

**Lyles-Simpson Award  
Recipient  
2024**



***Gary Lynn Graham***

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It is with great pleasure that the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission presents this year's Lyles-Simpson Award to Gary Graham. This prestigious award is presented annually to an individual, agency, or organization which has contributed to the betterment of the fisheries of the Gulf of Mexico through significant biological, industrial, legislative, enforcement, or administrative activities.

Gary was born in Wharton, Texas, and at the age of four moved with his family to a remote oil compound in northern Saudi Arabia. He was homeschooled by a private tutor until the age of eleven, after which he returned to the United States and lived with his grandparents in Texas until his parents returned. He graduated from West Columbia High School and then enrolled at Texas A&M University. In the summer of 1966, Gary took his first offshore trip aboard a shrimp trawler and continued to work in the industry during summers to help pay for college. He graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Range Ecology and joined the Texas National Guard, where he served as a helicopter crew chief and paratrooper for six years. After completing his military service, Gary returned to offshore shrimping.

In 1970, Gary was offered a position with Texas A&M University's AgriLife Extension and Texas Sea Grant, where he was tasked with introducing the College Land Grant concept to commercial and recreational fishermen. Initially, this was a challenging role, as few people recognized the program's potential. Gary traveled the Texas coast, introducing himself and discussing the opportunities for university collaboration. His first major success came from working with shrimpers who shared their "secret" locations of underwater obstructions that caused problems for trawling. This culminated in a 1975 atlas that mapped over 12,000 underwater hazards from the Rio Grande River to the mouth of the Mississippi River. The project was well-received by the shrimp industry and demonstrated the value of collaboration with universities. Gary's early work with

the recreational sector included participation in a Texas Sea Grant team that trained volunteers to conduct fishing tournaments, covering topics such as weighmaster training, fish identification, and detecting illegal entries. This program remains successful in Texas. Around this time, Gary also began graduate studies in Fisheries Science at Texas A&M Galveston.

The implementation of the Magnuson-Stevens Act in 1976 brought both opportunities and challenges to U.S. fisheries. To support domestic industry development, Gary established cooperative research with the shrimp industry, documenting commercial quantities of tilefish and deepwater grouper off the Texas coast. He outfitted a trawler with pelagic longline gear and demonstrated the successful harvest of swordfish. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) later requested that Gary investigate shark fishing, leading him to equip vessels with the necessary gear and demonstrate techniques aboard collaborating ships. Throughout his career, Gary emphasized the importance of involving the fishing industry in research and placed a high priority on teamwork. Decades later, "cooperative and collaborative research" became a widely recognized term, and Gary served on the National Academy of Sciences' Committee on Cooperative and Collaborative Research within NMFS.

Sea turtle conservation also became a significant and contentious issue during Gary's career. He served on the National Academy of Sciences Committee on Sea Turtle Conservation, and at the request of the Texas Shrimp Association, became deeply involved in efforts to address the issue. With support from the Gulf and South Atlantic Fisheries Development Foundation (GSAFF), where Gary served as Gulf Coordinator, he worked closely with NMFS and Dave Harrington, a colleague from the University of Georgia. They collaborated with shrimpers to develop ideas that ultimately led to the creation and implementation of Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs). Gary remained committed

to improving TEDs and advancing education and outreach efforts throughout his career.

Finfish bycatch emerged as another important concern for the shrimp industry. As coordinator of an industry observer program through the GSAFF, Gary worked to characterize trawl bycatch species. The success of this program was realized when shrimp industry data matched those collected by the NMFS observer program. In response to the need for bycatch reduction devices (BRDs), Gary and his team implemented a similar program that engaged the shrimp industry in the development and evaluation of various BRD designs. This cooperative effort continued throughout the remainder of Gary's career.

Another major initiative involved the development of electronic logbooks for shrimp trawlers. Serving as Gulf Coordinator with GSAFF and working with LGL Associates and the shrimp industry, Gary helped find collaborators to test the electronic logbook concept and employed shrimp industry observers to collect data.

Fuel efficiency became a critical topic in the shrimp fishery, and Gary successfully introduced Sapphire and Spectra netting into the industry, conducting studies that documented fuel savings. His efforts earned him a Texas Governor's Award for Fuel Efficiency.

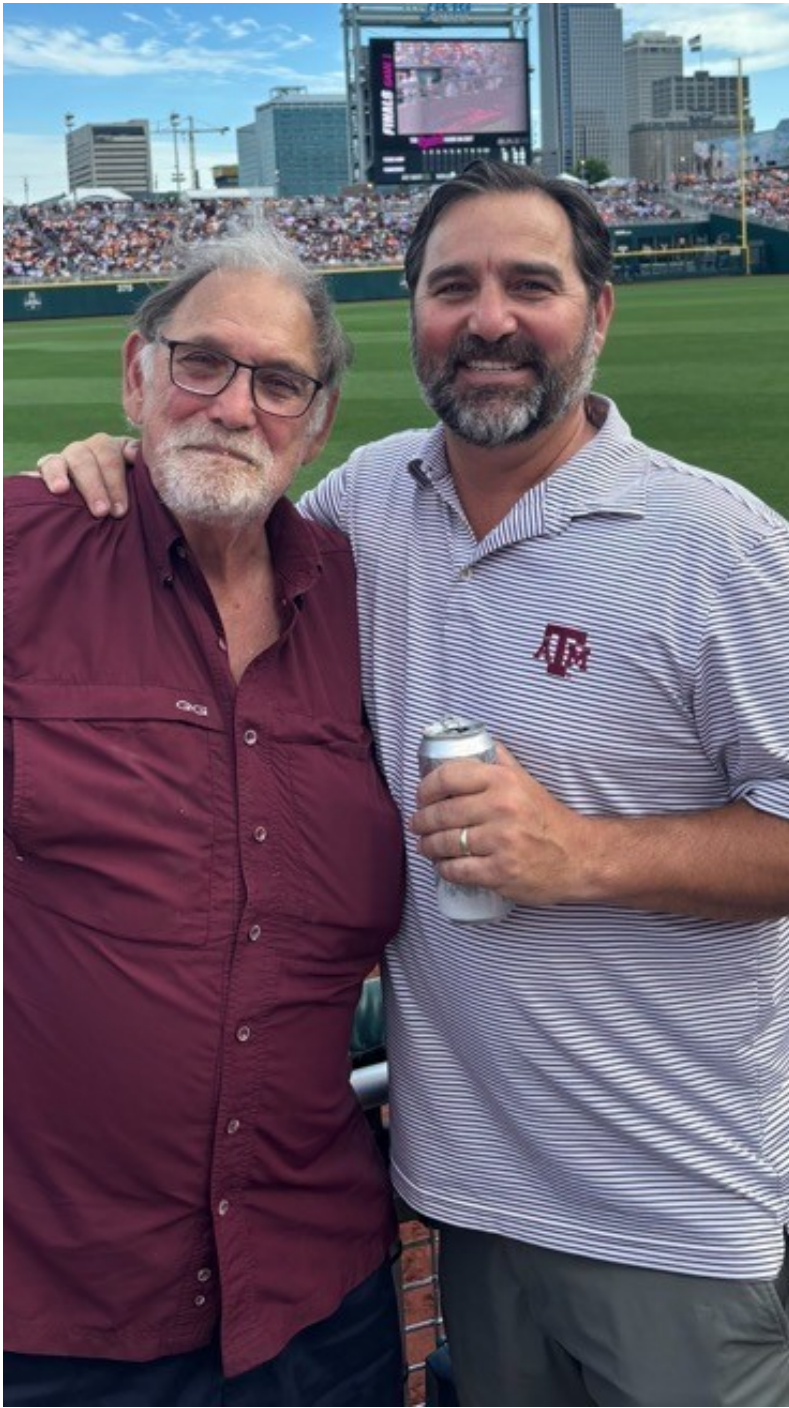
Gary has received numerous awards from Texas A&M University, the Texas Shrimp Association, the Southern Shrimp Alliance, the Gulf and South Atlantic Fisheries Foundation, National Sea Grant, and the Southeast Fisheries Association. He has served on numerous committees, including the Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council's Advisory Panels on Swordfish, Red Snapper, Shrimp, and Outreach and Education. He also served on the World Wildlife Fund's Smart Gear Committee and was the first chairman of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission's Sea Grant Committee. Most recently, he

worked as Community Liaison for Pelagic Long Liners with the National Fish and Wildlife Federation's Deepwater Horizon Pelagic Fish Restoration program. He continues to work with the Southern Shrimp Alliance to improve data collection from electronic logbooks in the Gulf of Mexico and maintains a close relationship with Texas Sea Grant.

Gary retired from Texas Sea Grant in 2018 after 48 years of service as an Extension Professor and Marine Fisheries Specialist. Since then, he has operated a couple of shrimp trawlers out of Palacios, Texas. He is an avid outdoorsman, managing 1,500 acres of high-fenced property in Comfort, Texas, where he enjoys hunting with family and friends. He also maintains wetlands in Collegeport, Texas, with his two sons and enjoys fishing at his bay house in Sargent, Texas. An enthusiastic birder, Gary serves on the Board of Directors of the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory.

For all of these accomplishments and his years of service the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission is proud to present this year's Lyles-Simpson Award to such a worthy recipient.















# Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission

## Past Lyles-Simpson Award Recipients

<i>Charles H. Lyles</i>	1984
<i>Theodore B. Ford</i>	1985
<i>J.Y. Christmas</i>	1986
<i>John Breaux</i>	1987
<i>John Ray Nelson</i>	1988
<i>I.B. "Buck" Byrd</i>	1989
<i>Hugh A. Swingle</i>	1990
<i>John A. Mehos</i>	1991
<i>J. Burton Angelle</i>	1992
<i>Louis A. Villanova</i>	1993
<i>Theodore H. Shepard</i>	1994
<i>Edwin A. Joyce, Jr.</i>	1995
<i>Tommy D. Candies</i>	1996
<i>Walter M. Tatum</i>	1997
<i>Thomas L. Heffernan</i>	1998
<i>Trent Lott</i>	1999
<i>James M. Barkuloo</i>	2000
<i>Walter W. Fondren, III</i>	2001
<i>Jerald K. Waller</i>	2002
<i>Andrew J. Kemmerer</i>	2003
<i>Hal R. Osborn</i>	2004
<i>Leroy Kiffe</i>	2005
<i>Robert P. Jones</i>	2006
<i>Wayne E. Swingle</i>	2007
<i>Ralph Rayburn</i>	2008
<i>William S. "Corky" Perret</i>	2009
<i>Albert L. King</i>	2010
<i>Virginia A. Vail</i>	2011
<i>R. Vernon Minton</i>	2012
<i>Larry B. Simpson</i>	2013
<i>Michael C. Voisin</i>	2014
<i>Ellie Francisco Roche</i>	2015
<i>Michael S. Ray</i>	2016
<i>Joseph I. Gill, Jr.</i>	2017
<i>Christopher M. Blankenship</i>	2018
<i>William Borden Wallace</i>	2019
<i>Harriet M. Perry</i>	2020
<i>Thomas D. McIlwain</i>	2022
<i>Joseph A. Shepard</i>	2023