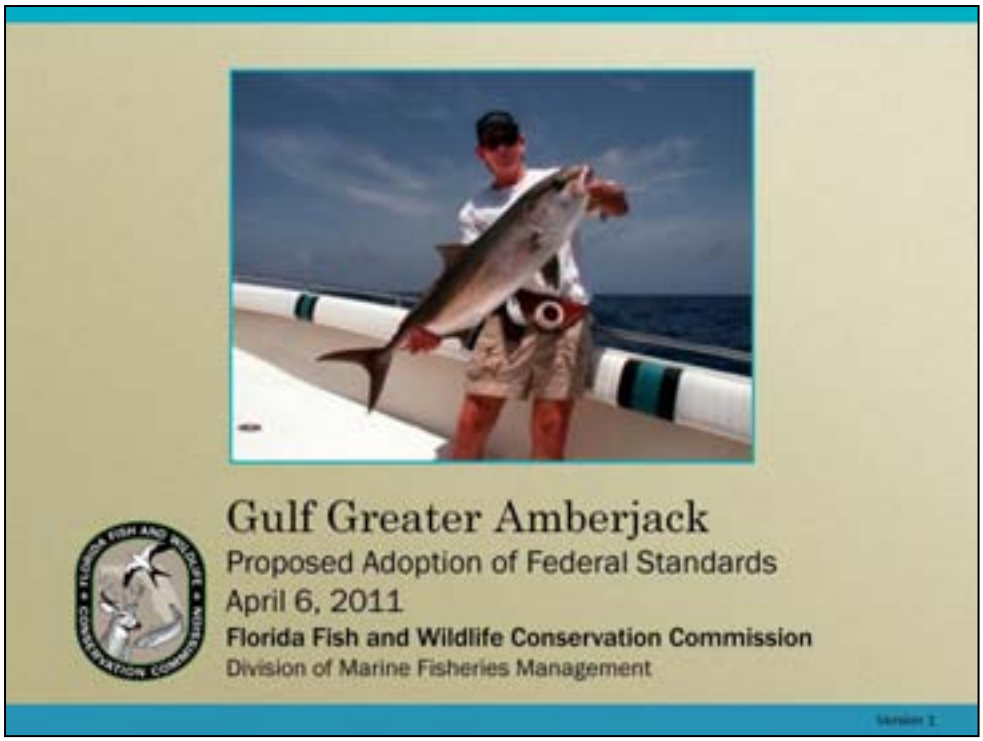

This is a summary of a proposed rule to adopt federal standards for harvesting greater amberjack in the Gulf of Mexico. This action would make the State's recreational greater amberjack regulations contained in the Reef Fish Rule, 68B-14 Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.) consistent with federal rules.

This proposed action would align state regulations with planned federal regulations that close the amberjack recreational fishery from June 1 through July 31 in federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico. The federal closure was recommended to ensure that the amberjack season would extend later into the year.

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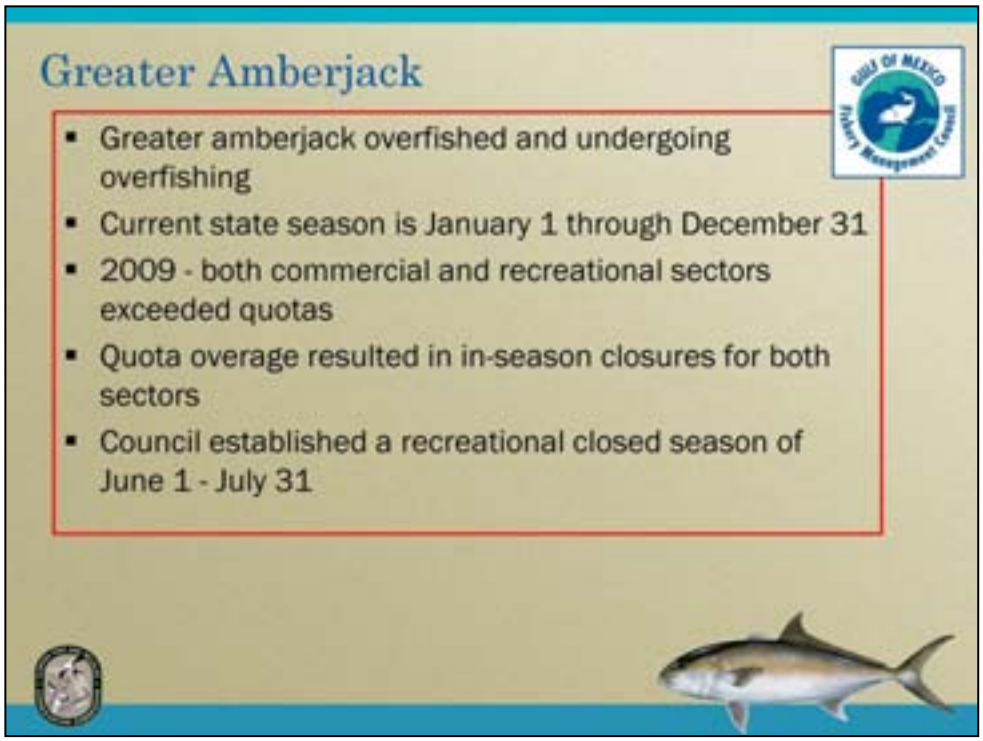
Report date: March 4, 2011

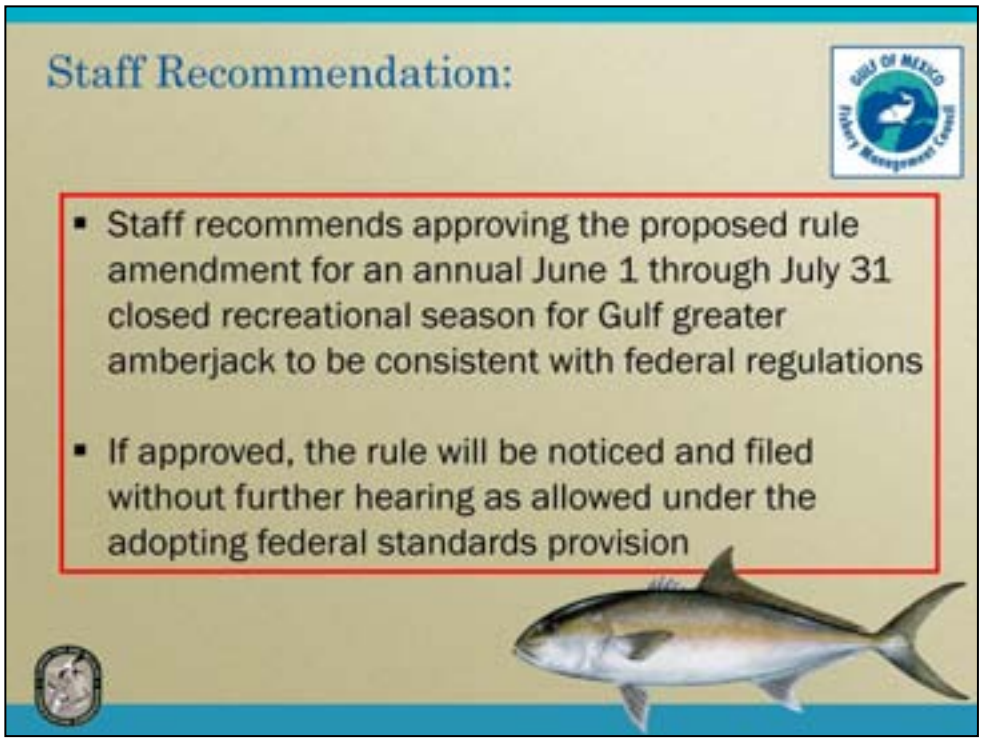
Photo Credit: Terry Tomalin, www.visitflorida.com



Gulf of Mexico Greater Amberjack is overfished and is in a rebuilding plan. The amberjack (AJ) season begins January 1 each year and historically ran through December 31. However, the current management plan calls for in-season closures when sector allocations are met. In 2009, both the recreational and commercial sectors achieved their quotas by September and consequentially the seasons were closed early. There was interest among the for-hire industry to establish a later opening date or a closure when red snapper is open in order to stretch the open season for AJ through the summer and fall. Consequently, the Council voted to establish an annual closed season for the recreational harvest of AJ of June 1 through July 31. This would close the AJ season during the open recreational red snapper season, thus minimizing the economic and social impacts of the closure and allowing for continued harvest of AJ after red snapper closes.

To make state rules consistent with federal regulations a new section in the Reef Fish rule, 68B-14.004, F.A.C., would be created to close the recreational harvest of amberjack from June 1 through July 31 each year.

If Florida does not go consistent with this closure state waters will remain open only to private recreational harvesters, and for-hire vessels that do not have a federal reef fish permit. The commercial amberjack fishery currently has a three month closure from March through May and there were no requests to adjust the commercial closed season.



Staff recommends adopting consistent state regulations for Gulf amberjack and using the process of adopting federal standards under Chapter 120.54(6), Florida Statutes. If passed, this rule would be filed without further public hearing and would become effective as soon as possible.

Staff has evaluated the rules under the standards of 68-1.004, F.A.C. and found them to be in compliance.