



Citizen Science

Citizen Science Program Update

Outreach and Communications AP
April 2026

Citizen Science Program Activities

New additions to CitSci Team



Kate Chatman
CitSci Project Assistant

Taylor Mickey
SAFMC CitSci / SCDNR Intern

Project Updates



**Feedback on SAFMC Release
Participant Recognition Program**



SMILE Project

- Led by Reef Environmental Education Foundation
- Partner with divers to collect length info on data limited species
- Laser-mounted Olympus underwater cameras
- Field testing in FL Keys
- 3 year pilot project complete; additional year of funding secured
- [SMILE presentation](#) – SAFMC Oct Seminar Series
- Survey to better understand demographics, motivations, and barriers of recreational divers





FISHstory



Project Findings To Date



Over 2,300+ photos have been digitized & archived from the South Atlantic from the 1940s-1990s
Looking for more photos from the Carolinas



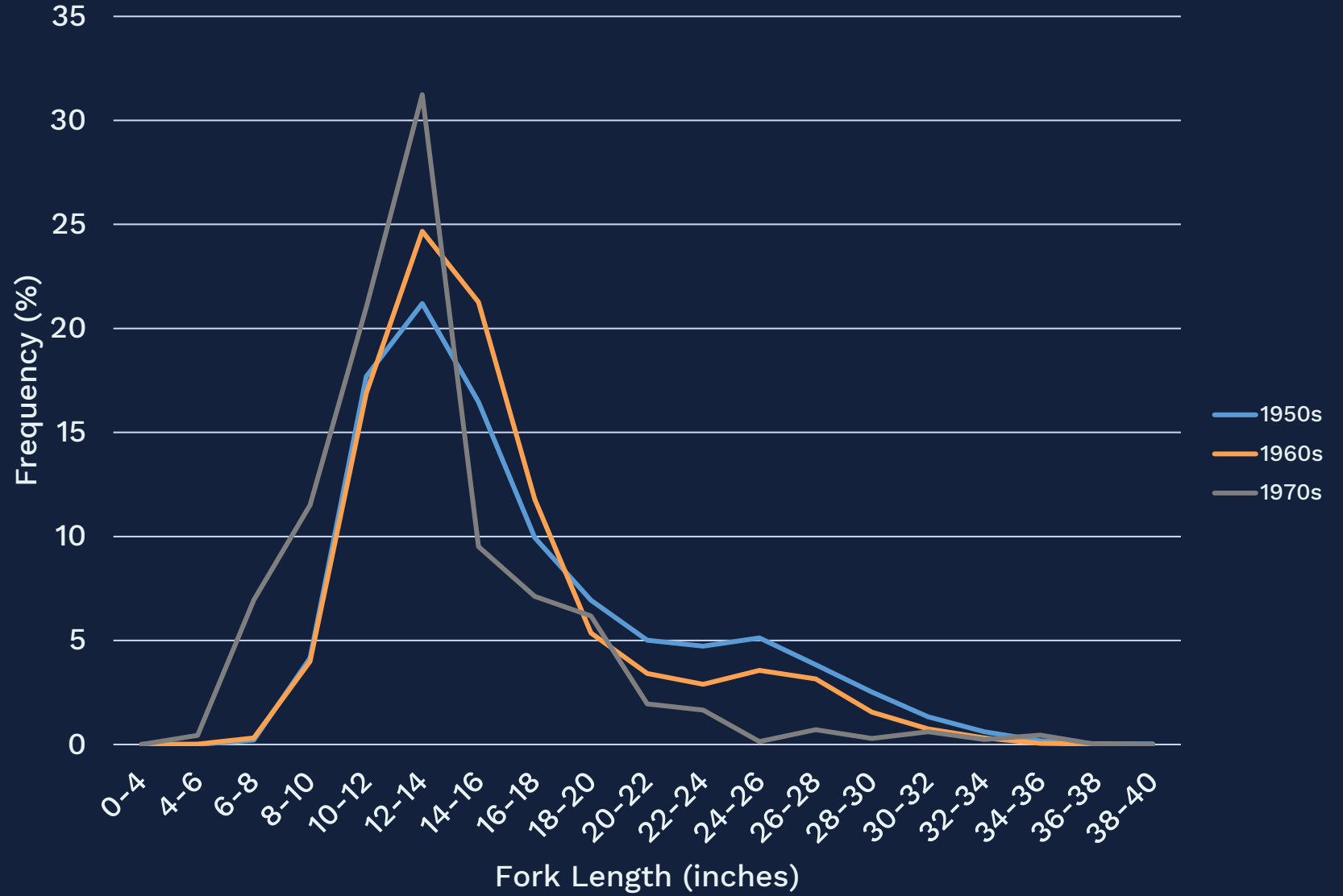
Over 4,000 volunteers analyzed 1,950 photos in Zooniverse
Validation Team reviewed 400+ photos
Analysis underway by NC State analytical team



All King Mackerel & Red Snapper measured in current photo archive
Red Snapper length compositions were recommended for use by SEDAR 90 (South Atlantic Red Snapper) Data Workshop Panel
King Mackerel length compositions are being updated & will be presented at next SEDAR South Atlantic King Mackerel assessment



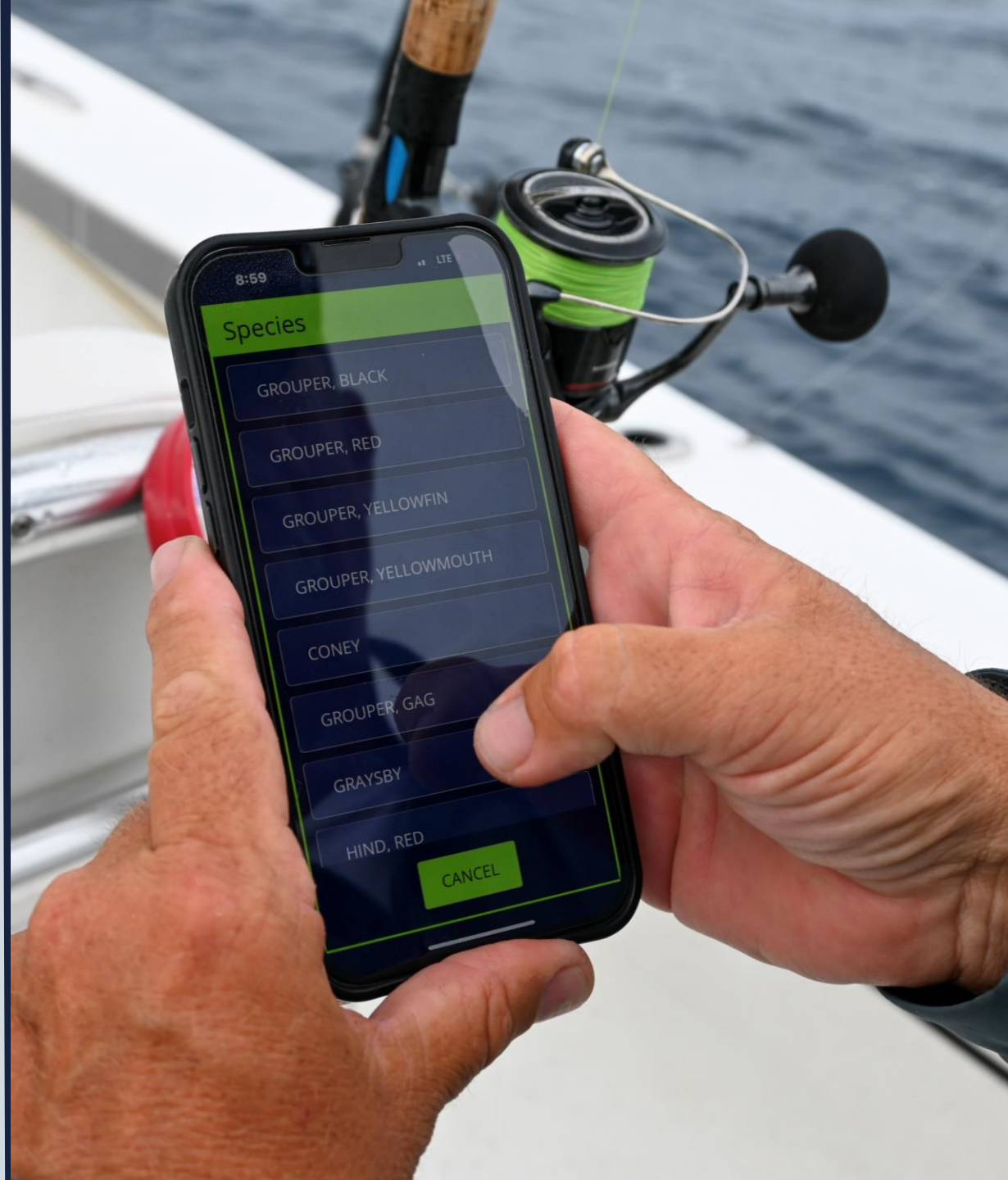
Red Snapper
FISHstory
length
compositions
by decade



SAFMC



Release



Updates



Red Snapper



Scamp



Graysby



Black



Yellowmouth



Gag



Rock Hind



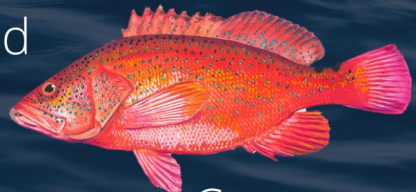
Yellowfin



Red Hind



Red



Coney

Participants recording released shallow water grouper and Red Snapper in SciFish app

Continued outreach, including collaboration with Best Fishing Practices initiative

Data Updates

2026 Participant Recognition Program



SAFMC Release 2025 Annual Data Summary

Citizen Science SAFMC Release 2025 Data Summary

All data summarized below were submitted to SAFMC Release in 2025.

Where Entries Came From

Headboat 10%
Charter 26%
Recreational 64%

The majority of releases recorded in 2025 were caught on recreational trips (64%), followed by charter (26%) and headboat (10%).

Most submissions came from South Carolina (46%), followed by North Carolina (31%) and Florida (23%). No Georgia submissions in 2025.

Species Submitted and Lengths

Red Snapper was the most commonly recorded species in 2025, followed by Gag. Red Snapper and Gag have been the most commonly submitted species since all project species were incorporated in 2022. Check out previous data summaries on our webpage.

Gag Grouper Lengths

Smallest: 7 in
Largest: 41 in
Average: 23 in
Average depth caught: 88 ft

Red Snapper

Smallest: 12 in
Largest: 32 in
Average: 20 in
Average depth caught: 88 ft

Red Snapper Lengths

Shark Depredation, Hook Type, and Release Treatment

~2% of recorded releases experienced shark depredation.

Non-offset circle hooks were the most frequently recorded hook type in 2025. This is great because these are less likely to hook fish in lethal areas, like the gills. 'Other' hooks, which includes jigs, were the second-most commonly recorded hook type. About 94% of recorded releases were hooked in the jaw. For hook regulations, visit the [Best Fishing Practices webpage](#).

Generally, as depth caught increases, so does the percent of releases being treated for barotrauma, such as being descended, vented, or both. This makes sense because the risk of barotrauma increases with depth caught. Knowing the signs of barotrauma is key to knowing when to assist your fish.

Legend: No Treatment, Descended, Vented, Both

Participant Recognition Program Milestones

In the SAFMC Release Participant Recognition Program (PRP), participants are recognized for meeting project-specific milestones, such as submitting the largest and/or smallest of each species, recording the most species, and submitting the most releases overall. Find updated 2026 milestones in the [2026 PRP Milestones document](#), but for now, check out some of the 2025 PRP winners below.

Size Matters

Red Grouper Smallest: 11 in Vincent Gatto Largest: 23 in Victor Tucker	Gag Smallest: 7 in Chris Kimrey Largest: 41 in Jake Harmon	Scamp Smallest: 16 in Chris Kimrey Largest: 35 in Jake Harmon
Graysby Smallest: 10 in Vincent Gatto Largest: 17 in Nigel Bowers	Red Snapper Smallest: 12 in Nigel Bowers Graham Free Mark McWaters Largest: 32 in Mark McWaters Victor Tucker	

Around the Reef

Jake Harmon is in the lead!
To win this milestone, a participant records information for all 11 project species. Jake has submitted valuable information on six species! This milestone is being replaced in 2026 with the Species Spotlight milestone. Check out the [2026 PRP Milestones Document](#) for details.

Release Champion

Nigel Bowers is our 2025 Release Champion!
Huge congratulations to Nigel for submitting an impressive 65 entries this year. His champion status is well-deserved!

Thank you to all our SAFMC Release participants for sharing what they see on the water.

Julia Byrd
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Have questions? Drop us a line.
Discover more on our [webpage](#)

Meg Withers
meg.withers@safmc.net



SAFMC Release Data Update

- Shared Red Snapper length data at the SEDAR 90 Data Workshop ([SEDAR90-DW-17](#)).
- Data were recommended for use in the assessment by the Data Workshop Panel.



SAFMC Release Participant Recognition Program (PRP)

SAFMC Release
Participant Recognition Program



The PRP aims to thank SAFMC Release participants for their contributions to the project and recognize them for their achievements.



SAFMC Release Participant Recognition Program (PRP)

2026 Milestones



Referral



Quantity of
Submissions



Species
Diversity



Smallest &
Largest



Photo
Highlights





SAFMC Release Participant Recognition Program (PRP)

How We're Spreading the Word



Intro & one-on-one emailing



Project Newsletter

Your 2026 Recognition Program

We've made some big changes to the SAFMC Release Participant Recognition Program (PRP). We're grateful for all your contributions to the project and can't wait to recognize you through this updated PRP!

The document below provides an overview of the milestones you can meet and the items you earn with your SAFMC Release submissions. Please click [here](#) to read the full document. It outlines important information about the PRP, shares more details about a Sea Grant photo challenge, and provides guidance on how to take a length validation photo, which is required for entries to qualify for some milestones.

Please reach out to [Meg Withers](#) with any questions or to opt out of the PRP.

Milestone	What to Do	Recognition
Referral Program	Refer three fishermen to the SAFMC Release project. When signing up, they must say they heard about the project from you.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Virtual certificate of appreciation\$25 West Marine e-gift card
First Fish	Submit your first SAFMC Release entry (this calendar year)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">SAFMC Release Shallow Water Grouper ID ruler and non-offset circle hooksYour name in the SAFMC Release newsletter
Silver Jig	Submit 5 SAFMC Release entries	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Rope-handle bucket with stickerYour name in the SAFMC Release newsletter
Golden Jig	Submit 20 SAFMC Release entries	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Sea-to-Summit 13L dry bagYour name in the SAFMC Release newsletter
Diamond Jig	Submit 45 SAFMC Release entries	<ul style="list-style-type: none">RTIC Cooler (30 can)Your name in the SAFMC Release newsletter
Quarterly Top Contributor	Submit the most SAFMC Release entries Jan-Mar, Apr-Jun, Jul-Sep.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">\$50 West Marine e-gift cardHighlighted in the SAFMC Release newsletter



SAFMC Release Participant Recognition Program (PRP)

How We're Spreading the Word



Intro & one-on-one emailing



Project Newsletter



Release Webpage

The screenshot shows a web browser displaying the SAFMC Release website. The URL is safmc.net/citizen-science/safmc-release/. The page features a dark blue sidebar with a navigation menu including: Home, Regulations, Meetings, Fishery Management, News & Updates, About the Council, Habitat and Ecosystem, Best Fishing Practices, Citizen Science Program, Program Development (with sub-items SAFMC Release, FISHistory, and SMILE Project), Science & SEDAR, and Resilient Fisheries. The main content area has a light blue background and includes a paragraph of text, a link to a project page, and a section titled "Participant Recognition Program" with a list of bullet points. A yellow button labeled "2026 PRP MILESTONES" is visible in the bottom right corner.

project.

[2021](#) | [2022](#) | [2023](#) | [2024](#) | [2025](#)

A big thank you to all of the SAFMC Release participants for their valuable contributions to the project. With their help, we are moving towards understanding more about our reef fish fisheries.

Participant Recognition Program

- The SAFMC Release Participant Recognition Program (PRP) is designed to celebrate our participants and their achievements!
- Participants are recognized for reaching milestones, like recording five releases in the SciFish app, on different platforms like our newsletters, social media, and annual data summaries.
- Sensitive information is not shared through this program.
- Join SAFMC Release to be recognized for your released shallow water grouper and Red Snapper!

SAFMC Release
Participant Recognition Program

2026 PRP MILESTONES



SAFMC Release Participant Recognition Program (PRP)

How We're Spreading the Word



Intro & one-on-one emailing



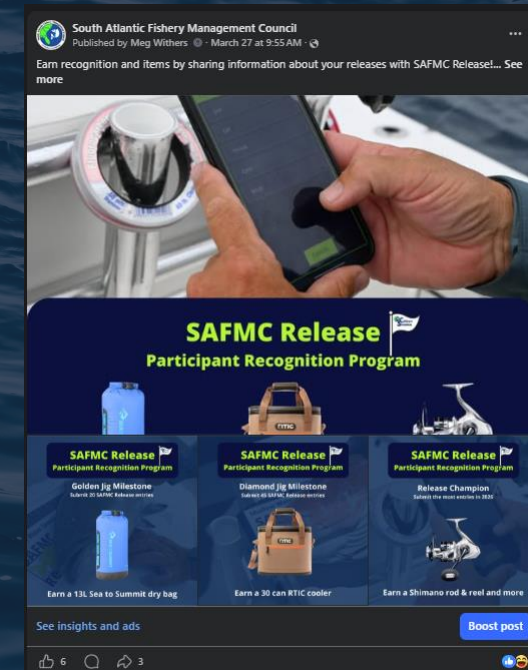
Social Media



Project Newsletter



Release Webpage





SAFMC Release Participant Recognition Program (PRP)

How We're Spreading the Word



Intro & one-on-one emailing



Social Media



Project Newsletter



Presentations

- Seminars
- Partner events
- AP presentations



Release Webpage



SAFMC Release Participant Recognition Program (PRP)

We want to:

- Ensure participants know about the PRP and what they can earn
- Engage and thank our participants
- Effectively spread the word about the PRP to recruit new participants

How Could We Better Get the Word Out?

1. What would be effective outreach avenues? (e.g., email fishing clubs about the PRP?)
2. What outreach products should we have? (e.g., PRP video, flyer, etc.)



**Keep up with projects
& the Program!**

safmc.net/citizen-science-program/



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