Sheepshead (Archosargus probatocephalus) is a widely distributed species in the Western Atlantic from Nova Scotia to Brazil in estuarine and marine habitats. This species is common and abundant in many parts of its extensive range. Very little, genetic stock structure information currently exists regarding sheepshead across their range between North Carolina and Texas (Anderson et al. 2007).

Sheepshead are estuarine-dwelling fish; they move offshore to spawn following the onset of cool weather and return to inshore waters in the spring after spawning. They are fractional spawners and estimates of spawning frequency range from daily to once every 20 days (Render and Wilson 1992).

Sheepshead (Archosargus probatocephalus) is caught mainly with bottom longlines and trawls. It is prominent in the catch of anglers. Sheepshead has been a major component of both commercial and recreational fisheries along the southeastern coast of the United States and in the Gulf of Mexico. There have been recorded declines in annual commercial and recreational landings of this species in the southeastern coast of the United States and in the Gulf of Mexico, however, these are attributed in part to enactment of laws limiting or banning the use of entanglement nets in Florida, Louisiana, and Georgia (Sheepshead Technical Task Force 2006).

Anderson et al. 2007 refers that an overall sheepshead molecular genetic data indicates very limited genetic subdivision between the subspecies despite considerable divergence of morphological characters. The bayesian structure analysis of microsatellite genotypes indicated that all Gulf of Mexico Sheepshead populations constitute a single stock. The Chesapeake Bay Sheepshead population is suggested to constitute a separate population, as large differences in vital rates are often indicative of this. The differences observed in growth could arise due to a variety of factors, including differences in mortality rates, environmental conditions, food sources, or genetic variation (Ballenger et al. 2011).

In the Gulf of Mexico, this species is caught commercially, recreationally, and incidentally throughout the region. The Gulf of Mexico represents the largest portion of the United States’ recreational estuarine harvest that is brought to shore; in this region the Sheepshead is one of the top three estuarine species harvested from 2000-2004, and together with the Red Drum and Spotted Seatrout, contributed to 39% of the region’s recreational harvest (Sheepshead Technical Task Force 2006).