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SALTWATER FISH IDENTIFICATION GUIDE



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MISSISSIPPI SALTWATER FISHING

From the brackish inshore to deep offshore waters, the Gulf of Mexico is home to a variety of saltwater fish species. This guide features over 30 of the most common fish on the Mississippi Gulf Coast and is designed to help anglers easily identify their catch. The provided illustrations are accompanied with supporting information to allow an accurate comparison between similar species.

MDMR's mission is to enhance, protect and conserve Mississippi's marine resources. Help our conservation mission by familiarizing yourself with current fishing regulations, commonly caught species in your area and learning how to properly handle your fish.

DMR.MS.GOV

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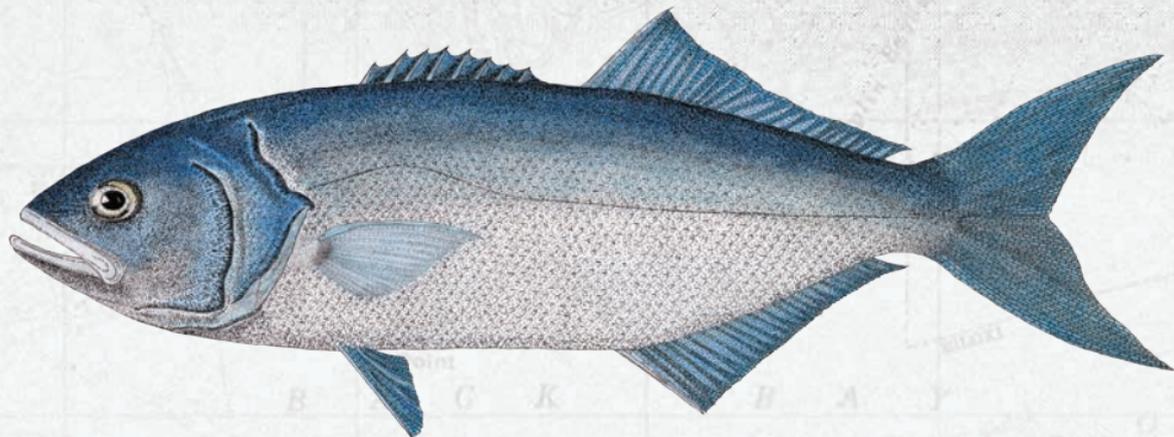
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**COMMISSION ON
MARINE RESOURCES**

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BLUEFISH *Pomotomus saltatrix*



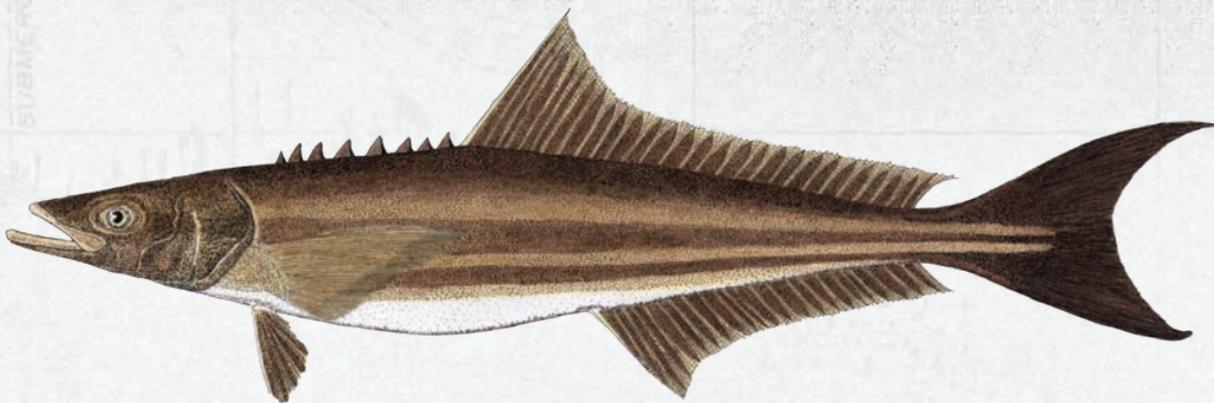
APPEARANCE: Greenish-blue top fades to silver underside. Pronounced teeth.

HABITAT: Bays, sound and offshore waters

AVERAGE SIZE: 3 lbs.

PEAK SEASON: Summer

COBIA *Rachycentron canadum*



APPEARANCE: Dark brown top fades to white underside. Dark lateral stripe from eye to tail. Long, slender body. Flat head with lower jaw projecting past upper jaw.

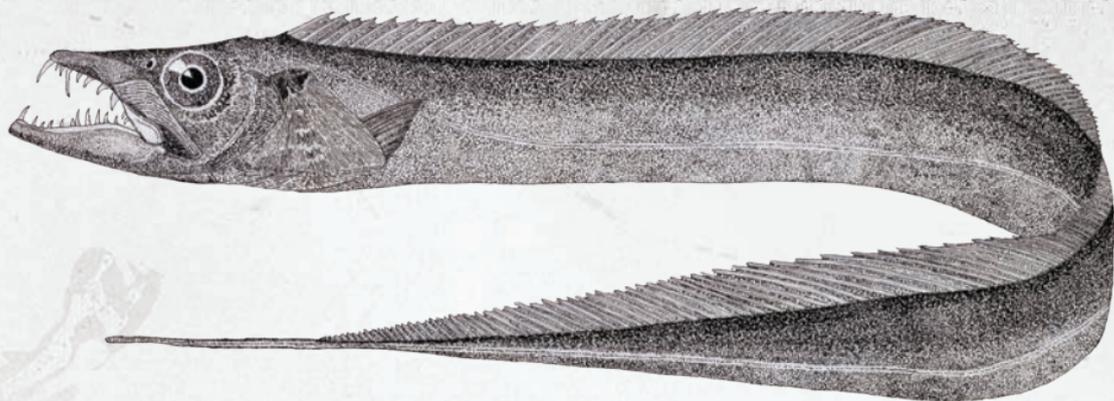
HABITAT: Coastal bays, sandbars and offshore structures

AVERAGE SIZE: 20 lbs.

PEAK SEASON: Spring - Fall

COMMON NAMES: Lemonfish, Ling

ATLANTIC CUTLASSFISH *Trichiurus lepturus*



APPEARANCE: Iridescent silvery blue to steely blue. Dorsal fin pale dusky yellow. Body tapers to a pointed tail. Large mouth with protruding lower jaw.

HABITAT: Throughout Gulf waters

AVERAGE SIZE: Less than 1 lb.

PEAK SEASON: Summer

DOLPHIN *Coryphaena hippurus*



APPEARANCE: Varying colors from blue, yellow to green. Laterally compressed body.

HABITAT: Offshore waters; around floating debris or Sargassum.

AVERAGE SIZE: 10 lbs.

PEAK SEASON: Summer - Fall

COMMON NAMES: Mahi-Mahi, Dorado

ATLANTIC CROAKER *Micropogonias undulatus*



APPEARANCE: Silver-gray or bronze color with brown bars on upper sides. Small barbels on chin.

HABITAT: Bays and estuarine systems

AVERAGE SIZE: Under 1 lb.

PEAK SEASON: Summer - Fall

BLACK DRUM *Pogonias cromis*



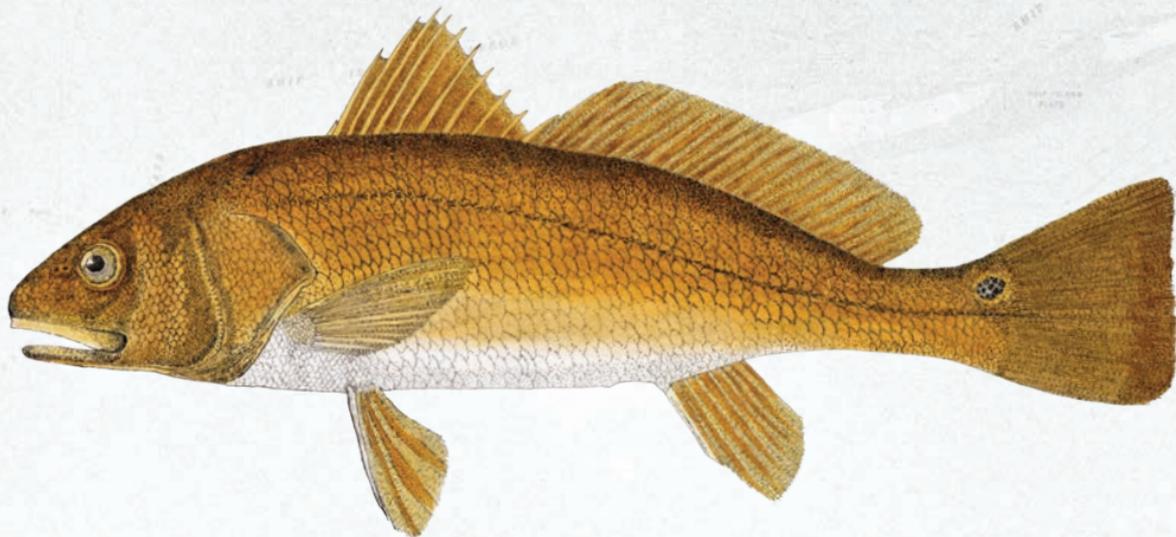
APPEARANCE: Juvenile fish have four to five dark vertical bars over its silver body; stripes fade on adult drums. Numerous barbels on chin.

HABITAT: Bays and estuarine systems

AVERAGE SIZE: 5 lbs.

PEAK SEASON: Spring - Fall

RED DRUM *Sciaenops ocellatus*



APPEARANCE: Copper-brown or reddish color with one or more large spots at base of tail.

HABITAT: Bays, estuarine systems and island passes

AVERAGE SIZE: 5 lbs.

PEAK SEASON: Spring - Fall

COMMON NAME: Redfish

SOUTHERN KINGFISH *Menticirrhus americanus*



APPEARANCE: Silver-gray to copper color with irregular blotches on side. One barbel under chin.

HABITAT: Bays and estuarine systems

AVERAGE SIZE: Under 1 lb.

PEAK SEASON: Summer

COMMON NAME: Ground Mullet

SPOT *Leiostomus xanthurus*



APPEARANCE: Bluish-brown top fades to brassy sides; silver-white underside. Upper sides have 12-15 dark diagonal lines. Dark spot behind gill cover.

HABITAT: Coastal waters

AVERAGE SIZE: Under 1 lb.

PEAK SEASON: Year-round

SPOTTED SEATROUT *Cynoscion nebulosus*



APPEARANCE: Bluish-gray top with multiple black spots; silver-white underside.

HABITAT: Bays and estuarine systems

AVERAGE SIZE: 1 lb.

PEAK SEASON: Spring

COMMON NAME: Speckled Trout

SAND SEATROUT *Cynoscion arenarius*



APPEARANCE: Pale, yellowish or tan top; silver or white underside. Inside of mouth is yellow.

HABITAT: Bays, estuaries and inshore artificial reefs

AVERAGE SIZE: Under 1 lb.

PEAK SEASON: Summer - Fall

COMMON NAME: White Trout

BLUE RUNNER *Caranx crysos*



APPEARANCE: Shiny, bluish fish. Scutes present on sides and in front of deeply forked tail.

HABITAT: Found offshore near floating objects or structure.

AVERAGE SIZE: Under 1 lb.

PEAK SEASON: Summer

FLORIDA POMPANO *Trachinotus carolinus*



APPEARANCE: Silver color body overall; bluish-silver top; yellow underside. Dark dorsal fin; other fins yellow. Deep, compressed body. Small mouth and forehead that gently slopes top-ward.

HABITAT: Surf zone of barrier islands and beaches

AVERAGE SIZE: Under 1 lb.

PEAK SEASON: Summer

GREATER AMBERJACK *Seriola dumerili*



APPEARANCE: Body is darker on top; whitish underside. Broad yellow stripe along mid-side. Dark stripe from nose to dorsal fin that "lights up" when fish is in feeding mode.

HABITAT: Offshore structures, including oil rigs and artificial reefs

AVERAGE SIZE: 15 lbs.

PEAK SEASON: Summer

JACK CREVALLE *Caranx hippos*



APPEARANCE: Bluish-green to greenish-gold top; silver or yellowish underside. Black spot on gill cover and base of pectoral fins. Deep body and steep head.

HABITAT: Bays to offshore waters.

AVERAGE SIZE: 15 lbs.

PEAK SEASON: Summer

KING MACKEREL *Scomberomorus cavalla*



APPEARANCE: Iridescent bluish-green top; silvery underside. First dorsal fin uniformly colored. Lateral line curves sharply under second dorsal fin.

HABITAT: Oil rigs, offshore wrecks and shoal waters

AVERAGE SIZE: 10 lbs.

PEAK SEASON: Spring - Fall

COMMON NAME: Kingfish

SPANISH MACKEREL *Scomberomorus maculatus*



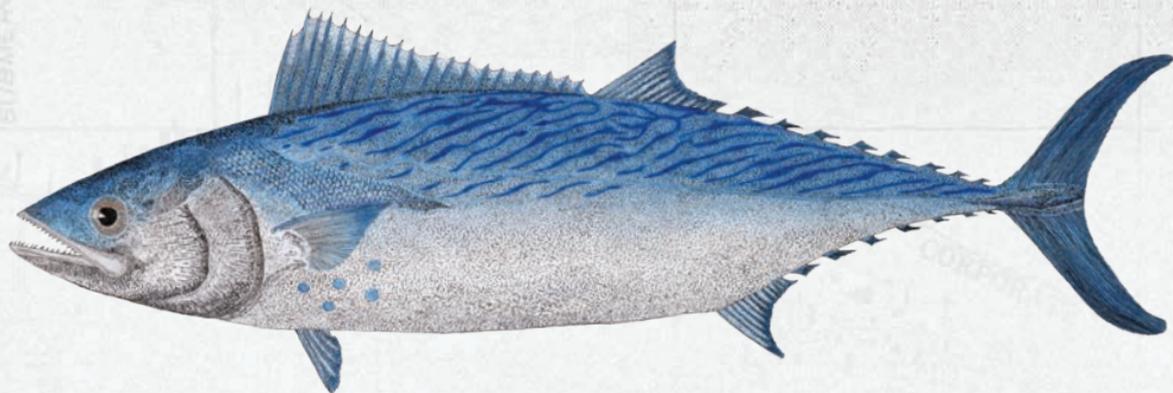
APPEARANCE: Bluish-green top; silver sides and underside. Distinct yellow spots on sides. Bluish-black blotch on front of first dorsal fin. Lateral line slopes evenly downward to the tail.

HABITAT: Surf zone to offshore

AVERAGE SIZE: 1 lb.

PEAK SEASON: Summer - Fall

LITTLE TUNNY *Euthynnus alletteratus*



APPEARANCE: Three to seven dark spots below pectoral fin. Wavy, dark stripes on top.

HABITAT: Offshore waters

AVERAGE SIZE: 5 lbs.

PEAK SEASON: Summer

COMMON NAME: Bonita

WAHOO *Acanthocybium solandri*



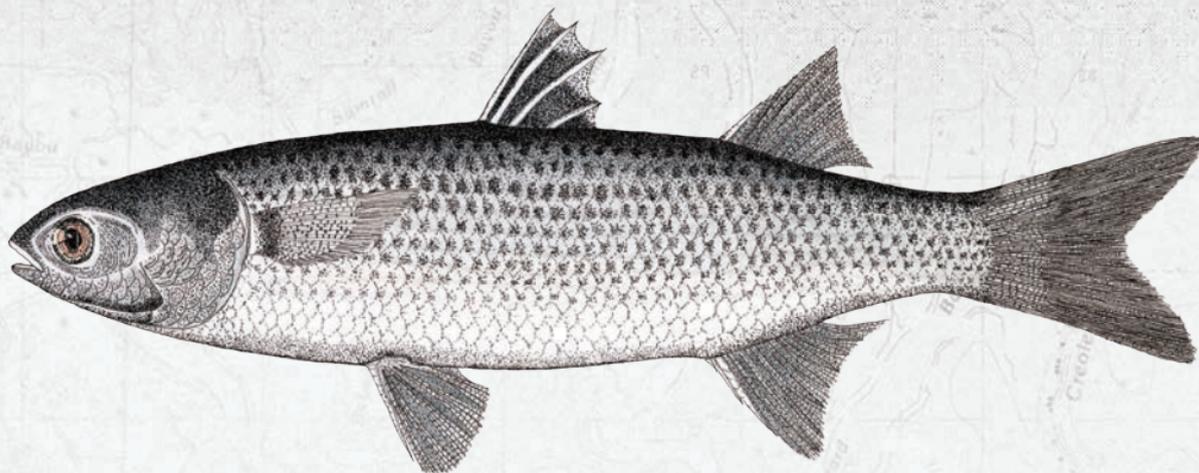
APPEARANCE: Slender body. Dark bluish-green top; silver sides; whitish underside. 24-30 wavy, dark blue bars on sides. Elongated jaw, forming a pointed beak with finely-serrated teeth.

HABITAT: Offshore pelagic waters

AVERAGE SIZE: 30 lbs.

PEAK SEASON: Summer and Winter

STRIPED MULLET *Mugil cephalus*



APPEARANCE: Grayish olive to grayish brown top; silver sides. Dark spots on scales form stripes along sides.

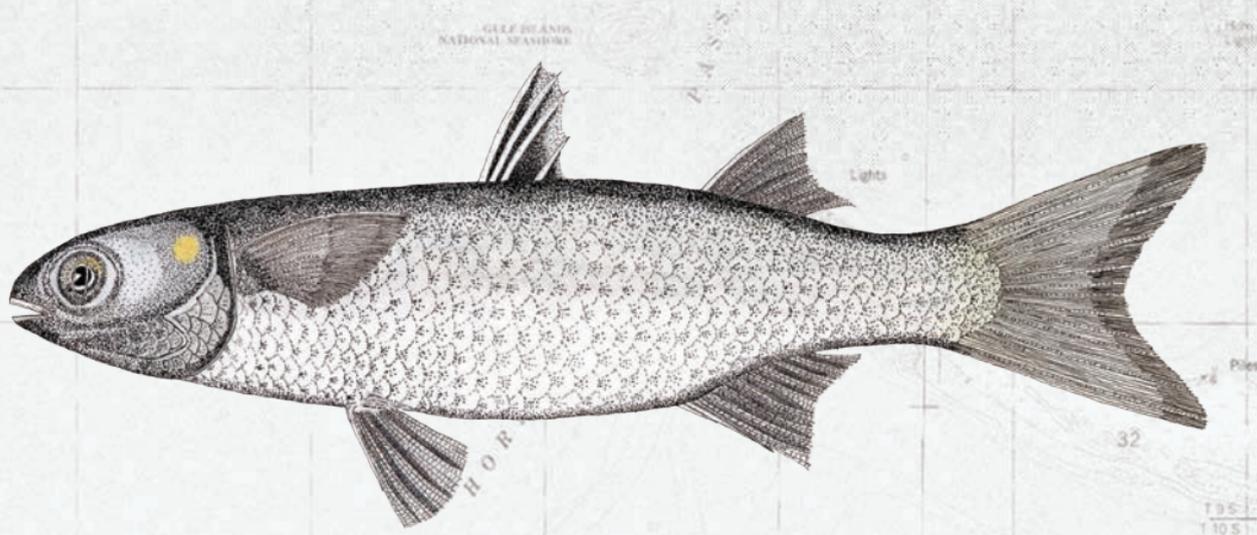
HABITAT: Coastal waters

AVERAGE SIZE: 1 lb.

PEAK SEASON: Fall

COMMON NAME: Popeye Mullet

WHITE MULLET *Mugil curema*



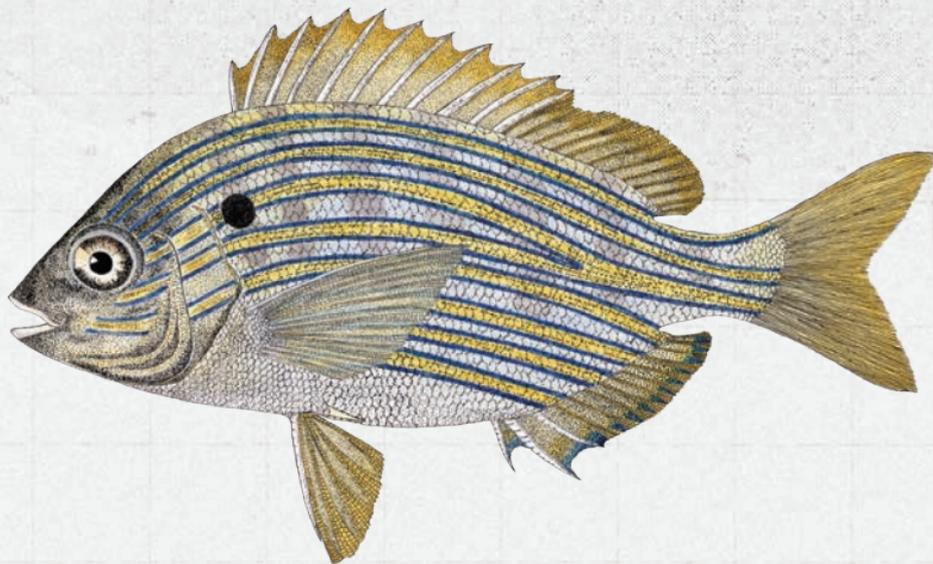
APPEARANCE: Small version of Striped Mullet, but without stripes. Yellow to orangish blotch at upper edge of opercle. Elongated with round cross-section.

HABITAT: Estuaries and coastal waters

AVERAGE SIZE: Under 1 lb.

PEAK SEASON: Spring

PINFISH *Lagodon rhomboides*



APPEARANCE: Bluish-silver color with many narrow bronze stripes and dark shoulder spot.

HABITAT: Man-made and natural structures

AVERAGE SIZE: Under 1 lb.

PEAK SEASON: Year-round

SHEEPSHEAD *Archosargus probatocephalus*



APPEARANCE: Light overall color with vertical black bars on sides. Prominent "sheep-like" teeth.

HABITAT: Man-made and natural structures

AVERAGE SIZE: 2 lbs.

PEAK SEASON: Winter - Spring

SOUTHERN FLOUNDER

Paralichthys lethostigma



APPEARANCE: Flat, brown body with numerous spots.

HABITAT: Silty bay and estuary bottoms

AVERAGE SIZE: 1 lb.

PEAK SEASON: Spring - Fall

BLACK GROUPEL *Mycteroperca bonaci*



APPEARANCE: Olive or gray overall with rectangular black blotches and brassy spots.

HABITAT: Coastal waters near structures

AVERAGE SIZE: 10 lbs.

PEAK SEASON: Year-round

GAG *Mycteroperca microlepis*



APPEARANCE: Pale to dark gray overall with worm-like marks. Color may deepen to dark brown after removal from water.

HABITAT: Offshore structures, including oil rigs and artificial reefs

AVERAGE SIZE: 5 lbs.

PEAK SEASON: Fall

GAFFTOPSAIL CATFISH *Bagre marinus*



APPEARANCE: Bluish-gray top; silver-white underside. Long fin rays and four whiskers.

HABITAT: Bays and shallow Gulf waters

AVERAGE SIZE: 2 lbs.

PEAK SEASON: Spring - Fall

HARDHEAD CATFISH *Ariopsis felis*



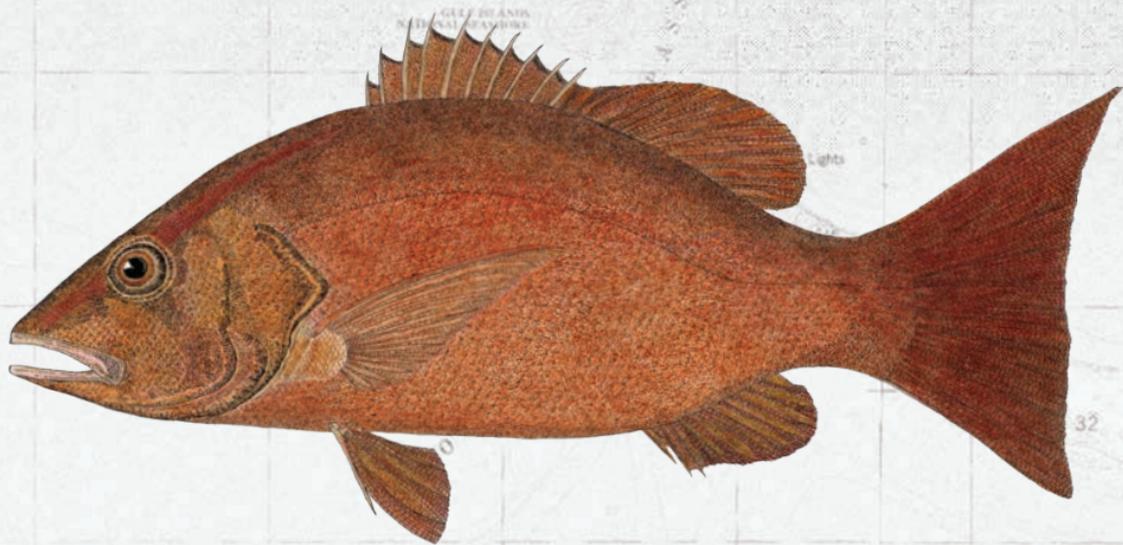
APPEARANCE: Brownish to gray-green color. Flattened head and six whiskers.

HABITAT: All coastal waters

AVERAGE SIZE: 1 lb.

PEAK SEASON: Spring - Fall

MANGROVE SNAPPER *Lutjanus griseus*



APPEARANCE: Dark red or maroon color. Dark stripe through eye.

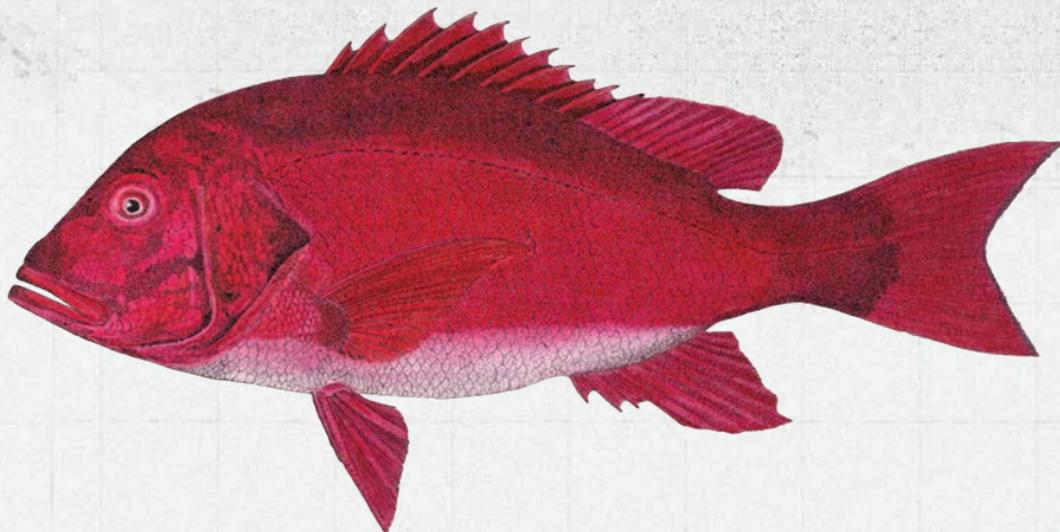
HABITAT: Juveniles inhabit inshore structures. Adults inhabit offshore oil rigs and artificial reefs.

AVERAGE SIZE: 2 lbs.

PEAK SEASON: Summer - Fall

COMMON NAME: Gray Snapper

RED SNAPPER *Lutjanus campechanus*



APPEARANCE: Pinkish-red top fades to white underside. Triangular snout. Red iris. Pointed anal fin.

HABITAT: Offshore structures, including oil rigs and artificial reefs.

AVERAGE SIZE: 6 lbs.

PEAK SEASON: Spring - Fall

ATLANTIC SPADEFISH *Chaetodipterus faber*



APPEARANCE: Deep, compressed body. Grayish-silver with four to six dark vertical bars on sides.

HABITAT: Offshore oil rigs and other hard structures

AVERAGE SIZE: 2 lbs.

PEAK SEASON: Year-round

TARPON *Megalops atlanticus*



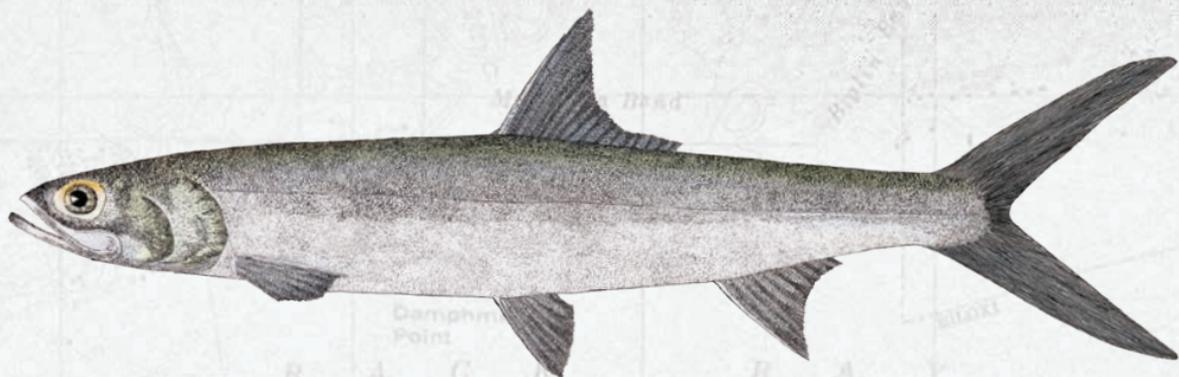
APPEARANCE: Bright silver color with dark blue-green or greenish-black top. Last ray of dorsal is elongated. Large scales and mouth that points upward.

HABITAT: Sound and offshore waters

AVERAGE SIZE: 75 lbs.

PEAK SEASON: Summer

LADYFISH *Elops saurus*



APPEARANCE: Long, slender and silver body. Head small and pointed.

HABITAT: Estuaries and bays

AVERAGE SIZE: 1 lb.

PEAK SEASON: Spring - Summer

COMMON NAMES: Ten-pounder

GRAY TRIGGERFISH *Balistes capriscus*



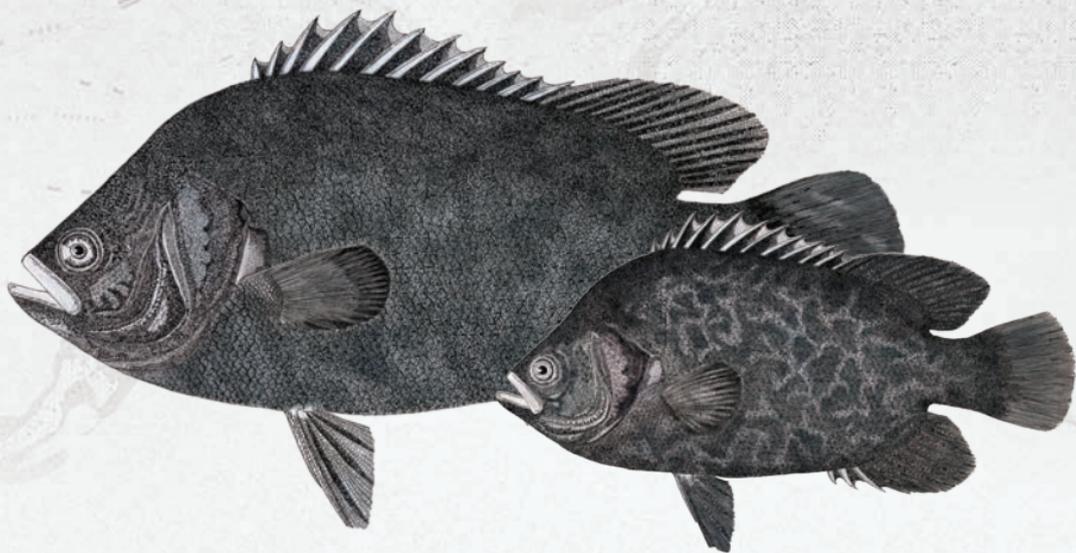
APPEARANCE: Olive-gray color with irregular dark markings. Small mouth and chisel-like teeth.

HABITAT: Offshore structures, including oil rigs and artificial reefs

AVERAGE SIZE: 2 lbs.

PEAK SEASON: Year-round

TRIPLETAIL *Lobotes surinamensis*



APPEARANCE: Yellow to copper-brown blotches which are more prominent in juveniles. Anal, dorsal and tail fin are close to the same length; giving the illusion to three tails.

HABITAT: Open water debris or wreckage. Inshore channel markers and buoys.

AVERAGE SIZE: 8 lbs.

PEAK SEASON: Summer

COMMON NAME: Blackfish

ATLANTIC STINGRAY *Dasyatis sabina*



APPEARANCE: Top color ranging from medium to dark brown; white underside. Flat body with pectoral fins that expand toward and fuse with the head.

HABITAT: Shallow water

AVERAGE SIZE: 2 lbs.

PEAK SEASON: Summer - Fall

COMMISSION

The Commission on Marine Resources is comprised of five members appointed by the governor for four-year terms to represent the following areas: commercial seafood processors, nonprofit environmental organizations, charter boat operators, recreational sports fishermen and commercial fishermen.

STATE OF MISSISSIPPI

The Honorable Phil Bryant, *Governor*

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF MARINE RESOURCES

Joe Spraggins, *Director*

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Steve Bosarge, *Chairman*
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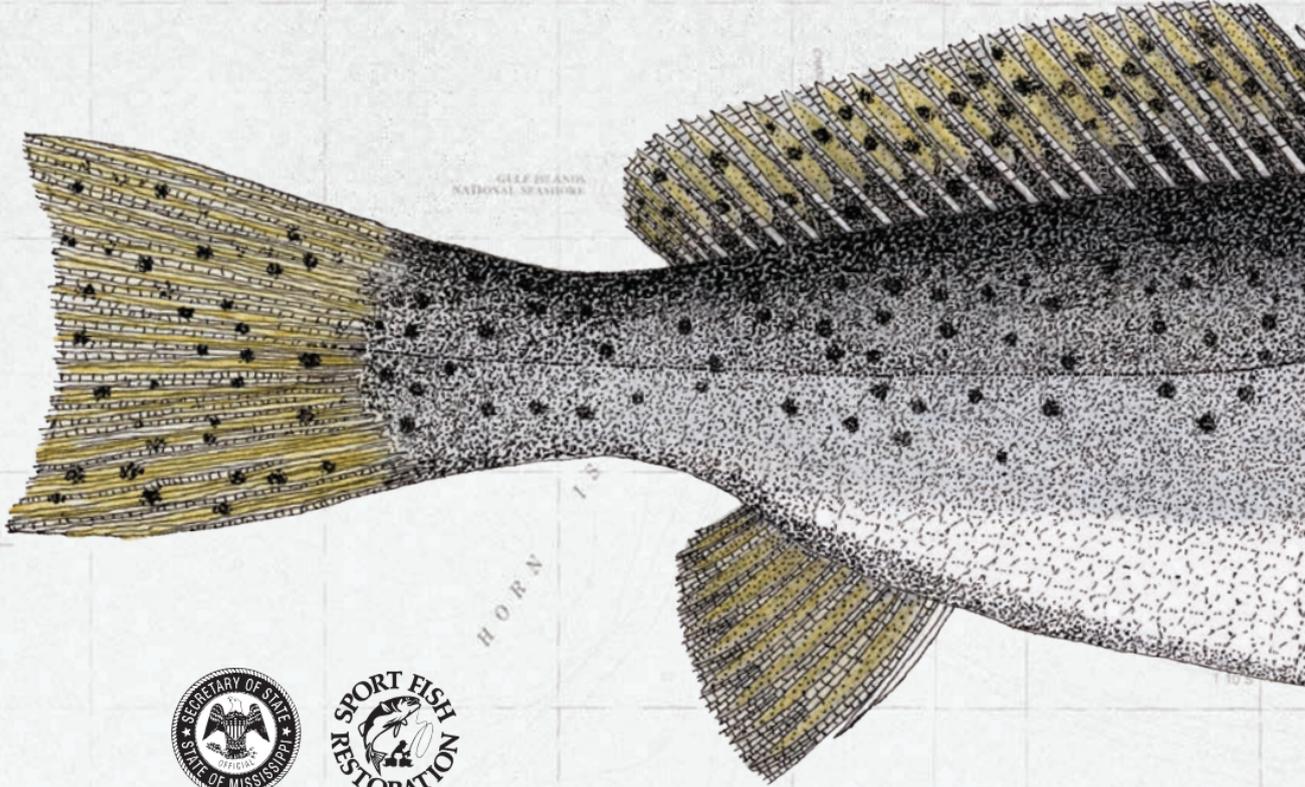
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