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(Thunnus thynnus) -- 9.3.4.1 Key Life-History Processes and Ecology -- 9.3.4.2 Predators and Prey -- 9.3.4.3 Key Habitat Needs and Distribution -- 9.3.4.4 Fisheries -- 9.3.5 Atlantic Blue Marlin (Makaira nigricans) -- 9.3.5.1 Key Life-History Processes and Ecology -- 9.3.5.2 Predators and Prey -- 9.3.5.3 Key Habitat Needs and Distribution -- 9.3.5.4 Fisheries -- 9.3.6 Atlantic Swordfish (Xiphias gladius) -- 9.3.6.1 Key Life-History Processes and Ecology -- 9.3.6.2 Predators and Prey -- 9.3.6.3 Key Habitat Needs and Distribution -- 9.3.6.4 Fisheries -- 9.3.7 Atlantic Sailfish (Istiophorus albicans) -- 9.3.7.1 Key Life-History Processes and Ecology -- 9.3.7.2 Predators and Prey -- 9.3.7.3 Key Habitat Needs and Distribution -- 9.3.7.4 Fisheries -- 9.3.8 Red Drum (Sciaenops ocellatus) -- 9.3.8.1 Key Life-History Processes and Ecology -- 9.3.8.2 Predators and Prey -- 9.3.8.3 Key Habitat Needs and Distribution -- 9.3.8.4 Fisheries -- 9.3.9 Tilefish (Lopholatilus chamaeleonticeps) -- 9.3.9.1 Key Life-History Processes and Ecology -- 9.3.9.2 Predators and Prey -- 9.3.9.3 Key Habitat Needs and Distribution -- 9.3.9.4 Fisheries -- 9.3.10 King Mackerel (Scomberomorus cavalla) -- 9.3.10.1 Key Life-History Processes and Ecology -- 9.3.10.2 Predators and Prey -- 9.3.10.3 Key Habitat Needs and Distribution -- 9.3.10.4 Fisheries -- 9.3.11 Dolphinfin (Coryphaena hippurus) -- 9.3.11.1 Key Life-History Processes and Ecology -- 9.3.11.2 Predators and Prey -- 9.3.11.3 Key Habitat Needs and Distribution -- 9.3.11.4 Fisheries -- 9.3.12 Striped Mullet (Mugil cephalus) -- 9.3.12.1 Key Life-History Processes and Ecology -- 9.3.12.2 Predators and Prey -- 9.3.12.3 Key Habitat Needs and Distribution -- 9.3.12.4 Fisheries -- 9.3.13 Greater Amberjack (Seriola dumerili) -- 9.3.13.1 Key Life-History Processes and Ecology -- 9.3.13.2 Predators and Prey -- 9.3.13.3 Key Habitat Needs and Distribution -- 9.3.13.4 Fisheries -- 9.4 Population Dynamics of Shark and Ray Species -- 9.4.1 General Introduction -- 9.4.2 Stock Assessment and Management History -- 9.4.3 Small Coastal Sharks Group -- 9.4.3.1 Atlantic Sharpnose Shark -- 9.4.3.2 Blacknose Shark -- 9.4.3.3 Bonnethead Shark -- 9.4.3.4 Finetooth Shark -- 9.4.4 Large Coastal Sharks Group -- 9.4.4.1 Sandbar Shark -- 9.4.4.2 Blacktip Shark -- 9.4.5 Pelagic Sharks Group -- 9.4.6 Prohibited Sharks -- 9.4.6.1 Prohibited Sharks Formerly in the Small Coastal Sharks Group -- 9.4.6.2 Prohibited Sharks Formerly in the Large Coastal Sharks Group -- 9.4.6.3 Prohibited Sharks Formerly in the Pelagic Sharks Group -- 9.4.7 Rays and Skates -- 9.5 Summary -- References -- Chapter 10: Commercial and Recreational Fisheries of the Gulf of Mexico -- 10.1 Introduction -- 10.2 The Management Process at Its Base -- 10.2.1 Federal Oversight: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration -- 10.2.2 State Agency Management -- 10.2.3 Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission -- 10.3 Gulf of Mexico Commercial Fisheries in Aggregate -- 10.3.1 Gulf of Mexico Landings -- 10.3.1.1 Menhaden Landings -- 10.3.1.2 Brown Shrimp Landings -- 10.3.1.3 White Shrimp Landings -- 10.3.1.4 Blue Crab Landings -- 10.3.1.5 Oyster Landings -- 10.3.1.6 Landings of All Other Species -- 10.3.2 Aggregate Landings by State -- 10.3.3 Catch by Distance from Shore -- 10.3.4 Dockside Value of Landings -- 10.3.5 Processing Plants and Related Employment -- 10.3.6 Economic Impact of Gulf of Mexico Commercial Fishing -- 10.3.6.1 Sales Impacts -- 10.3.6.2 Income Impacts -- 10.3.6.3 Employment Impacts -- 10.3.6.4 Value Added -- 10.3.6.5 Imports and Sales, Income, Employment, and Value Added Impacts -- 10.3.7 Commercial Fisheries of State Managed Species -- 10.3.7.1 The Blue Crab Fishery -- 10.3.7.2 The Menhaden Fishery -- 10.3.7.3 Other State-Managed Species -- 10.3.8 Additional Detail on

Key Commercial Species -- 10.3.8.1 The Shrimp Fishery -- 10.3.8.1.1 Gulf Shrimp Landings and the Relation to Imports -- 10.3.8.1.2 A Closer Look at Imports -- 10.3.8.1.3 A Closer Look at the Gulf Shrimp Fishery -- Shrimp Effort -- Shrimp Size at Harvest -- Harvested Species -- Harvest by Depth and Movement of the Fleet -- Variability in Shrimp Populations and Harvests -- Catch per Unit Effort -- Financial Condition of the Fleet -- 10.3.8.1.4 The Gulf of Mexico Shrimp Processing Sector.

10.3.8.1.5 Impact of Gulf Shrimp Landings on Dockside Price -- 10.3.8.2 The Oyster Industry -- 10.3.8.2.1 The Production Side -- Gulf Production in Relation to U.S. Total -- Gulf Production by State -- Dockside Value and Price -- 10.3.8.2.2 The Gulf Oyster Processing Industry -- 10.3.8.2.3 Impact of Oyster Landings on Dockside Price -- 10.3.8.3 The Commercial Reef Fish Sector -- 10.3.8.4 Menhaden -- 10.3.9 Additional Detail on Processing and Wholesaling -- 10.4 The Gulf of Mexico Recreational Sector -- 10.4.1 Expenditures and Multipliers -- 10.4.2 Gulf of Mexico Fishing Activities -- 10.4.2.1 Number of Angler Trips -- 10.4.2.1.1 Angler Trips by Mode -- 10.4.2.1.2 Angler Trips by Area Fished -- 10.4.2.1.3 Angler Trips by Wave -- 10.4.2.1.4 Angler Targeting Behavior -- 10.4.2.1.5 Aggregate Gulf of Mexico Recreational Catch/Harvest -- 10.4.2.2 Gulf of Mexico Recreational Catch/Harvest by Species/Group -- 10.4.2.2.1 Inshore Species -- Spotted Seatrout -- Red Drum -- 10.4.2.2.2 Offshore Species -- Aggregate Reef Fish -- Individual Reef Fish Species (Groups) -- Snappers -- Coastal Pelagics -- Highly Migratory Pelagics -- 10.4.3 Recreational Activities at the State Level -- 10.4.3.1 Participation by State -- 10.4.3.1.1 Florida -- 10.4.3.1.2 Alabama -- 10.4.3.1.3 Mississippi -- 10.4.3.1.4 Louisiana -- 10.4.3.2 Angler Trips by State -- 10.4.3.2.1 Florida (West Coast) -- 10.4.3.2.2 Alabama -- 10.4.3.2.3 Mississippi -- 10.4.3.2.4 Louisiana -- 10.4.3.3 Catch/Harvest by State -- 10.4.3.3.1 Florida -- Aggregate Catch/Harvest -- Analysis by Inshore and Offshore Species -- Snappers -- 10.4.3.3.2 Louisiana -- Aggregate Catch -- Inshore Species -- Red Drum -- Spotted Seatrout -- Offshore Species -- 10.4.3.3.3 Alabama and Mississippi -- 10.5 Summary -- References -- Appendix A -- Chapter 11: Sea Turtles of the Gulf of Mexico.

11.1 Introduction -- 11.1.1 Generalized Life History of Gulf of Mexico Sea Turtles -- 11.1.2 Historical Abundance of Gulf of Mexico Sea Turtles -- 11.1.3 General Nesting Abundance of Gulf of Mexico Sea Turtles -- 11.1.4 General In-Water Abundance of Gulf of Mexico Sea Turtles -- 11.1.5 Regulation and Protection of Gulf of Mexico Sea Turtles -- 11.1.5.1 History of Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle Protection in the United States and Mexico -- 11.1.5.2 History of Loggerhead Sea Turtle Protection in the United States -- 11.1.5.3 History of Green Sea Turtle Protection in the United States -- 11.1.5.4 History of Leatherback Sea Turtle Protection in the United States -- 11.1.5.5 History of Hawksbill Sea Turtle Protection in the United States -- 11.2 Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle (*Lepidochelys Kempii*) -- 11.2.1 Kemp's Ridley Life History, Distribution, and Abundance -- 11.2.1.1 Nesting Life History, Distribution, and Abundance for Gulf of Mexico Kemp's Ridges -- 11.2.1.2 Hatchling, Post-Hatchling, and Oceanic Juvenile Life History and Distribution for Gulf of Mexico Kemp's Ridges -- 11.2.1.3 Neritic Juvenile Life History and Distribution for Gulf of Mexico Kemp's Ridges -- 11.2.1.4 Adult Life History and Distribution for Gulf of Mexico Kemp's Ridges -- 11.2.2 Kemp's Ridley Recovery Program -- 11.3 Loggerhead Sea Turtle (*Caretta Caretta*) -- 11.3.1 Loggerhead Sea Turtle Life History, Distribution, and Abundance -- 11.3.1.1 Nesting Life History, Distribution, and Abundance for Gulf of Mexico

Loggerheads -- 11.3.1.2 Hatchling, Post-Hatchling, and Oceanic Juvenile Life History and Distribution for Gulf of Mexico Loggerheads -- 11.3.1.3 Neritic Juvenile Life History and Distribution for Gulf of Mexico Loggerheads -- 11.3.1.4 Adult Life History and Distribution for Gulf of Mexico Loggerheads -- 11.4 Green Sea Turtle (*Chelonia Mydas*). 11.4.1 Green Sea Turtle Life History, Distribution, and Abundance.

Sommario/riassunto

This book is open access under a CC BY-NC 2.5 license. The Gulf of Mexico is an open and dynamic marine ecosystem rich in natural resources but heavily impacted by human activities, including agricultural, industrial, commercial and coastal development. Nutrients and pollutants from coastal communities and dozens of rivers flow into the Gulf, including material from the Mississippi River watershed, which drains over one third of continental United States. The Gulf of Mexico has been continuously exposed to petroleum hydrocarbons for millions of years from natural oil and gas seeps on the sea floor, and more recently from oil drilling and production activities located in the water near and far from shore. Major accidental oil spills in the Gulf are infrequent; two of the most significant include the Ixtoc I blowout in the Bay of Campeche in 1979 and the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill in 2010. Unfortunately, baseline assessments of the status of habitats and biota in the Gulf of Mexico before these spills either were not available, or the data had not been systematically compiled in a way that would help scientists assess the potential short-term and long-term effects of such events. This 2-volume series compiles and summarizes thousands of data sets showing the status of habitats and biota in the Gulf of Mexico before the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill that began on April 20, 2010. Volume 1 begins with an overview of the following 13 chapters and focuses on the big picture rather than the details of habitat quality and biota. Volume 1 covers: • Water and sediment quality and contaminants, to provide perspective on environmental conditions in the Gulf. • Natural oil and gas seeps in the Gulf of Mexico, to identify natural sources of exposure to petroleum hydrocarbons. • Coastal habitats, including flora and fauna and coastal geology. • Offshore benthos and plankton, with an analysis of current knowledge on energy capture and energy flows in the Gulf. • Shellfish and finfish resources that provide the basis for commercial and recreational fisheries. Volume 2 covers: • Historical data on commercial and recreational fisheries, with an analysis of marketing trends and drivers. • Ecology, populations and risks to birds, sea turtles and marine mammals in the Gulf of Mexico. • A final chapter extensively illustrated with original images on diseases and mortalities of fish and other animals that inhabit the Gulf of Mexico. Chapters in these volumes have been peer reviewed by scientific experts in the subject areas covered. Hopefully, the collection and analysis of such data for the Gulf of Mexico will be continued and sponsored by responsible federal and state agencies with the frequency needed to accurately assess potential damage to natural resources from ecologically harmful events that may occur in the future.
