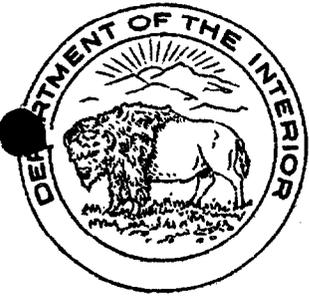


DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE



OFFICE OF COORDINATOR OF FISHERIES

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Fish is today one of the least known and most promising assets of the South, according to a publication on the fishery resources of that region just issued by the Interior Department's Office of the Coordinator of Fisheries.

The pamphlet is titled "Fish and Shellfish of the South Atlantic and Gulf Coasts" and was written by Rachel L. Carson, an aquatic biologist on the Coordinator of Fisheries' staff. It is the third in a regional series of bulletins by the same author dealing with the fisheries of the United States.

Describing what the southern states have already done in building up their fisheries, the bulletin points out that at the present time "the South supplies the United States with practically all of its shrimp, a third of its crabs, a fourth of its oysters, and a number of choice fishes that are not taken anywhere else in abundance, like the red snapper, the Spanish mackerel, and the pompano."

Although fish and shellfish have been caught along the southern coasts ever since the first settlements were made in the region, "the fisheries of the South Atlantic and Gulf coasts have by no means completed their development," according to Miss Carson. "With a coastline more than 2,500 miles long as the crow flies, the region produces only a little more than half a billion pounds of fishery products -- 14 per cent of the total yield of the United States and Alaska."

Southern coastal waters support a greater variety of fish and shellfish than are found anywhere else in the country, but as yet only five major fisheries have been developed -- those for menhaden, shrimp, mullet, crabs, and oysters.

Describing the southern fisheries as "a fertile field for exploration which will reveal whether they may in time yield an even larger and more valuable sea-food harvest," the bulletin cites lack of scientific exploration as one of the reasons for the slow development of the south's sea-food resources. Comparatively little is known either of the oceanography of the region or of the distribution or habits of the fishes. With few exceptions, fishing operations are confined to waters close inshore.

Studies are needed, it is pointed out, to find the areas where fish may congregate offshore, or whether such areas exist. In addition to such explorations, new methods of handling the catch would permit fuller use of species known to be abundant.

Annual landings of fish and shellfish in the states from North Carolina to Texas total about 575,000,000 pounds, consisting of some 85 different species.

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The menhaden alone, a large member of the herring family, is so important in the southern fisheries that it makes up more than half the total catch, and supports the largest fishery of North Carolina, Florida, and Mississippi, and the most valuable fishery of North Carolina. Menhaden is an important source of meal and oil used in animal feeding and of oil for industrial uses.

The catch of shrimp ranks next to menhaden in volume and accounts for a quarter of the total landings. Shrimp fishing is the principal aquatic industry in Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, and Texas, and the most valuable fishery in most southern states.

Mullet is the principal food fish of the south, yielding an annual catch of 35 to 40 million pounds. Largest catches are made on the west coast of Florida and in the vicinity of Beaufort, North Carolina, the peak of the season coming in the fall and early winter.

Mullet, crabs, and oysters each make up 3 to 6 per cent of the total catch of the region, all other species being caught in quantities of less than 10,000,000 pounds.

Differing greatly in the productivity of their fisheries, the southern states are led by Florida which, with its long coast line, contributes a third of the total yield. North Carolina is a close second, with 30 per cent of the total, and Louisiana is third, with 22 per cent.

Geographically, the products of the southern fisheries (exclusive of the canned pack) are distributed chiefly in the area bounded by the Mississippi River on the west and the Ohio River on the north. Certain species, however, have a much wider distribution. Probably shrimp and red snapper are shipped to more distant cities than any other southern sea foods.

Canning of sea food products in the South is limited almost entirely to shrimp and oysters. The greater part of the shrimp has been canned in the past, but there is now a strong trend toward freezing more shrimp and canning less. Practically all the oyster canning in the United States is done in the south, and Biloxi, Miss., cans more oysters than any other city in the world.

Most of the fish landed at southern ports enters the fresh-fish markets. At present the necessary shore facilities for packaging and freezing the catch by the most modern methods are limited in the South. The skilled labor necessary to operate such plants is almost unobtainable under war conditions.

The new bulletin, which is believed to be the first published account of the fishery resources of the entire southern coast, contains information on approximately 25 different kinds of fish and shellfish, including many of the less known and under utilized species of the region.

Copies of "Fish and Shellfish of the South Atlantic and Gulf Coasts," known as Conservation Bulletin 37 of the Department of the Interior, may be obtained from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C. for 10 cents each, or from members of Congress on request.