



Commercial fishermen stand to lose billions from government shutdown

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The government shutdown is jeopardizing jobs and tens of billions of dollars in revenue for the heavily regulated commercial fishing industry, a coalition of groups representing fishermen from Cape Cod to Alaska said Tuesday.

The Commerce Department's fisheries service has furloughed key employees that help to oversee commercial fishing operation and the quotas handed out to fishermen that need to be in place and enforced before they can enter the water.

Without the oversight, fishing data isn't collected, and the risk of overfishing becomes a problem. That situation prevents fishermen from working and results in lost catches.

Specifically, a plan worked out between the federal government and anglers to fish for highly prized red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico could be in jeopardy due to the shutdown.

"Commercial fishermen, charter fishermen, and private recreational anglers have spent years working to reach common ground, and now this shutdown could delay the sustainable solution that private anglers have been looking for," said Eric Brazer, deputy director of the Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders' Alliance, just one of the groups raising alarm with the Trump administration.

Alaskan fisheries are panicking that they could lose a big chunk of the fishing season without federal permit approvals being issued in time.

"We are working to help young fishermen gain access to local fisheries, but that access depends on government workers being at their desks to process transfers and manage fisheries — none of which is happening right now," said Linda Behnken of the Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association.

Ben Martens, executive director of the Maine Coast Fishermen's Association, said New England relies on federal workers to ensure fishermen are able to launch their boats and catch seafood within the guidelines of the law.

“With an extended shutdown, livelihoods, on the water accountability, and the sustainability of our marine resources will all be put at risk,” he said. Without the federal government, there is no one to assess how much fish has been caught.

If fishermen go over their preassigned fishing quotas, it threatens the health of the fisheries and the economic well-being of the fishermen themselves, said John Pappalardo, CEO of the Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen’s Alliance.