



## OPEN OCEAN RESTORATION AREA

# Return 'Em Right: Species and Area Expansion (Reduction of Postrelease Mortality from Barotrauma in Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Recreational Fisheries) (*preferred*)



Fish Descender Device  
Photo by Return 'Em Right Program



### PROJECT BENEFITS

- Reduce fish mortality by advancing use and adoption of best release practices
- Expand successful Return 'Em Right activities to new species groups and locations
- Activities would benefit injured species of reef fish, highly migratory species, coastal migratory pelagic species, and other species such as flounders, drums, and sea trout

**RESTORATION TYPE:** Fish and Water Column Invertebrates

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This project would restore recreationally important fish populations by reducing sources of mortality for priority injured species through increased use of release gear and adoption of best practices. Such practices include the use of appropriate hooks, tackle, and landing tools and minimizing fight time to reduce mortality associated with regulatory discards, catch-and-release fishing, barotrauma, and depredation. These activities would continue and expand upon existing project effort from the Open Ocean Trustees' [Reduction of Postrelease Mortality from Barotrauma in the Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Recreational Fisheries](#) project, which successfully initiated the Return 'Em Right program.

This project, estimated to cost \$66.2 million, would be implemented over approximately 15 years.

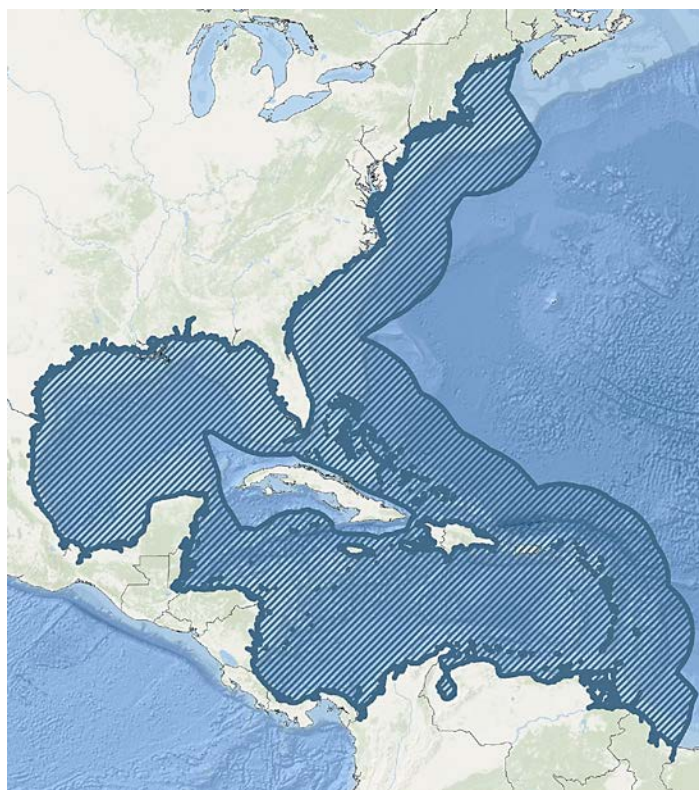


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This project would continue and expand the existing Return 'Em Right program's outreach and education activities focused on release gear and best practices, angler knowledge, and existing barriers that prevent anglers from adopting tools to improve post-release fish survival. Cost-effective tools may be developed for distribution among the fishing community.

Studies would be conducted to monitor gear use and effectiveness in reducing fish mortality, progress towards the adoption of gear and best practices by recreational anglers, and changes in angler awareness of tools and attitudes towards best practices over time. Increased monitoring would include enhanced at-sea observer coverage. Workshops and studies would be conducted to gather additional information on best practices and their effectiveness. Data collection and reporting tools would be improved to better support the collection and communication of this information with the fishing community and other interested parties.

Existing project activities would continue across the Gulf of Mexico and would be expanded to other regions including the Caribbean Sea and the U.S. Atlantic.



The Return 'Em Right program was established in 2022 via an Open Ocean project to raise awareness of post-release mortality among recreational anglers. By the end of 2023, it was estimated that about 30,000 recreational anglers had completed the education module and received packages of release gear.

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

[www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov/restoration-areas/open-ocean](http://www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov/restoration-areas/open-ocean)

