Southeast Fishery Bulletin

National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, Florida 33701-5505

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FB12-030

NOAA Fisheries Service Seeks Public Comment on Amendment 11 for Spiny Lobster in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic

Comment Period Ends June 26, 2012

NOAA Fisheries Service is seeking public comment on Amendment 11 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Spiny Lobster Resources of the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic Fishery Management Plan. The amendment proposes prohibiting commercial spiny lobster trap fishing in certain areas of the Florida Keys to protect threatened corals. The Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils (Councils) have submitted Amendment 11 to NOAA Fisheries Service for review, approval, and implementation. The Notice of Availability for public comment on this amendment was published in the *Federal Register* on April 27, 2012.

NOAA Fisheries Service and the Councils developed Amendment 11 to address requirements listed in a biological opinion on the spiny lobster fishery developed under the Endangered Species Act. These requirements include creation of new or expansion of existing closed areas to protect threatened species of coral. Staff from NOAA Fisheries Service and the Councils worked with fishermen, scientists, and managers to choose areas that would protect the most coral without overly restricting fishing. In total, 60 closed areas are proposed that cover 5.9 square miles. Maps of the proposed closed areas can be found in Amendment 11 and at http://gulfcouncil.org/resources/Spiny_Maps.php.

The Councils also considered trap line marking requirements, which are intended to allow greater accuracy in identifying fishery impacts to habitat and protected species, leading to more targeted measures to reduce the level and severity of those impacts. However, costs and labor for the fishery could be high, with little evidence of the durability of the markings. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is conducting a study of various methods for marking trap lines that should be completed in 2013. The Councils intend to revisit this issue when the results of that study are available.

Request for Comments

Written comments on this amendment must be received no later than June 26, 2012, to be considered by NOAA Fisheries Service. All comments received by NOAA Fisheries Service, whether specifically directed to the amendment or the proposed rule, will be addressed in the final rule. Electronic copies of the amendment may be obtained from the NOAA Fisheries Service Web site sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sf/SpinyLobsterAmendment.htm or the Federal e-Rule Making Portal www.regulation.gov.

How to Submit Comments

You may submit comments by either of the following methods. Comments received through other means may not be considered.

Electronic Submissions: Federal e-Rulemaking Portal: www.regulations.gov

- Enter the following docket number into the "Search" box: **NOAA-NMFS-2011-0223**.
- Select the appropriate title, and click "Submit a Comment." This will display the comment webform.
- Attachments to electronic comments (up to 10 MB) will be accepted in Microsoft Word, Excel, WordPerfect, or Adobe PDF file formats only.

Mail: Susan Gerhart, NOAA Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, Sustainable Fisheries Division, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, Florida 33701-5505.

All comments will be part of the public record, and generally posted for public viewing to http://www.regulations.gov without change. All personal identifying information (for example, name, address, etc.) voluntarily submitted by the commenter, may be publicly accessible. Do not submit confidential

business information or otherwise sensitive or protected information. Anonymous comments will be accepted.

For more information on Amendment 11 please refer to the Frequently Asked Questions on the NOAA Fisheries Service Web site.

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