



Knowledge, Attitudes and Perceptions: Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary



This map shows the location of Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary, 19 miles offshore from Sapelo Island, Georgia. Credit: Tony Reyer/NOAA

Background

Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary (GRNMS) is located off the coast of Georgia in the United States. In 2010, a baseline study of Georgia recreational anglers was conducted to assess their knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions about GRNMS. This survey was replicated 10 years later in 2020 to understand how knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions may or may not have changed among Georgia residents engaged in saltwater recreational fishing in the coastal and ocean waters of Georgia.

Purpose

Due to the multiple-use nature of marine protected areas, the results of the study will inform management and outreach strategies to better protect sanctuary resources. This will ensure that GRNMS will be able to deliver the ecosystem services demanded by the public.

Characteristics of Users

In 2010, about 60% of Georgia recreational anglers were in the 50–64 age range, while in 2020 the average age of recreational fishers was 57 years. In 2010 and 2020, recreational anglers had household incomes concentrated at \$75,000 and higher. This correlates with employment status, as close to 70% of the recreational anglers were employed full-time.

In 2010 and 2020, household sizes were similar with more households without children than with children in both years. In 2010, almost all (98%) recreational users surveyed were boat owners compared to 78% in 2020. The average boat length was 24 feet. Membership in fishing-related groups, clubs, or organizations was popular for recreational anglers in both years.

Minorities are Underrepresented

The diversity of recreational users in Georgia increased since 2010. However, minorities are underrepresented as users in the sanctuary. For gender and race, in 2010, 100% of the recreational users were white males, while in 2020, about 81% of the recreational anglers were male and 95% were white. Of the total recreational anglers, 19% were females and 5% were black or African American in 2020.

Pollution and Coral Health are Top Ocean Health Concerns

In 2010 and 2020, the top concerns were pollution, coral health/other live bottom habitat, habitat loss from coastal development, and marine animal health.

Recreational Users Cultivate a Sense of Place

Recreational anglers are highly involved in leisure activities in ocean and coastal areas. The primary activities include scuba diving, sailing, and whale watching. The reasons for engaging in these activities remained the same from 2010 to 2020:

- being close to the water
- being outdoor
- being with friends
- for relaxation
- to experience natural surroundings

Sanctuary Resources Perceived Getting Better

Overall, recreational anglers perceived the condition of resources in the sanctuary are getting better since designation in 1981. Specifically, fish populations, live-bottom habitat, and abundance of other sea life are the top resources perceived to be getting better since designation.

In terms of pressures on the resources, ocean acidification, invasive species (such as lionfish), and climate change are “getting somewhat worse” according to users.



Black sea bass Photo: Greg McFall/NOAA

Increased Trust in NOAA Information Sources

The most trusted information sources for recreational users are the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, NOAA Fisheries, and the sanctuary website and staff. Recreational anglers preferred to receive information from websites, email list serves, and emails from staff.

Users Familiar with Sanctuary Regulations

In 2020, 55.6% of the anglers surveyed were familiar with the sanctuary’s rules and regulations, with 24.4% very familiar. Close to 80% of the anglers who do not use the sanctuary were not familiar with its regulations.

Socioeconomic Benefits Important Then and Now

The sanctuary is extremely important to recreational anglers and provides other socioeconomic benefits to the communities and local economies.

Support for recreation activities, scientific research, and education were the top ecosystem services that were important in 2010 and have continued to be important.

Although not significantly different between the years 2010 and 2020, coastal and marine resources contribute to seafood supply and food security. In 2010, recreational users considered seafood purchased at local stores and restaurants as “medium value.”

In 2020, this same ecosystem service was “high value” for recreational anglers.

Users’ Willingness to Take Action

In 2020, anglers would undertake activities or actions to ensure that ocean and coastal resources are used sustainably and are available for future generations to enjoy.

These include recycling, using less energy, donating to groups representing recreational fishing interests, and volunteering time.

Increased Support for Ocean Protection

How people value the sanctuary and ocean resources leads to behavior that supports conservation. For example, for those who value the sanctuary for recreation activities, seafood, education, and research, their support for the sanctuary was relatively high.

There was high support among recreational anglers for the protection of coastal-marine resources in the sanctuary.

In 2020, there was higher support among anglers for the protection of marine resources both inside and outside of the sanctuary, when compared to 2010.

More Information

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