Cooperative Research Program Final Report: Estimating Gulf of Mexico Gray Triggerfish Release Mortality and Its Mitigation with Three-Dimensional Acoustic Telemetry

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## **Cooperative Research Program Final Report**

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#### **Executive Summary**

High-resolution three-dimensional (3D) acoustic telemetry was utilized to estimate gray triggerfish discard mortality in a 24.6 km<sup>2</sup> acoustic array (n = 59 receivers) deployed around a series of artificial reefs (n = 7) at approximately 30 m depth in the north central Gulf of Mexico (GOM). Fish were captured with standard hook-and-line gear, tagged externally with Innovasea V13P acoustic tags, and released at the surface, at the surface following venting, or at depth with a descender device. Experimental fishing and fish tagging occurred in winter and summer 2021, with 60 gray triggerfish captured and released in each season. Tags were programmed to transmit data every 1 to 3 minutes, with transmission timing randomized to minimize potential tag collisions. The maximum number of detections of a given tag within the acoustic array was 23,083, and the maximum number of days a tag was tracked was 242. However, both of those tags were estimated to have become detached from fish much earlier than the total days tracked. The longest time period a fish was tracked alive and swimming in the array was 115 days at 18,678 detections. Geoposition data from individual gray triggerfish demonstrated a consistent pattern of limited movement and nearly fixed depth from around midnight to 8 a.m., which was important to recognize when assigning fate to tagged fish. Estimated speed and depth differential between sequential detections suggested it took up to a month for fish to fully recover from catch and release, although it is unclear how much the tagging process added to recovery time.

Fate of released fish was assigned by examining movement patterns, speed, and depth profiles of acoustic tags, with potential fates including fish being alive in the array, dead on the seabed, consumed by a predator, emigration out of the array, tag loss, harvest, or tag failure. Cox proportional hazards modeling indicated there was no significant effect of release method on gray triggerfish mortality, with the most parsimonious model (evaluated with  $\Delta$ AICc) including season (winter versus summer), fish length, time out of water, and condition as independent variables. Winter discard mortality (± 95CI) was estimated to be 5.8 (± 5.2) % after 48 hours and 7.1 (± 6.2) % after 14 days. The same estimates for summer were considerably higher, at 34.7 (± 11.8) and 41.1 (± 12.2) %, respectively. Nearly all the mortality suffered by acoustically tagged fish was due to being eaten by large predators (i.e., sharks and dolphins), which was based on direct observation or examination of acoustically tracked movement dynamics of released fish versus positive (live) or negative (dead) controls tagged on the seafloor. It is unclear what affected the presence of large

predators in summer versus winter, but when present predators had a substantial effect on gray triggerfish discard mortality irrespective of release method.

Attempts to simulate the effects of higher discard mortality on the gray triggerfish stock assessment were unsuccessful. Our proposed plan was to utilize the SEDAR 62 GOM gray triggerfish stock assessment model as an operating model and then conduct simulations with the R package *SS3sim* to test the effects of different discard mortality rates on estimates of stock productivity and status. Unfortunately, the SEDAR 62 process was terminated following the assessment workshop stage due to data issues and structural issues with the assessment model, hence the assessment was never completed. Therefore, we attempted to conduct discard mortality simulations with the SEDAR 43 (2015) gray triggerfish assessment model, but discovered structural issues also exist with that model which precluded its use for simulation testing. An update SEDAR GOM gray triggerfish stock assessment is scheduled for 2024 to evaluate and revise the SEDAR 43 base model. Included in the terms of reference is examination of the effects of revised discard mortality estimates on the model.

### Introduction

Marine fisheries bycatch is a significant global issue that is anathema to efficient utilization of fishery resources, as well as counter to principles of ecosystem-based fisheries management. Globally, calls to address and minimize bycatch have resonated for more than two decades (Crowder and Murawski 1998; Hall et al. 2000; Francis et al. 2007), and in the U.S. minimizing bycatch and the mortality of bycatch, to the extent practicable, are among the National Standards of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. While progress has been made in this respect, until recently bycatch issues in commercial fisheries received much greater attention in the scientific literature and among marine fisheries management agencies than those related to recreational fishing. This is partly due to the fact that commercial fisheries are implicated more often than recreational fisheries in the bycatch of non-targeted megafauna, such as marine turtles, birds, mammals, or elasmobranchs (Lewison et al. 2004; Read et al. 2006; Mandelman et al. 2012). However, it may also stem from an historic underestimation of the effect of recreational fisheries and on marine ecosystems in general (Post et al. 2002; Cooke and Cowx 2004; Arlinghaus et al. 2007; Kerns et al. 2012; Raby et al. 2013). For example, Coleman et al. (2004) estimated that recreational fisheries' impacts in the northern Gulf of Mexico (nGOM)

rivaled and even surpassed those of commercial fisheries, especially among species of concern, and many of the species of concern highlighted by Coleman et al. (2004) are depleted reef fishes, such as gray triggerfish.

Reef fishes in the nGOM are particularly prone to discard mortality given the substantial increase in regulatory discards in recent years (SEDAR 43), and the fact that these physoclistous fishes often suffer significant barotrauma associated with being caught at depth and brought to the surface rapidly. Red snapper, *Lutjanus campechanus*, has received the greatest amount of attention with respect to discard mortality estimates (Campbell et al. 2014; Bohaboy et al. 2020), which is perhaps unsurprising given its importance to the nGOM reef fish fishery and the number of conventional and acoustic tagging studies that have been performed on red snapper. Among published studies, red snapper discard mortality estimates vary widely, which reflects myriad factors, such as time of year, depth of capture, and means of observation (Campbell et al. 2014). For example, fish placed in cages, thus protected from predators, or those only observed at the surface following release, produced the lowest estimates of discard mortality.

Most recently, large-scale (20 km<sup>2</sup>) three-dimensional (3D) acoustic telemetry produced estimates of red snapper discard mortality for surface-released fish that were among the highest yet reported for that species (Bohaboy et al. 2020). However, the authors also reported return-todepth tools, also known as descender devices, decreased red snapper discard mortality by approximately 50%. Utilizing a large-scale telemetry array in which fish geoposition (latitude/longitude) could be estimated, coupled with depth data from acoustic tags with pressure sensors, enabled fish to be tracked three-dimensionally, thus fate could be assigned more accurately to released fish. For example, in earlier acoustic telemetry studies red snapper that left the region of detection within 48-96 hours were censored from the data as émigrés. Bohaboy et al. (2020) reported most red snapper that rapidly disappeared from arrays deployed at 30 m or 60 m depths off Pensacola, FL or Orange Beach, AL were in fact consumed by large predators, such as sharks or dolphins. They were able to estimate that particular fate (predation) by tracking acoustically tagged bull sharks in study acoustic arrays that demonstrated large predators moved at mean speeds of ~1.5 m/sec, while red snapper typically moved at <0.5 m/sec. Furthermore, while red snapper moved among reefs located in study arrays, they typically stayed with ~100 m of a given reef. Large pelagic predators did not display a similar affinity for reef structure. Collectively, these results indicate large-scale 3D telemetry is an effective tool to examine reef fish movement and fate, including post-release fate (Donaldson et al. 2008; Raby et al. 2013), and previous approaches likely greatly underestimated the amount of predation mortality suffered by discarded red snapper (Bohaboy et al. 2020).

## Gray Triggerfish

Gray triggerfish, *Balistes capriscus*, is frequently captured along with snappers, groupers, and other reef fishes in mixed reef fisheries of the nGOM and US Atlantic. Historically, gray triggerfish was not a targeted species, but increasing regulations on other species, such as red snapper and gag, Mycteroperca microlepis, and a growing appreciation for quality of gray triggerfish meat, caused it to become increasingly targeted in the 1990s and early 2000s. The GOM stock was estimated to be overfished and undergoing overfishing in 2006 via an integrated assessment model with data through 2004 (SEDAR 2006). A rebuilding plan (RF 30A) was implemented for the stock within the Reef Fish (RF) Fishery Management Plan by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (GMFMC) in July 2008. Seasonal closures in the recreational fishery were first implemented through a revised rebuilding plan (RF 37) in May 2013 in response to an updated assessment that indicated a lack of recovery in the GOM gray triggerfish stock (SEDAR 2011). A 12-fish commercial trip limit was also instituted as part of RF 37. A subsequent stock assessment continued to fall shore of recovery targets established in the GOM gray triggerfish rebuilding plan (SEDAR 2015). In 2018, the passage of RF 46 increased the commercial trip limit to 16 fish, reduced recreational bag limit to 1 fish per person day, and increased the recreational minimum size limit to 15" fork length.

There are several sources of uncertainty that complicate assessment, hence management, of GOM gray triggerfish. Recruitment dynamics do not appear to be well estimated in the Stock Synthesis (SS) assessment model, given most of the adult biomass is estimated to occur in the eastern GOM, while most of the recruitment is estimated to occur in the western GOM (SEDAR 2015). Another issue is the traditional method of ageing gray triggerfish with dorsal spines underestimates age for age-5+ fish (Patterson et al. 2019), with underestimation becoming progressively worse with age (Chamberlin 2022). Chamberlin (2022) demonstrated through stock assessment simulations that underestimating age causes overestimation of growth, stock productivity, and spawning stock biomass, as well as underestimation of fishing mortality. Lastly, recent evidence suggests the historical assumption of 5% discard mortality for gray triggerfish

regulatory discards is likely to be inaccurate. For example, Bohaboy et al. (2020) employed 3D acoustic telemetry to estimate surface-released gray triggerfish captured at approximately 30 m in the nGOM suffered 26.7% mortality, although small sample size (n = 16) in a study focused on red snapper imparted considerable uncertainty in that estimate (e.g., 95CI:  $\pm 22.3\%$ ). Even greater uncertainty exists in their estimate of discard mortality for gray triggerfish (n = 10) returned to depth with a descender device (60.7  $\pm$  30.4%), which was higher but not significantly different than their surface release estimate. Runde et al. (2019) estimated the mean discard mortality rate of conventionally tagged gray triggerfish was approximately 65% ( $\pm$  25%) in U.S. Atlantic waters off North Carolina and Florida despite fish often lacking obvious external symptoms of barotrauma. However, necropsies performed on sacrificed fish indicated extensive internal organ damage was often present despite a lack of external symptoms, such as the presence of exophthalmia, a distended esophagus, or a prolapsed intestine.

The dramatic difference between the previously assumed discard mortality estimate utilized in GOM gray triggerfish stock assessments (5%) versus the new estimates produced by Runde et al. (2019) and Bohaboy et al. (2020) take on greater importance given recent trends in gray triggerfish landings versus discards. Quotas and seasonal closures have curtailed landings in recent years, but this has also caused a substantial increase in the percentage of captured gray triggerfish that are returned to the sea as discards. For example, nearly all of the gray triggerfish commercial catch and >75% of the recreational catch is discarded (SEDAR 2015). Therefore, if discard mortality estimates are as high as 30-60%, then assuming a discard mortality rate of 5% would substantially underestimate annual fishery removals from the GOM gray triggerfish stock.

The goal of this study was to estimate gray triggerfish discard mortality with highresolution 3D telemetry in the nGOM, as well as test the efficacy of different approaches to mitigate discard mortality. Specific study objectives were to 1) employ 3D acoustic telemetry to estimate the fate (e.g., survival, mortality, depredation, emigration, etc.) of gray triggerfish captured with standard recreational fishing gear in the nGOM; and, 2) estimate the efficacy of descender devices or venting to mitigate discard mortality. A third proposed objective was to conduct stock assessment simulations to examine the effect of higher (study estimates versus the current assumption of 5%) discard mortality on the SEDAR 62 gray triggerfish stock assessment scheduled for 2019-20. However, that assessment was abandoned due to data and model structural issues, and preliminary model runs with the previous (SEDAR 43) assessment model indicated structural issues existed with that model as well.

### Methods

#### Acoustic Array

We deployed an acoustic array consisted of 59 Innovasea VR2 Tx receivers with interreceiver spacing of 424 m (Fig. 1). This spacing was based on range testing and post-tagging analysis conducted by Bohaboy et al. (2020). The array was deployed on January 13-14, 2021 in the Escambia East-Large Area Artificial Reef Site (EE-LAARS). The center receiver was approximately 32 km south-southeast of Pensacola Bay Pass, Florida, and the water depth range in the array was 28-32 m (Fig. 1). The benthic habitat within the array area is characterized primarily by fine sand and shell rubble bottom and included 11 known artificial reefs, some of which were deployed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission in 2003. Other undocumented private artificial reefs are also likely present in the southeast portion of the array area (Bohaboy et al. 2020).

Each receiver was attached to the top of a 2-m tall PVC support pipe that was set in a 36-kg cement anchor (Fig. 2). Several grab lines were attached between the cement anchor and the riser that could be used as hoist points during deployment and retrieval. All receiver bases had a line attached to a syntactic foam buoy approximately 2 m above the receiver to increase visibility to sonar (Fig. 2c). A HOBO U26-001 dissolved oxygen sensor was deployed on the receiver riser at the center of the array approximately 1 m above the seabed.

Array deployment and retrieval were conducted onboard the *F/V Intimidator* out of Orange Beach, Alabama with study cooperator, Captain Johnny Greene, and his crew. The array remained on the seabed through two rounds of tagging in winter and summer 2021, as well as tagging positive and negative control fish in fall 2021. The array was then removed from the water between October 25 and November 13, 2021. A line was attached to each receiver with the ROV-mooring hook method described by Tarnecki and Patterson (2020), and then was winched to the surface. All study receivers were successfully retrieved from the seabed.

## Tagging

Tagging events occurred during winter and summer 2021 to test the effect of season on

gray triggerfish discard mortality. Gray triggerfish and other reef fishes were captured with twohook (3/0 to 5/0 Mustad model 39945BLN) rigs at artificial reef sites within the study area (Fig. 1), with hooks baited with cut squid or mackerel scad. Each gray triggerfish was held in a siliconelined V-shaped measuring board, measured to the nearest mm fork length (FL), and tagged with an Innovasea V13P high output (153 db) acoustic tag and a Floy dart tag, with the latter advertising a \$50 reward and toll-free phone number to report tagged fish. External symptoms of barotrauma (exophthalmia, everted esophagus or stomach, or prolapsed intestine), degree of abdominal rigidity (1 = fully pliable to 5 = stiff and inflexible), and total time out of water for dehooking and tagging were recorded.

A logistic regression was computed to test the effect of fish FL on the probability of observing external barotrauma symptoms. A one-factor ANOVA was computed to test the effect of fish size class (250-350, 350-450, and 450-550 mm FL) on abdominal rigidity score. And, a student's t-test was computed to test the effect of season on time out of water. All analyses were computed in R (R Core Team, 2021).

Acoustic tags transmitted a unique acoustic ID code and pressure value at random intervals between 1 and 3 minutes. As configured, Innovasea estimated the battery life of these tags at 468 days. Tags were attached to fish externally to ensure rapid tagging and the least intrusive tagging process possible. There were two different tag attachment methods used in this study, with method-I being utilized in winter (March 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>) 2021 and method-II being utilized during summer (July 22<sup>nd</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>) 2021. In method-I, tags were attached to Domeier dart heads that are constructed of a soft polymer and Dacron® surgical polymer fibers that are designed to heal into the muscle tissue of tagged fish. These dart heads have been used to quickly attach acoustic or satellite tags to tunas (Domeier et al. 2005), sharks (Rogers et al. 2013), and reef fishes (Bohaboy et al. 2020; Angela Collins, pers. comm.), thus minimizing handling time. Each V13P tag was attached to a medium-sized Domeier dart head with approximately 3 cm of polymer coated braided stainless steel fishing line. Marine heat-shrink tubing was applied over the V13P tag cap to reduce movement and friction against the side of the fish (Fig. 3a).

Two of three winter-tagged fish were harvested and reported by fishers in mid-May 2021, with only the Floy tag remaining in the fish. We had no way to estimate the extent of tag loss among all samples, and our plan was to wait until fall 2021 to retrieve receivers. Therefore, for summer 2021 tagging we switched to the tag attached approach reported by Bohaboy et al. (2020)

since we had earlier success acoustically tagging gray triggerfish with that approach. With this second attachment method, a tag was secured to an American National Standards Institute size 2 (approximately 2 mm diameter) threaded stainless steel rod with a nylon-insert 6.35-mm stainless steel hex nut. The stainless steel rod was sharpened on one end and inserted through the fish's dorsal pterygiophores and secured on the opposite side of the fish with a second 6.35-mm stainless steel hex nut behind a 3.2-mm thick polyethylene disk. Silicon disks (2.4–3.2 mm thick) were placed behind the tag and the polyethylene disk to minimize abrasion (Fig. 3b).

Once tagged, fish were released with one of three methods: at the surface, at the surface following venting with an Angler's Choice FVT-001 venting tool, or returned to depth with a Seaqualizer descender device (Fig. 3b). A downward looking GoPro Hero5 camera was mounted above the descender device to record fish fate during descent and release to evaluate the performance of the descender device, behavior of released fish, and possible predator interactions. Fish released at the surface were assessed for release condition following Patterson et al. (2001): condition-1 = fish immediately oriented to the bottom and swam down rapidly; condition-2 = fish oriented to the bottom and swam down slowly or erratically; condition-3 = fish remained on the surface; and condition-4 = fish was apparently dead at the surface, including from predation. Condition for fish released at depth with the descender device were estimated to be in condition-1.

Gray triggerfish were also captured near the seabed adjacent to study reefs by divers with nets on October 7, 2021. Fish were measured to FL, tagged with the Domeier attachment method, and either allowed to swim freely after tagging or were sacrificed by pithing and left on the seabed. Fish that swam freely served as positive controls of live gray triggerfish swimming behavior, while sacrificed fish were intended to mimic fish that died and were lying on the seabed following catch and release. A 1-m tall stainless steel camera rig with a GoPro Hero5 camera mounted in an underwater housing was positioned on the seabed a approximately 5 meters from and facing the artificial reef for 2 hours to record any interactions of the sacrificed fish with predators.

## Fates Assignment and Discard Mortality Estimation

Detection data were uploaded from study receivers in November 2021 and sent to Innovasea for geolocation estimation. Position estimates with horizontal position error in the upper 5<sup>th</sup> percentile of the data were excluded from further analysis (Smith, 2013; Bohaboy et al. 2020).

This filtering eliminated uncertain geoposition estimates from the data, as well as those that likely resulted from false detections. Sequential geoposition estimates separated by less than 10 min (600 s) were used to estimate swim speeds of tagged fish. The average swim speed (v) in m/s of a tagged fish as it moved from position 1 with coordinates ( $Lat_1$ ,  $Lon_1$ ) at time  $t_1$  to position 2 with coordinates ( $Lat_2$ ,  $Lon_2$ ) at time  $t_2$  was calculated as

$$v = \frac{2r*\arcsin\sqrt{\sin^2\left(\frac{Lat_2 - Lat_1}{2}\right) + \cos(Lat_1)\cos(Lat_2)\sin^2\left(\frac{Lon_2 - Lon_1}{2}\right)}}{(t_2 - t_1)} , \qquad \text{equation 1}$$

where coordinates are in radians and  $r = 6.371 \times 10^6$  m is the assumed mean radius of the Earth.

Following geoposition data processing, changes in depth over time and estimated speed were used to infer the fate of each tagged fish over three time periods: immediate (within 48 hours of release), short-term (48 hours to 14 days after release), and long-term (greater than 14 days after release). The parameter  $\Delta depth$  was calculated as the absolute value of estimated depth between two sequential tag detections. Fish movement behavior (*v* and  $\Delta depth$ ) was then utilized to assign fate to each tagged gray triggerfish (see below), with potential fates being alive in the array, dead on the seabed, predation, emigration, tag loss, harvest, or tag failure.

Acute discard mortality  $(\widehat{M}_a)$  was estimated as the percentage of tagged fish with estimated fates (n) that suffered from mortality within 48 hours of release. Chronic discard mortality  $(\widehat{M}_c)$  was estimated as the percentage of tagged fish with estimated fates (n) that suffered from mortality within 14 days of release. Ninety-five percent confidence intervals on discard mortality estimates were computed from standard error (SE) following Pollock and Pine (2007):

$$SE(\widehat{M}) = \sqrt{\frac{\widehat{M}(1-\widehat{M})}{n}}$$
, and 95CI = 1.96\*  $SE(\widehat{M})$ . equation 2

The effect of release method (i.e., surface, vented, or descended), season (winter versus summer), fish FL, presence/absence of external barotrauma symptoms, abdominal rigidity, release condition, and time out of water on the probability of acute or chronic discard mortality were tested with nonlinear regressions with the *glm* function in R (R Core Team 2021). Mortality was coded as 1 (dead) or 0 (alive until the next time period) for each individual, with overall discard mortality

modelled as a function of the explanatory variables listed above. Release method, season, presence or absence of barotrauma, and abdominal rigidity were coded as categorical variables in the model. Fish FL and time out of water were continuous variables in the model and were scaled to have mean = 0 and variance = 1. Candidate models were evaluated for parsimony with the small sample Akaike Information Criterion (AICc) (Burnham and Anderson 1998).

Lastly, we computed a Cox proportional hazards model to estimate the risk of mortality for significant factors in the regression model (Cox and Oakes, 1984). The model was fitted and its performance evaluated with the *survival* package in R (Therneau and Lumley 2019; R Core Team 2021). Goodness of fit was evaluated with pseudo-R<sup>2</sup>, while the effects of significant factors in the model were evaluated as the proportional reduction in the sum of squared residuals from the null (intercept only) to the final (with covariables) model.

### **Results and Discussion**

## Tagging

Sixty gray triggerfish were tagged in winter 2021, and an additional 60 fish were tagged in summer 2021 (Table 1). Mean  $\pm$  95% CI FL of tagged gray triggerfish was 375.1  $\pm$  21.3 mm in winter and 356.2  $\pm$  11.9 mm in summer. There was no significant difference in FL between release method (ANOVA, p = 0.947), seasons (ANOVA, p = 0.129), or their interaction (ANOVA, p = 0.831). Therefore, while mean FL was nearly 20 mm larger in winter versus summer, the lack of significant difference between seasons was driven by the slightly greater range in FL observed during winter (Fig. 4). Within seasons, mean FL and its variance was consistent among release methods (Fig. 4).

External barotrauma symptoms were present in 25.8% of gray triggerfish and included everted esophagus and prolapsed anus (Table 1). There was a significant relationship between the probability of observing external barotrauma symptoms and fish FL (logistic regression; p < 0.001;  $R^2 = 0.24$ ), with the probability increasing with fish size (Fig. 5). Abdominal rigidity scores ranged from 1 to 5, but were mostly in the range of 3 to 5 (Table 1). There was a significant effect of gray triggerfish size class on rigidity score (ANOVA; p < 0.001), with estimated abdominal rigidity increasing with fish FL (Fig. 6). While scoring abdominal rigidity is subjective, only a single tagger (WFP) was utilized among all fish, thus minimizing any potential variance that could occur among different rigidity evaluators. Moreover, abdominal rigidity scores mirror barotrauma symptom

trends with FL. They are also consistent with reports by Runde et al. (2019) that necropsies revealed gray triggerfish often displayed internal organ displacement without displaying external barotrauma symptoms, given that 41.7% of fish in the current study had an abdominal rigidity score of 5 and another 37.5% had a score of 4, yet only 25.8% displayed external barotrauma symptoms. There was a significant difference in the mean rigidity score of fish displaying external barotrauma symptoms ( $4.52 \pm 0.31$ ) versus those not displaying external symptoms ( $4.04 \pm 0.25$ ) in the current study, but 63% of fish with rigidity scores of 5 displayed no external barotrauma symptoms.

There was no significant difference in time out of water for fish tagged in winter (69.0  $\pm$  9.2 s) versus summer (78.9  $\pm$  5.6 s) 2021 (Fig. 7). Therefore, the approach utilized to attach external tags did not have a significant effect on time out of water given the approach differed between winter- and summer-tagged fish. There was also no significant difference in time out of water for fish released with different release methods (ANOVA; p = 0.088), thus obviating a potential confounding factor in our analysis of factors affecting discard mortality.

## Tag Detections and Water Parameter Data

Tag transmissions were received from all but two tags deployed on gray triggerfish (Table 1; Fig. A1). The range in detections per fish was 2 to 23,083, and the range in days detected was <1 to 242. Overall, 652,746 tag detections existed in the data from array receivers, but data filtering removed 43,828 detections. The mean  $\pm$  95% CI number of receivers that detected each tag transmission was 4.47  $\pm$  0.004, while the mean number of receivers utilized to triangulate fish x-y position was 4.22  $\pm$  0.003. While we relied on tag range detection and drift tests performed by Bohaboy et al. (2020) to inform receiver spacing, detection data confirm receiver spacing was optimized to achieve the largest array areal coverage while maintaining our ability to estimate tag geoposition given each transmission must be detected by at least 3 receivers to accomplish that.

Dissolved oxygen and temperature measured 1 m above the seabed within the acoustic array were within the range of expected values, with dissolved oxygen mostly ranging from approximately 5 to 10 mg/l and temperature ranging from approximately 18 to 29 °C (Fig. 8). However, there were brief periods of hypoxic (<2 mg/l) water observed in late March, the middle of July, and early August. It is not unusual to see episodic low dissolved oxygen on the shelf in

late summer when the nGOM seasonal thermocline is often the strongest (Patterson 1999), but its unclear what caused the brief occurrence of hypoxia in late March.

## Fate Assignment

Mortality estimation and analysis first required establishing an algorithm to assign fate to tags or tagged fish. We first examined the video samples and fish movement data of negative (GT-121 to GT-123) and positive (GT-124 to GT-126) controls. All three of the negative controls, which were sacrificed and left on the seabed, were consumed by large ( $\sim 2$  m) bull sharks within 12 min of being left on the seabed (Fig. 9). We also observed sharks and dolphins in video recorded with GoPro cameras mounted on the line above the descender device when returning acoustically tagged fish to depth (Fig. 10), although they were never observed removing a fish from a descender device. Estimated speed data of our positive controls indicated gray triggerfish typically swim approximately 0.1 to 0.2 m/s (Figs. 11&12). They do at times move at speeds >1 m/s, but that is rare and typically observed when fish transit between adjacent reefs, as evidenced by geoposition data (Fig. A2). Speed estimated from tags attached to negative control fish consumed by bull sharks was consistently much faster than positive controls (Fig. 12). However, positive control fish GT-124 demonstrated a marked change in speed around detection number 2,300, which was accompanied by movement back and forth across the array. Such movement was typical of tags attached to negative control fish that had been consumed by bull sharks (Figs. 11, 12, A2). Therefore, we infer fish GT-124 was alive and swimming in the array for 9 days, and then was consumed by a large predator, likely a shark, on day 10. The tag for GT-124 was sporadically detected for during each of the next 9 days, and then was no longer detected within the array (Fig. 13).

Based on movement data for negative controls, as well as GT-124 after day-10 posttagging, we estimate large predators typically move at speeds of >0.6 m/s (Fig. 12). However, sharks are not the only large predators in the nGOM shelf ecosystem capable of consuming an adult gray triggerfish. Bohaboy et al. (2020) inferred that dolphins were also likely consuming tagged reef fishes during their study due to the fact some tags periodically transmitted depth data indicated they were at or near the surface, which cetaceans must visit to breathe. We saw similar evidence of this surfacing pattern among some of our tagged fish during periods when their speed estimates increased substantially above typical gray triggerfish speeds (Fig. 14). Fish GT-034 and GT-035 were reported as harvested by recreational anglers on May 16, 2021 and May 23, 2021, respectively (Table 1, Fig. A1). Both fish were reported as only having the Floy dart tag, hence had suffered tag loss prior to fishery recapture. Tag speed and depth profiles indicated a shift in mean v to < 0.02 m/s, and  $\Delta depth$  dropped to nearly zero, following tag loss. These patterns were utilized to determine the occurrence of tag loss in other fish, such as GT-005, which was estimated to lose its telemetry tag on March 22, 2021 (Fig. 15). However, closer inspection of the data from individual fish revealed time of day must be considered when evaluating whether patterns in v or  $\Delta depth$  are indicative of tag loss. This is due to a consistent pattern of limited movement that occurred among all tagged fish between approximately 00:00 and 08:00. For example, in the week following tagging fish GT-016 moved very little from 00:00 until 08:00, but its movement was greater during other times of the day (Fig. 16). Therefore, determination of tag loss had be done later in the day than 08:00.

During the non-morning hours, it is also apparent from the GT-016 data that its v and  $\Delta depth$  increased steadily across the first four weeks post-tagging (Fig. 16). Greater variance in v observed after week 4 corresponds to greater movements away from the nearest artificial reef. Therefore, not only do the data for GT-016 demonstrate the pattern of limited movement between 00:00 and 08:00, they also suggest it took approximately one month for GT-016 to fully recover from the catch and release (and tagging) process. Greater exploration of the data among all tagged gray triggerfish is required to evaluate whether this is a general pattern among them, as well as whether movement data from control fish tagged at depth may enable the effects of catch and release versus tagging to be distinguished. However, initial inspection of the data for other individuals suggests this pattern may be persistent throughout the overall dataset, hence further demonstrating the power of 3D telemetry to estimate fish movement dynamics and infer physiological or ecological processes.

Movement data among tagged GT, especially those with known fates, such as recaptures reported by fishers without telemetry tags, enabled us to create a decision tree to assign fate to individual fish in our dataset (Fig. 17). For example, a fish was estimated to surfer tag loss if its  $\Delta depth$  was consistently <0.05 m outside of the 00:00 to 08:00time period and its tag speed was <0.6 m/s (and mostly well below 0.6 m/s). Alternatively, if a tag was estimated to consistently have a  $\Delta depth$  < 0.05 m outside of the 00:00 to 08:00 time period, but its tag speed later increased to >0.6 m/s, that was indicative of a fish that had suffered mortality and was subsequently

scavenged by a larger fish or mammal. Fish that were directly consumed by predators while alive had  $\Delta depth > 0.05$  m (and mostly well above 0.05 m) and v > 0.6 m/s. If the tag consistently traveled to the sea surface following consumption by a predator, then the predator was most likely a dolphin. Otherwise, the predator was likely a shark. If a tag had  $\Delta depth$  consistently >0.05 m (and mostly well above 0.05 m) but v < 0.6 m/s (typically well below 0.6 m/s), and detections did not cease, then the tagged gray triggerfish was estimated to be alive within the acoustic array. If the same conditions existed but detections ceased while the fish was detected near or just outside the edge of the array, then that fish was estimated to have emigrated out of the array. If the same conditions existed but the fish was not near the edge of the array when detections ceased, then that indicated tag failure or harvest. Most harvested fish were reported by fishers, but there was one instance where a tag (GT-94) moved toward the surface then was no longer detected within the array, but with no evidence of having been consumed by predators. We inferred these movement dynamics were indicative of an unreported fishery recapture.

## Fate of Tagged Fish

Our fate assignment algorithm (Fig. 17) was utilized to assign fate to 116 of 120 fish. Fate could not be assigned to 4 fish, which was likely due to tag failure for at least two fish (GT-117 and GT-118) which were never detected within the array. For the other two fish (GT-102 and GT-105), their tags were detected 6 and 13 times, respectively, on the day they were tagged. There is no evidence these fish were consumed by predators and left the array inside predator stomachs. However, their tags could have failed due to predator bite force. Unfortunately, the lack of movement data and related information means fate of these fish is coded as unknown in the dataset (Table 1).

Two winter-tagged gray triggerfish were estimated to die and their carcasses subsequently scavenged by predators, while 3 fish were estimated to be be directly consumed by predators within the first 2 days post-tagging (Table 1). An additional fish was estimated to be eaten by a predator on day-12. Following day-14, 5 fish were harvested by recreational anglers, 11 were estimated to emigrate away from the array, and 37 fish (65%) were estimated to lose their tags. The range in days until tag loss was 19-124 (mean = 58.2 days), thus all fish retained their tags during the initial 14-day period over which chronic discard mortality was estimated. The range in time until harvest

for fish recaptured by anglers was 73-152 days, with a mean of 95.6 days. No fish tagged during winter 2021 were estimated to be alive in the array by the end of the study.

Much higher mortality was observed for fish tagged in summer 2021 (Table 1). Within the first 48 hours post-tagging, 2 fish were estimated to have died and then their carcasses scavenged, while 16 fish were estimated to have been directly consumed by predators. One fish was harvested on the second day post-tagging. By day-14, an additional 3 fish succumbed to predators. Throughout the rest of the study, 4 additional fish were eaten by predators, 21 emigrated out of the array, 6 suffered tag loss, 1 tag suffered failure, and 1 additional fish was harvested.

The two most difficult fates to distinguish were harvest and tag failure. In both cases, tags disappeared from the array with out moving out of the array, either slowly (like typical gray triggerfish movement indicating emigration) or quickly (like in the stomach of a predator). Harvest was typically (6 of 7) reported by anglers, but in one case that was estimated to be a harvest the tag went to the surface within the array and then disappeared. Two of four tags estimated to experience failure (GT-117 and GT-118) were never detected within the array, thus we are reasonably confident in the inference of tag failure, hence an unknown fate of the tagged fish.

For the two other fish with unknown fate (GT-105 and GT-108), only 6 and 13 tag transmissions were detected immediately after tagging. Those two fish were tagged on site G in summer 2021 when 6 of 19 tagged fish were estimated to be consumed by predators within hours of being tagged. It is possible those fish were also consumed by predators, with predator bites disabling tags. However, we have no evidence that actually occurred, thus coded those fish as having an unknown fate in the data.

## Mortality Estimation

The most parsimonious regression model fit to release fate data included the factors season, fish length, and time out of water (Table 2). However, there was not a significant difference ( $\Delta AICc < 2$ ) between that model and one that also included release condition, so release condition was also included in the Cox proportional hazards model. That model had a pseudo R<sup>2</sup> value of 77.0%, with season (p < 0.001) and fish length (p = 0.014) being the only significant factors in the model.

Estimated discard mortality was 5.8% after 48 hours and 7.1% after 14 days in winter, and 34.7% after 48 hours and 41.1% after 14 days in summer. A model run with seasons modeled

jointly produced discard mortality estimates of 13.9% and 16.9% for 48 hours and 14 days, respectively. For the season-specific model, the hazards ratio indicated discard mortality was 7.2 times more likely in summer than winter.

#### Stock Assessment Simulations

Our original plan was for study co-PI Dr. Jeff Isley to run stock assessment simulations with different discard mortality scenarios utilizing the SEDAR 64 Gulf of Mexico gray triggerfish stock assessment base model as the operating model. That assessment was scheduled to be completed by 2020. However, data issues and model structural issues caused that assessment process to be terminated prior to model completion, and Dr. Isley left NOAA Fisheries shortly thereafter. In an attempt to move forward with planned stock assessment simulations, Dr. Derek Chamberlin, a post-doctoral scholar in Dr. Patterson's laboratory, obtained the SEDAR 43 Gulf of Mexico gray triggerfish Stock Synthesis control and data files from Dr. Katie Siegfried, the Chief of the Gulf and Caribbean Branch of the Sustainable Fisheries Division of the Southeast Fisheries Science Center. The assessment model was loaded in the SS3sim package in R (Taylor et al., 2014) and attempts were made to run simulations with discard mortality scenarios of 25% and 50%, utilizing the base SEDAR 43 model as the operating model and changing discard mortality in two different estimation models. Neither of those two models resulted in any appreciable difference in biomass or fishing mortality estimates. That did not seem plausible given the fact that nearly 80% of recreational catch in the terminal year of the SEDAR 43 assessment was discarded. Further diagnostics were explored, as well as the data input files. It became apparent that no length composition data were utilized in the model and it was not clear on what retention and discard mortality parameters were operating. It was concluded that running discard mortality simulations with the SEDAR 43 base model was not possible and any simulation work would have to wait until the SEDAR 43 update model has completed in 2024.

## Conclusions

Overall, our 3D telemetry results suggest gray triggerfish discard mortality are likely considerable higher than the 5% currently assumed in the GOM stock assessment. However, the high (~40%) discard mortality we estimated in summer 2021 was due almost entirely to predators. No predators were observed consuming tagged fish at the surface or taking tagged fish off

descender devices on the way to the seabed, be we did make direct observation of bull sharks consuming negative controls that were sacrificed and left on the seabed and have the 3D movement data from those fish as well as tagged sharks that moved through the arrays deployed by Bohaboy et al. (2020). Combined, data from those fish provided compelling evidence of what movement tracks look like when large predators consume tagged fish.

It is unclear why the estimated amount of predation in winter 2021 was so much lower than summer 2021. Several of the movement tracks of apparently consumed fish in summer appeared to suggest dolphin predation given tags were repeatedly recorded at or near the surface prior to exiting the arrays. Bottlenose dolphins often travel in groups of several individuals and it is possible that consumption of our tagged fish in summer 2021 resulted from a group or groups of dolphins. For-hire and private recreational fishers have provided public testimony at GMFMC meetings in recent years about the perceived increase in the consumption of discards by large predators, namely sharks and dolphins. Our data provide clear evidence of that source of discard mortality for tagged gray triggerfish, as did Bohaboy et al. (2020). However, in the Bohaboy et al. (2020) study, most gray triggerfish were (opportunistically) tagged in early spring, yet still suffered substantial mortality due to predators.

Gray triggerfish were not the target species in the Bohaboy et al. (2020) study, hence their low sample size (n = 26) and the resulting high variance in gray triggerfish discard mortality estimates. However, their overall gray triggerfish discard mortality estimate of approximately 40% was still comparable to the summer estimate in the current study and well below the estimate reported by Runde et al. (2019) for Atlantic gray triggerfish. Runde et al. (2019) utilized conventional tagging and employed Cox proportional hazards modeling to estimate discard mortality of surface-released fish referenced to return rates of positive controls tagged at depth by divers on SCUBA. Their mean discard mortality rate was 65%, which is much greater than the assumed discard mortality rate in the Atlantic or GOM stock assessments. However, it is unclear how much site fidelity versus emigration may have affected their estimates of fish fate or release mortality.

Fish captured with hook-and-line, tagged with external telemetry tags, and released at the surface in the current study appeared to take ~4 weeks to fully recover from the catch-and-release and tagging process. Afterwards, gray triggerfish showed limited site fidelity as most individuals visited numerous reefs within our acoustic array, and most of the fish that retained their tags for

more than two months eventually emigrated out of the array. If control fish tagged at depth in the Runde et al. (2019) were less likely to move away from reefs surveyed in their study area than were fish tagged and released at the surface, then apparent mortality would have been higher than actual discard mortality. However, reefs in their study system were up to 10 m deeper than those in the current study, thus depth may also may have been an important factor driving their higher discard mortality estimates.

Some uncertainty exists with respect to the causes of differences in gray triggerfish discard mortality estimates among the Bohaboy et al. (2020), Runde et al. (2019), and the current study. However, discard mortality estimates from all three studies are considerably higher than the current estimates utilized in GOM and Atlantic stock assessments. The red snapper discard mortality estimates reported by Bohaboy et al. (2020) were produced from 3D telemetry arrays in 30 and 60 m of water, with depth being a significant factor in their models of discard mortality. Likewise, Runde et al. (2019) estimated discard mortality to increase with depth for Atlantic gray triggerfish. Therefore, it seems evident that gray triggerfish would benefit from a 3D telemetry assessment of discard mortality in deeper waters of the GOM to bracket the range of depths typically utilized by recreational and commercial fishers targeting this species or catching it as bycatch when targeting other ones.

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	Days tracked	212	170	155	145	76	169	1	99	47	89	174	198	163	238	226	164	161	88	234	232	147	242	237	238	226	234	174	60	144	127
-	Total dections	23,083	15,443	15,667	11,678	2,131	6,160	67	6,482	2,761	7,933	4,077	7,545	5,001	11,949	13,869	15,867	1,562	8,285	14,110	13,733	8,425	20,577	18,744	13,741	10,670	10,174	9,662	16,230	7,843	3,874
0	Post day 14 fate	tag loss 4/25/21	tag loss 5/2/21	emigration 8/5/21	emigration 7/26/21	tag loss 3/22/21	tag loss 5/4/21		emigration 5/9/21	emigration 4/20/21	emigration 5/31/21	tag loss 4/21/21	tag loss 4/4/21	tag loss 4/10/21	tag loss 7/5/21	tag loss 6/23/21	tag loss 7/17/21	tag loss 3/27/21	emigration 5/30/21	tag loss 5/20/21	tag loss 5/25/21	emigration 7/29/21	tag loss 7/2/21	tag loss 4/30/21	tag loss 5/15/21	tag loss 4/5/21	tag loss 5/23/21	tag loss 4/21/21	tag loss 5/2/21	tag loss 5/11/21	emgration 7/8/21
	Day died							1																							
	Fate 14-day	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	predation	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive
	Fate 48-hr	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	redation	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive
-	3ottom temp	19.32	19.32	19.32	19.32	19.32	19.32	19.32 p	19.32	19.32	19.32	19.32	19.32	19.32	19.32	19.32	19.32	19.32	19.32	19.32	19.32	19.32	19.32	19.32	19.32	19.32	19.32	19.32	19.32	19.32	19.32
	Air ] temp	8.9	9.0	9.0	9.2	8.7	8.7	8.7	8.7	8.7	8.7	8.7	8.7	8.7	8.7	8.7	8.7	8.7	8.7	8.6	8.6	8.6	8.6	8.6	8.6	8.6	8.6	8.6	8.6	9.7	9.7
	Release	surface	vented	surface	lescender	vented	lescender	surface	vented	lescender	surface	vented	surface	lescender	vented	lescender	surface	lescender	vented	surface	vented	surface	lescender	surface	lescender	vented	surface	lescender	surface	vented	lescender
	Rigidity	3	5	4	5 6	4	3	4	3	4	3	3	3	3	5	3	4	4	2	æ	4	3	2	4	5 6	5	2	4	5	5	5
	Condition	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	-	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	
	Baro	PA	PA	PA	PA	PA					PA						PA								PA			PA, ES	PA	ΡA	PA
`	nnovasea tag	13334	13349	13341	13347	13343	13351	13344	13345	13350	13346	13348	13355	13354	13353	13335	13342	13352	13359	13358	13357	13356	13363	13339	13338	13360	13361	13362	13336	13337	13365
)	Floy 1 tag	487	488	489	490	491	492	493	494	495	496	497	498	499	500	501	502	503	504	505	506	507	508	509	510	511	512	513	515	516	517
	FL mm	314	520	535	503	287	290	370	338	295	307	273	310	300	304	323	408	340	305	323	315	375	322	322	505	457	321	405	515	470	475
	Secout	33	94	132	140	61	79	34	46	82	150	49	46	52	50	49	49	30	35	51	37	73	106	45	93	53	55	53	40	92	152
	Time	10:40	10:55	10:57	11:00	12:14	12:16	12:19	12:21	12:22	12:22	12:25	12:26	12:26	12:31	12:31	12:36	12:37	12:46	11:61	13:12	13:12	13:20	I3:26	13:26	13:43	13:43	13:44	14:34	15:15	15:16
	Seaon 7	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter
	Date	3/3/2021	3/3/2021	3/3/2021	3/3/2021	3/3/2021	3/3/2021	3/3/2021	3/3/2021	3/3/2021	3/3/2021	3/3/2021	3/3/2021	3/3/2021	3/3/2021	3/3/2021	3/3/2021	3/3/2021	3/3/2021	3/3/2021	3/3/2021	3/3/2021	3/3/2021	3/3/2021	3/3/2021	3/3/2021	3/3/2021	3/3/2021	3/3/2021	3/3/2021	3/3/2021
t.	Site	E	F	Ш	F	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	B	B	B	В	B	B	B	B	B	C C	с, С	IJ
in tey	Fish 5	1	2	e	4	5	9	7	8	6	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30

Table 1. Descriptive data of gray triggerfish acoustically tagged at artificial reef sites in the north central Gulf of Mexico during 2021. Site locations are provided in Figure 1. FL = fork length. Baro is external barotrauma symptoms: ES = everted esophagus; PA = prolapsed anus. Release condition and rigidity scores are indicated in the text. Temperature is °C. Fate assignment methods provided

Table 1 continued. Descriptive data of gray triggerfish acoustically tagged at artificial reef sites in the north central Gulf of Mexico during 2021. Site locations are provided in Figure 1. FL =fork length. Baro is external barotrauma symptoms: ES =everted esophagus; PA = prolapsed anus. Release condition and rigidity scores are indicated in the text. Temperature is °C. Fate assignment methods provided in text.

Days tracked	212	106	74	163	242	2	177	105	236	175	174	170	<i>TT</i>	231	160	175	9	111	161	98	53	1	169	233	0	70	77	183	78	237
Total dections	6,580	4,672	2,378	6,924	10,382	325	16,641	4,161	4,236	7,667	5,025	4,627	3,893	3,939	3,395	5,808	168	6,877	4,907	12,883	4,437	98	3,306	12,228	25	2,905	6,390	20,444	7,759	12,218
Post day 14 fate	tag loss 4/20/21		harvested 5/16/21	harvested 8/2/21	harvested 5/23/21		emigrated 9/17/21	tag loss 4/29/21	tag loss 3/30/21	tag loss 4/7/21	tag loss 4/17/21	tag loss 3/27/21	tag loss 4/24/21	tag loss 4/1/21	tag loss 3/31/21	tag loss 4/3/21		harvested 5/16/21	predation 4/1/21	harvested 6/10/21	emigrated 4/26/21		tag loss 4/13/21	tag loss 5/1/21		tag loss 4/26/21	tag loss 5/7/21	tag loss 6/26/21	emigrated 5/21/21	tag loss 4/18/21
Day died		12				1											1					1			1					
Fate 14-day	alive	predation	alive	alive	alive	dead	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	dead	alive	alive	alive	alive	predation	alive	alive	predation	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive
Fate 48-hr	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	dead	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	dead	alive	alive	alive	alive	predation	alive	alive	predation	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive
Bottom temp	19.32	19.32	19.32	19.32	19.32	19.32	19.34	19.34	19.34	19.34	19.34	19.34	19.34	19.34	19.34	19.34	19.34	19.34	19.34	19.34	19.34	19.34	19.34	19.34	19.34	19.34	19.34	19.34	19.34	19.34
Air temp	10.0	10.0	10.0	10.0	10.0	10.0	14.6	14.6	14.6	14.6	14.6	14.2	14.2	14.2	14.2	14.1	14	13.9	13.9	13.8	13.8	13.8	13.7	13.7	13.8	13.8	13.8	13.8	13.8	13.8
Release	vented	desc ender	surface	desc ender	vented	surface	vented	surface	desc ender	desc ender	surface	descender	descender	vented	surface	desc ender	vented	surface	surface	vented	surface	desc ender	desc ender	surface	surface	vented	vented	vented	vented	vented
Rigidity	5	5	3	5	5	5	4	3	3	4	3	S	4	4	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	-	4	5	4	5	ю
Condition	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	-		-	1	1	1	1	-	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
Baro	ΡA				$\mathbf{PA}$	ΡA				ΡA		ΡA		ΡA		ΡA	DA	ΡA		ΡA	$\mathbf{PA}$	ΡA	ΡA			ΡA	ΡA	ΡA		
Innovasea tag	13340	13392	13391	13397	13390	13364	13366	13367	13389	13388	13384	13385	13386	13387	13380	13381	13382	13383	13376	13377	13378	13379	13372	13373	13368	13375	13374	13369	13370	13371
Floy tag	518	519	520	522	523	525	526	527	528	529	530	531	532	533	534	535	536	537	538	539	540	541	542	543	544	545	546	547	548	549
FL	522	498	360	500	403	490	278	325	325	390	285	347	306	363	324	275	540	518	408	394	465	460	335	340	344	325	353	282	312	313
Sec	60	96	48	98	42	154	61	83	31	39	51	154	86	29	34	4	34	91	94	143	73	101	73	49	46	60	45	33	37	90
Time	15:19	15:20	15:21	15:28	16:23	16:28	8:42	8:43	8:46	8:49	8:50	8:50	8:54	9:05	9:10	9:10	9:29	9:40	9:42	9:54	9:58	10:06	10:38	10:40	10:49	10:49	10:54	10:56	10:58	10:58
Seaon	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter	Winter
Date	3/3/2021	3/3/2021	3/3/2021	3/3/2021	3/3/2021	3/3/2021	3/4/2021	3/4/2021	3/4/2021	3/4/2021	3/4/2021	3/4/2021	3/4/2021	3/4/2021	3/4/2021	3/4/2021	3/4/2021	3/4/2021	3/4/2021	3/4/2021	3/4/2021	3/4/2021	3/4/2021	3/4/2021	3/4/2021	3/4/2021	3/4/2021	3/4/2021	3/4/2021	3/4/2021
Site	IJ	IJ	IJ	IJ	A	A	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	ц	ц	ц	IJ	IJ	IJ	в	В	в	В	В	В	В	В
Fish	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	4	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	09

able 1 continued. Descriptive data of gray triggerfish acoustically tagged at artificial reef sites in the north central Gulf of Mexico uring 2021. Site locations are provided in Figure 1. FL = fork length. Baro is external barotrauma symptoms: ES = everted conheme: DA = undersed and Pelasse condition and rigidity scores are indicated in the text. Tennerature is °C. Fate assignment
sopnagus, 1.7. – protapseu anus, recease condition and rightly scores are indicated in the text. Temperature is C. Fate assignment acthods provided in text.

ys Ted	25	41	15	39	37	37	24	41	37	18	71	39	$\overline{\nabla}$	$\overline{\vee}$	$\overline{\nabla}$	$\overline{\vee}$	$\overline{\nabla}$	$\overline{\vee}$	$\overline{\nabla}$	$\overline{\vee}$	77	4	14	$\infty$	54	24	39	24	39	86
Day			1											·	·	·	·		Ľ	·										
Total dections	2,058	2,472	18,678	4,783	2,557	2,225	1,785	3,942	2,258	1,765	14,703	6,370	2	46	7	32	4	3	10	7	11,664	1,873	4,924	170	3,978	2,243	3,113	3,755	4,621	8,556
Post day 14 fate	tag loss 8/3/21	predation 9/1/21	alive in array	emigration 8/30/21	tag loss 8/9/21	tag loss 8/19/21	emigrated 8/15/21	emigrated 9/2/21	tag loss 8/9/21	tag loss 8/9/21	predation 10/1/21	harvested 8/30/21									emigrated 10/7/21	tag failed 7/27/21	emigrated 10/8/21			tag loss 8/6/21	emigration 8/31/21	emigration 8/16/21	emigration 9/4/21	emigration 9/18/21
Day died													1	1	1	1	1	1	-	1				1	7					
Fate 14-day	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	predation	predation	predation	dead	predation	predation	predation	predation	alive	alive	alive	predation	predation	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive
Fate 48-hr	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	predation	predation	predation	dead	predation	predation	predation	predation	alive	alive	alive	predation	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive
3ottom temp	25.48	25.48	25.48	25.48	25.48	25.48	25.48	25.48	25.48	25.48	25.48	25.48	25.48	25.48	25.48	25.48	25.48	25.48	25.48	25.48	25.48	25.48	25.48	25.48	25.48	25.48	25.48	25.48	25.52	25.52
Air H emp	28.7	28.7	28.7	28.7	28.7	28.7	28.7	28.7	28.7	28.7	28.6	28.6	28.6	28.6	28.6	28.6	28.6	28.6	28.6	28.6	28.6	28.7	28.7	28.7	28.7	28.8	28.8	28.8	29.3	29.3
Release 1	surface	descender	vented	surface	desc ender	vented	desc ender	surface	descender	vented	descender	surface	vented	descender	surface	descender	surface	descender	desc ender	surface	vented	descender	surface	vented	surface	descender	vented	vented	surface	vented
Rigidity	4	5 6	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	5 6	5	4	4	5	4	5 6	5	5	æ	4	3	5	5	ю
Condition	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		1	1	1	-	1	-	3	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1
Baro																ΡA														
Innovasea tag	11650	11651	11652	11653	11646	11647	11648	11649	11642	11643	11656	11638	11639	11645	11640	11680	11644	11657	11665	11655	11654	11658	13404	13405	13409	11661	11660	11659	13399	13395
Floy tag	551	552	553	554	499	556	557	558	559	561	562	563	564	565	566	567	568	560	569	570	571	538	573	574	575	576	577	578	579	580
FL mm	360	392	353	312	312	327	327	322	343	420	315	346	335	338	340	415	382	315	337	490	312	442	343	387	320	347	352	294	335	313
Sec out	108	98	71	107	103	80	99	58	68	111	108	68	65	68	61	114	108	78	72	63	116	119	72	93	98	65	73	125	79	62
Time	8:35	8:38	8:40	8:41	8:43	8:46	8:47	8:50	8:54	8:55	9:31	9:32	9:34	9:36	9:37	9:40	9:41	9:46	9:47	9:48	9:52	12:39	13:05	13:12	13:41	13:42	13:51	14:12	8:27	8:28
Seaon	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer
Date	7/22/2021	7/22/2021	7/22/2021	7/22/2021	7/22/2021	7/22/2021	7/22/2021	7/22/2021	7/22/2021	7/22/2021	7/22/2021	7/22/2021	7/22/2021	7/22/2021	7/22/2021	7/22/2021	7/22/2021	7/22/2021	7/22/2021	7/22/2021	7/22/2021	7/22/2021	7/22/2021	7/22/2021	7/22/2021	7/22/2021	7/22/2021	7/22/2021	7/27/2021	7/27/2021
Site	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	В	В	В	В	B	В	B	В	B	В	B	Ц	ر ت	Ċ	D	D	D	В	B	В
Fish	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	<u>79</u>	80	81	82	83	8	85	86	87	88	89	90

Table 1 continued. Descriptive data of gray triggerfish acoustically tagged at artificial reef sites in the north central Gulf of Mexico during 2021. Site locations are provided in Figure 1. FL =fork length. Baro is external barotrauma symptoms: ES =everted esophagus; PA = prolapsed anus. Release condition and rigidity scores are indicated in the text. Temperature is °C. Fate assignment methods provided in text.

		-				_		_		_		_		_		_		_		_		_									
Days	tracked	1	3	$\overline{\nabla}$	2	38	3	49	49	41	34	101	$\overline{\vee}$	2	32		95	75	2	56	40	55	4	66	7	30	96	$\overline{\nabla}$	$\leq$	23	$\overline{\nabla}$
Total	dections	11	130	41	336	3,333	166	5,496	3,931	1,119	629	711	9	41	776	13	739	1,910	15	346	413	311	47	330	192	540	11,603	0	0	5,965	4
Doot dow 14 fato	r usi uay 14 late					emigration 9/2/21		emigration 9/14/21	predation 9/14/21	emigration 9/6/21		emigration 9/8/21			emigration 8/29/21		predation 8/28/21	emigration 10/10/21		emigration 9/6/21	emigration 9/21/21			emigration 8/14/21		emigration 8/26/21	emigration 10/23/21			emigration 8/16/21	
Day	died	1	1	-			2				6								1				7		2						
Fate	14-day	predation	predation	dead	harvest	alive	predation	alive	alive	alive	predation	alive	unknown	unknown	alive	unknown	alive	alive	predation	alive	alive	predation	predation	alive	predation	alive	alive	unknown	unknown	alive	predation
Fate	48-hr	predation	predation	dead	harvest	alive	predation	alive	alive	alive	alive	alive	unknown	alive	alive	unknown	alive	alive	predation	alive	alive	predation	predation	alive	predation	alive	alive	unknown	unknown	alive	predation
Bottom	temp	25.52	25.52	25.52	25.52	25.52	25.52	25.52	25.52	25.52	25.52	25.52	25.52	25.52	25.52	25.52	25.52	25.52	25.52	25.52	25.52	25.52	25.52	25.52	25.52	25.52	25.52	25.52	25.52	25.52	25.52
Air	temp	29.3	29.3	29.3	29.3	29.3	29.3	29.3	29.3	29.3	29.3	29.4	29.4	29.4	29.4	29.4	29.4	29.4	29.4	29.4	29.4	29.4	29.4	29.4	29.4	29.4	29.4	29.4	29.4	29.4	29.4
Delege	NCICASE	surface	descender	surface	vented	descender	descender	surface	descender	surface	vented	vented	vented	vented	descender	surface	vented	descender	vented	surface	surface	descender	vented	descender	surface	descender	descender	surface	vented	surface	vented
Discidity	Nigiuity	5	4	5	4	s	4	4	4	4	5	ю	4	4	5	S	5	S	4	ю	3	S	5	4	4	s	5	5	5	5	S
Condition	CULULIOU	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	3	1	3
Dam	Dalu		ΡA																				ΡA								
Innovasea	tag	13393	13396	13394	13415	13413	13414	13398	13411	13416	13410	13400	13407	11664	13412	13408	13403	13406	11662	13402	13401	11663	11641	11675	11678	11672	11667	11668	11673	11669	11666
Floy	tag	581	583	584	585	586	587	582	588	589	590	591	592	593	595	596	594	597	598	599	600	601	602	603	604	605	606	607	608	609	610
FL	mm	359	352	353	335	353	317	355	296	301	434	400	382	355	363	363	370	388	376	296	253	372	376	366	348	484	336	480	338	378	364
Sec	out	62	79	78	60	78	64	56	93	40	64	69	65	70	48	64	57	59	72	80	63	62	64	81	145	121	70	91	68	76	58
E.		8:29	8:31	8:37	8:42	8:45	8:51	8:55	9:12	9:13	9:59	10:02	10:03	10:06	10:07	10:11	10:13	10:15	10:16	10:17	10:19	10:21	10:24	10:26	10:27	10:29	10:42	10:43	10:45	11:05	11:06
Concer	DCAUII	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer	Summer
Deto	Date	7/27/2021	7/27/2021	7/27/2021	7/27/2021	7/27/2021	7/27/2021	7/27/2021	7/27/2021	7/27/2021	7/27/2021	7/27/2021	7/27/2021	7/27/2021	7/27/2021	7/27/2021	7/27/2021	7/27/2021	7/27/2021	7/27/2021	7/27/2021	7/27/2021	7/27/2021	7/27/2021	7/27/2021	7/27/2021	7/27/2021	7/27/2021	7/27/2021	7/27/2021	7/27/2021
0.4°S	olle	В	В	В	В	В	В	В	D	Ω	IJ	J	IJ	J	IJ	J	IJ	J	IJ	J	IJ	IJ	IJ	J	IJ	U	IJ	J	IJ	۲	ц
ц., Р Ц., Р	LBII	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	66	100	101	102	103	104	105	106	107	108	109	110	111	112	113	114	115	116	117	118	119	120

Table 2. Regression models computed to estimate the effect of measured parameters on gray triggerfish post-release survival. -LL is the negative log likelihood of each model. AICc is Akaike's Information Criterion with correction for small sample size and  $\Delta$ AICc is the difference between a given model's AICc and the lowest AICc value. Season = winter or summer. Length = fish fork length. Time = time out of water while attaching external acoustic telemetry and dart tags. Rigidity is abdominal rigidity score (1 = flaccid to 5 = completely rigid). Barotrauma = presence (1) or absence (0) of external barotrauma symptoms (e.g., everted esophagus, prolapsed anus). Release = release type: surface, vented, or descended. Condition = apparent condition based on swimming: 1 = swam down vigorously, 2 = oriented to bottom but swam down slowly, 3 = alive at surface but struggled to submerge, and 4 = apparently dead at surface.

Parameters included in model	n	k	-LL	AICc	ΔAICc	Rank
βο	116	1	64.11	130.25	19.15	8
$\beta_0 + season$	116	2	57.03	118.16	7.05	6
$\beta_0 + season + length$	116	3	53.36	112.93	1.82	3
$\beta_0 + season + length + time$	115	4	51.37	111.10	0	1
$\beta_0 + season + length + time + condition$	115	5	50.94	112.43	1.32	2
$\beta_0 + season + length + time + condition + rigidity$	115	6	50.75	114.28	3.17	4
$\beta_0 + season + length + time + condition + rigidity + barotrauma$	115	7	50.73	116.50	5.40	5
$\beta_0 + season + length + time + condition + rigidity + barotrauma + release$	115	8	50.73	118.81	7.71	7





Figure 1. Map of the north central Gulf of Mexico indicating the location (white polygon) of the acoustic array deployed off Pensacola, Florida (yellow star) at depths of 28.1 to 31.8 m. Receiver (dark gray circles) and artificial reef (blue triangles) locations are indicated in bottom map.



Figure 2. A) Innovasea VR2-Tx receiver attached to the top of a 2-m riser consisting of 2" PVC anchored in a 36-kg concrete base. B) An entire receiver base with syntactic foam buoy (float) readied for deployment to the seabed. C) Sonar image of the buoy suspended above the riser facilitating locating the receiver and its base upon a return trip offshore.



Figure 3. A) An adult gray triggerfish externally tagged with a Innovasea V13P acoustic tag applied with the Domeier anchor method. A Floy stainless steel dart tag is being applied to the fish before release. B) An adult gray triggerfish tagged with an Innovasea V13P acoustic tag applied with the Bohaboy et al. (2020) threaded stainless steel rod method. The fish is being descended to depth for release with a Seaqulizer return-to-depth tool.



Figure 4. Overall winter (top) and summer (bottom) gray triggerfish fork length distributions for fish captured with hook and line, tagged externally with Innovasea V13P acoustic tags, and released at the surface (S), vented and released at the surface (V), or released at depth with a Seaqualizer descender device (D). Inset panels indicate season-specific mean  $\pm$  95% CI for each release treatment.



Figure 5. Probability of gray triggerfish experiencing external barotrauma symptoms (e.g., everted esophagus or prolapsed anus) as a function of fork length. Data were coded as 1 if symptoms were observed, and 0 for no external barotrauma symptoms. Fitted line is the logistic regression predicting barotrauma symptoms (FL = 6.51 - 0.014\*FL; p < 0.001; pseudo R<sup>2</sup> = 0.24).



Figure 6. Mean ( $\pm$  95% CI) rigidity score for gray triggerfish size classes.



Figure 7. Winter (top) and summer (bottom) distributions of time out of water to tag gray triggerfish externally with Innovasea V13P acoustic tags and a Floy stainless steel dart tag. Sample size was 60 in each season.



Figure 8. Dissolved oxygen (top) and water temperature (bottom) measured with a HOBO U26-001 dissolved oxygen sensor attached to a telemetry receiver PVC pole approximately 1 m above the seabed in the center of the telemetry array.


Figure 9. A) Fish GT-123 externally tagged with an Innovasea V13P acoustic tag on the seafloor and then sacrificed via pithing to render it dead. B) Same fish consumed by a bull shark which then swam away with the gray triggerfish and attached telemetry tag in its gut.



Figure 10. Digital images of a shortfin make shark (top) and a bottlenose dolphin (bottom) that were present on tagging artificial reefs and followed acoustically tagged triggerfish as they swam back or were descended to reefs from the surface.



Figure 11. Estimated speed versus detection number for three adult gray triggerfish captured with nets near the seabed and externally tagged with Innovasea V13P telemetry tags. Red lines are loess regressions fitted to the data. These fish serve as positive controls of the general trend and variance observed in live gray triggerfish movement. Fish GT-124 subsequently appeared to be consumed by a predator at approximately detection 2,300, after which its speed profile changed substantially.



Figure 12. Estimated speed box plots for positive (green) and negative (red) gray triggerfish controls captured and tagged on the seabed. The negative controls were subsequently sacrificed via pithing. Fish 124 is plotted with both groups to indicate the time period prior to being consumed by a predator (124a) versus after being consumed (124b). Upper and lower sides of boxes indicate the upper and lower quartiles of the data, while horizontal lines indicate the median. Extended bars indicate 5<sup>th</sup> and 95<sup>th</sup> percentiles, with green or red circles indicating data beyond those percentiles.



Figure 13. Detections over time of sacrificed (negative controls) and live (positive controls) gray triggerfish externally tagged with Innovasea VP-13H acoustic tags on the seafloor in the north central Gulf of Mexico during 2021. Green circles indicate date of tagging. Red circles indicate predation events or predator tracking.



Figure 14. Estimated speed and depth of tagged fish GT-070, which was tagged on 7/22/21 and consumed by a predator almost immediately after release. Repeated movements toward to the surface suggest a marine mammal was the consumer, most likely a bottlenose dolphin, *Tursiops truncatus*.



Figure 15. A) Estimated depth and B) speed of an Innovasea V13P tag that was attached to Fish GT-005. The near-constant depth and limited speed estimates indicate the tag became detached from the fish on March 22, 2021 (blue circles) but periodically was detected on the seabed until May 18, 2021, after which it either became covered in sediment or otherwise stopped transmitting. Inset panels indicate mean  $\pm$  95% CI for  $\Delta$ depth (above) or speed (below) during pre- versus posttag loss periods.



Figure 16. Estimated A) depth differential and B) speed (mean  $\pm$  95% CI) for gray triggerfish GT-016 tracked with acoustic telemetry. Depth differential is the absolute value of the difference in depth between two sequential detections.



based on movement behavior. Adepth is the absolute value of the difference in estimated depth Figure 17. Decision tree constructed to assess the fate of acoustically tagged gray triggerfish between two sequential detections of a given acoustic tag. TOD = time of day.



Figure 18. Season- and time-specific estimated gray triggerfish mortality for the most parsimonious model presented in Table 2. Error bars indicate 95% CI computed as 1.96\*SE following Pollock and Pine (2007). Sample size was 60 for winter and 56 in summer due to 4 fish with unknown fate in summer.

# Appendix 1

Figure A1. Detections over time of gray triggerfish tagged externally with with Innovasea VP-13H acoustic tags in the north central Gulf of Mexico during 2021.



Figure A1. Detections over time of gray triggerfish externally tagged with Innovasea VP-13H acoustic tags in the north central Gulf of Mexico during 2021. Green circles indicate date of tagging. Gray circles indicate fish detected within telemetry array. Pink circles indicated release mortality without predation. Red circles indicate predation events and subsequent predator tracking. Orange circles indicate scavenging events and subsequent tracking. Dark blue circles indicate tag loss and transmission on bottom. Light blue circles indicate fishery harvest. Yellow indicates emigration from array. Minor tick marks on x-axis indicate weeks since March 1, 2021.



Figure A1 cont. Detections over time of gray triggerfish externally tagged with Innovasea VP-13H acoustic tags in the north central Gulf of Mexico during 2021. Green circles indicate date of tagging. Gray circles indicate fish detected within telemetry array. Pink circles indicated release mortality without predation. Red circles indicate predation events and subsequent predator tracking. Orange circles indicate scavenging events and subsequent tracking. Dark blue circles indicate tag loss and transmission on bottom. Light blue circles indicate fishery harvest. Yellow indicates emigration from array. Minor tick marks on x-axis indicate weeks since March 1, 2021.



Figure A1 cont. Detections over time of gray triggerfish externally tagged with Innovasea VP-13H acoustic tags in the north central Gulf of Mexico during 2021. Green circles indicate date of tagging. Gray circles indicate fish detected within telemetry array. Pink circles indicated release mortality without predation. Red circles indicate predation events and subsequent predator tracking. Orange circles indicate scavenging events and subsequent tracking. Dark blue circles indicate tag loss and transmission on bottom. Light blue circles indicate fishery harvest. Yellow indicates emigration from array. Minor tick marks on x-axis indicate weeks since March 1, 2021.



Figure A1 cont. Detections over time of gray triggerfish externally tagged with Innovasea VP-13H acoustic tags in the north central Gulf of Mexico during 2021. Green circles indicate date of tagging. Gray circles indicate fish detected within telemetry array. Pink circles indicated release mortality without predation. Red circles indicate predation events and subsequent predator tracking. Orange circles indicate scavenging events and subsequent tracking. Dark blue circles indicate tag loss and transmission on bottom. Light blue circles indicate fishery harvest. Yellow indicates emigration from array. Minor tick marks on x-axis indicate weeks since March 1, 2021.



Figure A1 cont. Detections over time of gray triggerfish externally tagged with Innovasea VP-13H acoustic tags in the north central Gulf of Mexico during 2021. Green circles indicate date of tagging. Gray circles indicate fish detected within telemetry array. Pink circles indicated release mortality without predation. Red circles indicate predation events and subsequent predator tracking. Orange circles indicate scavenging events and subsequent tracking. Dark blue circles indicate tag loss and transmission on bottom. Light blue circles indicate fishery harvest. Yellow indicates emigration from array.



Figure A1 cont. Detections over time of gray triggerfish externally tagged with Innovasea VP-13H acoustic tags in the north central Gulf of Mexico during 2021. Green circles indicate date of tagging. Gray circles indicate fish detected within telemetry array. Pink circles indicated release mortality without predation. Red circles indicate predation events and subsequent predator tracking. Orange circles indicate scavenging events and subsequent tracking. Dark blue circles indicate tag loss and transmission on bottom. Light blue circles indicate fishery harvest. Yellow indicates emigration from array.

#### Appendix 2

Table A2. Movement maps of acoustically tagged gray triggerfish in an acoustic array deployed approximately 32 km south southeast of Pensacola Pass, Florida (array midpoint: 30.081N 87.104W) in the Escambia East Large Area Artificial Site. Acoustic receivers locations indicated by light blue circles. Triangles indicate locations of known artificial reefs. Dark blue circles indicate fish geoposition estimates. Number of detections and total days tracked o is provided on each sample-specific map.

#### GT-001 detections: 23,083 days: 213



GT-002 detections: 15,443 days: 170











GT-007 detections: 97 days: <1















#### GT-013 detections: 5,001 days: 164



GT-014 detections: 11,949 days: 238











GT-019 detections: 14,110 days: 235



GT-020 detections: 13,733 days: 233











54

GT-025 detections: 10,670 days: 226



GT-026 detections: 10,174 days: 234











### GT-031 detections: 6,580 days: 213















56

### GT-037 detections: 16,641 days: 178













#### GT-043 detections: 3,893 days: 77



## GT-044 detections: 3,939 days: 231











#### GT-049 detections: 4,907 days: 162













#### GT-055 detections: 25 days: <1



GT-056 detections: 2,755 days: 70











GT-061 detections: 2,058 days: 25



GT-062 detections: 2,472 days: 41











GT-067 detections: 1,785 days: 25



GT-068 detections: 3,942 days: 42























GT-079 detections: 10 days: <1













GT-085 detections: 3,978 days: 54



GT-086 detections: 2,243 days: 25











65

#### GT-091 detections: 11 days: 1













GT-097 detections: 5,496 days: 49













GT-103 detections: 41 days: 3



GT-104 detections: 776 days: 33










GT-109 detections: 346 days: 56













GT-115 detections: 540 days: 31























