

ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE
FISHERIES
INFORMATION NETWORK IN
THE SOUTHEAST REGION
(FIN)

JANUARY 1, 2023 - DECEMBER 31, 2023

APRIL 2024

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WHO WE ARE

The need for a comprehensive and cooperative data collection program has never been greater because of the magnitude of the recreational and commercial fisheries and the differing roles and responsibilities of the agencies involved. Many southeastern stocks targeted by anglers are now depleted, due primarily to excessive harvest, habitat loss, and degradation. The information needs of today's management regimes require data, which are statistically sound, long-term in scope, timely, and comprehensive. A cooperative partnership between state and federal agencies is the most appropriate mechanism to accomplish these goals. The Fisheries Information Network (FIN) is a state-federal cooperative program to collect, manage, and disseminate statistical data and information on the marine commercial and recreational fisheries of the Southeast Region. The scope of GulfFIN includes representation from seven state agencies in the region, NOAA Fisheries, Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, Caribbean Fishery Management Council and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Program Organization

The organizational structure consists of the GulfFIN Committee, two geographic subcommittees (Caribbean and Gulf), standing and ad hoc subcommittees, technical work groups, and administrative support (Figure 1).

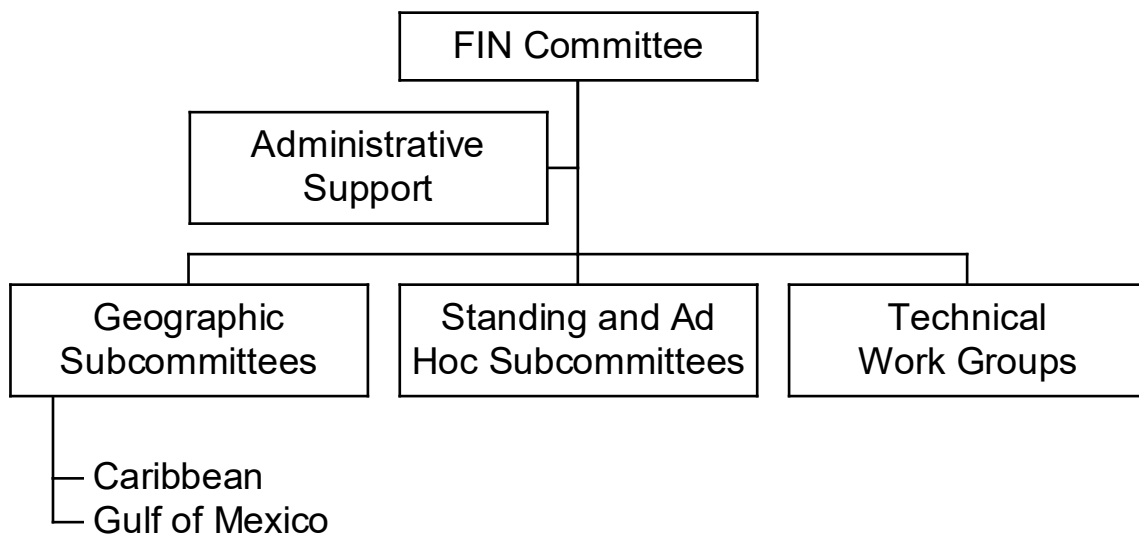


Figure 1. Organizational structure of the FIN.

WHAT WE DO

GulfFIN is a comprehensive program comprised of coordinated data collection activities, an integrated data management and retrieval system, and procedures for information dissemination. Activities during 2023 were associated with addressing issues and problems regarding data

collection and management and developing strategies for dealing with these topics. In addition to committee activities, FIN was involved in various operational activities concerning the collection and management of marine commercial and recreational fisheries data. These activities were conducted by the various state and federal agencies involved in FIN. Each type of activity is discussed below.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Collecting, Managing and Disseminating Marine Recreational Fisheries Data

Marine recreational landings data often provide a direct measure of the effectiveness of management efforts and are important inputs in the stock assessment process. These datasets can also be extremely useful in assessing mortality that results from recreational angling effort. GulfFIN recognizes this need and supports the conduct of the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) survey in Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. GulfFIN provides coordination of the surveys, an access-point intercept survey (AP AIS) of shore, for-hire and private boat anglers to estimate angler catch using the existing MRIP methodology which is conducted by state biologists. GSMFC staff oversee the quality control of electronic data that is uploaded from port sampler tablets. These data are combined with the NMFS Fishing Effort survey data to allow for estimation of total catch and landings for all species encountered along with total fishing effort estimation as well. The states also conduct weekly telephone calls to a 10% random sample of the Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida (east and west coast) charter boat captains to obtain estimates of charter boat fishing effort. GulfFIN also provided partial support for Louisiana Creel field surveys which have been implemented to replace MRIP in Louisiana. GulfFIN also provided financial support to collect enhanced recreational samples in Texas along with supporting Alabama Snapper Check and a small amount of financial support for Mississippi Tails n’ Scales to support ACL monitoring of red snapper. The table below shows the number of dockside assignments and angler interviews the state samplers conducted for each mode.



2023 Numbers of Dockside Assignments and Interviews						
State	Assignments			Interviews		
	SH	CH/PR	Total	SH	CH/PR	Total
Florida - East	265	1098	1363	1955	8723	10678
Florida - West	531	1640	2171	4278	12106	16384
Alabama	127	443	570	1439	4510	5949
Mississippi	101	357	458	163	1601	1764
				CH	PR	Total
Louisiana				2572	8103	10675
Texas (red snapper trips sampled)					375	375

2023 For-hire Telephone Survey Response Rates

RESPONDENTS					NONRESPONDENTS					
State	Active eligible	Inactive eligible	Ineligibles	Subtotal	Refusal	Non-contacts number	attempts	No contact possible	Subtotal	Total
Florida										
Region 1	1337	52	108	1497	207	0	568	5.0	3	778
Region 2	1851	152	158	2161	229	0	1342	5.0	20	1591
Region 3	800	66	41	907	67	0	941	5.0	8	1016
Region 4	864	30	47	941	158	0	605	5.3	4	767
Region 5	1018	82	139	1239	177	0	805	5.1	14	996
FL totals	5870	382	493	6745	838	0	4261	5.1	49	5148
Alabama	1123	96	218	1437	81	0	232	5.9	4	317
Mississippi	262	3	0	265	0	0	143	4.2	1	144
Total	7255	481	711	8447	919	0	4636	5.1	54	5609

RESPONDENTS					NONRESPONDENTS					
State	Active eligible	Inactive eligible	Ineligibles	Subtotal	Refusal	Non contacts		No contact possible	Subtotal	Total
Florida										
Region 1	58.8%	2.3%	4.7%	65.8%	9.1%	0.0%	25.0%		0.1%	34.2%
Region 2	49.3%	4.1%	4.2%	57.6%	6.1%	0.0%	35.8%		0.5%	42.4%
Region 3	41.6%	3.4%	2.1%	47.2%	3.5%	0.0%	48.9%		0.4%	52.8%
Region 4	50.6%	1.8%	2.8%	55.1%	9.3%	0.0%	35.4%		0.2%	44.9%
Region 5	45.5%	3.7%	6.2%	55.4%	7.9%	0.0%	36.0%		0.6%	44.6%
FL totals	49.4%	3.2%	4.1%	56.7%	7.0%	0.0%	35.8%		0.4%	43.3%
Alabama	64.0%	5.5%	12.4%	81.9%	4.6%	0.0%	13.2%		0.2%	18.1%
Mississippi	64.1%	0.7%	0.0%	64.8%	0.0%	0.0%	35.0%		0.2%	35.2%
Total	51.6%	3.4%	5.1%	60.1%	6.5%	0.0%	33.0%		0.4%	39.9%

Southeast Region Headboat Sampling

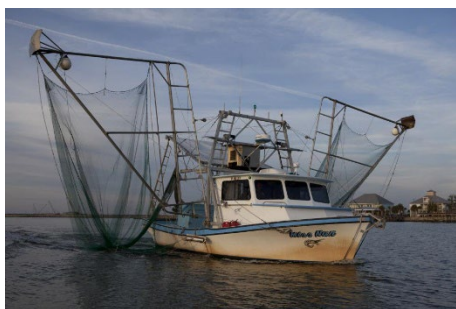
The Southeast Region Headboat Survey (SRHS) is administered by the Beaufort Laboratory of the NOAA Fisheries Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC). The survey has operated along the southeast U.S. Atlantic since 1972 and in the Gulf of Mexico since 1986. Although not directly supported with GulfFIN funding, monies are provided to assist with the port sampling portion of this project. The GSMFC subcontracted with individuals to sample headboat catches in the states of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. GSMFC also subcontracted with the state of Florida to hire personnel as port agents to intercept headboats and sample their catches dockside. These port agents collect various data such as, length/weight observations on fishes in the headboat catches; otoliths, gonads, and other biological materials from selected species as prioritized. Collectively these port agents sampled 643 trips, measured 19,481 fish and collected 4,351 otoliths and spines from January 1, 2023 to December 31,

2023. Along with dockside sampling duties, port agents QA\QC vessel trip reports and monitor reporting compliance for each headboat in their area of responsibility. This information is summarized in bi-monthly landings estimates and annual estimates that are used for monitoring Annual Catch Limits (ACL) and stock assessments analyses. The port agents submitted all data, weekly reports, sampling schedules, and other pertinent information to NMFS-Beaufort Laboratory on established deadlines.

STATE	NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS	NUMBER OF FISH MEASURED	NUMBER OF HARD PARTS
AL	66	3253	709
LA/MS	44	1271	440
WFL	332	10783	2386
TX	201	4174	816
TOTAL	643	19481	4351

Trip Ticket Program Operations

To fully characterize marine fishery removals, it is necessary to have accurate landings data from the commercial fishery. GulfFIN supports full operation of a commercial trip ticket program to census the commercial landings in the Gulf of Mexico using the data elements and standards developed by the GulfFIN. In addition, GulfFIN provides funding to contract for implementation and operation of an electronic reporting system as well as reporting of data for the quota monitoring and IFQ programs. For 2023, there were approximately 1,200 commercial dealers and processors in Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas who were utilizing this program. The new web based VESL system is in production for Florida, Texas and Mississippi and work should be completed in 2024 to provide VESL for Louisiana and Alabama dealers as well.



Development and Implementation of FIN Data Management System (DMS)

Storage and dissemination of data are a vital component to GulfFIN. Creating a system of secure storage and easy access for state and federal partners to access GulfFIN databases is critical to increasing the amount and quality of data available for science and management. Funding is utilized to support a GulfFIN Data Base Manager and ComFIN Survey Coordinator who will, in conjunction with the ACCSP, work on developing more data modules for the FIN and ACCSP data management systems. This also supports all the hardware and software requirements needed by GulfFIN to implement necessary information technology infrastructure. Responsibilities of staff include further development of data modules structures; routine loading of state commercial catch effort data, Gulf biological data, Gulf recreational data and maintenance of DMS. More

information regarding the GulfFIN Data Management System can be found at <https://www.gsmfc.org/fin-dms.php>.

Biological Sampling of Recreational Catches

Biological age and length data are essential to accurately assessing the status of commercial and recreational species. GulfFIN has worked hard to provide funding to support the collection and processing of age structures from important management species. All five states have developed more representative sampling methods to obtain biological data based on random sampling techniques similar to dockside sampling catch landings surveys. The hope is that as methods are refined we could take a standardized approach in all states. GulfFIN provided funding for collection, processing and analysis of these data. The primary target species include black drum, gag, gray snapper, gray triggerfish, greater amberjack, king mackerel, red drum, red grouper, red snapper, sheepshead, flounders (gulf & southern), spotted seatrout, striped mullet and vermilion snapper although many other species are also collected. The amount of funding that was available was significantly less than a normal year so sampling levels were reduced. Some of the collection totals are a result of state cost share. Worth noting that Florida collected over 8,000 age structures and 20,000 additional lengths for 195 different species through additional state funded sampling efforts.



STATE	NUMBER OF SPECIES	NUMBER OF AGE STRUCTURES	NUMBER OF LENGTHS
FL	66	2290	2502
AL	15	478	483
MS	9	430	866
LA	15	9183	12085
TX	9	3247	3241

Coordination and Administration of FIN Activities

Working closely with the Committee in all aspects of program coordination, administration, and operation was a major function of FIN coordination and administrative support. Other important coordination and administrative activities included but were not limited to: providing coordination and logistical support, including communications and organization of meetings for the Committee, subcommittees, and work groups; serving as liaison between the Committee, other program participants, and other interested organizations; preparing annual operations plans under the direction of the Committee; preparing and/or supervising and coordinating preparation of selected documents, including written records of all meetings; and distributing approved FIN information and data in accordance with accepted policies and procedures.

In 2023 FIN also assisted in the administration of funds to support:

- *Alabama Snapper Check Implementation* – This task provides funding support through Modernizing Recreational Fisheries Management Act to support red snapper monitoring in Alabama. Funding was used to support vessel operator reporting tools along with the creation and support of an electronic application for collecting dockside validation surveys.
- *Commercial Conversion Factor Research* - The objective of this project is to conduct continued research with the Gulf state partners to improve the quality and accuracy of commercial data by collecting and analyzing priority species samples to validate, verify, and update conversion factors used to determine whole (live) weight of commercial landings from reported units (ex. Gutted to whole, bushels to pounds, units to pounds). This allows for commercial landings to be reported accurately in common currency for use in stock assessment and management. This next step has focused on key reef fish species like red snapper and groupers.
- *GulfFIN Strategic Planning Session* – GulfFIN participates in facilitated strategic planning sessions every 3-5 years to help determine regional data collection priorities that will inform changing needs of state/federal science and management. This session was facilitated by CI Solutions and was highly effective for identifying the most important current priorities. The committee determined that centralizing regional fishery dependent data within the GulfFIN Data Management System, working on a pathway toward integrated recreational surveys that can be used together, and phasing out paper reporting methods for trip ticket transactions to be the most important priorities for the next 2-3 years of GulfFIN work.
- *LDWF Trip Ticket QR Code Project* – The objective of this project is to create an import process within VESL mobile to scan a QR code, capture the information encoded and use the data to populate the appropriate fields in the trip ticket form. The goal is to make it easier for dealers to instigate an electronic trip ticket transaction and also increase the accuracy of dealer id data linked to the transaction.
- *Early Adopter Shrimp eLB Project* – The objective of this project is to establish an early adopter project for the federal shrimp fishery that responds to efforts for developing modernized shrimp effort data collection program. The hope is to get shrimp vessels equipped with new electronic monitoring devices that provides shrimp fishing effort data back to NOAA Fisheries for the purpose of monitoring the shrimp fishery. Current devices are being phased out due to 3G cellular technology no longer being supported. GSMFC submitted a RFP and subsequently awarded a subcontract to LGL Ecological Research Associates to administer this project.

COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

FIN Committee

The GulfFIN Committee met in October 2023 in conjunction with the GSMFC Annual Meeting. There were a variety of important issues addressed. The issues discussed during the meeting included:

- A discussion on GSMFC Oracle Cloud Transition Process;
- Updates from the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) including a review of the MRIP Transition Team Research Plan;
- An update on GSMFC Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding activities;
- A discussion on MRIP For-Hire Survey (FHS) next steps including recommendations for restoring the Southeast For-Hire Integrated Electronic Reporting (SEFHIER) program;
- A presentation on the Alabama BigFin electronic measuring board project;
- A discussion on the reef fish conversion factor project;
- Updates on the progress of VESL commercial trip ticket reporting program development;
- A discussion and approval of a resolution to honor Charlie Gardner;
- Discussion on the frequency of election of officers;

Subcommittees and Work Groups

A couple FIN subcommittees met during the year to provide recommendations to the Committee to formulate administrative policies, address specific technical issues for accomplishing many of the FIN goals and objectives, and to examine other issues as decided by the Committee. Many of the normal subcommittees did not meet due to the COVID19 pandemic and other priorities that took up state and federal partner time. A summary of the normal subcommittee activities is provided below.

- The annual Otolith Processor Training Workshop held in April 2023. This was the first time this meeting was convened since 2020. Age sample collection and processing remains an essential data component in the stock assessment process. Overall, the state labs that are processing and reading otoliths do an exceptional job which is represented in the low average percent error (APE) from the historical reference set readings. State processing labs continued to work as possible to process and read age structures. GulfFIN fills a large data gap by providing the majority of recreational samples available for the Gulf of Mexico and East Florida. During the 2023 workshop Dr. Jennifer Potts led a gray triggerfish ageing training session. She shared recent validation work on gray triggerfish and suggested that

these findings would require re-ageing fish age-5 and older using these new methods. You can see the results from 2015-2019 and 2023 reading exercises in the table below. For most species an APE of 5 or lower is a good result. Reference set coordinators are distributing sets again and our hope is to have an in-person processors meeting sometime in early 2023.

Species	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2023
Black drum	0.11	0.00	0.00	NR	0.00	NR
Red drum	1.05	1.83	1.33	0.00	NR	0.09
Spotted seatrout	1.09	0.86	4.97	NR	0.00	NR
Southern flounder	4.57	6.48	1.85	3.79	2.29	1.80
Striped mullet	2.58	3.12	2.67	2.04	NR	3.40
Sheepshead	0.33	0.00	0.00	NR	0.00	NR
Red snapper	3.33	0.98	0.00	1.22	0.97	3.70
Gray snapper	0.44	0.80	0.50	0.53	NR	3.00
Vermilion snapper	6.70	7.47	8.93	6.48	6.08	7.80
King mackerel	4.71	7.84	5.79	2.89	7.20	11.10
Greater amberjack	4.96	10.88	9.65	6.79	10.30	14.00
Gray triggerfish	10.64	22.33	11.08	6.02	11.37	11.70
Gulf menhaden	7.69	14.36	10.70	5.67	8.86	NR
Gag				6.25	3.74	4.20
Atlantic croaker				0.00	0.00	0.00
Southern kingfish				6.11	3.63	12.90
Cobia				2.67	10.22	5.80

- The State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee also met in October 2023 in conjunction with the October GSMFC Fall Meeting to determine the activities for inclusion in the 2024 FIN cooperative agreement; to discuss and approve 2024 SEAMAP funding; to receive an update on the IJ State Research Funding for 2024; to receive the Menhaden Advisory Committee report; a presentation on the GSMFC IRA funding activities; a presentation on the Gulf Commercial Fisherman Program; and a presentation on Aquatic Species Conversion Gap Analysis by US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Information Dissemination

Committee members and staff provided program information via a variety of different methods such as distribution of program documents, presentation to various groups interested in the FIN, and via the Internet:

- FIN Committee. 2022. *Annual Report of the Fisheries Information Network for the Southeastern United States (FIN) January 1, 2022 - December 31, 2022*. No. 323 Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, Ocean Springs. 30 pp + appendices.
- FIN Committee. 2021. *Annual Report of the Fisheries Information Network for the Southeastern United States (FIN) January 1, 2021 - December 31, 2021*. No. 315 Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, Ocean Springs. 37 pp + appendices.
- FIN Committee. 2020. *Annual Report of the Fisheries Information Network for the Southeastern United States (FIN) January 1, 2020 - December 31, 2020*. No. 309 Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, Ocean Springs. 38 pp + appendices.
- FIN Committee. 2019. *Annual Report of the Fisheries Information Network for the Southeastern United States (FIN) January 1, 2019 - December 31, 2019*. No. 303 Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, Ocean Springs. 34 pp + appendices.
- FIN Committee. 2019. *2019 Operations Plan for Fisheries Information Network (FIN)*. No. 290 Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, Ocean Springs. 20 pp + appendix.
- FIN Committee. 2018. *Annual Report of the Fisheries Information Network for the Southeastern United States (FIN) January 1, 2018 - December 31, 2018*. No. 289 Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, Ocean Springs. 43 pp + appendices.
- FIN Committee. 2018. *2018 Operations Plan for Fisheries Information Network (FIN)*. No. 273 Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, Ocean Springs. 26 pp + appendix.
- FIN Committee. 2017. *Annual Report of the Fisheries Information Network for the Southeastern United States (FIN) January 1, 2017 - December 31, 2017*. No. 277 Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, Ocean Springs. 51 pp + appendices.
- FIN Committee. 2016. *Annual Report of the Fisheries Information Network for the Southeastern United States (FIN) January 1, 2016 - December 31, 2016*. No. 272 Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, Ocean Springs. 51 pp + appendices.
- *Current Issues Facing Recreational Fisheries Management*. No. 271 Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, Ocean Springs. 13pp.
- FIN Committee. 2017. *2017 Operations Plan for Fisheries Information Network (FIN)*. No. 252 Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, Ocean Springs. 26 pp + appendix.

- FIN Committee. 2016. *2016 Operations Plan for Fisheries Information Network (FIN)*. No. 251 Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, Ocean Springs. 26 pp + appendix.
- FIN Committee. 2015. *Annual Report of the Fisheries Information Network for the Southeastern United States (FIN) January 1, 2015 - December 31, 2015*. No. 250 Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, Ocean Springs. 53 pp + appendices.
- FIN Committee. 2015. *2015 Operations Plan for Fisheries Information Network (FIN)*. No. 232 Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, Ocean Springs. 29 pp + appendix.
- FIN Committee. 2014. *Annual Report of the Fisheries Information Network for the Southeastern United States (FIN) January 1, 2014 - December 31, 2014*. No. 248 Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, Ocean Springs. 22 pp + appendices.
- Variety of informal discussions occurred throughout the year during ASMFC, GSMFC, NMFS, and other participating agencies meetings and workshops.
- The FIN has developed a data management system that provides access to commercial and recreational data for the Gulf States. There are two levels of access: confidential and non-confidential and users can request access via the FIN DMS web site (www.gsmfc.org/data.html)
- NMFS provides a user-friendly data management system (DMS) for the MRIP that is accessible via the web (www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/st1/recreational/index.html)
- GSMFC has developed a home page that provides programmatic and operational information regarding FIN.

If you are interested in any of the documents, they are available upon request from the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission office.

TABLE 1. PROPOSED ACTIVITIES FOR GulfFIN IN 2019 – 2022

	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>	2022
Planning, Management, and Evaluation				
Operations plans				
B1-Development of annual operations plans	X	X	X	X
B2-Development of Funding Initiatives to Establish Marine Recreational Fisheries Surveys	X	X	X	X
B5-Define approach for assessing partner needs and requirements	X			
Information dissemination				
B3-Disseminate Program Information	X	X	X	X
B4-Coordinate with ACCSP and NMFS to develop outreach/education materials	X	X	X	X
B4-Use Internet communications	X	X	X	
Program review				
B5-Conduct periodic FIN strategic planning			X	
Data Collection				
Operational activities				
A1-Operation of Trip Ticket Programs	X	X	X	X
A2-Design, Implementation, Maintenance of Data Management System	X	X	X	X
A3-Collection of Recreational Fisheries Data	X	X	X	X
Quality control/assurance				
B6-Port Samplers Workshops	X	X	X	
B7-Otolith Processors Training Workshops	X	X	X	X
B8-Review of commercial QA/QC standards	X			
B10-Expand approach for validating commercial conversion factors	X	X	X	X
B11-Review of recreational QA/QC standards	X			
Coordination of data collection				
B9-Evaluate biological sampling strategies	X	X		
B11-Development of recreational data standards	X	X		
B13-Explore Strategies for In-Season Quota Monitoring	X	X	X	X
B14-Improve Timeliness of Data to Support Quota Monitoring	X	X	X	X
Innovative collection technology				
B12-Evaluate innovative data collection technologies	X	X	X	X
Data Management				
Hardware/software capabilities				
B15-Review hardware/software capabilities	X	X	X	X
Innovative data management technology				
B12-Evaluate innovative data management technologies	X	X	X	X
Development of National Program				
Long-term and coordination with other programs planning				
B16-Implementation of Long-Term National Planning	X	X	X	X
B17-Coordination with ACCSP and Pacific RecFIN	X	X	X	X

TABLE 2. FIN COMMITTEE MEMBERS FOR 2022

Nicole Beckham
Alabama Marine Resources Division

Ken Brennan
NOAA Fisheries
Beaufort Laboratory

Steve Brown/Chris Bradshaw
Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute

Marie Head
Alabama Marine Resources Division

Gregg Bray
Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission

Justin Esslinger
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Graciela Garcia-Moliner
Caribbean Fishery Management Council

Alan Lowther
NOAA Fisheries
Southeast Fisheries Science Center

Joel Anderson
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Michael Harden
Louisiana Department of Wildlife and
Fisheries

Lisa Hollensead
Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

Daniel Matos-Caraballo
Puerto Rico Department of Natural and
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Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute

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Megan Fleming
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Jessica Stephen
NOAA Fisheries
Southeast Regional Office

Darrin Stewart
Mississippi Department of Marine
Resources

APPENDIX A
2022 Operations Plan

2022 Operations Plan
for the
Fisheries Information Network
in the Southeastern United States
FIN

by: FIN Committee

March 2021

Number 295

**2022 Operations Plan for the
Fisheries Information Network in the
Southeastern United States (FIN)**

January 1, 2022 to December 31, 2022

I. INTRODUCTION

The Fisheries Information Network (FIN) establishes a state-federal cooperative program to collect, manage, and disseminate statistical data and information on the commercial and recreational fisheries of the Southeast Region. The FIN is comprised of a commercial fisheries component and the recreational fisheries component.

The FIN is a cooperative state-federal marine commercial and recreational fisheries data collection program. It is intended to coordinate present and future marine commercial and recreational fisheries data collection and data management activities through cooperative planning, innovative uses of statistical theory and design, and consolidation of appropriate data into a useful data base system. This operations plan implements the FIN Framework Plan for 2022. All tasks will be completed dependent upon availability of funds.

II. MISSION AND GOALS

The mission of the FIN is to cooperatively collect, manage, and disseminate marine commercial and recreational fisheries statistical data and information for the conservation and management of fishery resources in the Southeast Region and to support the development and operation of a national program.

The goals of the FIN are:

- To plan, manage, and evaluate data collection and management activities;
- To implement data collection activities;
- To establish and maintain a data management system; and
- To support the establishment of a national program.

The goals and objectives of FIN are found in Appendix A.

III. OPERATIONS

A. Operational Activities

The tasks below cover all 2022 objectives (see Appendix A). A “C” denotes a commercial activity; an “R” denotes a recreational activity; and an “F” denotes a commercial/recreational activity.

Task A1: Operation of Trip Ticket Programs (Goal 2, Objective 4) (C)

Objective: Operation of trip ticket program for the Southeast Region.
Team Members: Gulf States and Commercial Technical Work Group
Approach: For Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama, this task will provide funding for the operation of their trip ticket programs. In addition, GSMFC will contract with Bluefin Data to implement and maintain electronic trip ticket reporting for Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. Accomplished by meetings, telephone, and mail and in conjunction with the ACCSP, where applicable.
Resources: Operational and implementation costs, telephone costs, report costs, travel/meeting costs, and staff time.
Product: Gulf-wide trip ticket program
Schedule: Operations of trip ticket will continue in 2022 for Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida.

Task A2: Design, Implementation and Maintenance of Data Management System (Goal 3, Objective 3) (F)

Objective: To design, implement, and maintain a marine commercial and recreational fisheries data management system to accommodate fishery management/research and other needs (e.g., trade and tourism).
Team Members: FIN and ACCSP program partners, GSMFC Systems Administrator, SEAMAP/FIN Oracle DBA, and ComFIN Programmer/Survey Coordinator
Approach: The FIN will continue to develop the Data Management System (DMS) including the development of standard protocols and documentation for data formats, input, editing, quality control, storage, access, transfer, dissemination, and application. The ComFIN Programmer/Survey Coordinator will continue to receive routine delivery of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida trip ticket data into the FIN DMS. The Oracle DBA will also maintain the historical data in the system and provide support of outside users of the system. In addition to the commercial data,

regular loads of recreational and biological data into the DMS will be accomplished. FIN will continue to work in conjunction with the ACCSP to ensure compatibility and comparability between the programs.

Resources: Travel/meeting costs, mail costs, and staff time.
Product: FIN data management system
Schedule: Routine delivery and loading of data will continue in 2022.

Task A3: Collection of Recreational Fisheries Data (Goal 2, Objective 5) (R)

Objective: Collection of recreational fisheries data in the Gulf of Mexico.
Team Members: Gulf States, GSMFC, NOAA Fisheries
Approach: This task will provide for the conduct of the MRIP survey in Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida for shore, for-hire, and private modes. This task will provide for coordination of the survey, an intercept survey of shore, for-hire and private boat anglers to estimate angler catch using the existing MRIP methodology, and entry of the data. The states will also conduct weekly telephone calls to a 10% random sample of the Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida charter boat captains to obtain estimates of charter boat fishing effort. NOAA Fisheries will produce expanded estimates using cleaned data provided via GSMFC of catch and effort by wave using the existing MRIP methodology. This also provides partial support for LA Creel Program which was implemented to replace MRIP in Louisiana. Where possible, the Committee will work with the ACCSP to ensure comparability and compatibility between the two programs.

Resources: Operational costs, travel/meeting costs, mail costs, and staff time.
Product: Collection of recreational fisheries data for the Gulf of Mexico.
Schedule: This is an on-going task.

B. Committee Activities (see Section E for Committee and Work Group membership)

The tasks below cover all 2022 objectives (see Appendix A). A “C” denotes a commercial activity; an “R” denotes a recreational activity; and an “F” denotes a commercial/recreational activity.

Task B1: Development of Annual Operations Plan, 2023 (Goal 1, Objective 3) (F)

Objective: Develop 2023 Annual Operations Plan including identification of available resources that implements the Framework Plan.
Team Members: FIN Committee
Approach: Through meetings and email, the Committee will develop and complete an Annual Operations Plan for 2023.

Resources: Travel/meeting costs, report costs, and staff time.
Product: 2022 Annual Operations Plan.
Schedule: Annual Operations Plan will be drafted by fall 2022 and reviewed by full committee.

Task B2: Development of Funding Initiatives to Establish Marine Recreational Fisheries (MRF) Surveys (Goal 1, Objective 3) (R)

Objective: Support the establishment of long-term, comprehensive MRF surveys in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

Team Members: The Recreational Technical Work Group/NOAA Fisheries/GSMFC
Approach: The Work Group has been working on this issue for several years.

In 2000, the MRFSS was re-established in the U.S. Caribbean, although there were severe problems with attracting and retaining reliable intercept interviewers in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Sampling in Puerto Rico began in 2001 however this only lasted for the 2001 sampling season. In 2012, the GSMFC reinstated the coordination and administration of the recreational data collection activities in Puerto Rico. Unfortunately in 2014 GSMFC discontinued coordinating recreational data collection due to difficulties in obtaining support staff from Puerto Rico DNER and inability of PRDNER staff to adhere to new MRIP methods. An MRIP Implementation Team for the Caribbean was established in 2016 and the GulfFIN Program Manager participated in those discussions to develop sampling priorities for that region.

Resources: Travel, copy and mailing expenses and staff time.
Product: Develop a long-term MRF surveys for the Caribbean.
Schedule: This task is an ongoing activity.

Task B3: Dissemination of Program Information (Goal 1, Objective 4) (F)

Objective: Distribute program information to cooperators and interested parties.

Team Members: FIN Committee and staff

Approach: The Committee will distribute program information to cooperators and interested parties. Each committee member is responsible for maintaining a list of information distributed and providing that list to the staff. In addition, the MRIP staff has developed a home page where users are able to access the MRIP data for their use. The user is able to specify the area, species, gear, etc. that he/she is interested in obtaining. Also, the GSMFC has developed a home page that includes information concerning the FIN. The GulfFIN Committee

has identified creating more effective outreach materials for FIN stakeholders as a priority for 2022.

Resources: Copy and mailing expenses and staff time.

Product: Improve and update information being disseminated through GSMFC website specific to GulfFIN. Results-oriented tables were included in the FIN Annual Report in 2009 and will continue in 2022. GSMFC Program Manager will look for ways to further improve the annual report.

Schedule: This task will be an ongoing activity.

Task B4: Implementation of Outreach Program (Goal 1, Objective 4) (F)

Objective: Implement an outreach program for FIN.

Team Members: FIN Outreach Work Group/FIN Committee

Approach: The FIN Committee has identified improved program outreach as a high priority task. FIN Committee members have identified improved website information, more frequent presentations at commission and council meetings summarizing current FIN actions, and producing joint press releases between partner agencies.

Resources: Telephone costs, report costs, travel/meeting costs, and staff time.

Product: FIN outreach program

Schedule: The FIN Committee will be holding quarterly conference calls in 2022 to discuss specific changes and improvements.

Task B5: Define Partner Needs and Requirements (Goal 2, Objective 1) (F)

Objective: Survey state and federal GulfFIN partners to determine current needs for data collection, quality control, and data management.

Team Members: State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee/FIN Committee

Approach: To promote improvements in data collection activities and improve the GulfFIN Data Management System, GulfFIN needs to survey its state and federal partners to determine and define each partner's data needs. Recent strategic planning sessions were a good method for obtaining input on needs from state and federal partners. It's likely that continuing that approach every 3 years would be the most successful way to obtain this information.

Resources: Telephone costs, report costs, travel/meeting costs, and staff time.

Product: Develop a list of partner needs and research focus for data collection, quality control, and data management that can be used to guide future improvements.

Schedule: FIN Committee subgroup is working on this topic in 2022 to begin discussions on approach and timeline.

Task B6: Port Samplers Workshops (Goal 2, Objective 3) (C)

Objective: Convene workshops of state and federal port samplers to discuss commercial data collection activities

Team Members: State and federal commercial port samplers and GSMFC and NOAA Fisheries

Approach: In an effort to provide a forum for discussing various issues concerning commercial data collection activities, the FIN Committee decided to convene workshops of state and federal port agents. The Gulf of Mexico workshop will be attended by the state and federal port agents from Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida, NOAA Fisheries and GSMFC staff as well as other interested personnel. In addition to commercial issues, the group will also dedicate some time to discuss biological sampling issues. Some of the suggested topics for these meetings include species identification workshops, trip ticket information, sampling and sub-sampling techniques and other pertinent topics.

Resources: Telephone costs, report costs, travel/meeting costs, and staff time.

Product: Provide a forum for field personnel to discuss problems and issues related to commercial data collection activities. Develop a list of recommendations regarding commercial data collection activities.

Schedule: The need for a 2022 meeting will be evaluated based on available funding and the amount of essential agenda topics.

Task B7: Otolith Processors Training Workshop (Goal 2, Objective 3) (F)

Objective: Convene an annual workshop of state, federal, and university otolith processors to discuss issues related to analyzing hard parts (otoliths, spines, etc.)

Team Members: State and federal processors and GSMFC and NOAA Fisheries

Approach: In an effort to provide a forum to ensure quality control and quality assurance for otolith processing, the FIN Committee decided to convene workshops of state and federal processors. Processing personnel from Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida and NOAA Fisheries, GSMFC staff as well as other interested persons will attend the workshop.

Resources: Telephone costs, report costs, travel/meeting costs, and staff time.

Product: Provide a forum for processing personnel to discuss problems and issues related to analysis of age structures.

Schedule: The meeting will be scheduled for early to mid-2022 if the states and NOAA Fisheries continue to request attending this workshop.

Task B8: Review of Commercial QA/QC Standards (Goal 2, Objective 3) (C)

Objective: Review the existing FIN commercial quality assurances/quality control (QA/QC) standards.

Team Members: Commercial Technical Work Group, Data Management Subcommittee

Approach: The current development of a unified Gulf Trip Ticket program coupled with a planned redesign of the FIN Data Management System will aid in reviewing and editing the Commercial QA/QC standards also. The Commercial Technical Work Group will be involved with development of the new unified trip ticket system. The Data Management Subcommittee will be provided several presentations regarding progress of the new system development. This task will be accomplished by meetings, conference calls, and mail. New standards resulting from the new unified trip ticket system will be included in GulfFIN QA/QC standards documentation.

Resources: Meeting/travel costs, telephone costs, mail costs, and staff time.

Product: Updated FIN QA/QC standards

Schedule: The FIN Committee will be updated by the Commercial Technical Work Group and keep them abreast of the progress on this issue.

Task B9: Evaluate and Standardize Biological Sampling Strategies (Goal 2, Objective 3) (R)

Objective: Update GulfFIN biological sampling strategies to meet needs of stock assessors.

Team Members: Recreational Technical Work Group

Approach: Current biological sampling methods prioritize sampling for specific species. Methods likely need to switch to focusing on trip types instead of specific species. An analysis to provide recommendations on proper sampling methods for complete fishery coverage is a necessary step. We plan to contract with an analyst to support this work.

Resources: Meeting/travel costs, telephone costs, mail costs, and staff time.

Product: Updated FIN Biological Sampling Standards and Methods

Schedule: The FIN Committee will be updated by the Recreational Technical Work Group and keep them abreast of the progress on this issue.

Task B10: Expand Approach for Validation Commercial Conversion Factors (Goal 2, Objective 3) (C)

Objective: Expand approach for updating commercial conversion factors.
Team Members: Commercial Technical Work Group
Approach: Previous work has shown that many of the conversion factors used in commercial data are outdated and have no details as to how they were generated. Many states have questioned the accuracy of conversion factors for several key species. A method has already been tested by FL FWC in conjunction with ACCSP that appears to be suitable. GulfFIN has selected shrimp as the first species for data collection and analysis and received FIS funding to support this work in 2022. The Commercial Technical Work Group will be involved with the Gulf of Mexico research and will work to identify next priority species and methods for obtaining funding.
Resources: Meeting/travel costs, telephone costs, mail costs, and staff time.
Product: Updated commercial conversion factors
Schedule: The FIN Committee will be updated by the Commercial Technical Work Group and kept abreast of the progress on this issue.

Task B11: Review and Update of Recreational Standards (Goal 2, Objective 3) (F)

Objective: Review and modify the existing FIN recreational standards documentation.
Team Members: Recreational Technical Work Group
Approach: The current Recreational Standards document is outdated and in need of improvement. Each state has developed specialized recreational surveys to try and obtain more accurate estimates of harvest for reef fish or specifically red snapper. Work is ongoing to implement logbook electronic reporting in the for-hire sector and this standards document needs to include these types of data collection programs. This task will be accomplished by meetings, conference calls, and mail.
Resources: Meeting/travel costs, telephone costs, mail costs, and staff time.
Product: Updated FIN QA/QC standards
Schedule: The Recreational Technical Work Group will reconvene in 2022 with the goal of providing a revised FIN Standards document to the FIN Committee in 2022.

Task B12: Evaluation of Innovative Data Collection Technologies (Goal 2, Objective 6) (F)

Objective: Evaluate and recommend innovative data collection technologies

Team Members: FIN Committee and other appropriate personnel.
Approach: Communicate results of evaluation and recommendations regarding marine commercial and recreational fisheries surveys to the appropriate personnel.
Resources: Travel/meeting costs, report costs, and staff time
Product: Communication and presentation of recommendations to ongoing programs.
Schedule: This is an ongoing activity.

Task B13: Exploration of Strategies for In-Season Quota Monitoring (Goal 2, Objective 6) (R)

Objective: Explore strategies for implementing in-season quota monitoring for the recreational fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico.
Team Members: Recreational Technical Work Group
Approach: In the past, FIN has recommended that in-season quota monitoring for recreational fisheries not be implemented; however, it appears the in-season quota monitoring has become an important recreational issue with shorter seasons for many key species. Some work has been accomplished specific to red snapper data collection pilot programs in each Gulf State. The FIN will continue to work in conjunction with the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) to explore this issue.
Resources: Travel/meeting costs, report costs, and staff time
Product: Potential strategies for implementing in-season quota monitoring.
Schedule: The MRIP will provide periodical reports to the FIN Committee to keep them abreast of the progress on this issue.

Task B14: Improve Timeliness of Data to Support Quota Monitoring (Goal 2, Objective 6) (C)

Objective: Improve timeliness of commercial data to support quota monitoring for the commercial fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico.
Team Members: NMFS and FIN staff
Approach: NMFS instituted a rule in 2011 that all federally-permitted dealers are required to report their commercial landings via electronic means. In 2016 GulfFIN contractor began creating a new electronic trip ticket program to meet evolving dealer technology needs. In 2018 GulfFIN started working on developing new QA/QC processes to provide cleaner data in a more timely fashion. The goal of this work is to better address this task.
Resources: Travel/meeting costs, report costs, and staff time

Product: Increased electronic reporting.
Schedule: NMFS, Gulf States and FIN staff will continue to increase the number of commercial dealers who report via electronic means and improve the reporting system to meet scientific needs.

Task B15: Evaluation of Information Management Technologies (Goal 3, Objective 6) (F)

Objective: Evaluate and recommend innovative, cost-effective information management technologies.
Team Members: FIN Committee and industry personnel
Approach: Committee members will report any new technologies, which will aid in the management of marine commercial and recreational fisheries data.
Resources: Travel/meeting costs, conference call costs, report costs, and staff time.
Product: Progress reports.
Schedule: This is an ongoing activity.

Task B16: Implementation of Long-term National Program Planning (Goal 4, Objective 1) (F)

Objective: Provide for long-term national program planning.
Team Members: FIN Committee
Approach: The FIN Committee members, GSMFC staff and ASMFC staff will attend Pacific RecFIN, PacFIN, ACCSP Operations Committee, and other pertinent meetings and coordinate activities as appropriate. This task will be accomplished by mail and meetings.
Resources: Travel/meeting costs, report costs, and staff time.
Product: Record of coordination activities.
Schedule: This task is an ongoing activity.

Task B17: Coordination, Consistency and Comparability with Other Cooperative Marine Commercial and Recreational Fisheries Programs (Goal 4, Objective 2 and Objective 3) (F)

Objective: Coordinate FIN with other regional cooperative marine commercial and recreational fisheries programs and encourages consistency and comparability among regional programs over time.
Team Members: FIN Committee
Approach: The FIN Committee members, GSMFC staff and ACCSP staff will coordinate activities with the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission as well as attend the national Fisheries Information

System (FIS) meetings. The FIN and ACCSP staffs periodically meet jointly to discuss the activities that each program is involved in and where the two programs can work together. This task will be accomplished by mail and meetings.

Resources: Travel/meeting costs, report costs, and staff time.
Product: Ensure adequate information exchange, consistency and comparability between all regional fisheries programs and compilation of a record of information exchange.
Schedule: This task is an ongoing activity.

C. Administrative Activities

Coordination and administrative support of FIN will be accomplished through The Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission. Major tasks involved in the coordination and administration of the various levels of FIN include but are not limited to the following:

- Work closely with the FIN Committee in all aspects of program coordination, administration, and operation;
- Implement plans and program directives approved by the FIN Committee;
- Provide coordination and logistical support, including communications and organization of meetings for the FIN Committee, subcommittees, and work groups;
- Develop and/or administer cooperative agreements, grants, and contracts;
- Serve as liaison between the FIN Committee, other program participants, and other interested organizations;
- Assist the FIN Committees in preparation or review of annual spending plans;
- Prepare annual operations plans under the direction of the FIN Committee;
- Prepare and/or supervise and coordinate preparation of selected documents, including written records of all meetings;
- Distribute approved FIN information and data in accordance with accepted policies and procedures as set forth by the FIN Committee;
- Assist in the identification of regional and geographic needs that can be satisfied through FIN activities;

APPENDIX A

FIN Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: To plan, manage and evaluate a coordinated State/Federal marine commercial and recreational fishery data collection program for the Region.

- Objective 1 To establish and maintain FIN Committee consisting of MOU signatories or their designees to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate the program.
- Objective 2 To develop and periodically review a Framework Plan that outlines policies and protocols of the program
- Objective 3 To develop annual operation plans, including identification of available resources that implement the Framework Plan.
- Objective 4 To distribute program information to the cooperators and interested parties.
- Objective 5 To conduct an internal program review at least every five years of operation to evaluate the program's success in meeting needs in the Region.

Goal 2: To implement and maintain a coordinated State/Federal marine commercial and recreational fishery data collection program for the Region.

- Objective 1 To characterize and periodically review the commercial and recreational fisheries and identify the required data priorities for each.
- Objective 2 To identify and periodically review environmental, biological, social and economic data elements required for each fishery.
- Objective 3 To identify, determine, and periodically review standards for data collection, including statistical, training and quality assurance.
- Objective 4 To identify and evaluate the adequacy of current programs for meeting FIN requirements.
- Objective 5 To coordinate, integrate and augment, as appropriate, data collection efforts to meet FIN requirements.

Objective 6 To evaluate and recommend innovative data collection methodologies and technologies.

Goal 3: To establish and maintain an integrated, marine commercial and recreational fishery data management system for the Region.

Objective 1 To periodically review and make recommendations regarding the location and administrative responsibility for the FIN data management system.

Objective 2 To periodically evaluate the hardware, software and communication capabilities of program partners and make recommendations for support and upgrades.

Objective 3 To implement, maintain, and periodically review a marine commercial and recreational fishery data management system to accommodate fishery management/research and other needs.

Objective 4 To develop, maintain, and periodically review standard protocols and documentation for data formats, inputs, editing, storage, access, transfer dissemination, and application.

Objective 5 To identify and prioritize historical databases for integration into the marine commercial and recreational fisheries database.

Objective 6 To evaluate and recommend innovative, cost-effective information management technologies.

Objective 7 To protect the confidentiality of personal and business information, as required by state and/or federal law.

Goal 4: To support the development and operation of a national program to collect, manage and disseminate marine commercial fisheries information for use by states, territories, councils, interstate commissions and federal marine fishery management agencies.

Objective 1 To provide for long-term national program planning.

Objective 2 To coordinate FIN with other regional and national marine commercial and recreational fisheries programs.

Objective 3 To encourage consistency and comparability among regional and national marine commercial and recreational fisheries programs over time.