

Gulf Coast

Fisheries Coordination Office



photo: Stuard Porter



photo: USFWS



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photo: Forest Service

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Station Facts

- Established: 1991.
- Number of staff: one permanent full-time, one full-time contract employee.
- Annual budget (FY 06) \$200,654.

Geographic Area Covered

- Southeast Region (Region 4): Alabama, Florida, Louisiana and Mississippi for Gulfwide coordination of Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) interests in coastal fisheries issues.
- Portions of Arkansas, Georgia and Tennessee for issues in watersheds of rivers entering the Gulf of Mexico.
- Southwest Region (Region 2): Texas for Gulfwide coordination of FWS interests in coastal fisheries issues.

Station Goals

- Restoration of anadromous fish, particularly Gulf striped bass, in accordance with interjurisdictional goals.
- Recovery of Gulf sturgeon and other species listed under the Endangered Species Act.
- Proper management and conservation of interjurisdictional fisheries and other aquatic resources, including their habitats, in Gulf of Mexico coastal waters and watersheds.

Services Provided To

- State and Federal partners in restoration of Gulf striped bass.
- State and Federal partners in recovery of Gulf sturgeon and other species listed under the Endangered Species Act.
- Interjurisdictional fisheries management councils, commissions and other partnership entities in cooperative management of Gulf coastal fisheries and their habitats.

- Other FWS program offices.

Activity Highlights

- Administrative, oversight and technical assistance in various aspects of an interagency Gulf striped bass restoration program.
- Chair the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission's (GSMFC) Anadromous Fisheries Subcommittee.
- Provide fisheries technical assistance to the FWS's Habitat Conservation, Endangered Species and Refuge programs.
- Represent the FWS on the Gulf of Mexico Program's Nutrient Enrichment Focus Team.
- Represent the FWS at meetings of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.
- Represent the FWS at meetings of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (GMFMC).
- Coordinate FWS involvement in Gulf coastal fisheries issues in the Gulf of Mexico.
- Provide administrative support to and supervise the FWS's Baton Rouge Fisheries Resource Office (Louisiana).
- Represent the FWS on the Mississippi River/Gulf of Mexico Nutrient Task Force Watershed Coordinating Committee.
- Chair the GSMFC's Technical Task Force for revising the Striped Bass Fishery Management Plan for the Gulf of Mexico.

Questions and Answers

What does your office do?

The Gulf Coast Fisheries Coordination Office (FCO) is a relatively new type of field station in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Our office provides a coordination point for the work of many different FWS offices that deal with Gulf of Mexico aquatic resource issues.

Gulf Coast Fisheries Coordination Office

The FWS works in cooperative partnerships with many other state and Federal agencies, fishery management councils, commissions and private organizations in managing aquatic resources of the Gulf and its river drainages. A single FWS point of contact helps to improve communication and cooperative efforts within the FWS and between the FWS and these other organizations.

Are there other offices like yours in the FWS?

In the Southeast Region of the FWS there are two other fisheries coordination offices — the South Atlantic FCO, located at Morehead City and Raleigh, North Carolina; and the Lower Mississippi River FCO, located at Vicksburg, Mississippi.

Other FWS regions have similar offices that generally coordinate fisheries and aquatic resource activities within discrete river basins. These offices are generally referred to as river coordination offices. The Large Rivers FCO, located at Rock Island, Illinois, coordinates a variety of fisheries issues within the entire Mississippi River basin, with an area of responsibility that transcends several FWS regions.

What are the FWS roles in managing Gulf of Mexico aquatic resources?

The FWS is chiefly concerned with management of what are referred to as “interjurisdictional” resources. The term “interjurisdictional” generally means a fish population that crosses state or international boundaries.

In the Gulf the FWS is primarily concerned with restoration and management of anadromous fish. The term “anadromous” refers to a species that spawns in rivers but spends part of its life in the ocean. Also falling into the interjurisdictional category are coastal and marine species such as red drum, spotted sea trout, red snapper, and a multitude of others.

The FWS participates as a partner with the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission and the Gulf states in helping to manage such species in state coastal waters. The FWS is also a non-voting member of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, which manages fisheries in Federal marine waters (out to 200 miles).

Besides these roles, the FWS also reviews development projects that require federal funding or licensing and makes recommendations to reduce damages to aquatic habitats. The FWS also enhances and restores aquatic habitats through funding and carrying out specific on-the-ground projects. The FWS is also responsible for implementing provisions of the federal Endangered Species Act, which applies to several species in the Gulf.

What species in the Gulf of Mexico are threatened or endangered?

The Gulf sturgeon is currently listed as threatened. There are also five species of sea turtles on the threatened and endangered list. The Green, Hawksbill, Kemp’s Ridley, and Leatherback sea turtles are endangered, and the Loggerhead Sea Turtle is threatened. Also, the West Indian Manatee, found primarily in Florida, is endangered. The FWS shares responsibility with the National Marine Fisheries Service and the Gulf states in managing and recovering all of these species.

What anadromous species are found in the Gulf of Mexico?

There are three anadromous fish species in the Gulf: the striped bass; Gulf sturgeon; and Alabama shad. Anadromous fish spawn in rivers but spend part of their lives in oceans.

Striped bass were native to Gulf of Mexico rivers from the Suwannee River in Florida to at least the rivers draining into Lake Pontchartrain in eastern Louisiana and southwestern Mississippi. Striped bass populations began declining earlier this century, and by the mid-1960s had disappeared from all Gulf rivers except for the Apalachicola River system of Alabama, Florida and Georgia. The FWS and Gulf states began cooperative efforts to restore

and maintain Gulf striped bass populations in the late 1960s, mainly through stocking of hatchery-raised fingerlings, and this effort continues today.

The Gulf sturgeon’s historic range was similar to the striped bass’, and populations declined similarly to the striped bass as well. The Gulf sturgeon was listed as threatened in 1991.

The Alabama shad’s historic range was similar to the striped bass and Gulf sturgeon, but also extended well up the Mississippi River system. Populations of Alabama shad are thought to have declined significantly over the years, and population data are currently being evaluated in order to determine what actions, if any, should be taken regarding this species. Dams that have been built on many southeastern rivers are thought to be a major reason for the decline of anadromous fish species in the Gulf of Mexico.