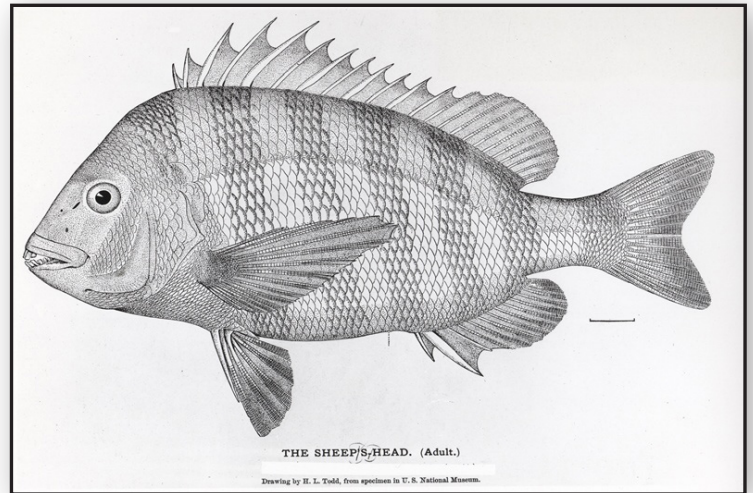




Late winter and early spring are often tough times to get out and fish in Louisiana, it's cold, windy, and sometimes challenging to find the bite. However, one fish that is a reliable early-spring staple is sheepshead. In 2011, Extension Agent Kevin Savoie wrote an informative article about sheepshead for his publication *Chenier Ecology*, titled "Sheepshead". We've included it here in the February issue of *Lagniappe* to get us all excited for a little Spring fishing!

Sheepshead

Whether you call them convict fish, bait stealers, sea bream or bay snapper, the Sheepshead (*Archosargus probatocephalus*) is one of the most intriguing estuarine dependent fish found in Louisiana's coastal waters. Sheepshead are identified by their very broad body, boldly marked with five to seven wide, grayish-black vertical bars set on a light gray or white background. Although similar to a Black Drum, any confusion can be set aside by inspecting the teeth, which look a great deal like human (or sheep) incisors. The dorsal and anal fins have large, very sharp spines. Often discarded by many recreational anglers, due to their stiff dorsal spines and difficulty in cleaning, sheepshead make excellent table fare. Traditionally, most sheepshead have been taken as incidental catch in various nets during commercial fishing activities, but commercial hook-and-line and trotline fishermen have landed a significant proportion in recent years. Nearly all commercially caught sheepshead is sold to restaurants or markets in-state.



Sheepshead: NOAA Central Library Historical Fisheries Collection

Sheepshead are found Gulf wide, primarily in saline to near-fresh estuarine waters. They are very common near rock jetties, piers, pilings and weirs. They are also found in nearshore waters of the Gulf of Mexico during the spawning period of February-April.

Sheepshead spawn in February, March and April, with most spawning taking place during the last two months. Spawning takes place offshore, but near the coast. Some males and females begin spawning at two years old, but not all of the fish are mature enough to spawn until males are three years old and females are four. Sheepshead will spawn several times during each season. Females will lay 14,000 to 250,000 eggs per spawn, with the average being 87,000 eggs. Sheepshead have been recorded as old as 20 years. Females grow more rapidly than males. At 20 years old, males average a little over four pounds and females about five and-a-half pounds. Growth is rapid until six to eight years of age, after which growth slows dramatically, especially for males.

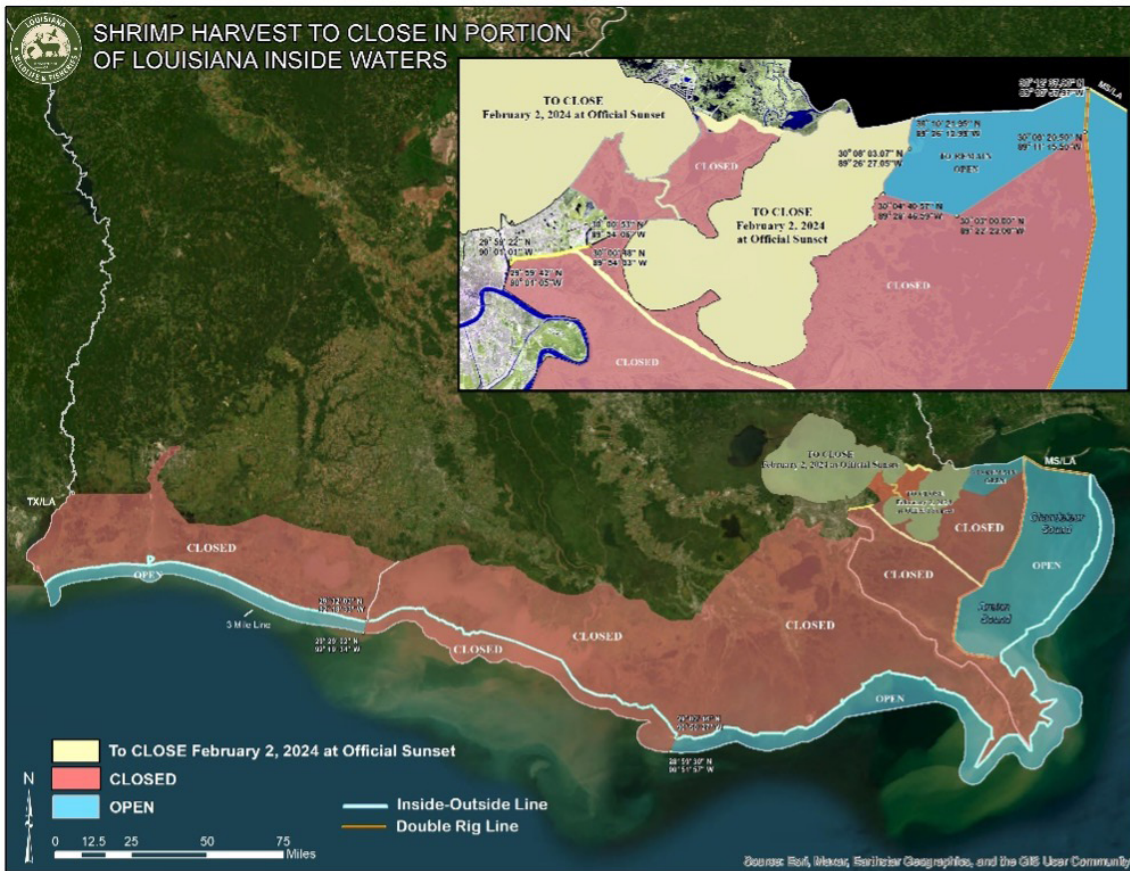
The most interesting thing about sheepshead biology is their food habits. In a nutshell, they eat everything. A study in Texas showed them eating mostly plants and algae with a few crabs. In the Florida Everglades, fish over three inches long ate mostly mollusks (mussels, clams, etc.) and barnacles. In Mississippi, researchers found that fish six to 14 inches long ate mollusks and plants. Larger sheepshead ate mollusks, crustaceans (crabs, etc.), bottom worms and quite a bit of fish, mostly anchovies. They did note that when sea grasses or algae were plentiful, that sheepshead will occasionally feed heavily on them. A Lake Pontchartrain, Louisiana study showed that by volume, 54 percent of their diet was plants, 19 percent mussels, 10 percent sponges, 8 percent clams, 3 percent croakers and other fish and almost 2 percent mud crabs. Barnacles and blue crabs made up less than 1 percent each of their diet.

Fall Inshore Shrimp Season to Close in a Portion of State Waters

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) announces that the 2023 fall inshore shrimp season will close as follows:

The portion of Zone 1 from the Mississippi/Louisiana state line westward to the eastern shore of South Pass of the Mississippi River closed at official sunset on Feb. 2, 2024, except for the following areas:

- The open waters of the Louisiana portion of Mississippi Sound: beginning at a point on the Mississippi/Louisiana state line at 30 degrees 10 minutes 21.95 seconds north latitude, 89 degrees 26 minutes 12.99 seconds west longitude; thence southerly to a point at 30 degrees 08 minutes 03.07 seconds north latitude, 89 degrees 26 minutes 27.05 seconds west longitude; thence southwesterly to a point at 30 degrees 04 minutes 40.57 seconds north latitude, 89 degrees 28 minutes 46.59 seconds west longitude; thence southeasterly to a point on the western shore of Three-Mile Pass (30 degrees 03 minutes 00.00 seconds north latitude, 89 degrees 22 minutes 23.00 seconds west longitude); thence northeasterly to a point on Isle Au Pitre (30 degrees 09 minutes 20.50 seconds north latitude, 89 degrees 11 minutes 15.50 seconds west longitude), which is a point on the double-rig line as described in R.S. 56:495.1(A)2; thence northerly along the double-rig line to the Mississippi/Louisiana state line (30 degrees 12 minutes 37.90 seconds north latitude, 89 degrees 10 minutes 57.97 seconds west longitude); thence westerly along the Mississippi/Louisiana state line to the point of origin; and
- The open waters of Breton and Chandeleur Sounds as bounded by the double-rig line described in R.S. 56:495.1(A)2.



Recent biological sampling conducted by the department indicates that the average white shrimp size within these portions of state inside waters is smaller than the minimum possession count allowed by law. A closure is needed to protect the small white shrimp in these waters and provide an opportunity for growth to larger and more valuable sizes. R.S. 56:498 provides that the possession count on saltwater white shrimp for each cargo lot shall average no more than 100 (whole specimens) per pound except during the time period from October 15 through the third Monday in December.

The department will continue monitoring the remaining open areas and close them when biologically appropriate. Notice of any opening, delaying or closing of a season by the secretary will be made by public notice at least 72 hours prior to such action.

For more information, contact Peyton Cagle at (337) 491-2213 or pcagle@wlf.la.gov.



Final Louisiana Red Snapper Landing Estimates for 2023

During the last week of 2023, anglers landed 31,858 pounds (3.4 percent of allocation) of Red Snapper. The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries estimates that 878,464 pounds of Red Snapper were landed during the 2023 private recreational season. These landings equal 94 percent of the 934,587-pound Louisiana allocation. Therefore, 6 percent of the Louisiana allocation remained unharvested.

Anglers were able to fish Red Snapper for 220 days (May 26 – Dec. 31) during the 2023 season in Louisiana, the longest season since the implementation of state management. The Red Snapper season is scheduled to reopen on Friday, May 24, 2024, unless changes are made to that opening date by the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission.

For more information on the 2023 Red Snapper season and detailed landing estimates, visit www.wlf.louisiana.gov/page/red-snapper.

“We are excited about the success of the 2023 Red Snapper fishing season for our private recreational anglers,” says LDWF Secretary Madison Sheahan. “The effectiveness of our Red Snapper management approach proves our ability to offer the best access for our anglers in federal waters. Our commitment is to serving the state’s sportsman by identifying where we can expand our management programs while actively working with our partners through the Gulf Council.”

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries is charged with managing and protecting Louisiana’s abundant natural resources. LDWF depends on license sales as a major funding source. Help us protect your hunting and fishing heritage while preserving habitat, wildlife and aquatic resources by purchasing your license at www.wlf.la.gov.

Seismic Public Meeting Notice

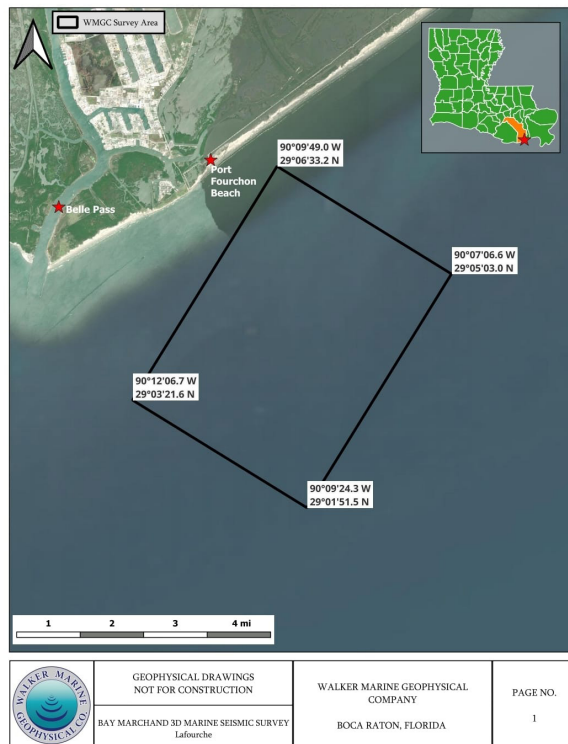
Walker Marine Geophysical Company LLC (WMGC) will be conducting seismic activity approximately 2.5 miles due east of the Port Fourchon inlet, in an area that measures 3.3 miles wide by 4.3 miles long orientated Northeast by Southwest. This area ranges from approximately 0.5 miles to 5.5 miles off the coast. See the area outline at the link below. WMGC will be utilizing a large number of ocean bottom sensors tethered together throughout the detailed area in addition to near ocean surface tow behind streamers and an air gun seismic source.

The survey will begin March 8, 2024 and last until approximately May 1, 2024.

To provide the public with additional information regarding the seismic survey, Walker Marine Geophysical Company LLC and LDWF will hold a public meeting at 6 pm on Feb. 8, 2024. The meeting will be held at the Port Fourchon Marina Lodge on the second floor, 140 Floatation Canal Rd, Golden Meadow, LA 70357.

For additional details pertaining to the seismic survey prior to the public meeting, contact Matthew McClellan, (716) 696-2339.

An outline of the seismic project showing the potential area to be affected is located at wlf.louisiana.gov/page/seismic-exploration-permits under *Current Public Notices*. Any public comments should be submitted to Joe Maryman at jmaryman@wlf.la.gov.



The 2023 Census of Aquaculture needs participants, census applications will be accepted through March 1

The U.S. Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) has mailed the 2023 Census of Aquaculture to all producers who indicated in their 2022 Census of Agriculture that they produce and sell aquaculture products. The deadline to respond is March 1st, 2024.

The Census of Aquaculture will provide comprehensive aquaculture data at the state and national levels, including production volume and methods, surface water acres and sources and sales. Federal, state, and local governments, agribusinesses, trade associations and producers use these data.

“The information that respondents provide will serve as the foundation for many decisions involving the sustainability and growth of the U.S. aquaculture sector for years to come,” said NASS Administrator Hubert Hamer. “This is an opportunity to share your voice and showcase the uniqueness of American aquaculture.”

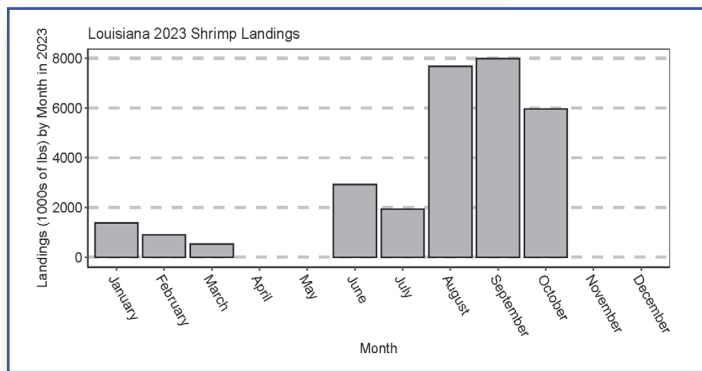
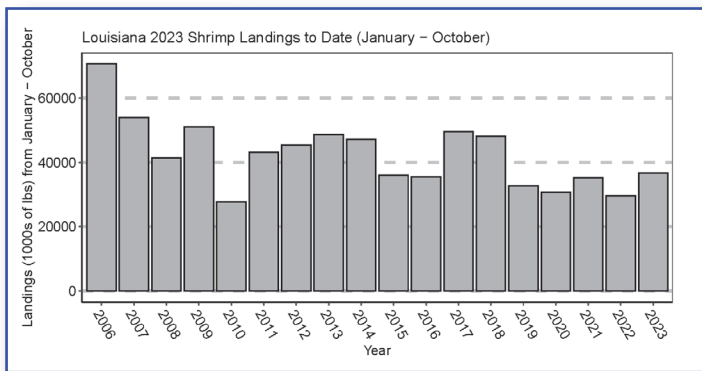
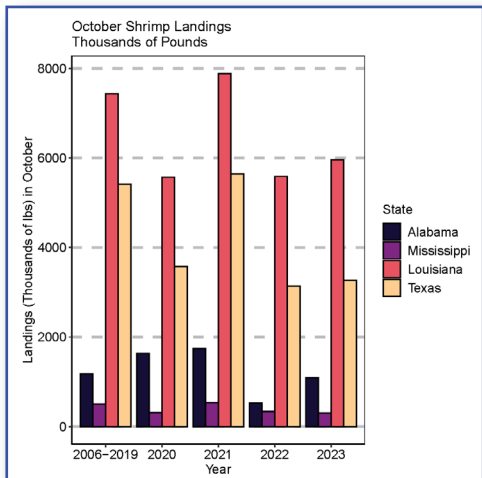
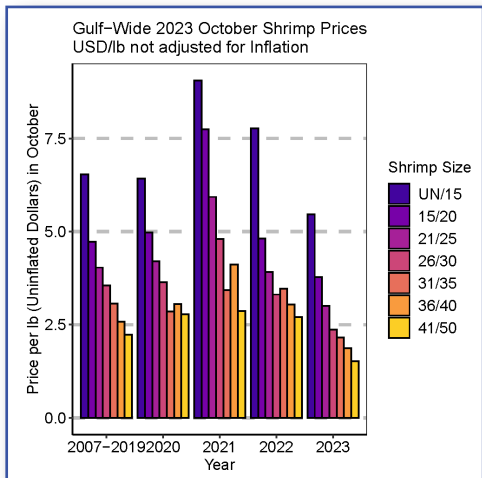
NASS has made survey response more convenient with their online Respondent Portal at www.agcounts.usda.gov. On the site, producers can complete their NASS surveys, view historical reports, and access other resources.

Farmers who did not receive a Census or lost their survey form are strongly encouraged to fill out the Census and mail it to Census of Aquaculture, 1201 East 10th Street, Jeffersonville, IN 47132 on or before March 1.

Contact jplumlee@agcenter.lsu.edu for a digital copy of the census form.

Louisiana Shrimp Watch

The shrimp watch data for the February issue includes data through October. All landing data is based on trip ticket data provided by Gulf States and no estimations have been made.



THE GUMBO POT

Crawfish Pimento Cheese Dip*

Recipe courtesy of Ms. Sarah's Country Kitchen.

From Ms. Sarah: It's a festive time of the year! With Mardi Gras and the Super Bowl coming up, you may be wondering what to serve to your guests at your celebration parties.

With crawfish season officially here, consider this in season recipe for your party appetizer needs!

Please reach out to the editor on suggestions for recipes or ingredients to use in future editions, we are always looking for feedback and improvement!



Ingredients:

6-8 oz fully cooked crawfish tails
8 oz softened cream cheese
½ cup mayonnaise
1 ½ cup shredded cheddar cheese
4 oz pimento peppers- drained
Salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

1. Mix softened cream cheese together with mayonnaise and cheddar cheese. Add peppers and mix.
2. Add crawfish tails to mixture and stir. Add salt and pepper to taste.
3. Refrigerate for 4 hours.
4. Enjoy!

**Total time: 15 minutes.*



For more information, contact your local extension agent:

Thu Bui

Marine Agent
St. Mary, Iberia and Vermilion Parishes
Phone: (337) 828-4100, ext. 300
tbui@agcenter.lsu.edu

Kevin Savoie

Marine Agent
Natural Resources-Fisheries
Phone: (337) 905-1318
ksavoie@agcenter.lsu.edu

Carol D. Franze

Marine Agent
Southeast Region
Phone: (985) 875-2635
cfranze@agcenter.lsu.edu

Dominique Seibert

Marine Agent
Plaquemines and St. Bernard Parishes
Phone: (504) 433-3664
dseibert@agcenter.lsu.edu

Haley Gambill

Marine Agent
Terrebonne and Lafourche Parishes
Phone: (985) 873-6495
mgambill@agcenter.lsu.edu

Mark Shirley

Marine Agent
Jefferson Davis, Vermilion, Acadia, St. Landry,
Evangeline, Cameron, Calcasieu, Lafayette,
Beauregard and Allen Parishes
Phone: (337) 898-4335
mshirley@agcenter.lsu.edu

Albert 'Rusty' Gaudé

Marine Agent
Jefferson, Orleans, St. Charles and St. John Parishes
Phone: (504) 433-3664
agaude@agcenter.lsu.edu

Thomas Hymel

Marine Agent
Iberia, St. Martin, Lafayette, Vermilion, St. Landry and
Avoyelles Parishes
Phone: (337) 276-5527
thymel@agcenter.lsu.edu

We would like to hear from you! Please contact us regarding fishery questions, comments or concerns you would like to see covered in the Lagniappe. Anyone interested in submitting information, such as articles, editorials or photographs pertaining to fishing or fisheries management is encouraged to do so.

Please contact Lagniappe editor Jeffrey Plumlee at jplumlee@agcenter.lsu.edu

Jeffrey Plumlee

Fisheries Specialist
Louisiana State University AgCenter
334 Renewable Natural Resources Building
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
Phone: 225-578-4102
Email: jplumlee@agcenter.lsu.edu

Be sure to visit the *Lagniappe* blog for
additional news and timely events between issues.
<https://louisianalagniappe.wordpress.com/>

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Editor: Jeffrey Plumlee

Web coordinator: Melissa Castleberry

Copy editor: Roy Kron