

Caribbean
Management of Bajo de Sico off Puerto Rico's West Coast
Frequently Asked Questions
November 2010

What is Bajo de Sico?

- Bajo de Sico is an area off the west coast of Puerto Rico (See Figure 1);
- It has been identified as an important site for resident groupers including the red hind, Nassau and yellowfin groupers;
- It is also an important foraging site for these and numerous other species.

How has Bajo de Sico historically been managed?

- Bajo de Sico was originally open to all fishing activities prior to regulations being implemented in 1996;
- The Bajo de Sico area closure was first implemented as a means to protect spawning aggregations of red hind;
- Commercial fishermen in the area noticed decreases in fish size and total catch (pounds) and a decrease in the number of individuals comprising the spawning aggregations;
- Commercial fishermen proposed three seasonal area closures (Bajo de Sico, Tourmaline Bank, and Abrir La Sierra Bank) to protect the spawning aggregations and in 1996, a regulatory amendment to the Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) established a closed season from December 1 through the last day of February, each year;
- In 2005, the Comprehensive Sustainable Fisheries Act Amendment to the Spiny Lobster, Queen Conch, Reef Fish, and Corals and Reef Associated Plants and Invertebrates FMPs (Comprehensive SFA Amendment) was implemented to prohibit the use of bottom tending gear (traps, pots, gill and trammel nets, and bottom longlines) in all seasonally closed areas, including Bajo de Sico, to enhance protection of essential fish habitat (EFH). This amendment also implemented the requirement for an anchor retrieval system for all fishing vessels designed to minimize anchor damage to EFH.

Why were changes made to Bajo de Sico regulations?

- Recently, nearly pristine coral reef formations in high densities have been discovered in the seasonally protected area;
- Large individuals of red hind and many large snappers and groupers have been observed in the area.

What were the previous regulations in Bajo de Sico?

- Fishing with pots, traps, bottom longlines, gillnets, or trammel nets is prohibited year-round;
- From December 1 through the end of February, all fishing activities are prohibited.

What are the current changes to regulations in Bajo de Sico?

- Modify the length of the seasonal closure to 6 months (October 1 through March 31);
- Prohibit fishing for or possession of Council-managed reef fish; and
- Prohibit anchoring year-round within Bajo de Sico.

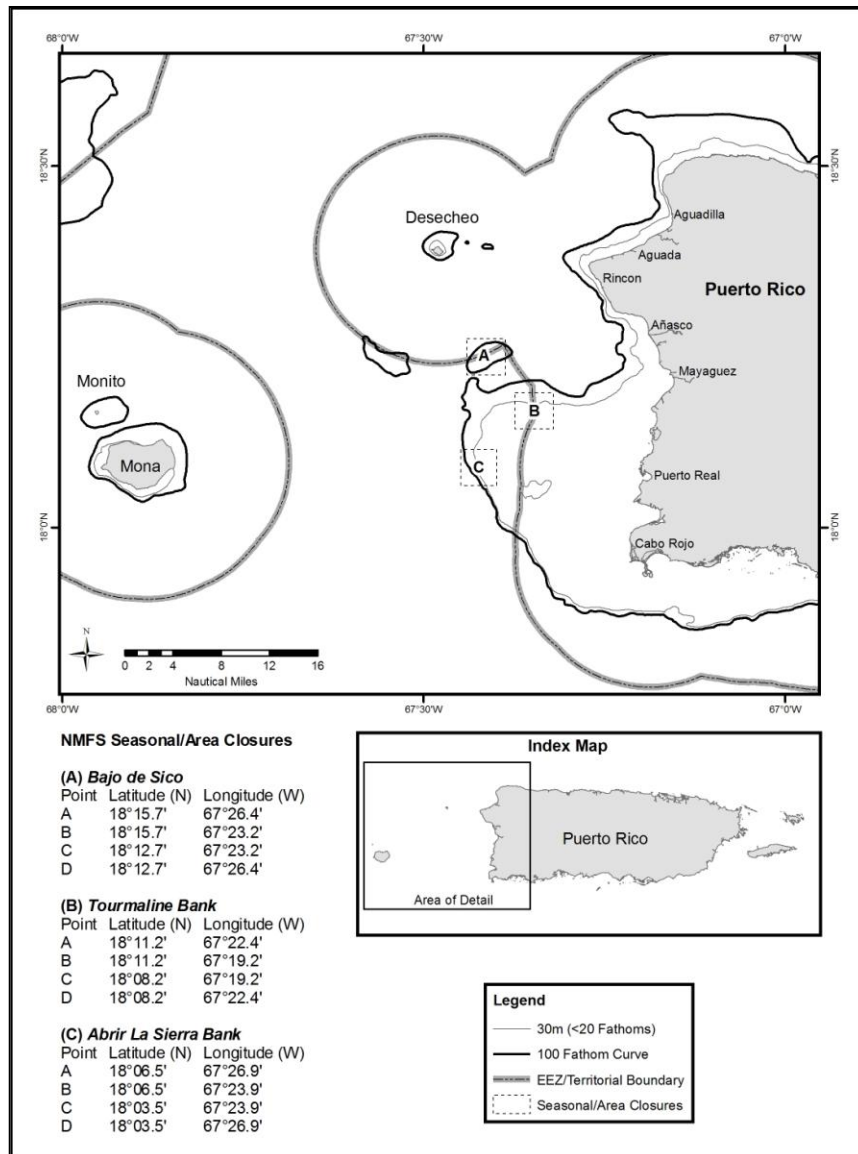


Figure 1: Bajo de Sico in relation to Puerto Rico and other seasonally closed areas