



NOAA
FISHERIES
Southeast
Region

Giant Manta Ray ESA Section 4(d) Rule Development Update and New Information

Mackerel Cobia Committee Meeting
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Presentation Overview

- Update on giant manta ray section 4(d) rule development
- New information available on giant manta ray important habitat and on recreational cobia fishing impacts
- Section 7 considerations for the Coastal Migratory Pelagic Resources FMP

Giant Manta Ray ESA Section 4(d) Rule Development

- In December, we informed the SAFMC that NOAA Fisheries is considering developing protective regulations under section 4(d) of the ESA for giant manta ray to manage activities to help preserve and recover the species. Regulations under section 4(d) of the ESA can extend some, or all, of the section 9 “take” prohibitions to threatened species. The term “take” means to harass, hunt, shoot, capture, trap, kill, collect, wound, harm, or pursue an ESA-listed species, or attempt any of these activities.
- We are continuing to collect information on activities that may take giant manta rays to help conserve and recover the species.

New Information on Giant Manta Rays Reproductive Habitat

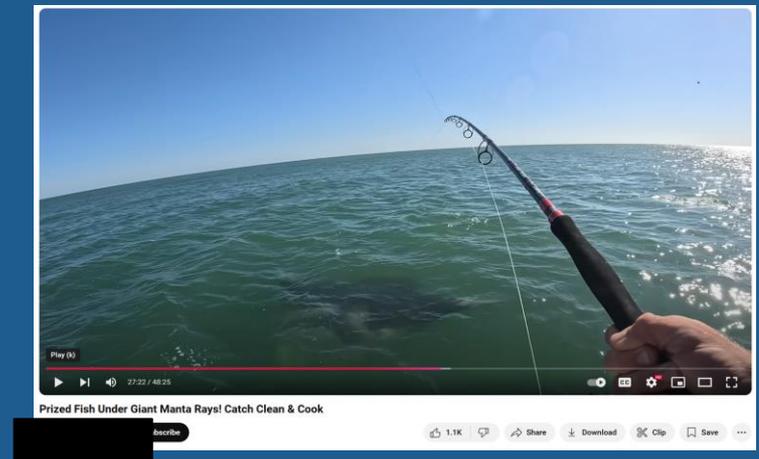
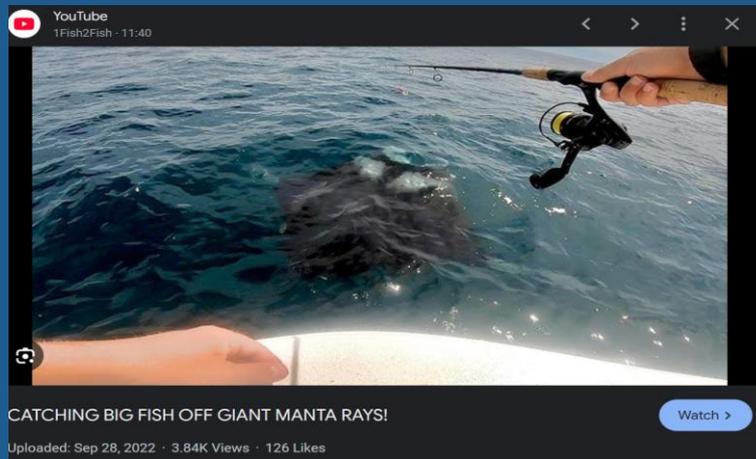
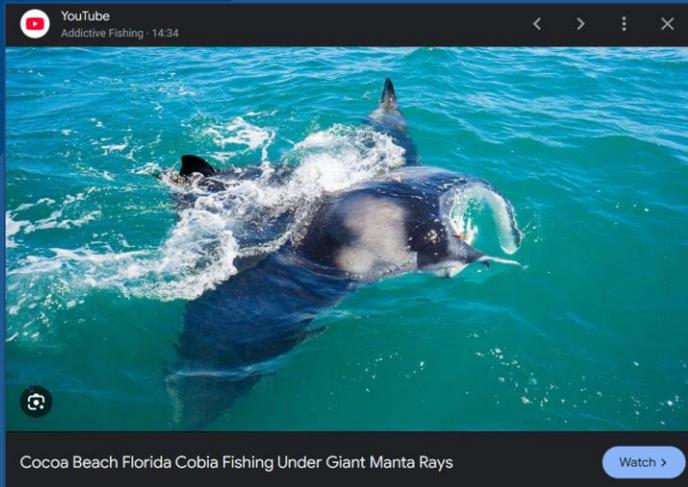
- Each spring adult manta rays aggregate off the coast of central and northern Florida.
- Mating, courtship, reproduction, and feeding have all been observed to take place during this seasonal aggregation.
- [Pate et al. 2024](#) suggests this area is reproductive habitat for giant manta rays.
 - First documented reproductive habitat in the United States



New information on Giant Manta Rays & Cobia Fishing

- New study documents that cobia fishing practices are resulting in the entanglement, injury, and disturbance to giant manta rays in this region([Braun et al. 2024](#))
- 86% anglers interviewed (n=12) indicated that they or their charter clients had hooked manta rays.
- 91% indicated that they had seen manta rays with hooks
 - Described as looking “Christmas Trees” or “Mardis Gras.”
- Overcrowding average max 22 boats (range 1-50) on manta ray(s)
- Social media identified as key driver of expansion of this practice.

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=cobia+manta+rays



Section 7 Considerations

- Applying ESA/MSA Integration Policy on evaluating the new information and early coordination and cooperation
- Sustainable Fisheries Division and Protected Resources Division will work together to evaluate if reinitiation of formal Section 7 consultation on the CMP Biological Opinion is needed based on new information

- How do your experiences compare to Braun et al. 2024 findings?
 - Are these practices limited to only Florida east coast?
 - How far offshore is this cobia fishing practice used? Does it extend into federal waters?
 - Best practices?