



Updated COVID-19 Information - CARES Act Gulf State Spend Plans

August 15, 2020

The Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders' Alliance (Shareholders' Alliance) continues to keep up to date and find as much information as possible regarding the relief money allocated to the commercial fishing industry through the CARES Act. From a national perspective, four states have had their spend plans approved by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA): California, Massachusetts, Oregon, and South Carolina. The five Gulf States are at various stages of the approval process and the level of transparency between each state has not been consistent.

While the money allocated in the CARES Act is not enough to make up for the full economic losses the industry has experienced during this crisis, it is an important source of aid that must be distributed to the industry quickly and effectively. Since the passage of the CARES Act, the Shareholders' Alliance has been urging states to develop their spend plans in a public and transparent manner that does not sacrifice expediency. Such an example occurred in Massachusetts where an [industry advisory panel](#) was established, and their spend plan has already been approved.



Update on States' Spend Plans

As a reminder, the Gulf States (GSMFC) and Atlantic States (ASMFC) Marine Fisheries Commissions are acting as the “pass-through” for the CARES Act funding. Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama will develop spend plans for the money and work with [GSMFC](#), while Florida will work with [ASMFC](#). Once a state’s spend plan has been approved by NOAA Fisheries, GSMFC and ASMFC will process the payments to eligible fishery participants on behalf of the states.

The process for CARES Act is:

1. States submit spend plans to the Commissions.
2. Commissions forward plans to NOAA.
3. NOAA approves spend plans.
4. States execute spend plans and send lists of eligible fishermen to Commissions.
5. Commissions send funds directly to fishermen.

Mississippi: On Friday, August 14, Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR) opened a public comment period for their spend plan. You can view the plan [here](#) and it is summarized below.

- Applicants must be over 18 and have possessed a valid Mississippi resident commercial fishing, dealer-processor, or charter boat license during the 2019-2020 license year.
 - Applicants must provide licenses and affidavits self-certifying a 35% loss greater than 35% from July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020 as compared to July 1, 2014 – June 30, 2019 (previous 5 year period).
 - The revenue loss does not have to be for the entire year but should cover January through June 2020.
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- Individuals or organizations that have not been in the qualifying fisheries or seafood business for five years prior can provide an affidavit for revenue losses for the actual time frame they have been in the business.

If you would like to provide input on the plan, send comments to CARESActComments@dmr.ms.gov by **August 26, 2020**.

Texas: The spend plan is currently under review by the governor and has not yet been submitted to GSMFC or NOAA Fisheries. No aspect of the spend plan has been made public nor will there be an opportunity for industry to comment. If you are a fisherman in Texas, contact Lance Robinson at lance.robinson@tpwd.texas.gov if you have concerns with this and consider asking the following questions:

- What is the status of Texas's spend plan?
- What will the application process be?
- What criteria will TPWD use to determine revenue loss?
- Why did TPWD chose to bypass industry input in the spend plan?

Louisiana: The final plan is currently waiting on approval and will likely be the first plan approved by NOAA. For information on what was in the draft spend plan, [view our last newsletter](#).

Florida: Florida Wildlife Conservation Commission held a public comment period on the spend plan that closed on July 29, 2020. Their draft proposal can be found [here](#).

Alabama: The draft spend plan has been submitted to NOAA Fisheries and is currently under review. Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources now has a public website with some information about the CARES Act and will be where the application is posted. [View website here](#).

The Shareholders' Alliance will continue to update you as we receive information about the CARES Act funding. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thanks,

Eric

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The Shareholders' Alliance is the largest organization of commercial snapper and grouper fishermen in the Gulf of Mexico. We work hard to ensure that our fisheries are sustainably managed so our fishing businesses can thrive and our fishing communities can exist for future generations. We are the harvesters that provide much of the American public with a reliable source of domestically caught wild Gulf seafood, and we do this through a philosophy that sustainable seafood and profitable fishing businesses depend on healthy fish populations.

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