

Texas Saltwater Fisheries Management Explained

Introduction to Fisheries Management



WHAT IS FISHERIES MANAGEMENT?

Fisheries management is the practice of regulating fishing activities and managing habitats and fish populations to ensure fishery resources remain healthy, productive, and sustainable over time. The overall goals of fisheries management are to prevent overfishing, rebuild and maintain fish populations, protect habitats, support the economic and cultural value of fishing communities, and conduct public outreach and education. Management actions may include regulations that determine how many fish can be caught, their allowable sizes, and how, when, and where fishing is allowed.

Texas ecosystems support thriving saltwater fisheries. Saltwater, or marine, fisheries include fish and shellfish populations found in Texas' coastal bays, estuaries, and Gulf of America waters. Texas saltwater fisheries include Red Drum, Spotted Seatrout, snapper, grouper, shrimp, oysters, crab, and much more.

WHO MANAGES MARINE FISHERIES IN THE U.S.?

Depending on where you are fishing and what you are fishing for, marine fisheries in the U.S. are managed through a system that involves both state and federal agencies and numerous partners working together to support sustainable fishing and healthy fish populations.

Goals of Fisheries Management

- ***Maintain Sustainable Fisheries***
Allow fishing to continue at levels that provide food, jobs, and economic benefits while preserving long-term stock health.
- ***Protect Marine Ecosystems***
Minimize impacts on habitats, non-target species (bycatch), and the broader ecosystem.
- ***Prevent Overfishing and Rebuild Overfished Stocks***
Ensure that fish are not harvested faster than they can reproduce, and implement rebuilding plans when populations fall below healthy levels.
- ***Provide Fair and Equitable Access***
Balance fishing opportunities among commercial, charter, and recreational sectors and support consumer access to local sustainably harvested seafood.
- ***Educate and Engage the Public***
Increase public understanding of how management decisions are made, the science behind fisheries management, and opportunities for public participation.



Texas Waters

Fishing Regulations

Texas State marine fisheries are managed by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD). TPWD sets fishing regulations such as seasons, bag limits, size limits, gear types, and harvest areas, which are enforced by TPWD's Game Wardens. Current regulations can be found in the Outdoor Annual app at tx.ag/OutdoorAnnual. Texas state waters extend from the shoreline out to 9 nautical miles.

Fisheries Enhancement Programs

TPWD supports coastal fisheries through fish stocking programs that raise species such as Red Drum, Spotted Seatrout, and Southern Flounder at three saltwater hatcheries: Sea Center Texas (Lake Jackson), Perry R. Bass Marine Hatchery (Palacios), and the CCA Marine Development Center (Corpus Christi). They release juvenile fish into coastal bays to enhance recreational fisheries.

TPWD's Artificial Reef Program builds marine habitats using manmade structures like ships, oil and gas platforms, and concrete structures. These reefs attract smaller fish and invertebrates, which in turn draw sportfish like snapper and grouper.

Regional Coordination

Regional coordination helps oversee species that cross state boundaries. The Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission is an interstate partnership of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. Though not a regulatory agency, it promotes collaboration among states, coordinates research and management efforts, and provides key fisheries information. The Commission includes 15 members, three from each state, representing legislators, managers, scientists, and citizens.

U.S. Federal Waters

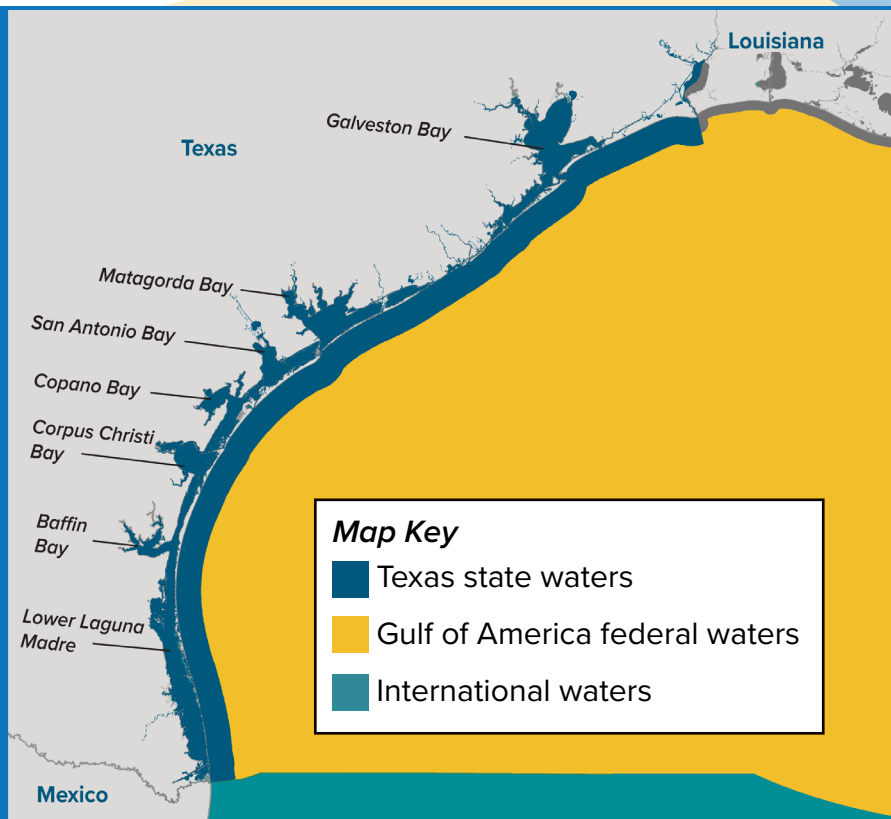
In the Gulf, marine fisheries in federal waters are managed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) using recommendations made by the Gulf Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council). Federally managed Gulf fishery resources include species such as reef fish (snapper, grouper, jacks, and more), coastal migratory pelagics (mackerel and cobia), spiny lobster, and coral. Council members include representatives from the commercial, recreational, and charter-for-hire fishing industries, along with scientists and other stakeholders. The five Gulf states collaboratively participate in federal fisheries management through the Gulf Council. Each state's marine resource management agency has a representative on the Council, and each state's governor nominates individuals for appointment to Council seats.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is also a key federal partner. Together, USFWS, NOAA, and state agency representatives administer the Endangered Species Act to conserve listed species and their habitats. Additionally, USFWS supports U.S. fisheries through its National Fish Hatchery System and its monitoring and habitat restoration projects. These initiatives help strengthen coastal ecosystems, recreational fishing opportunities, and aid in the recovery of threatened species.

Map of Texas State Waters and U.S. Federal Waters

Texas state waters extend from the shoreline out to 9 nautical miles.

Off the coast of Texas, Gulf of America federal waters extend from 9-200 nm offshore.



LEGISLATION

Texas State Laws

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Code grants TPWD the authority to manage Texas fisheries, including establishing regulations, conducting research, and enforcing laws. Regulations are adopted through the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission and are guided by science, stakeholder input, and coordination with federal and regional partners.

Federal Laws

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) is the primary law governing U.S. fisheries. Enacted in 1976, the MSA's goal is to ensure the long-term economic and biological sustainability of these resources. It aims to prevent overfishing, rebuild overfished stocks, increase economic and social benefits, provide a safe and sustainable supply of seafood, and protect essential fish habitat.

Other federal laws - including the Endangered Species Act (ESA), Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) - also guide fisheries management. These laws protect vulnerable species and their habitats, reduce harm to marine life from fishing activities, and require federal agencies to evaluate and minimize environmental impacts when making management decisions. Together, they help safeguard threatened and endangered species and marine mammals like whales and dolphins.

STAY INFORMED: LEARN HOW FISHERIES ARE MANAGED

Understanding how fisheries are managed helps you participate confidently and make your voice heard. Whether you want to stay informed or actively weigh in on decisions, there are options that fit your schedule and comfort level.

The best way to stay informed is to get information directly from the agencies responsible for managing fisheries in Texas and federal waters.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD)	<i>Manages fisheries in Texas state waters</i> • Learn about regulations, fisheries enhancement programs, and research initiatives through TPWD Fisheries Management: https://tx.ag/tpwdmanagement • Download the Outdoor Annual app for Texas fishing, boating, and hunting regulations: https://tx.ag/outdoorannual • Follow on social media: Facebook: Texas Parks and Wildlife Instagram: @texasparksandwildlife
Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC)	<i>Coordinates management efforts across the five Gulf states</i> • Learn about regional initiatives and interstate committees: https://www.gsmfc.org/ • Follow on social media: Facebook: Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission
Gulf Council	<i>Develops management measures for federal waters in the Gulf</i> • Follow meeting schedules and proposed management changes: http://gulfcouncil.org • Sign up for email updates • Download the Fish Rules app for U.S. fishing regulations: https://fishrulesapp.com/ • Get familiar with the Council process: https://tx.ag/CouncilProcess • Follow on social media: Facebook: Gulf Council Instagram: @gulf_council
NOAA Fisheries	<i>Oversees federal fisheries management and implementation</i> • Website: https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/ • Southeast fishing regulations, permits, and updates: https://tx.ag/SENOAAFisheries • Sign up for email or text updates and review Southeast Fishery Bulletins: https://tx.ag/NOAAsignup • Follow on social media: Facebook: NOAA Fisheries Instagram: @noaafisheries
Marine Resource Education Program (MREP)	<i>Free, fishermen-led training program that equips participants to engage in fisheries science and management</i> • Learn more and apply to a regional MREP workshop: https://tx.ag/ApplyMREP

GET INVOLVED: PARTICIPATE IN FISHERIES DECISIONS

Fishermen, seafood consumers, scientists, and other stakeholders all play important roles by sharing local knowledge, data, and experience that guide management decisions.

You should get involved because:

- Management affects your livelihood, business, food source, or hobby.
- Stakeholders often have different perspectives on what defines a healthy fishery and how fisheries should be managed. Input from recreational anglers, commercial fishermen, charter captains, and other users helps fishery managers better understand stakeholders' priorities and concerns when developing management measures. Every voice counts.

How to Get Involved

Share Your Input on Proposed Changes

Give Testimony

1. Register to speak at the meeting before the public comment session begins. Some meetings also allow attendees participating online to provide virtual comments.
2. State your name and affiliation (e.g., "John Doe, charter captain from Galveston, Texas")
3. You can prepare notes in advance and read from them when it's your turn to speak, or share what comes to mind on the issues you want to address.
4. You typically have 2–3 minutes.
5. Be respectful of time limits so others can speak.

In Writing

If you prefer not to speak publicly, you can submit written feedback.

- Gulf Council
 - Email gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org
 - Submit online comment: <https://gulfcouncil.org/fishery-management/public-comment/>
- TPWD
 - Call or email your fisheries managers: <https://tx.ag/TPWDfieldoffices>
 - Submit online comment: <https://tx.ag/TPWDpubliccomment>

Agencies may also request feedback outside of meetings through surveys or formal comment periods.

Anonymous Option

The Gulf Council offers a voicemail line for anonymous public comment: 850-297-2883

Attend Public Meetings

Fisheries management meetings are open to the public and typically offer in-person and virtual attendance options.

Attending meetings allows you to:

- Hear proposed changes before they take effect
- Listen to perspectives from other fishermen
- Ask questions of managers
- Prepare to share your own input

Gulf Council

- Meets five times per year, rotating among Gulf states.
- Also hosts advisory panel meetings, public hearings, and scoping workshops.
- All meetings are open to the public, and meeting minutes and summaries are archived on the Council's website.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission

- Holds at least four meetings annually at TPWD headquarters in Austin, TX.
- Includes a public hearing each August on proposed fishing regulations.
- Additional public scoping meetings and hearings are held along the coast and virtually when regulation changes affecting stakeholders are being considered.
- All meetings are open to the public.

CHOOSE YOUR PREFERRED METHOD

STAY ANONYMOUS



Leave a voicemail comment.

WRITE IT DOWN



Submit comments online or by email.

JOIN VIRTUALLY



Give public comment during a meeting.

SPEAK IN PERSON



Attend a meeting and share input directly.

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