



# Citizen Science

## Citizen Science Program Update

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CitSci Ops AP  
June 2026

# Citizen Science Program Activities

## New additions to CitSci Team



**Kate Chatman**  
*CitSci Project Assistant*

**Taylor Mickey**  
*SAFMC CitSci / SCDNR Intern*

## Project Updates

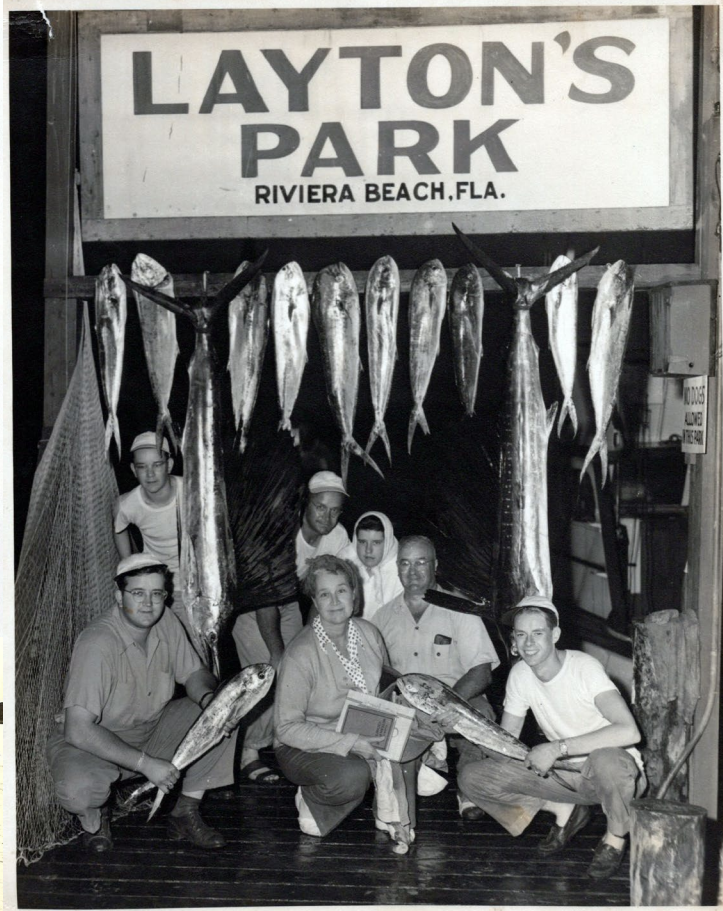




# SMILE Project

- 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
- Presented survey findings to better understand motivations & barriers of recreational divers at April 2026 SEP





# FISHstory



# Project Findings To Date

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



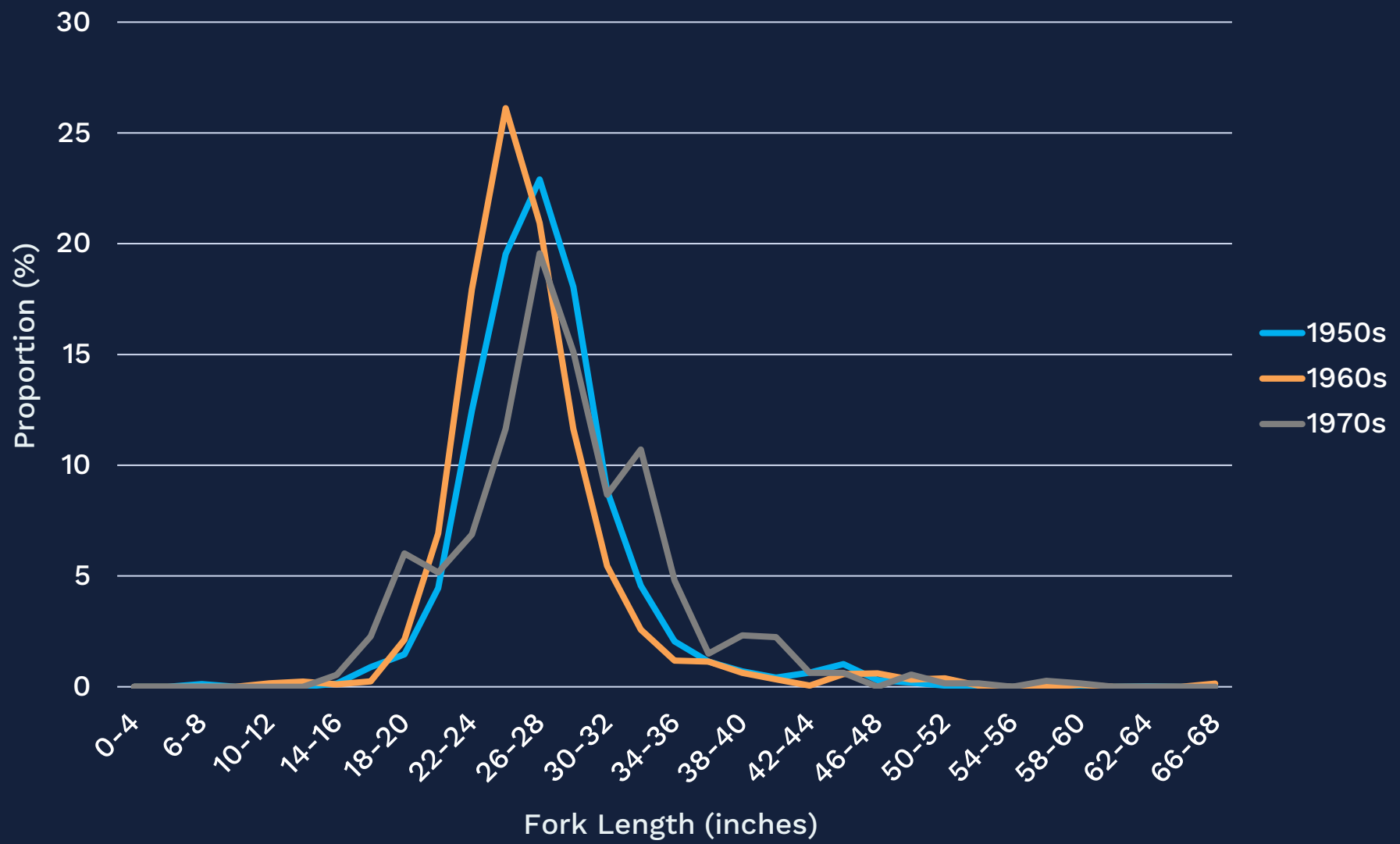
Over 4,000 volunteers analyzed 1,950 photos in Zooniverse  
Validation Team reviewed 400+ photos  
Zooniverse model & index development underway by NC State analytical team



All King Mackerel & Red Snapper measured in current photo archive & length compositions produced



King Mackerel FISHstory length compositions by decade



# Upcoming Activities



Sharing results & writing manuscripts



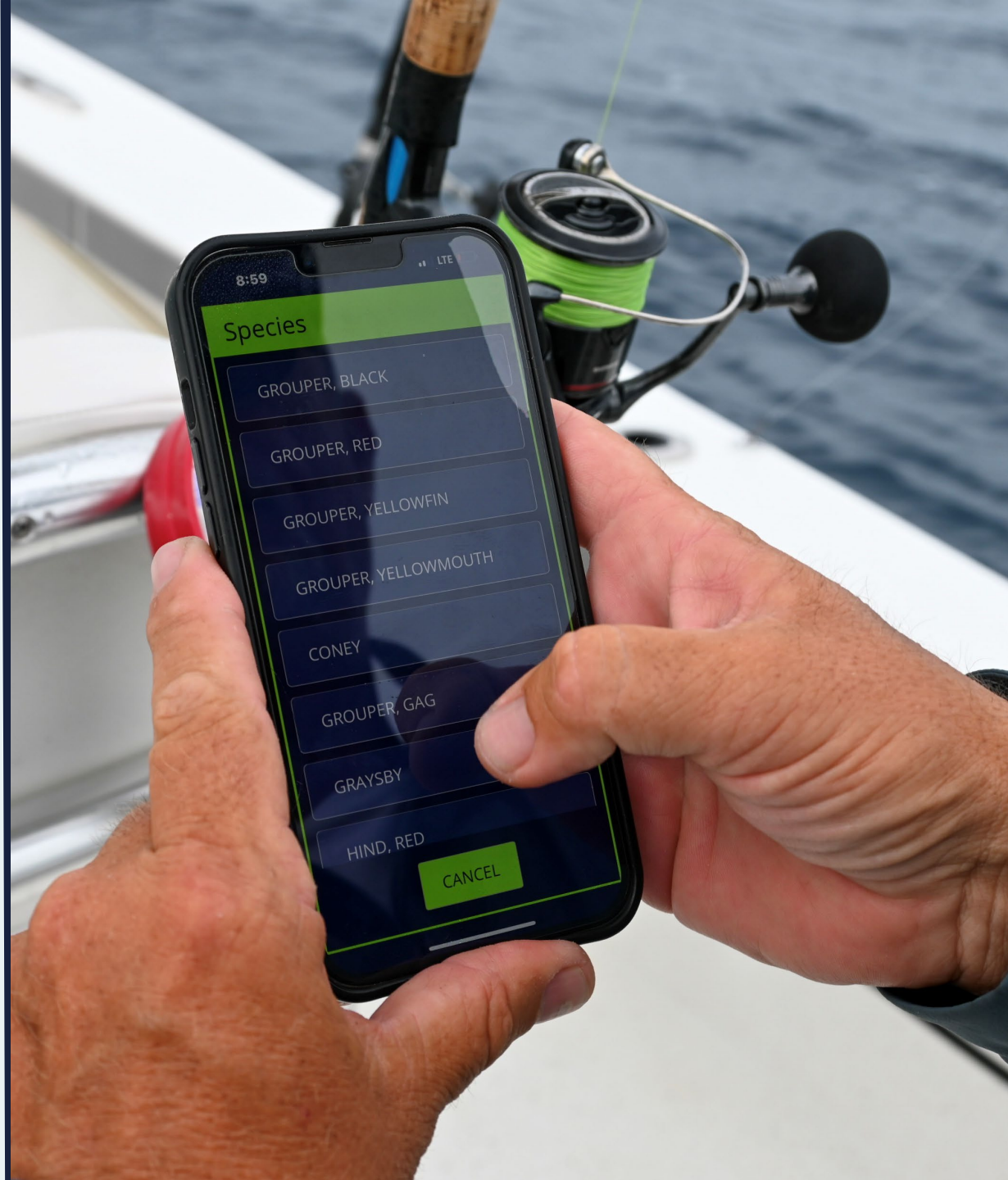
Growing partnerships & support



# SAFMC



# Release



# Updates



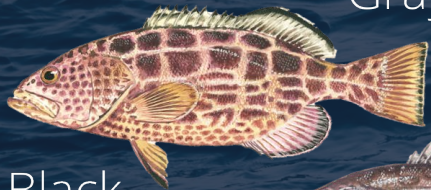
Red Snapper



Scamp



Graysby



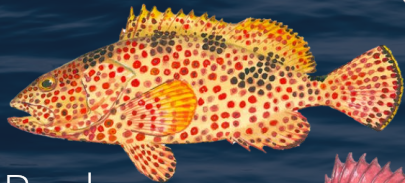
Black



Yellowmouth



Gag



Rock Hind



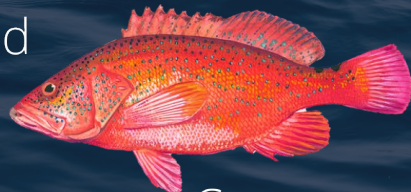
Yellowfin



Red Hind



Red



Coney

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

Continued outreach including seminar, expos, and partner events

2025 SAFMC Release Data Summary

2026 Participant Recognition Program & Sea Grant South Atlantic Release Rodeo



# SAFMC Release Outreach Activities



GA & SC recruitment mailing to recreational anglers



Seminars & Expos



Call to Action Video with participants



# SAFMC Release 2025 Annual Data Summary



## SAFMC Release 2025 Data Summary

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

### Where Entries Came From

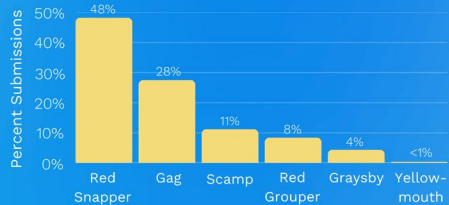


The majority of releases recorded in 2025 were caught on recreational trips (64%), followed by charter (26%) and headboat (10%).

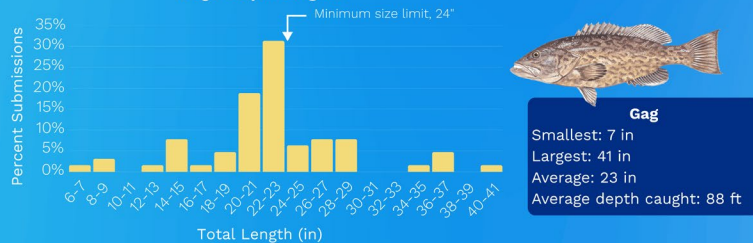
Most submissions came from South Carolina (46%), followed by North Carolina (31%) and Florida (23%). No Georgia submissions in 2025.

### 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](#).



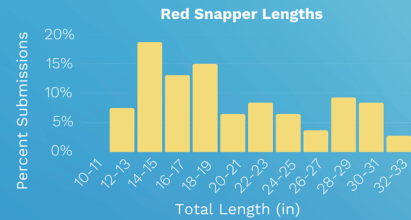
### Gag Grouper Lengths



**Gag**  
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

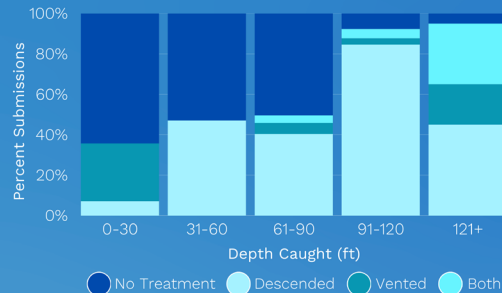
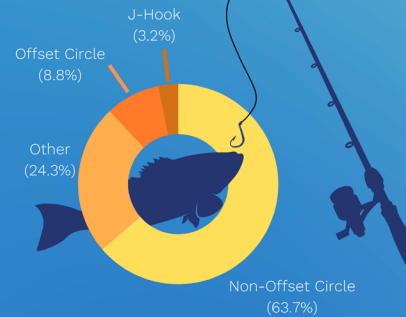


### Shark Depredation, Hook Type, and Release Treatment



~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.

### 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  
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# SAFMC Release Participant Recognition Program (PRP)

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## 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





# Sea Grant South Atlantic Release Rodeo



Sea Grant wants best fishing practices gear in fishermen's hands



SAFMC Release wants more entries that can be used for validation

## Rodeo Structure



May - July



4 entries/month



8 entries/month if include ruler



2 names drawn by Sea Grant/month!



# 2026 Sea Grant South Atlantic Release Rodeo

<https://gulfseagrants.org/reef-fish-extension/safmc-release-rodeo/>



MAY 1 - JULY 31

## SEA GRANT SOUTH ATLANTIC RELEASE RODEO

HOOK GIVEAWAYS WHILE SUPPORTING YOUR FISHERY!

### What is the Release Rodeo?

The Sea Grant South Atlantic Release Rodeo is a challenge running from **May 1 - July 31, 2026**. South Atlantic fishermen can win Sea Grant giveaways by sharing data on their released shallow water grouper (e.g., Gag) and Red Snapper through the citizen science project SAFMC Release.

### Why Jump In?

- Share your observations to support your snapper grouper fishery
- Submit data through a free and easy-to-use mobile app
- Submissions are confidential
- Earn a chance to win giveaways!

### Getting Started

1. **Visit the Sea Grant Release Rodeo webpage** for rules, guidelines, and giveaway details (scan top QR code)
2. **Make an SAFMC Release account** on the SAFMC Release webpage (scan bottom QR code and click "Set Up An Account")
3. **SAFMC staff will email account details**
4. Start recording your releases to earn your chance to win!

### Release Rodeo Webpage

Scan to check out the rules and guidelines to make the most of every submission.



[gulfseagrants.org/reef-fish-extension/safmc-release-rodeo/](https://gulfseagrants.org/reef-fish-extension/safmc-release-rodeo/)

### SAFMC Release Webpage

Scan to learn more about the project and click the "Set Up An Account" button to get started.



[safmc.net/citizen-science/safmc-release/](https://safmc.net/citizen-science/safmc-release/)



Keep up with projects  
& the Program!

[safmc.net/citizen-science-program/](http://safmc.net/citizen-science-program/)



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