



The Center for Sportfish Science and Conservation works closely with recreational anglers on outreach and best management practices for catch-and-release fishing of common Texas sportfish species.

# BIG MILESTONE

*Celebrating 10 Years of Sportfish Research*

The Center for Sportfish Science and Conservation at the Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies (HRI) at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi is celebrating over 10 years of innovative sportfish research in the Gulf of Mexico and beyond. The Sportfish Center, as it's commonly known, is the first research center in the western Gulf of Mexico dedicated to providing key science-based information that supports sustainable management of the multibillion-dollar

recreational fishery industry that flourishes along the Gulf Coast.

The center has made a name for itself among anglers, Gulf stakeholders, natural resource managers, and fans of Discovery's Shark Week alike.

"Sharks are great ambassadors for the ocean," said Dr. Greg Stunz, HRI Senior Executive Director and Director of the Sportfish Center. "They are a key that opens the door for scientific curiosity and discovery."

Multiple appearances on the yearly summer television series have drawn significant attention to the Sportfish Center's research on these top ocean predators, with studies focusing on the movement of sharks in the Gulf through various forms of tagging. Shark Week episodes have featured Stunz, along with Associate Research Scientist, Dr. Kesley Banks '19.

"Sharks are a vital part of our oceans," Banks said. "Without them, our oceans

are out of balance. By working to understand the importance of their ecological roles and conserving these apex predators, we're helping to ensure healthy oceans for both current and future generations."

*"The Sportfish Center has become a respected authority on sportfish science and conservation."*

**DR. MATT STREICH**, Sportfish Center Assistant Director

The work of the Sportfish Center spans far beyond sharks, though. From the beginning, fisheries scientists have launched extensive studies on fisheries-related issues including the habitat and biodiversity surrounding artificial reefs in the Gulf of Mexico,

ways to provide anglers with better catch and release practices, and citizen science programs, to name a few.

"Our angler engagement program, 'Science That Keeps You Hooked,' acknowledges the importance of involving recreational anglers in the scientific process," said James Sanchez, Sportfish Center Angler Engagement Coordinator. "In the last year, our Sportfish Tagging Initiative has seen a 64% increase in participation and those who tagged fish for us provided valuable data that enhanced our understanding of fish movement and growth rates."

Dr. Matt Streich, Assistant Director of the Sportfish Center, echoes this sentiment.

"Over the next 10 years, we plan to increase our engagement efforts with recreational anglers and other citizen scientists to integrate them into the work we do and strengthen their role as leaders in fisheries conservation," Streich said.

One of the most impactful projects led by the Sportfish Center is the Great Red Snapper Count. Over the course of three years, 80 scientists from across the Gulf captured massive amounts of data,



Dr. Kesley Banks '19 completed her doctoral work at HRI and now oversees the Sportfish Center's shark tagging program.

revealing in 2023 that there are more than 118 million Red Snapper in the U.S. waters of the Gulf of Mexico. The new estimate could change the way the Gulf of Mexico fishery is managed by federal and state officials.

"The Sportfish Center has become a respected authority on sportfish science and conservation," Streich said. "We will continue to produce sound science that supports the sustainable management of recreational fisheries in the Gulf, as our ultimate goal is to ensure healthy fisheries for future generations to enjoy." •



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