

The Villages Deep Sea Fishing Club Awaits Gag Grouper Season After New Regulations Have Limited Recreational and Commercial Fishing. The Season Starts Sept. 1 and Runs Through Nov. 10

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The Villages Deep Sea Fishing Club takes many days-spanning trips out at sea and gag grouper is one of the group's more popular journeys.

However, the club's fishing trip is being postponed as the group has been keeping a close eye on new regulation updates from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

The regulation updates show the season is being cut short to help the population grow after overfishing on the Gulf Coast.

"The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council wants to try to see a consistent number of fish that they catch in their sampling year-to-year," said Gaylon Thompson, vice president of The Villages Deep Sea Fishing Club. "They hope

that number stays consistent or rises instead of that number declining, because as it declines, we lose breeding stock." The council made updates to the gag grouper season after a June press release on Reef Fish Amendment 56, which determines criteria, catch limits, accountability measures for the recreational fishing season.

Gag grouper is a very popular type of fish. It is often caught for its savory lobster-like meat.

To help reduce overfishing, the season was delayed from starting on June 1 and now is starting on Sept. 1 and running through Nov. 10, with the possibility of ending soon. The available population is split between 65% being caught for recreational use and 35% for commercial fishing. This allows each fisherman two fish, with a minimum of 2 feet or 24 inches in length, to be

caught per fishing trip.

The season will end sooner if the annual catch limit, 20% under the recreational fishing threshold, have been caught.

The fishing reduction is important because a recent survey from the council found that males comprise less than 2% of the population, significantly affecting the population's chances of recuperating its numbers. All groupers are born as females, but some transition to male after reaching maturity, further reducing the possibility to reproduce year after year.

"There are thousands of charter captains in Florida that will be impacted by grouper season is a big draw," said Thompson, of the Village of St. Charles. "When grouper season opens, they're booked up day after day after day, because people want to go. It's very popular."

Thompson just came back from a four-day fishing trip with Charlie Pryde, of the Village of Marsh Bend, and other club members at Pull Ridge, 120 miles from Marco Island. The group's catch included 20 different species of fish. Pryde caught a sizable gag grouper, but released it per the season.

During his childhood, in the suburban outskirts of Detroit, Pryde was exclusively exposed to fresh water fishing.

He later enlisted into the U.S. Army in 1978 and served for 31 years.

During his service, he looked toward the ocean and saw greater game to catch. He fished wherever he was stationed, from Australia to Alaska.

For Thompson and Pryde



Charlie Pryde, left, of the Village of Marsh Bend, and Gary Coleman, right, of Village La Zamora, catching gag groupers out on the Gulf last year.

Submitted photo

and many others, the ocean is an irreplaceable landscape filled with many novel and amazing sights even after decades of fishing.

"This last trip that we were 100 miles off-shore and people have seen dolphins before, but we saw this specific species of dolphin called spotted

dolphins," Pryde said. "And they only reside in really deep, deep waters. And as the boat was going along at night, we were scaring up these flying fish."

The Villages Deep Sea Fishing Club prides itself on following the rules and regulations to practice ethical fishing

to maintain a sport some have been practicing since they were children. For more information, visit deepseafishingclub.com.

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