

Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission/NOAA Fisheries IRA Funding Request for Proposals

Pre-Proposal Deadline: November 15, 2024

Proposal Deadline: January 15, 2025

Notice of Award: January 31, 2025

Funds Distributed: Spring-Summer 2025 (pending timing of availability)

Introduction

Purpose of this request for proposals (RFP): Recreational fishing generates more than 138 billion in sales impacts and supports more than 692 thousand jobs. In the Southeast, more recreational angler fishing trips occur than the rest of the United States combined. Accurate collection of recreational data is critical to manage recreational fisheries. Estimation of recreational fishing effort and released fish discards represent two of the greatest sources of uncertainty in recreational data statistics. Given questions regarding the accuracy of recreational catch estimates in the offshore finfish reef fishery, we are seeking proposals that would improve the quality of two specific components of marine recreational finfish data collection systems. The specific areas of interest are:

1. Research that would provide estimates of recreational fishing effort from private boats in offshore waters (related to managed reef fish species such as red snapper, groupers, jacks and others). Researchers should be focused on geographic study areas that facilitate meaningful comparisons with estimates from existing state or federal recreational surveys. Research approaches that focus on novel technological and methodological solutions are desired. Specific examples include but are not limited to:
 - a. Shore based camera technology coupled with machine learning artificial intelligence for identifying, counting and estimating size of vessels at spatial resolutions conducive to estimating private boat fishing effort.
 - b. Satellite imagery that could explore the capabilities of large-scale estimates of the number of vessels fishing in offshore waters for estimation and calibration of existing survey boat-based estimates of recreational fishing effort.
 - c. Citizen science self-reporting mobile application survey approaches that could be coupled with probability-based recreational angler effort estimation to bolster sample sizes, increase sampling precision, and demonstrate compatibility with existing data sources for comparison purposes.
2. Research that would validate and improve the quality of private and for-hire vessel released catch data available for red snapper and other managed reef fish species. Research should focus on accurately quantifying the numbers of releases by species. Research in novel technological solutions for increasing confidence in fish identification and collecting critical biological information (weights, lengths, condition at release, observed disposition) from released catch are desired. Specific examples include but are not limited to:
 - a. Vessel camera systems coupled with machine learning artificial intelligence that could support identification, and counts and sizes of released catch of key managed reef fish species.
 - b. Citizen science self-reporting mobile application survey approaches that could be coupled with probability-based recreational angler catch and release estimation to bolster sample sizes, increase sampling precision, and demonstrate compatibility with existing data sources for comparison purposes.

- c. Survey methods that integrate existing dockside survey information and design features to contact and engage anglers at the beginning of their fishing trips to provide information on the importance of accurate released catch data and providing mechanisms for reporting released catch data after the trip is completed.

Who is eligible: Eligible participants include state resource management agencies, universities, non-governmental organizations and private sector research groups. Interested non-governmental and private sector organizations, academic and research institutions are encouraged to collaborate with state resource agencies on research needs.

Funding: We anticipate up to but not exceeding \$7,000,000 in available funding through this RFP. The goal would be to potentially fund one or two large projects (\$1-3M+) depending on scope and multiple smaller scale projects (>\$200K). Successful award recipients are encouraged to begin work as soon as funds are made available. Funding will be administered through subrecipient agreements coming from Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission. Research would need to be completed by December 31, 2027 with final reports due on or before March 31, 2028.

Submission Overview

This RFP will require both pre- and full proposals. Submissions need to be emailed to Gregg Bray (gbray@gsmfc.org) and Stephen Poland (stephen.poland@noaa.gov). We are requesting that all proposals be submitted in .pdf format. A review team representing state and federal fishery managers and scientists and members of academia with experience in survey design and application (excluding individuals affiliated with submitted proposals) will review and evaluate all full proposals. The review and evaluation of all written proposals will take into consideration the description of eligible projects, funding availability and the ability of project applicants to complete the project in established timeframes. The final selections will be made by the co-principal investigators for the IRA Funding who are Andy Strelcheck (NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Administrator) and Clay Porch (NOAA Fisheries Southeast Fishery Science Center Director). Entities that receive project funding must abide by the established reporting requirements. If accepted for funding, the project must comply with all federal government audit principles/procedures and the Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions.

Pre-Proposals

The pre-proposal process is intended to provide an opportunity to potential applicants to receive input from the technical team on the relevancy of proposed projects before continuing work on a full proposal. This process is meant to achieve the following:

- Ensure proposals align with the priority focus areas
- Promote collaboration among complementary or redundant proposals
- Ensure proposals are reasonable within available funding

Pre-proposals are meant to be a one-page description of the proposed methodology and how it intends to provide useful results within the area of focus. Pre-proposals should also provide a total estimated costs to execute the proposed work. **All pre-proposals must be submitted by November 15, 2024.** The goal would be to provide comments to PIs based on pre-proposals by December 2, 2024.

Full-Proposals

All proposals must be emailed to Gregg Bray (gbray@gsmfc.org) and Stephen Poland (stephen.poland@noaa.gov) in the following standard format:

- Applicant Name: Identify the name of the applicant.
- Project Title: A brief statement to identify the project.
- Project area(s) of interest, anticipated outcomes/results
- Requested Award Amount: Provide the total requested amount of proposal.
- Requested Award Period: Provide the total time period of the proposed project (not to exceed CY 2027).
- Approach: List and describe all procedures necessary to accomplish the desired tasks.
- Cost Summary (Budget): Detail all costs to be incurred in this project, including, but not limited to: personnel, equipment, travel.
- Principal Investigator (PI): List the PIs and their experience in conducting the proposed sampling

Full proposals must be submitted by January 15, 2025

Applicants should be willing to work closely with commission, state and federal partners. Proposals will be reviewed by a technical team established in conjunction with the National Marine Fisheries Service. The final selections will be made by the co-principal investigators for the IRA Funding who are Andy Strelcheck (NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Administrator) and Clay Porch (NOAA Fisheries Southeast Fishery Science Center Director). The review and evaluation of all written proposals will take into consideration the description of eligible projects, funding availability and ability to complete the project in the established timeframe. The entity that receives project funding must abide by the established reporting requirements. If accepted for funding, this project must comply with all federal government audit principles/procedures and the Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions.

Evaluation Criteria

A review team representing state and federal fishery managers and scientists and members of academia with experience in survey design and application (excluding individuals affiliated with submitted proposals) will review and evaluate all full proposals against the Evaluation Criteria (listed below). We plan to convene a virtual meeting of the review panel to discuss the submitted proposals. After the meeting each reviewer will be asked to submit scores and recommendations. The final selections will be made by the co-principal investigators for the IRA Funding who are Andy Strelcheck (NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Administrator) and Clay Porch (NOAA Fisheries Southeast Fishery Science Center Director).

Matching with RFP Research Priorities (25 possible points): This RFP is focused on implementing research that will help marine fisheries scientists answer two very specific questions regarding recreational fishing effort and released catch data. The review team will be assessing proposals to determine which offer the greatest potential to address identified research priorities and that demonstrate an innovative approach to collecting and analyzing data in these priority areas. Reviewers will ultimately consider whether the project primarily addresses either area of focus and identifies how study results will be used?

Quality of Proposal (up to 15 points): Applicants should demonstrate they have thoughtfully and thoroughly completed the proposal, detailing what issue their proposal is addressing, providing a well-articulated rationale for the planned approach that clearly lays out underlying assumptions and potential

risk. Qualifications and experience of the project team will be considered. Some questions that reviewers may consider when scoring this criterion - Are the problem and the solution well formulated? Does the proposal describe the goals, objectives and risks in a realistic manner? Does the full proposal provide a realistic and complete budget? Does the proposal include detailed milestones and a timeline for achieving success and a process for developing deliverables? For proposals that plan to develop and use innovative technologies, is there a robust data collection and analysis methodology?

Scope and Broader Applicability (up to 20 points): This RFP places a large emphasis on supporting projects that have broad applicability and impact, both directly and indirectly, and places value on projects that have a plan for coordination among partners and dissemination of results. A diverse research team that reflects the required expertise for all aspects of the proposed study is highly desirable in this process. Where applicable, the RFP would encourage projects that involve stakeholders in the research process. Some questions that reviewers may consider when scoring this criterion - Does the project have a regional multi-state relevance and impact? Is the project cross-regionally scalable and portable or transportable? Is there a knowledge transfer plan that considers regional applicability and provides potential solutions to optimize implementations for transferring knowledge and lessons learned? Is this project coordinated with similar projects completed or underway? Is there buy-in among partners who are expected to benefit from the project? Does the project involve stakeholders in the research?

Use of Existing or Matching Resources (up to 5 points): Projects that take advantage of existing resources to multiply the outcome of their efforts are desirable. This includes existing commitments from their program or partners to match resources or the use of existing resources. Some questions that reviewers may consider when scoring this criterion - Does the project take advantage of existing resources? Will the submitting project investigator(s) provide matching funds, personnel resources, or equipment? Will other programs, regions, FINs, or states provide matching funds, personnel resources, or equipment?

Timeliness (up to 10 points): The project should have a clear and realistic timeline and schedule of deliverables listed in the proposal. Some questions that reviewers may consider when scoring this criterion - Are the timeline and milestones appropriate and realistic? Is there a clear description of the project end-point?

Cost/Benefit (up to 15 points): The proposed budget will be evaluated considering the potential benefits and impact. There should be detailed information on all budget categories that would demonstrate the project manager has investigated costs for personnel, equipment and contractor support. Some questions that reviewers may consider when scoring this criterion - Is the proposed cost of the work reasonable considering the expected benefits? Does the project have the potential to reduce the current cost of an existing process? Is there information about transitioning to a long-term/full scale implementation project to assist in future funding requests?

Level of Risk (up to 10 points): The project should have a realistic description of the risks involved with the different aspects of the project. Some questions that reviewers may consider when scoring this criterion - Do the risk descriptions and risk impacts seem realistic? Are the risk mitigation approaches outlined in the proposal reasonable? Are there other risks that you would have liked to have seen addressed in the proposal? If there is reliance on outside participation? Will that present a barrier or is it appropriate and realistic? Do the potential gains from the project outweigh the level of risk?

Project Reporting

Quarterly Status Reports

Principal Investigators (PIs) for each project will be expected to be the primary point of contact for communications and reporting and are expected to provide all requested status report information for their respective projects. PIs are required to submit status reports on a quarterly basis **until the completion of the project**. This will include an update on tasks and milestones identified in the proposal, progress on project spending, and any specific performance metrics that the granting agency establishes as a condition of the award.

Written Final Report

Project PIs must provide a written final report detailing the accomplishments for the completed project. This will be due 90 days after the project completion date. External links to raw data products, references, and related information may be included in the report. Upon completion of all research projects under this RFP, PIs will likely be required to present their projects and outcomes during a future GSMFC fall meeting. This is intended to be a forum for sharing information and lessons learned among partners.

Presentations of Progress and Results

The PI may be asked during the course of the funding to provide verbal updates and/or presentations to regional fishery management bodies highlighting progress of the work. Upon the completion of the work, the PI is expected to present all relevant findings and results to federal, regional, and state partners in the region.