial interests and towards more reasonable, rational fisheries management based on sound biological principles instead of ideological / political agendas. Thank you Sec. Ross!

The Magnuson-Stevens Act is what governs our federal fisheries laws and is up for reauthorization right now. Although there have been some positive moves to help us this summer, if there is to be any meaningful changes for the long term benefit of recreational anglers, there MUST be changes made to the Magnuson.

Right now, the Gulf of Mexico red snapper biomass is managed as one unit. Considering that the Gulf of Mexico is composed of numerous unique ecosystems from Key West, FL to Brownsville, TX, it makes no scientific, ecological, nor economic sense to manage that way. Right now, Texas fishermen and fisheries are being managed based on the needs of Florida fishermen/fisheries. It's like managing Texas deer herds/seasons based on what Alabama deer populations/hunters are doing. It's ludicrous, and this needs to be changed in the Magnuson. Recreational fishermen are entitled to enjoy optimum yield of our fisheries as mandated in Magnuson - managing the fishery as one unit does not allow that to happen.

Not only are there regional ecosystem differences, but there are jurisdictional differences as well. The federal government has been overstepping its Constitutional authority by counting fish caught in state waters and counting that towards our federal quota. The Magnuson defines the extent of its authority as stopping at the state/federal demarcation line, yet our federal fisheries managers point to the above "managing as one unit" as justification for sticking their noses into state jurisdiction. They are claiming that we are catching 81% of our federal quota in state waters this year - a truly ludicrous proposition, yet they are using this as justification for further ratcheting down our season to just 3 days this year. This needs to be changed in the Magnuson. It's none of the Fed's business what happens in state waters.

Right now, Gulf of Mexico red snapper fishermen/fisheries are being managed the same as commercial fishermen/fisheries - constrained by annual catch poundage. Commercial fishing operations sell their fish by the pound and they should be managed by the pound. Recreational legal tender is access; season days / bag limits. Who cares what a speckled trout weighs, or a duck or a deer? It doesn't matter since the wildlife resources are managed very well using the tried and true method of setting seasons / bag limits based on what the wildlife resource can SUSTAINABLY allow. This needs to be changed in the Magnuson.

The federal government gave away "ownership" rights to 51% of our red snapper via Catch Shares FOR FREE to a few well-connected commercial corporations in the 2006 reauthorization. Today, these shares are worth about \$1/4 BILLION dollars. Our Public Trust Resources have been taken from the many (ALL Americans) and given to a few corporations for their exclusive access/benefit. In addition, they are exempted from paying royalties to the nation for the privilege of profiting from the harvest of what we ALL own! To add insult to injury, these shareholders actually COLLECT our nation's royalties when they lease OUR fish. A large % of these IFQ shareholders do not even own a commercial fishing permit any more - they simply "lease" their quota, making 6 to 7 figure salaries, to commercial fishermen relegated to "Catch Sharecropper" status. Can you say "mafia-style hostile takeover of our fisheries"? Theodore Roosevelt is turning over in his grave right now, as his vision to preserve our Public Trust Resources "for the enjoyment and benefit of the People" has been under full frontal attack by enviro/commercial interests in their zeal to privatize our Public Trust Resources through Catch Shares. It's ALREADY in the Magnuson that the councils have the power to levy resource rent or royalties on the IFQ shareholders, yet for some strange reason have elected not to do so. This needs to change. The commercial fishermen actually doing the fishing should be required to lease their fish each year directly from the government - NOT from IFQ shareholders, and this needs to be spelled out in the Magnuson.

Make no mistake, most ALL of the problems we are facing today are a DIRECT RESULT of the changes made to Magnuson in 2006 - we have an opportunity to right those wrongs in this year's reauthorization. Make sure that your Congressman makes these changes happen!